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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 18 June 2020

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER in the Chair]

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Order, 4 June).

[NB: [V] denotes a Member participating virtually.]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The Secretary of State was asked—
UK-Canada Free Trade Agreement

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with her Canadian counterpart on a free trade agreement with that country. [903419]

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): I spoke to my Canadian counterpart Mary Ng last week, and we talked about progressing our bilateral trade and working together to promote free trade across the world.

Andrew Percy: Bilateral trade between the UK and Canada is worth £20 billion a year. It grew exponentially following the implementation of the comprehensive economic and trade agreement. By comparison, our bilateral trade with New Zealand is worth £3 billion a year. We have opened formal negotiations with New Zealand on a new trade agreement. Can we not go further with Canada and seek something much more comprehensive than simply a roll-over of CETA?

Elizabeth Truss: I know that my hon. Friend is committed to Canada, having served as trade envoy and done a fantastic job. As part of our ambitious free trade agreement programme, we announced yesterday our intention to accede to the CPTPP, which is an advanced trade agreement covering chapters such as data and digital and goes far beyond what the EU has been willing to agree. Canada is one of the key players in the CPTPP, alongside countries such as Australia and New Zealand.

Free Trade Agreements: Environmental Protection Standards

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): What discussions she has had with UK trade partners on maintaining environmental protection standards in future free trade agreements. [903420]

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): What discussions she has had with UK trade partners on maintaining environmental protection standards in future free trade agreements. [903422]

The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands): The Government are committed to meeting their ambitious environmental objectives. We are exploring all options

in the design of future trade and investment agreements, including environmental provisions within those, to ensure that we uphold the UK's high environmental standards.

Cat Smith: Last year's free trade agreement between Mexico, the US and Canada ran to 250 pages but failed to mention climate change or global emissions. What assurances can the Minister give the House that the free trade agreement being negotiated by his Government between the UK and the US will not make the same mistake and will put climate change at the heart of it?

Greg Hands: The hon. Lady raises a good question. The UK is absolutely committed to our international climate change agenda; that is one of our key objectives. We have not included that because the US is withdrawing from the Paris accord, which we regret. She mentioned the United States-Mexico-Canada agreement. That agreement does include 30 pages of environmental commitments, including, for example, on sustainability, forestry, air quality, marine plastics, multilateral agreements and so on. There is plenty of potential for us to go further on the environment with our US trade agreement.

Stephen Morgan: There is no point in the UK achieving our own zero-carbon targets if the trade deals we reach with other countries are pushing them ever further away from achieving theirs. Can the Secretary of State ensure that all future FTAs agreed by the UK reinforce the legal primacy of emission targets established in the Paris climate change agreement?

Greg Hands: It is worth pointing out that nothing in any trade agreement would prevent the UK from reaching its targets under the Paris agreement and to go net zero by 2050—we are the first Government to commit to doing that, and no trade agreement will prevent us from doing that. We remain on the front foot in our advocacy, making sure that the international response remains extremely strong, including through multilateral agreements and the UK contribution to the global climate fund.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Last year, Brazil lost an area of rainforest the size of Yorkshire, and the new land reforms proposed by the Bolsonaro Administration will make the scale of deforestation and commercial exploitation in the Amazon even worse. In the light of that, can the Minister tell us what environmental conditions are attached to his Department's £20 million trade facilitation programme with Brazil? Will he promise to suspend that programme if the Bolsonaro Administration persist with their proposed land reform laws?

Greg Hands: This question is about trade agreements, and it is worth pointing out that we are not currently in negotiation with Brazil on a trade agreement. The European Union is, by the way. When it comes to trade agreements, the right hon. Lady needs to get her own house in order. Yesterday at this very Dispatch Box, she praised EU trade agreements with Pacific rim countries in the CPTPP. The only problem for her is that those on the Labour Front Bench voted against CETA and did not support the EU-Japan agreement. Worst of all, she led her troops to vote against the Trade Bill—

Emily Thornberry indicated dissent.

Greg Hands: The Labour Front Bench at the time. She led her troops to vote against the Trade Bill, which would roll all these EU trade agreements over to become UK trade agreements.

Mr Speaker: Chris Loder, who had the next Question, is not here, but I will still take the SNP supplementary questions—I call Stewart Hosie.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Scottish Land and Estates has said that food and farming is critical, and it is concerned that UK producers are not placed in an impossible situation where they have to compete in an effective “race to the bottom”. What guarantees can the Secretary of State give that cheaply produced agrifood imports will not lead to that race to the bottom?

Elizabeth Truss: First, we have the independent Food Standards Agency, which is committed to high food standards. All the food standards that are currently with us through EU law are put into UK law as a result of the withdrawal agreement, so those standards are not going to be lowered, and they are not going to be negotiated as part of any trade agreement.

Stewart Hosie: I thank the Secretary of State for her answer, but I did not ask about food quality standards; I understand that. I am asking about production standards. As the National Farmers Union of Scotland has pointed out, there is deep concern about the importation of agrifoods into the UK that may be produced to an inequivalent and uncompetitive standard. How will she guard against agrifood imports produced to that inequivalent standard, which is much cheaper and simply could not or would not be done in the UK?

Elizabeth Truss: Scottish beef and lamb is a very high-quality product and highly competitive. When the beef ban is ended with the US, we will have the opportunity to get British beef into the US market—there is £66 million-worth of opportunity for that product—but in every trade agreement I negotiate, I will always make sure that our farmers, with their high standards, are not undermined.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Food standards were not a matter for the Agriculture Bill—at least that is what MPs, including Conservative Back Benchers, were told on Report. They were told that they would be included in the Trade Bill. I am sure Agriculture Ministers were telling the truth, so will the Government accept Labour’s amendment to the Trade Bill to enshrine in law the principle that food imported under any free trade agreement must maintain our farming industry’s high production and safety standards?

Elizabeth Truss: The reason they were not part of the Agriculture Bill is that the import standards that we already have and which already ensure that we import only high-quality products into this country are being transported into UK law through the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. That is already there. There has been a lot of scaremongering going around about these lowered standards. That is simply not true. We are maintaining exactly the standards we have, which are in place, for example, through agreements with Canada.

Mr Speaker: Richard Holden—another one not here. Oh my word. We now go virtual—to Angus Brendan MacNeil.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP) [V]: Tapadh leibh, Mr Speaker. We hope to see the Secretary of State at the International Trade Committee next week, as requested by Committee members for a number of weeks. At yesterday’s Committee hearing, the NFU, the CBI and the TUC all coalesced around the figure that Brexit would cost the UK about 4.9% of GDP and an American trade deal would benefit it by around 0.16% of GDP—a thirtieth of what is being lost by Brexit. They said that gains from the Japan deal would be a lot less than the paltry lot from the US deal, so can any Minister furnish the House with the figure for what would be gained as a percentage of GDP from a Japan-UK trade deal?

Elizabeth Truss: First of all, I am extremely happy to appear in front of the hon. Gentleman’s Committee, and I will ask my office to immediately set that up in the diary. I am very keen to communicate with the Committee about the various trade deals we are negotiating.

We published figures for the scoping study on the Japan free trade agreement, but this is not an either/or. We want to get a good trade deal with the EU. We want to get a good trade deal with the US. We also want to get access to CPTPP, which is a very fast-growing part of the world. That is what we want. We want global Britain to sit at the heart of a network of free trade agreements.

Bill Esterson: In March, the Government said that Japan must show “increased ambition” and set a higher headline target on reducing carbon emissions ahead of COP26. Is that still the view of the Secretary of State? Will she show increased ambition and include more stretching, measurable and binding climate targets in the new free trade agreement she puts in place with Japan?

Elizabeth Truss: We have a huge opportunity to achieve our environmental objectives in many of the free trade agreements we are negotiating. For example, with New Zealand, which is a leader in this area, we will be looking for very advanced environmental clauses, and of course we will seek those in negotiations with Japan. But the hon. Gentleman should understand that there are a number of routes through which we are pursuing our objectives, namely our leadership of the COP26 summit, and it is right that that process should be the primary focus of where we achieve our climate change objectives.

Free Trade Agreements: Effect on Cornwall

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): What assessment she has made of the potential effect of future free trade agreements on the economy in Cornwall.

[903424]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mr Ranil Jayawardena) [V]: I know that my hon. Friend is a great champion of business in his constituency, including the dairy industry. I can assure him that every region and nation will benefit

from our trade deals, and that includes every industry from farming to FinTech to boot. In the south-west, exports of dairy amounted to more than £46.7 million last year and these businesses stand to benefit even further from the removal of US tariffs.

Steve Double: I am delighted to see my hon. Friend in his ministerial position.

Whether it is our excellent butter, cheese and cream, our amazing beef and lamb, our stunning fish and seafood, or our beer, wine and gin, Cornish food and drink are among the highest quality and most sought after in the world. The Minister will be aware that food producers are concerned that our high standards will be undermined in trade deals, so what reassurance can he provide to Cornish food producers that their interests will be protected, and what opportunities does he see for export?

Mr Speaker: We go back to the Minister, who looks as though he is a fan of James Bond—“Dr No” no less.

Mr Jayawardena: Who wouldn't be, Mr Speaker?

Like my hon. Friend, I am also proud of the high-quality produce from British farmers, including from those in Cornwall, and I can assure him that trade deals will help to deliver economic security for Britain and protect us all from new trade barriers and tariffs that could harm jobs and industry. I can assure him that Cornish food producers will be supported at every turn and will continue to be highly competitive. Negotiations will certainly reward them through providing access to new markets.

Covid-19: Import of Essential Medical Products

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): What steps she is taking to expedite the import of essential medical products during the covid-19 outbreak. [903425]

The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands): We continue to work tirelessly across government to secure vital equipment and PPE from overseas partners, including from the US, Malaysia, China, Turkey and South Africa. We have sourced more than 18 billion items from across the globe to be shipped and delivered to the frontline to our NHS.

Rachel Hopkins: As the Minister will be aware, many imports such as medical products enter the UK as cargo in the hold of passenger flights. Given that the imposition of an illogical quarantine is having a negative impact on passenger confidence and flights coming into many of our regional airports, such as Luton airport in my constituency, will the Minister confirm whether he made any assessment of the impact of quarantine on the import of medical goods, and, in the light of that, does he agree with me that the quarantine should be lifted for less blunt measures, such as fast-track testing, to facilitate the import of medical goods and support the recovery of our aviation industry?

Greg Hands: I have to say, Mr Speaker, that I was woken at 4.40 this morning by a passenger flight coming into Heathrow and then by another one at 4.45 am. It strikes me that although passenger traffic coming into the country is much reduced, it is still very much facilitated.

I am not aware that any disruption that may be caused by the quarantine regulations is having any direct impact on our ability to import vital PPE into the country.

Mr Speaker: I am very impressed that the right hon. Gentleman knows the difference between a cargo flight and a passenger flight.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): At the last International Trade questions in May, my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) asked about reducing global tariffs on soap, which average at 17% among World Trade Organisation members and range as high as 65% in some countries. The Minister of State said that it was a very good question and that the Government were working tirelessly to reduce or remove those sorts of barriers. I am sure that that has been the case, so will he tell us what progress he has made on the specific issue of soap tariffs over the past month?

Greg Hands: Mr Speaker, you will know that on 20 March, which was the start of the UK lockdown, the EU Commission wrote to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and HM Treasury alerting them to the existence of the potential mechanism by which tariffs in VAT could be waived on certain imports in the light of the covid-19 crisis. We have identified more than 190 products that are in scope, ranging from PPE to soaps and disinfectants. When these products are imported by an organisation covered by the relief, the tariff will be zero.

Promoting UK Agriculture Exports

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): What steps she is taking to promote UK agriculture exports. [R] [903426]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): Our food and drink sector is vital to our economy. In 2019, exports increased by nearly 5% to £23.7 billion. We want to see that success continue and will shortly be launching a bounce back strategy for the industry as the world recovers from covid-19.

Peter Aldous: I am grateful for that answer. I draw your attention, Mr Speaker, to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. There are significant opportunities to increase agricultural exports, but for the UK to make the most of them, there is a need to dramatically increase food and drink processing capacity. What discussions has my hon. Friend's Department had with the Treasury, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, to ensure that the right fiscal and grant arrangements are in place?

Graham Stuart: My hon. Friend is right to raise that important issue. My Department is working closely with DEFRA, BEIS and Her Majesty's Treasury to understand the market and investment trends in the agriculture and food processing sector in a post-covid environment. The Department for International Trade's high potential opportunity—HPO—programme, which is part of our levelling-up agenda, is already attracting investment in food and drink programmes throughout the UK. For instance, there is agricultural engineering

in Telford and aquaculture in Dorset. However, we want to do more, which is why, in partnership across government and as part of our forthcoming export strategy, we will work to identify new investment opportunities in the sector and its supply chain, so that UK agriculture's full potential can be realised internationally.

UK Tech Sector

Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): What support her Department is providing to the UK tech sector to help them export and access overseas markets. [903427]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): I know that my hon. Friend is, like me, proud that the UK tech sector is the dominant and most successful in Europe. With 79 unicorns and counting, last year the sector attracted a third of all European tech investment—more than France and Germany combined. That success has continued this year, and just last week the Secretary of State launched a new tech strategy to support the internationalisation of our firms, including a digital trade network across the Asia Pacific.

Alan Mak: British entrepreneurs are at the cutting edge of developing technology medicines—from apps to medical devices—in the fight against coronavirus. What support is my hon. Friend giving to our health tech start-ups to access overseas markets where British innovation can help to save lives?

Graham Stuart: My hon. Friend is right: companies such as Cambridge-based C2-Ai, which last week won the CogX award for covid-19 health innovation, are leading the way in the UK's cutting-edge health tech sector. C2-Ai saves lives by predicting avoidable harm and mortality to free up capacity in intensive care units for covid-19 patients. My Department is supporting dozens of firms just like C2-Ai that are looking to provide covid-19-related treatments. We have also produced a directory of those British digital health companies that provide covid-19 solutions and shared that with our international network, in response to inquiries from Governments around the world.

Free Trade Agreements: Effect on Blyth Valley

Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con): What assessment she has made of the potential effect of future free trade agreements on the economy in Blyth Valley. [903428]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): In 2018, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear exported goods worth £496 million to the US, £130 million to Japan, £24 million to New Zealand and £216 million to Australia. Against a backdrop of rising trade barriers, our FTAs will secure and protect existing trade, and, according to our analysis, FTAs with the US, Japan, Australia and New Zealand will go further and bring additional export opportunities to every part of the country, including Blyth Valley.

Ian Levy: In Blyth Valley, we have many successful companies that trade globally. As we move closer to the deadline of 31 December 2020, will my hon. Friend please advise the House what steps the Department has

taken to help companies such as Dräger Safety and Tharsus in Blyth, and Miller engineering and Renolit in Cramlington—to name just a few—so that they can take advantage of free trade agreements?

Graham Stuart: My team is developing a new export strategy, which will align DIT support for exporting businesses, such as the ones my hon. Friend mentions, with our FTA and market access work. In February, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited Tharsus and the Port of Blyth, and they emphasised to her how important data and digital chapters were for them. Blyth Valley companies will be supported by ambitious FTAs, an enhanced network of international trade advisers in the northern powerhouse and teams in 108 countries around the world.

Free Trade Agreements: UK Farming Exports

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that UK farmers are able to sell their products into global markets under future free trade agreements. [903430]

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): We are determined to remove barriers so that more of our fantastic British produce can be sold internationally. We have now become a net dairy exporter for the first time in recent years. A US-UK FTA can reduce tariffs of, for example, 26% on beef and more than 25% on some dairy products.

Dr Evans [V]: Some of my constituents in Bosworth have written to me concerned about food standards. What discussions is my right hon. Friend having with DEFRA regarding the Food Standards Agency to guarantee that the agency is fully supported to ensure and enforce that our food standards are up to scratch in our new trade deals as they come to fruition?

Elizabeth Truss: It is very important to note that we are not going to be lowering our food standards in any of our trade negotiations. British food standards—or certainly those in England and Wales—are a matter for the Food Standards Agency, and it is down to the agency to ensure that standards are upheld. Those standards are also in UK law, transferred as part of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, so they are guaranteed, and the Food Standards Agency is an independent body designed to ensure that they are upheld.

Free Trade Agreements: Benefits for All Parts of the UK

Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to ensure that all parts of the UK benefit from future free trade agreements. [903436]

Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to ensure that all parts of the UK benefit from future free trade agreements. [903443]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): When the UK left the EU, we had successfully signed trade continuity

agreements with 48 countries, accounting for £110 billion of UK trade in 2018. Now we are seeking new trade agreements so that UK trade is diversified and better aligned with global growth. Analysis shows that the US deal, for instance, will benefit all parts of the United Kingdom, although Scotland and the midlands will gain most. That US deal could reduce tariffs and non-tariff barriers for everything from Scottish cashmere to automotive manufacturing in the midlands, machinery manufacturing in the north-west and our world-class services sector in the south-east, the midlands, Northern Ireland and elsewhere.

Lia Nici: Does the Minister agree that the ports of Grimsby, Immingham, Hull and Goole, as part of a pan-Humber free port, offer a huge opportunity to UK plc and are a key element of levelling up areas such as mine?

Graham Stuart: The Humber ports contribute so much to the UK economy, providing a critical trade route into Europe and beyond. Like my hon. Friend, I am proud that the Humber is one of the busiest and fastest growing trading areas in Europe, is responsible for a quarter of the UK's seaborne trade and hosts 30,000 international shipping movements each year, yet it can do so much more; and, with the help and support of my hon. Friend, it will do so. I cannot comment on any individual free port bids, but I encourage anybody who wants their views taken into account to respond to the Government's consultation before it closes on 13 July.

Dr Hudson [V]: Does my hon. Friend agree that trade options such as free port status will add a major boost to our local economies, and that free port bids, such as the one involving Carlisle Lake District airport in my constituency of Penrith and The Border, warrant serious further consideration?

Graham Stuart: As I have said, I cannot comment on individual free port bids, but as I am someone who was born and brought up in Carlisle, my hon. Friend can certainly expect support and sympathy in this part of the Government.

Free Trade Agreements: Effect on the East Midlands

Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con): What assessment she has made of the potential effect of future free trade agreements on the economy in the east midlands. [903432]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mr Ranil Jayawardena) [V]: This is an important question. Free trade agreements will certainly help Britain to bounce back from coronavirus and will bring better jobs, higher wages, greater choice and lower prices to consumers and businesses across the country. In the east midlands, lower tariffs and barriers will help to diversify the supply chain and reduce reliance on any single country for businesses that seek to thrive in the new global trading network which we are going to be at the heart of.

Tom Randall: I am particularly pleased that we are now finally able to open direct negotiations with some of our oldest and closest allies. Will my hon. Friend tell

me what steps the Government are taking to support businesses in the east midlands to make the most of the new opportunities created by these future trade agreements?

Mr Jayawardena [V]: As a newly independent trading nation, we will be able to champion free trade, fight protectionism and remove barriers at every opportunity. That includes tariffs. We will be trading on British terms with our new global tariff, which will cut red tape and cut costs for consumers and businesses in Gedling and in the region. My Department and our experienced international trade advisers will continue to support companies across the east midlands access exporting opportunities, and to provide export credit and insurance through UK Export Finance.

Free Trade Agreements: US and Japan

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): What recent progress she has made on negotiating free trade agreements with (a) the US and (b) Japan. [903435]

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): What recent progress she has made on negotiating free trade agreements with (a) the US and (b) Japan. [903459]

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): We have launched negotiations with both the US and Japan. We want to secure ambitious trade deals that benefit every part of the United Kingdom. Scotland is expected to be a particularly strong beneficiary from those deals.

Patricia Gibson: Despite what the Secretary of State said in response to previous questions, there are persistent concerns about the lifting of the ban on pathogen reduction treatments, which would permit chlorine washes over food as part of future trade deals. That would be bad for us and bad for animal welfare. To address those concerns once and for all, will the Secretary of State commit to enshrining minimum food standards into law? If she will not, will she devolve the necessary powers to Scotland to allow us to do it for ourselves?

Elizabeth Truss: I would point out that Scotland has its own food standards agency, which is responsible for upholding food standards in Scotland. I would also point out that the standards already are in the law and will continue to be in the law.

Dave Doogan [V]: Given what the Secretary of State—
[Inaudible.]

Mr Speaker: I am afraid we will have to move on.

Free Trade Agreements: Freedom of Religion or Belief

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that freedom of religion or belief is included in negotiations on free trade agreements. [903434]

The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands): The freedom of religion is a universal human right. The UK has a strong record of safeguarding human rights and promoting our values globally. Our strong economic

relationships with trading partners allow the Government to have open discussions on a range of difficult issues, including human rights and religious freedom. The Government will continue to encourage all states to uphold international human rights obligations.

Rehman Chishti: I thank the Minister for that answer. He knows that I lead for the Government on freedom of religion or belief as the Prime Minister's special envoy and on taking forward the Truro report. The Minister also knows, from our previous work when I was a trade envoy covering Pakistan, that there was a GSP-plus—generalised system of preference—trade clause which meant that human rights had to be respected. Around the world at the moment under covid-19, religious minorities have suffered immensely. Can we ensure that our future discussions on trade cover fully and frankly our concerns on freedom of religion or belief and wider human rights?

Greg Hands: My hon. Friend has done superb work as the Prime Minister's special envoy on freedom of religion and belief. He references the Truro report, which was set up by the previous Foreign Secretary. Its overall approach is very much endorsed by this Government. He also draws reference to his time as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Pakistan, when I worked with him very closely. The GSP-plus scheme will be rolled over into a UK scheme. Obviously, that will include key human rights obligations, including freedom of religion and expression.

UK-US Free Trade Agreement

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): What progress she has made on negotiations for a free trade agreement with the US. [903437]

James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op): What progress she has made on negotiations for a free trade agreement with the US. [903454]

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): We have just commenced round 2 of trade negotiations with the United States. Talks so far have been positive and constructive, but I am absolutely clear that we will only sign up for a deal that benefits all parts of the UK and all sectors of the UK.

Kerry McCarthy: In the absence of any final agreement between Britain and the EU on trading arrangements beyond the end of this year, is it not impossible for the UK and the US to have a meaningful discussion about the extent to which the UK's regulatory framework can diverge from the EU's in any future trade deal? Does that not mean that the chances of actually getting a deal with the US done and through Congress before the November election are virtually nil?

Elizabeth Truss: Let me be absolutely clear that we have not set a timetable for completion of the negotiations with the United States, because we are concentrating on getting a good deal rather than meeting any particular negotiation timetable. I am afraid that the hon. Lady is absolutely wrong with respect to the EU, because we have been clear that we are not aligned with EU regulations. We have our own independent regulatory regime and

we are negotiating with all our trading partners, whether the US, Australia, New Zealand or Japan, on that basis.

James Murray [V]: The Government have repeatedly promised this House and the British public that they are committed to non-regression on food standards. However, there is great concern over a number of practices in the US that are currently banned in the UK, such as the widespread use of antibiotics to increase growth in animals. As the Government approach their negotiations on a trade deal with the US, does the Secretary of State accept that it is time to put that commitment to non-regression on food standards into law?

Elizabeth Truss: I could not have been more clear: these food standards are already in British law as part of the EU withdrawal agreement, and we are not negotiating those as part of our negotiations with the United States or any other trade partner.

Support for Small Businesses and the Self-Employed

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): What steps she is taking to support (a) small businesses and (b) the self-employed to trade internationally as part of the covid-19 recovery. [903439]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): I know that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the unprecedented support for businesses and workers, including small businesses and the self-employed, that this Conservative Government have put in place. SMEs are the backbone of our economy and will be at the heart of the Department's new export strategy as our response to covid-19.

Mr Sharma [V]: Do the Government recognise that, aside from covid-19, one of the biggest threats to small businesses in the UK is reaching the end of the transition period with no trade deal? What assessment have they made of the number of SMEs in the UK that would go bust if faced with the toxic combination of covid-19 and a no-deal Brexit in December?

Graham Stuart: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about the importance of SMEs. They need Government support to enter international markets, and that is why the DIT exists. We are not responsible for negotiation with the EU, but we are confident that we will reach a good deal with it. The Department is putting SME chapters in our trade deals with other countries. It is a pity that the Labour party opposes every trade agreement and continually shows its indifference to small business and enterprise, but I am looking to the hon. Gentleman, as he may be able to do what no others have done and lead the shadow Secretary of State away from being an enemy of business and towards supporting it, as he does.

Free Trade Agreements: UK Car Manufacturers

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): What assessment she has made of the potential effect of free trade agreements on UK car manufacturers. [903440]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): The automotive industry will see more change in the next 10 years than it is seen in the past 100. That is why we are investing so heavily in research and development to ensure that the UK industry can be a global leader in clean transport. Lowering trade barriers is an essential step in attracting further investment and allowing the industry to thrive at a time of unprecedented change.

Stephen Metcalfe [V]: The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and the Japanese Automobile Manufacturers Association say that a UK-Japan agreement would greatly benefit economic prosperity in the UK and Japan. What opportunities for the sector does the Minister see in future FTAs that would help businesses such as Ford UK, based in Basildon?

Graham Stuart: My hon. Friend and the SMMT are both right. Turkey—as well as Japan—is important, not least to Ford. We prize our trading relationship with Turkey and recognise how important Turkish supply chains are to our automotive manufacturers, including Ford of Britain. I am pleased to say that UK and Turkish officials are working hard to ensure that trading arrangements transition into a bilateral agreement at the end of the implementation period, and I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting, unlike the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), issues that will help prosperity, jobs and businesses in this country instead of posturing and posing for the benefit of the hard left.

UK Exports of Arms and Equipment

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): What steps she is taking to ensure that arms and equipment licensed for export from the UK comply with the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria. [903441]

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): What steps she is taking to ensure that arms and equipment licensed for export from the UK comply with the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria. [903444]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mr Ranil Jayawardena) [V]: We assess all export licence applications on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria. We draw on all available information, including reports from NGOs and our own overseas network. I can assure the hon. Lady that we will not license the export of equipment where to do so would be inconsistent with the consolidated criteria.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I thank the Minister for his response, but there is a worrying pattern here. Last year, the Secretary of State said that her Department had inadvertently allowed licences for arms destined for Saudi Arabia to use against Yemeni civilians. Now she has failed to answer the clear questions of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) regarding the export of riot control equipment to the US and its use against civilians involved in the Black Lives Matter protests. Is that because the

Secretary of State has inadvertently allowed those exports, too, or does she simply not know what is happening in her own Department?

Mr Jayawardena: Not at all. The United Kingdom has issued licences to the United States in a number of different areas, and those have been provided in written answers to the shadow Secretary of State, but we continue to monitor developments in all countries, including the United States, very closely, and we are able to review licences, and suspend or revoke them as necessary, when circumstances require. That would be done in line with the consolidated criteria.

Zarah Sultana: Arms export criteria state that licences should not be granted if

“there is a clear risk that the items might be used for internal repression”.

In the light of the police in America using tear gas and rubber bullets, which may have been supplied by the UK, to attack Black Lives Matter protesters, will the Minister cancel licences involved in the arming of repression? On a technical point can he tell me whether tear gas equipment is covered by the open general export licence for the US-UK defence trade co-operation treaty?

Mr Jayawardena: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer that I have just given. We will continue to monitor developments closely. We will review where necessary. On the technical points that she refers to, I welcome her probing question. We believe that criterion 2 is very important. It addresses the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country of final destination, and that is something that Her Majesty's Government will certainly bear in mind as we review situations in the United States or elsewhere.

Free Trade Agreements: Human Rights

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had with UK trade partners on inserting clauses on human rights in future free trade agreements. [903448]

The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands): The UK has commenced trade negotiations with the United States, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. The UK has a strong history of safeguarding human rights and promoting our values globally, and our strong economic relationships with like-minded trading partners allow the UK to open discussions on a range of difficult issues, including human rights. We continue to encourage all states to uphold international human rights obligations.

Kim Johnson: I thank the Minister for his response, but does he agree that the Government's de-prioritisation of human rights in favour of trade has been exacerbated and highlighted by Brexit and has been part of a long-running trend dating back to the coalition Government? Pragmatism on human rights has been particularly clear when it comes to the promotion of trade, and there has been a conscious decision not to seek the inclusion of clauses relating to human rights in most of the post-Brexit agreements. The Government have listed 16 countries and trading blocs where negotiations are ongoing about rolling over existing EU trade deals

beyond 31 December, so can the Minister tell us whether human rights are part of those discussions, and will he guarantee the inclusion—

Mr Speaker: Order. It has to be a question, and it has to be fairly short. I am sure the Minister has a grip of what he needs to say.

Greg Hands: Let us be absolutely clear: there has been no relaxation or watering down of the UK's complete commitment to human rights. That is valid right across the Government, including in the Department for International Trade and in trade deals. The hon. Lady referred to the continuity EU agreements. Part of the issue there is that the Cotonou agreement itself is expiring. What we have sought to do is to ensure that the practical outcome of that element of the existing EU trade deal is maintained in the rolled-over deal. That applies to such things as the Andean agreement and other agreements that we have with developing-world countries, ensuring that human rights remain at the core of the agenda and that there is no watering down of the human rights commitments in existing trade agreements.

Topical Questions

[903479] **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): We have launched trade negotiations with four of our closest partners: the US, Japan, Australia and New Zealand—close allies with shared values, believing in democracy and free enterprise. We are prepared to walk away if any deal is not in the national interest. We will not lower our food standards. They are overseen by the independent Food Standards Agency and are in UK law. Ambitious free trade agreements will deliver on the Brexit promise to drive an industrial revival in this country and level up the UK.

Kerry McCarthy: I note the response that the Secretary of State gave to her opposite number earlier when talking about Brazil, but we are still trading with Brazil. Between 2013 and 2019, British financial institutions provided over \$2 billion in financial backing to Brazilian beef companies linked to Amazon deforestation. How can we ensure that there is greater transparency in our supply chains so that we are not unwittingly, through exports from Brazil, contributing to such environmental degradation?

Elizabeth Truss: First, we are doing a lot of work on our supply chains, looking at vulnerabilities and resilience and making sure we have more transparency in supply chains. That work is being led through the Department for International Trade and Project Defend. Through our climate change negotiations, as we head towards COP26, that is precisely the type of issue that the Business Secretary will be looking at.

[903483] **David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the long-standing agreements between local authorities, sectoral agreements involving UK universities and counterparts abroad, such as the British Israel Research Academic

Exchange Partnership, and the many agreements between UK local authorities and regions in, for example, China, can provide a useful foundation and route in for trade deals that are based on existing identified mutual opportunities and interests?

The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands): First, I praise the long-standing work that my hon. Friend has done in local government leadership over many years. Local government and councils will play a key role. This week, I have spoken to civic leaders, including Andy Burnham in Manchester and candidate Shaun Bailey in London, and impressed on them the importance of trade and investment decisions in our biggest cities. Trade and investment is a whole-UK effort involving all four nations, and all regions and cities, including councils and local government. I praise my hon. Friend for his work.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): On Monday in Yemen, 13 civilians travelling by road, including four children, were killed in an alleged Saudi airstrike—the latest innocent victims of this barbaric war. A year ago this week, the Court of Appeal ruled that it is unlawful for the Government to license any more exports of arms to Saudi Arabia for use in the war in Yemen, and ordered the Government to review all extant licences in the light of that judgment. A full year later, can the Secretary of State tell us whether that review of extant licences is complete and, if not, why not?

Elizabeth Truss: As the right hon. Lady knows from the written ministerial statement I made earlier this year, we have been reviewing our processes and making sure all the work we do is compliant with the consolidated criteria.

Emily Thornberry: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, but the fact is that, a year on from the Court of Appeal ruling, British firms are still exporting arms for use in Yemen, and that is unacceptable.

On a related issue, the Government refuse point blank to tell us whether British-made tear gas and other riot equipment have been used in the United States over the past month. I ask the Secretary of State a very simple but important question that goes alongside that: does she condemn the tear gassing and beating of unarmed, peaceful protesters and journalists, and will she make it clear that riot equipment should never be used in that way?

Elizabeth Truss: Of course we are all extremely concerned about what has happened in the US—in particular, the killing of George Floyd. We are very, very concerned about that. However, we have one of the strictest arms licensing regimes in the world and we are absolutely clear—I have made this clear to the team—that we always comply with the consolidated criteria.

[903484] **Theo Clarke** (Stafford) (Con): Given that the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting that was meant to take place next week—I planned to attend it as the co-chair of the all-party group on trade out of poverty—has been postponed, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is vital that the Government continue to back the SheTrades initiative in order to support businesswomen throughout the Commonwealth?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank my hon. Friend for her commitment to this important cause. I am convening a meeting of Commonwealth Trade Ministers, due to take place this autumn, and the issue of female empowerment and entrepreneurship and the SheTrades initiative will be on the agenda for the meeting.

[903480] **Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): Can I ask about Welsh lamb? Every time I ask the Government about this, they always say to me, “Oh yes, it is all very worrying. We don’t know where it is going to go. It is very important that we make sure that there are no tariffs on Welsh lamb going into Europe.” It is important, because 50% of Welsh lamb is eaten in the UK and the rest goes to Europe. It does not go to any other markets, pretty much, around the world, so we have to get a zero tariff on Welsh lamb. Can the Secretary of State guarantee that, please?

Elizabeth Truss: I am working very hard to get rid of the small ruminant rule in the United States, which prevents the export of our fantastic Welsh lamb to the market—[*Interruption.*] I hear the hon. Gentleman shouting from a sedentary position. The US is the second largest importer of lamb in the world. It is a massive opportunity for lamb. In fact, this afternoon, I have a call with some Welsh sheep farmers to talk to them precisely about these opportunities. I suggest that he gets behind the US trade deal rather than shouting from the Back Benches.

[903485] **Shaun Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Con): Manufacturers in the Black Country have recently shown the resilience and ingenuity that demonstrate why the Black Country is head and shoulders above the rest, in the whole United Kingdom. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that manufacturers in the town that I represent—in Wednesbury, Oldbury and Tipton—can increase their exports and we can ensure an industrial renaissance for manufacturers in those towns?

Greg Hands: This is very opportune, because last week, I was the guest speaker at the Black Country chamber of commerce, and they were uniformly enthusiastic about the Government’s free trade agenda and trade and investment agenda. Perhaps if the Opposition were to go along, they might hear that, and some of this enthusiasm might rub off on them. I remember taking a question from a particular firm, Thomas Dudley, in the area about the roll-over of the CARIFORUM agreement with the Commonwealth Caribbean countries and the Dominican Republic. It was very concerned to hear that the Labour party is opposed to the Trade Bill, which would see the roll-over of that EU agreement and make an operable UK agreement. They were shocked at the seeming disregard by—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I think you have made the political points very well, but it is not an election yet—I think you can hold your fire a little bit longer. I would be more worried that people will be asking who you sat next to at the dinner.

[903482] **Alex Davies-Jones** (Pontypridd) (Lab): The Minister mentioned that she is talking to Welsh sheep farmers later today, but what discussions has she

recently had with the Welsh Labour Government on the potential effect of any free trade agreements on the economy in Wales, particularly in relation to the devolved responsibilities?

Greg Hands: We engage with the devolved Administrations on a regular basis. Baroness Morgan is my opposite number in the Welsh Government and we have a very good relationship, both on free trade agreements and on the whole relationship on trade between the UK Government and the Welsh Government. We make sure, through the ministerial forum for trade, that the devolved Administrations are updated and kept constantly apprised of our free trade agreement agenda. I look forward to continuing our excellent work with the Welsh Government.

[903486] **Mr Robert Goodwill** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): Does the Minister agree that global free trade agreements present more opportunities than threats to British agriculture, particularly as we have fantastic products such as North Yorkshire lamb and cracking cheeses such as Wensleydale? Indeed, I think they also make cheese in Lancashire, Mr Speaker. Does the Secretary of State agree that there are likely to be more Americans wanting to eat British beef than British people wanting to eat American beef, particularly if accompanied by Yorkshire pudding?

Elizabeth Truss: I completely agree about the fantastic products such as Wensleydale, Yorkshire beef and lamb and all these opportunities. In fact, the first cargoes of British beef will be leaving UK ports this summer destined for America, now that the beef ban has been lifted. That is worth £66 million to the industry over the next five years. Of course, there is nothing nicer than a Sunday lunch and a nice bit of beef and Yorkshire pudding.

[903488] **Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP) [V]: From the continuity agreement, exports to Chile have grown on average by 16% a year and consumers in the UK have benefited from lower prices on fruit, nuts and excellent Chilean wine. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for Chile, I ask the Secretary of State what further progress will be made to ensure that that trading relationship with Chile goes from strength to strength?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank the hon. Lady for her positive question about Chile. Chile is an important trade partner of the UK. Of course, it is a key member of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, which we want to join. We want to have a better trading relationship with Chile and the 11 fast-growing members of that agreement.

[903487] **Duncan Baker** (North Norfolk) (Con): My rural constituency of North Norfolk is highly agricultural, with farming being the lifeblood of the community, so along with telling me what steps are being taken to ensure that high animal welfare and import standards are kept, can we be positive and can the Secretary of State tell me about the great opportunities that there are for the farming community in North Norfolk to celebrate with a free trade agreement?

Elizabeth Truss: As I have said, we are absolutely committed to maintaining our high animal welfare standards and our high import standards and also to making sure that our farmers do not face unfair competition. That is something I am going to negotiate in every trade agreement we are discussing. There are huge opportunities, such as with malting barley. We are the second largest exporter of malting barley into Japan, and there are fantastic malting barley producers all across Norfolk who will benefit from lower tariffs and more trade.

[903490] **Wendy Chamberlain** (North East Fife) (LD): My constituent Freddie Melville wrote to me last week. He is 10, and when he grows up he wants to be a farmer like his dad. He told me that all animals deserve to be reared to a high standard and that allowing lower standard food into the UK would reduce what his father and other farmers get paid for their food. The Government want a trade deal with the US and want to protect UK farmers and consumers. They cannot have both. If they truly believe in their welfare standards, will the Minister commit to enshrining them in trade legislation, as they should have done with the Agriculture Bill?

Elizabeth Truss: If the hon. Lady looks at the analysis of the US agreement, it shows that UK farming benefits. That is because people in the United States want to buy high-quality, high-welfare UK produce.

[903489] **Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): Will the Secretary of State comment on how well placed the Food Standards Agency is to enforce our high import food standards?

Greg Hands: My hon. Friend will know that the Food Standards Agency is extremely well placed on this issue. He will know that the chair, Heather Hancock, sent a letter to all parliamentarians, which I recommend all parliamentarians read and digest. There was also a letter from the Secretaries of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and for International Trade about the important work of this non-ministerial Government Department. To be clear, decisions on standards will be made separately from trade negotiations.

[903494] **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The use of bullets, tear gas and batons on innocent protesters has, as the Secretary of State acknowledged, shocked the world in the aftermath of the brutal killing of George Floyd, so can she tell us whether her Department has authorised the export of any of the above in the past 12 months?

Elizabeth Truss: I have already answered a letter from the shadow Secretary of State on precisely this issue. Quarterly, we publish exactly which export licences we issue as a Department. We are completely transparent, and we operate in line with the consolidated criteria.

[903491] **Sir Roger Gale** (North Thanet) (Con) [V]: It is good to see you again, Mr Speaker. I listened very carefully to the statement yesterday by my right hon. Friend and also to her remarks this morning about animal welfare. She must understand that there is still a

concern because of the Government's refusal to accept the agriculture Committee amendments to the Agriculture Bill. Will she give the House a complete assurance that once we have left the European Union and ended the transition period, no goods—animal products, fish products or bird products—will be allowed into the United Kingdom from the EU or anywhere else in the world where those are reared under conditions that we simply would not permit in the United Kingdom?

Elizabeth Truss: I can give my right hon. Friend an absolute assurance that all the regulations we currently have in place with the EU will be transposed into UK law. However, it is not the case that we ask other countries to follow our domestic regulations. We currently import produce from Canada on zero tariffs without those requirements. We currently import goods from the developing world without those requirements. What is very important, and what I am committed to in all the trade negotiations, is making sure that any deal we achieve does not undermine our domestic production standards.

[903495] **Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab) [V]: Complacency from the Government, and indeed from the international community as a whole, over human rights violations in Kashmir has contributed to the crisis that is unfolding at the line of actual control. The Indian and Chinese armies are now toe to toe, and there has been a Mexican stand-off between Pakistan and India since last August. I do not need to remind anybody that these are three nuclear powers. What economic and other levers is the Secretary of State using to resolve this crisis? Will she urge the Prime Minister to call for a UN Security Council meeting to avert a global disaster?

Greg Hands: Obviously, the whole of government is extremely concerned by the situation in Kashmir. It is primarily of course a matter for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. However, I can tell the hon. Lady that trade assists dialogue and assists countries and peoples to come together. In reference to India, we are having a JETCO—India-UK Joint Economic and Trade Committee—shortly to talk about trade between the UK and India. In relation to Pakistan, as I said earlier, we are rolling over the GSP-plus arrangements that the EU currently has with Pakistan, which also include a key human rights element. Making sure that dialogue continues and that trade continues will assist in that.

Mr Speaker: I am sure the House would like to be with me in prayers and thoughts for the sad news that Dame Vera Lynn has died—one of the great British icons.

In order to allow safe exit of hon. Members participating in this item of business and the safe arrival of those participating in the next, I am suspending the House for three minutes.

10.32 am

Sitting suspended.

DFID-FCO Merger

10.36 am

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the merger of the Department for International Development with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and First Secretary of State (Dominic Raab): I begin by thanking the hon. Lady and welcoming this opportunity to respond to her question on the merger between DFID and the FCO. On Tuesday, the Prime Minister announced that they will merge to become the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. I can tell the House that the process will start immediately and will be completed by September. Alongside this merger, Her Majesty's trade commissioners will now report formally to the ambassadors and high commissioners in their respective countries. The Prime Minister will set the UK's overall international strategy, through the National Security Council, and by integrating development policy with our diplomatic network, the UK will be following a similar model to that of some of our closest international partners, such as Australia and Canada.

This move is about placing our world-class aid programme at the beating heart of our foreign policy decision making. We will integrate the development expertise and know-how that DFID does so well with the diplomatic reach and clout of the Foreign Office, ensuring that our impact abroad is bigger than the sum of its parts. Far from diminishing our ambitions, it will elevate them. As the Prime Minister set out on Tuesday, we retain our commitment to spending 0.7% of our gross national income on development, but through closer integration, we will maximise the impact of our aid budget in helping the very poorest in the world, while making sure we get the very best value for taxpayers' money.

For too long, we have indulged an artificial line, dividing the goals that our aid budget and foreign policy serve. This coronavirus crisis has confirmed just how artificial that line is. Across Whitehall, I have chaired the international ministerial group, bringing all relevant Departments together to support the most vulnerable countries exposed to covid-19; to energise our pursuit of a vaccine, working with our international partners; to return stranded British citizens from abroad; and to keep vital international supply chains open. In every one of these areas, we have been compelled to align our development, trade, security and wider foreign policy objectives. As in many a crisis, necessity has proven the mother of innovation. For example, at the GAVI vaccine summit, which the Prime Minister recently hosted, we smashed the target for vaccine funding, with \$8.8 billion raised. That was a major success, where our development and foreign policy objectives had to be integrated to serve our dual aim of securing a vaccine for the British people, while making it accessible for the most vulnerable people, right across the world. Likewise we are working to bolster the health systems and institutional resilience of the most vulnerable countries, doing so not only out of a sense of moral responsibility, but to safeguard the UK from a potential second wave of the virus. I am afraid those demarcating a boundary between our national interests and our moral responsibilities

in the world are mistaken. Covid has reinforced just how inextricably interwoven they are, just how much they reinforce each other and why we need to integrate them in our foreign policy decision making. It is to boost our impact and influence in the world, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Wendy Chamberlain: On Tuesday, the Prime Minister U-turned on free school meal vouchers for disadvantaged kids in England, only to stand at the Dispatch Box and cancel meals for the world's poorest. UK aid reduces suffering. It is not some "cashpoint in the sky"; we will look to the £900,000 military plane makeover for that. DFID is a world leader. It is what global Britain is all about. No wonder the proposed merger with the Foreign Office has been roundly condemned by three former Prime Ministers.

We have to question why this merger is happening now, in the middle of the coronavirus crisis, when our aid is needed most. Why is this happening prior to the integrated review? The Prime Minister insisted that massive consultation had taken place. Which non-governmental organisations were consulted? To my knowledge, none was. Can the Foreign Secretary confirm that DFID employees only heard the news on social media? Were unions consulted? Can the Foreign Secretary commit to retaining all jobs, including the 200 EU nationals who work for DFID and those in East Kilbride? What assessment have the Government made of how much this will all cost?

Is the Secretary of State for International Development happy with this change? It is striking that she has as yet made no statement on the matter. It is almost as though the merger has taken place overnight. Will international development retain a Cabinet Minister and a seat on the National Security Council, so that humanitarian concerns are heard at the very top of government? The Government have committed to 0.7% of GNI on aid spending, but can the Foreign Secretary confirm that this will be overseen by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact? If not, how will the Foreign Office—poorly rated for official development assistance transparency—be held to account? Can the Government commit to maintaining the International Development Committee?

Can the Foreign Secretary guarantee that this will not open the door to tied aid? Do the Government have any intention to repeal or amend any legislation about international development, and if so, in what way? Do the Government intend to continue to use the Development Assistance Committee definition of aid, and if not, what definition will they use? Will the Government ensure that poverty reduction is central to our approach, and how is this consistent with the Prime Minister's ambitions to take aid away from Zambia and give it to Ukraine?

Finally, what will happen to all new DFID projects, which reportedly have been paused, and will the Foreign Secretary have a say? How will this decision impact on current recipients of DFID's spending? Will it impact on the UK's Gavi commitments referenced by the Prime Minister, and will the Government commit to equitable access to covid-19 technologies?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Lady. It is good to hear that she is championing global Britain, and I agree with her on her points about the centrality of UK aid to

[Dominic Raab]

our foreign policy, including our soft power. I totally agree with her on that. Her instincts and ours are entirely aligned.

I have explained and set out in my answer to her question exactly why we are doing this now. Covid-19—the crisis, the challenge—has forced us to align and integrate more closely than we have done before, and that was a positive step, but it has also shown how much further we can go if we integrate the formal decision-making structures. The discussions about and consideration of this have been going on for several weeks and months, but it has been under debate for considerably longer.

The hon. Lady asked about the financial repercussions of the merger. Of course, there are opportunities to save administrative costs, but as we have made clear, there will be no compulsory redundancies or anything like that. We are committed to the 0.7% of GNI commitment, which is something she asked. I can give her reassurance about that. We want the aid budget and the development know-how and expertise that we have in DFID—it has done a fantastic job, including under respective Development Secretaries—at the beating heart of our international decision-making processes.

The hon. Lady asked about the Select Committee. It is ultimately, I believe, a matter for the House, but certainly the Government's view is that normally the Select Committees would mirror Government Departments. However, as I say, that is a decision for the usual channels and, ultimately, for the House.

The hon. Lady then asked about the National Security Council. Ultimately, the Prime Minister leads the foreign policy of the day. He does that, in practical terms, through his chairmanship of the National Security Council. The role of Secretary of State for the new Department will be to make sure, in an integrated and aligned way, that aid is right at the heart, not just of the Foreign Office, but of Cabinet discussions and NSC discussions.

The hon. Lady also mentioned the Gavi summit. The Gavi summit is an exceptional example of why it makes sense to integrate our decision-making processes in this way, because it links our development means and goals with our wider foreign policy goals. We want a vaccine for the people of this country, but we also know, as a matter of moral responsibility but also good sensible foreign policy, that we must do more to uphold the most vulnerable countries and help them weather the crisis, so that we do not get a second wave of this crisis.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East and North Africa has just come back from a virtual meeting on Yemen. Yemen is another exceptionally good example of where our foreign policy interests in bringing an end to that terrible conflict align with our development and aid goals—with trying to alleviate the humanitarian plight. I would hope that is something that Members in all parts of the House could get behind.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): My right hon. Friend has already spoken about various opportunities. Will he please speak very clearly about the ethos of the international aid Department, and how much that ethos will be kept in the new structure?

Because clearly Britain's soft power really does rely on a fantastic team of people, who have done amazing work over the years to develop an independent and very powerful voice for the UK in standing up for the world's poorest. Now I think that can be integrated with our politics; in fact, I think it is fundamental to our foreign policy that we champion both together, but clearly it does require maintaining those people, keeping that ethos and maintaining the morale of an amazing team.

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. I know that he has looked at this very closely. We have discussed the integration of foreign policy on many occasions. That is absolutely essential, and I agree with him entirely that we want to keep not just the funding but the expertise, the know-how, the branding, the soft power—the elements that make the United Kingdom a development superpower—in the new structure. However, the reality is, and I thank him for his agreement on this, that we have an opportunity to do even better if we focus our aid and our foreign policy, and indeed, we are more aligned on trade and defence and wider security matters in a more focused way. That is the exciting opportunity that this merger allows, but I agree with him entirely on the point that he raised.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) for her important urgent question.

“The effectiveness with which DFID is able to deliver aid is because the Department has decades of honed experience in understanding the most effective and targeted ways of spending taxpayers' money”—[*Official Report*, 10 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 276.]

—not my words, but those of the Secretary of State for International Development, last week, who now appears to have simply been completely overruled.

Scrapping a Department that is crucial to global vaccine development provides health care and aids the world's poorest in the middle of a global pandemic is irresponsible and counterproductive and wrong. The Government should be totally focused on steering our country through the challenges we face right now. We have had one of the highest death tolls from covid-19 in the world. Millions of children are out of school and face the worst unemployment crisis in a generation, which will hit young people and the lowest-paid the hardest; and these challenges are global, too.

Instead, the Prime Minister has decided to undertake a large-scale restructure, which will cost millions of pounds of public money, and he will abolish a Department that is the most transparent, the most effective and a global champion at delivering value for money for British taxpayers. Instead, UK aid will be spent through Departments, which, TaxPayers Alliance found,

“neither”

contribute

“to poverty reduction or the national interest.”

So can the Foreign Secretary tell me: when did the Prime Minister decide this matter? Why did he not wait for the conclusion of the integrated review? Did the decision go through the National Security Council? Which civil society and development partners were

consulted? How much will the reorganisation cost and what legislative changes are planned? Will the DFID budget be ring-fenced in the new Department?

The Foreign Secretary also mentioned trade envoys. What role now for the Department for International Trade? Multiple former Prime Ministers, from both sides of the House, have criticised the decision. A former Conservative Secretary of State for International Development said:

“Most British diplomats lack the experience and skills to manage 100 million pound development programs...Trying to pretend these two very different organisations are”

the same

“damages both.”

Laurie Lee, the chief executive of Care International, said,

“this is the worst decision on aid since the Pergau dam scandal” and

“In the middle of a national crisis, the Prime Minister has chosen to spend time, focus and effort on fixing a problem which does not exist...it’s not too late...to think again.”

This is not global Britain. This retreat from the global stage is a mistake, and we firmly oppose this attempt to abolish the Department. It will not only have a life-threatening impact on the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people, but it will reduce our ability to make the world safer, fairer and better for all.

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman and welcome the opportunity to debate this issue with him. He asked a number of questions, including on timing. The covid crisis has required the Government to act and operate in ways that we have not done before—

Stephen Doughty *indicated dissent.*

Dominic Raab: He is shaking his head before he receives the answer—I thought we were going to have a sensible debate about the pros and cons of this change. I listened carefully to what he said, so he might do me that courtesy in return. We had an integrated approach, and we brought the alignment as far as we conceivably could on covid, the repatriation of nationals, the hunt for a vaccine and keeping supply chains open. However, this situation has brought to light and made clear to us how much more effective we can be if we integrate through this merger.

The hon. Gentleman asked when the Prime Minister made the final decision. Obviously, he spent weeks considering it, but he announced the change on Tuesday, swiftly after the conclusions had been resolved. The hon. Gentleman asked whether the aid budget will be protected, and we are committed to the figure of 0.7% of gross national income—I think that reassures those who are concerned that somehow the aid budget will be cut as a result of this change, which is not true.

The hon. Gentleman asked about DIT and trade, and as the Prime Minister made clear on Tuesday, we will ensure that our trade envoys are responsible for formally reporting to ambassadors and high commissioners in their respective countries. More broadly, the International Trade Secretary, who answered questions in the House a few moments ago, is doing an exceptional job in striking those free trade deals, which are a great opportunity for businesses and consumers in this country. That will continue. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned third party support. There has been widespread agreement on this from the Chair of the Select Committee, from

my predecessor as Foreign Secretary and from the HALO Trust, which is a charity that deals with landmines and welcomes this move.

I will leave the hon. Gentleman with one thought: of OECD developed countries, only one has a separate Ministry of Development. Indeed, the tide has been in the direction of integrating foreign policy with aid and development, as that is the progressive thing to do. I understand why the Labour party, which set up DFID, feels proprietorial about it, but what matters is the effectiveness of foreign policy. What we have learned during coronavirus is that this merger will ensure that we can be as effective as possible, and deliver more efficient value for taxpayers’ money.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con) [V]: In the past week, we have seen three changes to the machinery of government, including the merger of the FCO and DFID. All those moves are designed to maximise our resources, as we reignite and re-establish the UK’s global position. To continue that restructuring and make it even more comprehensive, particularly with the trade commissioners reporting to the ambassadors, what plans does my right hon. Friend have to support our business export activities, by eventually bringing the Department for International Trade into the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office? Surely that would now make sense.

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend and pay tribute to her expertise and experience in this area. We are not proposing to integrate DIT into the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, but through the structure with trade envoys we want to maximise our impact in those countries where we are seeking to liberalise, free up and open up greater access for British businesses and British exports.

Mr Speaker: We now head to Scotland and the SNP spokesperson, Chris Law, who has one minute.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP) [V]: The decision to abolish the Department for International Development and rechannel funds for eradicating global poverty to further diplomatic and commercial interests is unforgivable, particularly amid a global pandemic. The last three Prime Ministers opposed this merger, as does every development organisation that has been in touch, and the SNP. Today, the International Development Secretary is not even present to answer any questions. Will the Foreign Secretary say whether the Cabinet was consulted? Were international development organisations consulted, and which, if any, supported this decision?

How will aid spending be scrutinised in the new Department? Will the UK continue to follow the Development Assistance Committee definition of official development assistance, or will the Government try to redefine aid on their own terms? Finally, today we learned that one of the UK Government’s recent Secretaries of State would like the HMS Royal Yacht Britannia to be funded on the back of the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalised people in the world. Is the royal family even aware of that? Is it not the case that such a move is led not by a vision of global Britain, but by the myopic Prime Minister of “let them eat cake” Britain?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his constructive and measured response to this proposal. He asked a series of serious questions, and it is incumbent on me to respond to them. He asked about protecting the aid budget. We have made clear that we remain committed to 0.7% of GNI. He asked about consultation. Of course, there were discussions across government about this, and it has been looked at closely. The Prime Minister had indicated, with the establishment of joint Ministers across the FCO and DFID, that we wanted to take steps down this path to further integration. As I mentioned in my previous responses, what has really focused our minds is what we have learnt in coming through the challenge of coronavirus on the international level.

The hon. Gentleman asked about third-party support. The former Foreign Secretary, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, has welcomed it. My right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt) has welcomed it. The Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee has welcomed it. He said that no NGOs did, but I can quote James Cowan, CEO of the HALO Trust, a landmine clearance charity, who said that he welcomes this decision because UK policy

“is very siloed... and needs to be broken down”

and brought together. We certainly endorse that. Aid policy and the aid budget will be at the centre—it will be the beating heart—of our international decision-making.

Mr Speaker: I am probably going to run this session for 20 minutes, so we need speedy questions and answers.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con) [V]: Will my right hon. Friend consider using overseas aid to create a large-scale, nationwide voluntary overseas apprentice scheme, sending young people overseas to work with charities and businesses to help developing countries but also develop the skills that they need?

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend, the Chair of the Education Committee, who always manages to get apprenticeships into every question he asks with fantastic zeal and enthusiasm. I share his passion. I would be very interested to look at any suggestions he had. One of our priorities is ensuring that every young girl can have a quality education at least up to the age of 12, and that is a good example of where we want to maximise, strengthen and reinforce development policy within our wider international agenda.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab) [V]: This rushed merger was done without consultation with the sector, Parliament, staff or the staff trade unions, at a time when the global south is about to be hit by a global pandemic. The Government urgently need to clarify the implications of the merger on the 3,600 DFID staff. Does the Foreign Secretary agree with the Prime Minister that there needs to be an ODA Select Committee? Is he committed to the Conservative Independent Commission for Aid Impact? Can he confirm that existing DFID projects will continue and funding agreements will remain in place, and what will happen to the current review of DFID projects?

Dominic Raab: I pay tribute to the work that the hon. Lady does in this area. I do not think it is right to say that we are having no scrutiny. I am here before the

Chamber, the Prime Minister has made a statement to the House, and we want to continue that as we go through this process. She asked about accountability. Of course, we want maximum accountability for not just the process but the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, in terms of the structures that apply to it and here in the House of Commons.

I have already answered the question about the Select Committee. Our view is that, in the normal course, it is right for Select Committees to mirror Government Departments, but ultimately that is a matter for the House. There is a huge opportunity in this process to leverage the very best of our aid—not just money but ethos, passion and commitment—with the muscle and clout that comes with our diplomatic network, and that is what we are committed to delivering.

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: As the coronavirus pandemic has laid bare, the interconnectedness of the modern world means that no one is safe until we are all safe. The UK’s commitment to international development is even more vital in the response to covid-19 at home and abroad. The sudden merging of DFID and the FCO and the absence of any parliamentary scrutiny or consultation means that we must focus on the quality of aid now spent through the Foreign Office. Can the Foreign Secretary give the House a commitment that the aid budget will not be tilted towards richer countries like Ukraine and that we will continue to spend at least 50% of aid in the least developed countries? Can he give a yes or no answer to this: will there be a retaining of a Cabinet Minister responsible for international development—not the Prime Minister—with a place on the National Security Council, so that humanitarian and development considerations are heard at the top of government?

Dominic Raab: I share the hon. Lady’s passion and commitment in this area. We have made the commitment to 0.7% of gross national income. We will discuss and scrutinise all the questions around accountability and the structure of the new body. Aid will be represented not just in foreign policy but in the NSC and at the Cabinet table by the Secretary of State for the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office—that would obviously be me—and the Prime Minister will oversee it through the NSC, which he chairs.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): First, will the Secretary of State confirm that claims that this merger will take money from the world’s poorest are simply false? Secondly, will he say whether this is a one-off move or part of a programme to give greater coherence and integration to British overseas policy?

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. In fact, I wanted to say in relation to the previous question that we are absolutely committed not just to safeguarding and protecting but to improving the work we do to help and lift out of poverty the most vulnerable and the poorest around the world. My hon. Friend asked whether this was a process. I think we are on a process of further integration, but our current plans are the ones that we have announced, and we are very focused on making sure we get maximum effectiveness out of this merger.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP) [V]: Approximately 600 jobs in the Department for International Development in East Kilbride in my constituency may be placed at risk by the shocking Government plans announced this week—shocking to staff, who found out just a few hours before the announcement, and shocking to the international community. They have caused considerable anxiety for local staff and all their families, who have been contacting me. Will the Secretary of State agree to meet me to discuss these crucial issues for my constituency and to guarantee that those highly skilled DFID jobs will remain in East Kilbride?

Dominic Raab: First, may I give the hon. Lady the reassurance she needs that the office in her constituency will not be closed? Is it not fantastic to have an SNP Member of this House asking for and giving value to the work that the United Kingdom Government do in Scotland, both domestically and around the world? We welcome her support in that regard.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): I had the privilege of being a merged Minister in both the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development, and I could see how well our embassies and high commissions worked across Africa presenting a “one UK” face to the world. Will the Foreign Secretary reassure me on three points: first, that he will be a strong voice in Cabinet for the world’s poorest and most dispossessed; secondly, that the proportion of the aid budget that is spent in the poorest and most conflict-affected countries will continue to be significant and at least where it is now; and thirdly, that he will prioritise the campaign for 12 years of quality education for every girl?

Dominic Raab: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the fantastic job she did. It is hard to believe but we do believe we can do even better by integrating, through this merger, the aid and foreign policy functions. She asked three specific questions; it is a yes on all three counts. Indeed, one of the first things I did yesterday was speak to Professor Paul Collier, one of a number of experts in the field, to look at how we can maximise our aid effort alongside our foreign policy, our trade and our wider international security objectives.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): For 20 years, since the success of the Jubilee 2000 campaign, there has been a consensus across the House about the importance of international development, and I commend the Churches in particular for delivering and establishing that consensus. I deeply regret that this downgrade is bringing it to an end. Does the Foreign Secretary recognise how many people in the UK profoundly disagree with his claim and believe there is a profound difference between focusing on doing good in the world—tackling poverty and dealing with the climate crisis—and what he and his colleagues regard as our own national interests?

Dominic Raab: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question. He is one of those Members of this House I always listen to with great care and interest, and he has a track record on these issues as well as on financial issues and many others. I made this point in my opening remarks that we have to be careful about this artificial

dividing line between what serves our moral sense of duty and what serves a harder, grittier perception of the national interest. I think that that is an artificial dividing line. I believe in a sense of moral self-interest, an enlightened self-interest, and if he looks at what we are doing on vaccines at the Gavi summit, he will see that that will crystallise the opportunity for us to do things that serve the people of this country, by securing a vaccine, while helping the most vulnerable in the world.

Gary Sambrook (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con): Britain is not alone in unifying its foreign policy, so does my right hon. Friend agree that we can learn from countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand, which run well-respected and well-funded development programmes from their Foreign Ministries?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is perhaps one of the reflections of the debate in this country that very little attention is paid to the fact that of the OECD countries, there is only one now with a separate Ministry for Development. Indeed, the trend since 2009 has all been in the opposite direction—in Belgium, Australia, and Canada. The zeitgeist and the progressive thing to do is to bring together those functions to ensure that they have maximum impact together.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC) [V]: The Pergau dam aid for arms scandal under the Conservative Government more than 25 years ago exposed the dangers of tying aid to foreign policy. Indeed, in 1994, in a landmark judgment, aid for Pergau was declared unlawful. Is the Foreign Secretary fully confident that there is no danger at all of history repeating itself?

Dominic Raab: I understand the point the hon. Gentleman is making. It is a perfectly respectable one, but the world has moved on, policy has moved on, and accountability and governance have moved on since the 1980s. Of course we are in a different place. I pay tribute to all the work that DFID has done since 1997. I understand why the Government, through that period, thought it was right as of and in its time. The best way now, the progressive way now, to integrate foreign policy with aid and development is to bring those functions together, and that is where most of the developing countries—indeed almost all of them—have gone.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): Departmental fragmentation is a very real problem in government, which is why I welcome the announcement made by my right hon. Friend. This Government’s commitment to international aid is, of course, enshrined in law. How will he ensure that social justice programmes, such as those that he has already talked about, including 12 years of quality education for girls, which has been championed by the Prime Minister, continue to receive the priority they need within a much more complex framework?

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend and former Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee. Of course she will know from the equalities agenda how easy it is for cross-cutting issues to fall between the cracks of individual Government Departments. We remain absolutely committed, and she will know that I am personally committed, to our campaign to ensure that

[*Dominic Raab*]

there are 12 years of quality education for every girl in the world, not just as a matter of moral duty but because it is one of the best levers to raise poverty in those countries. I also cite COP26 and climate change as another example of where we need to bring together our domestic ambitions and our international ambitions across the board and unite our diplomatic muscle and leverage with our development goals.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): The spread of covid-19 has pushed half a billion people into poverty and 265 million to the brink of starvation. This merger is a massive distraction in the middle of an emergency. Can the Foreign Secretary assure the House that official development assistance will not be misspent on foreign security projects, which risk the UK contributing to human rights abuses abroad?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I know that she takes a very close interest in this matter. In relation to conflict situations in particular—I have mentioned Yemen, but I can think of other situations around the world—integrating the aid and development budget and policy is the way that we will get a coherent approach, which not only brings the conflict to an end and alleviates the humanitarian crisis, but is the best vehicle for protecting human rights sustainably.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): In my role as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Nigeria, may I say that that our best high commissions around the world, such as that in Abuja, already work on an integrated basis? Does not this merger merely justify what is already happening on the ground?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Indeed, we are taking advantage of those officials—I have asked Nic Hailey to head up some of this work in the Foreign Office, as he has experience in Kenya doing exactly what my hon. Friend described in Nigeria—to help us knit together the aid, the development and the wider foreign policy functions. It is misplaced, but I understand why, to think that these functions, including the international security functions in those countries, should remain siloed. The most effective way, with the highest impact, is to bring them together.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): For the past two decades, the world has witnessed the impact of DFID's life-saving investments in the HIV response and the wider global health arena. That critical UK global leadership on HIV, health and international development must not be squandered at a time when years of progress are already at risk of being unravelled. How does the Secretary of State believe this level of focus will be achieved in an already overstretched FCO?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Gentleman raises exactly the point at issue. We want to maximise our focus and funding, but also our political effort, on those key priorities and ensure that we are delivering with the very highest impact. HIV and some of the other ground-breaking areas where we have helped to reduce disease, malnourishment and poverty are absolutely a top priority in the new administrative structures.

Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con): This important and necessary change provides the crystal clear clarity of purpose needed to boost and bolster global Britain. Our commitment to spend 0.7% of our national income on aid is enshrined in law. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we owe it to the people of our nation and the many we help across the world to make the best use of every penny?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that is exactly what this merger is all about. Ultimately, it is not about the institutional mechanics, but about the strategic objectives and ensuring that foreign policy, aid and our wider international objectives are brought together and that we demonstrate at home and abroad—in all the areas he described—that we are bigger than the sum of our parts.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab) [V]: Mr Speaker, “some giant cashpoint in the sky that arrives without any reference to UK interests”—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 670.]

That is how the Prime Minister describes aid to the poorest and most exploited nations and people in the globe. In a *Spectator* article, he previously mocked such aid as “politically correct”, with aid workers building toilets that people will end up living in and handing out condoms. In the same article, he said of British colonialism in Africa:

“The problem is not that we were once in charge, but that we are not in charge any more.”

Is it not the brutal truth that the Prime Minister is not interested in poverty reduction at home or abroad?

Dominic Raab: No; after all that bluff and bluster, there is really only a one-word answer. Look at what this Prime Minister did when he was Foreign Secretary—his commitment to making sure every girl has 12 years' education; the passion that he has brought to the COP26 agenda—a conference that we will host; his commitment to making sure that we promote media freedom throughout the world, as well as all those wider aid and development functions. This is someone who has direct experience of foreign policy and knows, as I understand, that we can maximise our impact in all those areas where we share aspirations and objectives right across the House and that we can get better results for the people we are trying to help across the world, but also for taxpayers' money in this country.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I very much welcome this merger, which is good for global Britain, good for aid beneficiaries and good for our ability to explain and advocate international development among a generally sceptical population. Can the Foreign Secretary say, however, what the Independent Commission for Aid Impact's role will be in the merged Department? Also, since DFID's terms and conditions of service for its staff tend to be rather better than those for Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff and diplomats, will there be a levelling up or a levelling down?

Dominic Raab: May I thank my right hon. Friend and say what a fantastic Minister he was in the Foreign Office? I worked very closely with him and he was

exceptional. He will know from his brilliant work on Yemen the importance of bringing together conflict resolution foreign policy objectives with the aid and development budget and programme that we have been delivering. We will come forward with the details he described as soon as practical so that this House can scrutinise them, but I can certainly tell him that we will want to maintain, if not increase, maximum scrutiny over the aid budget and the functioning of this merger.

Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con) [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer to the urgent question. This move mirrors similar situations in countries such as Australia, with its well respected Aussie Aid. In the merger of the FCO and DFID, what importance will be attached to the provision of sexual and reproductive health rights and family planning as a key component of ODA going forward?

Dominic Raab: May I thank my hon. Friend and say what a fantastic Minister she was for the Asia-Pacific region? She will know first hand what can be done when we combine all the resources, expertise and efforts right across government in the international sphere. On the public health goals she mentions, we will not be diluting or dimming the development goals in any way, shape or form.

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP) [V]: The reorganisation of Government Departments is day-to-day business; what we object to is the explicit and deliberate politicisation of international aid. Will the Foreign Secretary at least commit to meeting the international development non-government organisations to discuss, for the first time, implementing this selfish vanity project in the least bad way possible?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Gentleman talks about not politicising and then he comes up with a comment like that. Of course, we will look very carefully. We understand—I want to be clear about this—why NGOs are not universally, shall we say, welcoming this merger. Over £1 billion goes into NGOs' budgets every year from the aid budget, so I understand why they take a very close interest. I have given the reassurance that we are retaining the 0.7% commitment. Ultimately, in the last analysis, we have to ensure that our policy and taxpayers' money is brought together and invested in a way that can deliver the most effective results for the strategic objectives of alleviating poverty for the most vulnerable and delivering on climate change and on the wider international agenda that we on the Conservative Benches passionately support.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for Africa, I would like to put on record my view that the takeover of DFID by the FCO will undermine Britain's influence in Africa, not enhance it. Diplomacy is not development. Diplomacy must and should be driven by British interests. Development must be seen to be in the interests of the country concerned. DFID benefited from not being seen as an arm of British foreign policy. Will the Foreign Secretary take this opportunity to confirm that this takeover will not lead to a reduction in the proportion of aid that goes to Africa?

Dominic Raab: I fundamentally disagree with the hon. Lady, but I respect her view. I actually think that Africa—we mentioned Nigeria and Kenya as two examples—is an area where we really need to bring together, in one united, forged effort, development, aid and foreign policy objectives in conflict zones. I started my career as a war crimes lawyer—I worked in the FCO—and I saw the risk of having a shadow aid foreign policy at the time of conflict resolution. Bringing those things together will lead not only to a more effective aid and development set of objectives, but to more effective foreign policy. I think that will be at its highest and greatest in Africa.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Having spent time with DFID teams around the globe, I was initially concerned when I heard about the merger. However, they always worked positively and I believe we should, too. I therefore wish my right hon. Friend well in looking after the aid budget. I know that he believes in social justice and results, so I trust him to do so. As I am sitting next to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), may I ask the Foreign Secretary to ensure that we deliver value for money with our aid budget?

Dominic Raab: I agree with everything my hon. Friend says. He mentions our right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield. I pay tribute to the incredible work he did at DFID. We are absolutely committed, with even more passion and even more zeal, to those objectives, while at the same time, as my hon. Friend rightly says, making sure we can deliver the best bang for our buck with British taxpayers' money. The best way to do that is in a co-ordinated and integrated way. That is what the merger will achieve.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): After failing to consult the Cabinet let alone the sector, does the takeover not spell the end of collective responsibility and transparency and show us that it is not the Foreign Secretary or the Prime Minister in charge but another Dominic—and he has got to go?

Dominic Raab: I had thought we were on the cusp of a very serious question but it descended into political cut and thrust. Actually, what we are really focused on, and what this crisis has proved, is that necessity is the mother of innovation and invention. We have to try to drive greater effectiveness not just domestically as we tackle coronavirus but in our international effort, and that is what we are focused on.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): I welcome the merger for all the benefits of co-ordination and synergy that it promises. Can the Foreign Secretary please confirm that it will also come with a more comprehensive strategy for combining all the multiple threads of soft and hard power?

Dominic Raab: We have of course taken this merger decision now because we can see that we need to be as effective as we possibly can be during this coronavirus challenge. Equally, it will help to galvanise the integrated view that will bring into play all the wider security factors that my hon. Friend mentioned.

Mr Speaker: In order to allow the safe exit of hon. Members participating in this item of business and the safe arrival of those participating in the next, I am now suspending the House for three minutes.

11.20 am

Sitting suspended.

Business of the House

11.23 am

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

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): The business for the week commencing 22 June will include:

MONDAY 22 JUNE—Second Reading of the Extradition (Provisional Arrest) Bill [*Lords*].

TUESDAY 23 JUNE—Remaining stages of the Medicines and Medical Devices Bill, followed by motions relating to the establishment of an independent expert panel to consider cases raised under the independent complaints and grievance scheme.

WEDNESDAY 24 JUNE—Opposition day (9th allotted day). There will be a debate on a motion in the name of the official Opposition, subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 25 JUNE—If necessary, consideration of Lords amendments, followed by a debate on a petition relating to the recognition and reward for health and social care workers, followed by a debate on a petition relating to the support for UK industries in response to covid-19. The subjects for those debates were determined by the Petitions Committee.

FRIDAY 26 JUNE—The House is not expected to be sitting.

Valerie Vaz: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the business for next week. Let me start by sending my condolences to Dame Vera Lynn's family and friends. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The Queen mentioned some of the songs that we all know: we will all meet again someday.

I thank the Leader of the House for allotting another Opposition day. Obviously, we will be dealing with highly topical subjects. I do not know what we have done to deserve another day, but we may yet force another U-turn, as we did through our "Holidays Without Hunger" campaign. He has not announced the recess dates and it is important for us to know them, as well as details of the business, as we are keen to get on with the legislative programme that he says he wants to get on with. Mention has also been made of a mini-Budget in September, and it will be useful to know when the Session will end—whether it is to be in November or in May.

Can the Leader of the House say when the Intelligence and Security Committee will be set up? It looks as though the Government are either hiding something or incompetent—perhaps it is both.

The Environment Bill is in Committee and is apparently due to report on 25 June. The shadow Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Secretary has said that about 18 sittings have to be completed, so I wonder whether the Leader of the House could enlighten the House on that.

Mr Speaker,

"it's reign of terror now and, inevitably, reign of error next".

Those were the words of Tim Montgomerie, lately of the Leader of the House's parish. It seems that we are already into the reign of error, because shop workers,

who have worked their socks off, keeping us all in food, and who have been so polite and helpful, may be asked to work extra hours on Sunday—that is cruel. We are opposed to that, and I hope the Leader of the House will do a Marcus Rashford and work with the Opposition to make sure the Government do a U-turn on that. The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers has just done a survey, finding that 92% of shop workers oppose the move and two thirds of them feel they are under pressure when they are asked to work on a Sunday.

What about the reign of error on school meals? That went right to the wire. The Government were going to vote against us until it went right to the wire; the shadow Secretary of State for Education was about to stand up and then she had to admit that the Government had done a U-turn.

Again on the reign of error, not one but three former Prime Ministers think that the Prime Minister is wrong. I do not know whether the Leader of the House heard what the Prime Minister said:

“it is no use a British diplomat one day going in to see the leader of a country and urging him not to cut the head off his opponent and to do something for democracy in his country, if the next day another emanation of the British Government is going to arrive with a cheque for £250 million.”—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 674.]

That shows that the Prime Minister does not understand international development.

We can look at international development, first, as reparation for former colonialism. It goes to organisations on the ground. It is about education and health, and economic development. It provides support to people in their own countries so that they do not feel that they have to leave their countries to search for a better life somewhere else. Most importantly, it gives people hope and it was the right thing to do. I know that the Foreign Secretary said that we are following Australia and Canada, but we in Britain lead; we do not follow. I want to say thank you to Jan Thompson, the acting high commissioner in India, for bringing back all my stranded constituents. She is a diplomat; she is not dealing with international development. It is diplomats who are involved in freeing Nazanin, freeing Anoosheh and freeing Kylie, who, if reports are correct, has been beaten because she has started a choir. I wonder whether the Leader of the House could find out about that. May we have a statement, not just an urgent question granted by Mr Speaker, from the Secretary of State for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office on exactly how the Department will be set up? This is chaos and incompetence, without any idea for the infrastructure of the machinery of government.

Another machinery of government change was slipped out in a written statement last week. Apparently, border controls are now in the Cabinet Office. It seems that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster wants to wear a uniform and a cap so that he can count people in and count people out. But, really, are we to have border controls in the Cabinet Office? We need an urgent statement on what that is going to look like.

We see the reign of error again in the chaotic and incompetent policy announcement on racism and the Black Lives Matter movement. The Prime Minister obviously does not trust any of his Ministers to do the work, but for those who cannot remember, it was a

Labour Government in 1976 who put through the Race Relations Act and the Commission for Racial Equality, which said:

“We work for a just and integrated society, where diversity is valued. We use both persuasion and our powers under the law to give everyone an equal chance to live free from fear, discrimination, prejudice and racism.”

Those of a younger generation who do not think they face racism—it is because we had the Commission for Racial Equality, which changed society.

The Government have to stop dragging the BBC into politics. They know that the over-75s commitment was made by political parties. The BBC has educated, informed and entertained us through this lockdown. The Government must do the right thing in the middle of this crisis and fund the free television licences.

Last week, I missed our Chief Whip’s birthday. I want to put on record his fantastic record. It was on Saturday, the same day as the Queen’s official birthday. He has served five leaders over four decades, and two Prime Ministers, and we thank him for all his work, and also thank Sir Patrick Duffy, formerly of this place, as Member for Colne Valley and for Sheffield, Attercliffe. He is 100. He published his autobiography at 94, and the title is “Growing up Irish in Britain and British in Ireland and in Washington, Moscow, Rome and Sydney”. Sir Patrick, I am sure the whole House wishes you a very happy birthday.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I agree with the right hon. Lady that the whole House sends its condolences to Dame Vera Lynn’s family. She sang uplifting tunes that ensured the nation’s morale was good at a time of desperation. It is noticeable that when we had a difficult time recently, it is once again her words that our sovereign reached for. We look forward to “bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover” as we get blue passports back, so as people come in they will be looking for bluebirds waving their blue passports. We commemorate and remember her for the great contribution she made to boosting the nation’s resolve and morale.

I appreciate the right hon. Lady’s gratitude for Opposition days. I always do my best to ensure that there is contentment on the Opposition Benches. In that spirit, may I add to the celebratory comments about the Opposition Chief Whip’s birthday and his service to Parliament, for which I think he has a genuine commitment and love? I think that has been good news for how this place has operated in some, although not necessarily in all, ways, because he is also a very effective party politician. [*Interruption.*] I am in favour of effective party politicians. I think it is a perfectly reasonable thing to do. There is no criticism in that; it is part of making a democracy work.

Recess dates are always subject to the progress of parliamentary business and that remains the case. As soon as I can bring an update to the House, I will do so. The Environment Bill is an important Bill. Obviously, because there were no Public Bill Committees during the period when we were entirely hybrid, there have been delays. It would be very unlikely for it to be out of Committee at the date currently proposed.

I am very glad the right hon. Lady welcomes the Government policy on free school meals. The Government are a Government who listen, and that is quite right. It is very odd that the Labour party should come late to a party asking for something, and then when the Government

[Mr Rees-Mogg]

give it, complain that the Government have given it. I do not really see the logic in that. I think the Government have done absolutely the right thing.

As regards the merger of DFID and the Foreign Office, this is an absolutely brilliant policy. It is one that commands support across the country, because it is putting British interests first. It was not from this Dispatch Box, but from a Dispatch Box in a very similar place—it had to be replaced after the damage caused by the bomb—that Lord Palmerston pointed out that we have eternal interests. Our nation's interests must be served by the structures of government, and that is what is being done. We must ensure that taxpayers' money is well spent, and taxpayers have a right to demand that their money is used carefully.

The Prime Minister has been here to make a statement to the House. You, Mr Speaker, rightly keep Her Majesty's Government on their toes when announcements are not made to this House, and sometimes they creep out at press briefings, which is something you deprecate, but when the Prime Minister comes and makes the statement to this House, does he get the laurels that he deserves—the paeans of praise that should come to him? No, not at all; we get grumbling, moaning and complaining that it is not enough. It has to be said that some people can never be satisfied.

The right hon. Lady called for a uniform for the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster; I can tell her that as Lord President of the Council, I am entitled to a uniform but, as I understand it, the uniform has not been worn by any Lord President since the coronation of George V. I therefore do not intend to resurrect that ancient tradition. [Interruption.] I do not have the uniform and nor will I be seeking to get the uniform. I do believe that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is entitled to have a flag on his official car, but I understand that that practice has also fallen into disuse.

The right hon. Lady referred to the Government's commitment to racial equality, which is a very important subject. It was clear in our manifesto that we will ensure that Britain is a fairer society and tackle racial and ethnic inequalities where they exist. The new commission has been set up to have a fresh and positive approach to try to ensure that we have as fair a society as we possibly can. The seriousness with which the Government take the issue is shown by the seniority of the person put in charge of the commission, working from Downing Street.

Finally, the right hon. Lady questioned whether the BBC was being brought into politics. It is noticeable that it is the left that likes to see much higher funding for the BBC; I wonder why that is.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Leader of the House for confirming that the Prime Minister will make that statement here first.

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): May we have an urgent debate on aviation, for two reasons? First, because many of us want to express our support for BA staff, who are currently having a very difficult time with their management; we need to stand up for them. Secondly, because the 14-day quarantine in aviation is such a good policy that it needs rapid improvement to air

bridges or testing. We need to get the aviation industry going and those two issues need fully to be discussed in the House.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising an important question. Many of us represent constituents who have worked for British Airways and given long service over many years, and there are concerns about the way that they have been treated. This matter has quite rightly been brought before the House under an urgent question, and I think could be debated next week in the Petitions Committee debate relating to support for UK industries in response to covid-19. The matter clearly comes under that heading, so the debate will be available.

I note the point that my hon. Friend makes about the quarantine regulations, which of course are for a period and will be reviewed. The issue of safe countries is being looked at, as the Foreign Secretary said on the wireless this morning.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP) [V]: First, may we have a debate on how the fiscal framework within which the devolved national Administrations operate should be changed to improve their capacity to deal with the current pandemic and its aftermath?

To date, the Scottish Government have spent more than £4 billion on covid-19. Most of it will be funded through Barnett consequentials, but several hundred million has had to be diverted from other priority spending. For the UK Government, that would not be a problem, as they can overspend if necessary and borrow unlimited amounts to cover the cost. Neither of those options is available to the Scottish Government under the fiscal framework. I hope the Leader of the House will agree that when the framework was devised, no one had in mind the need to cope with a crisis on this scale. On Tuesday, four out of the five parties in the Scottish Parliament united behind a call for additional fiscal responsibilities. Their motivation was practical, not ideological. When can we discuss this Parliament's response to that call?

Sticking with responses to coronavirus, we have discussed previously how the crisis sadly brings out the worst in some people, and we now hear that companies such as BA are intending, under cover of the pandemic, to execute mass redundancies and then hire back fewer people on worse pay and conditions. My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) has launched a Bill, with cross-party support, to outlaw such Dickensian employment practices. It would be an easy matter—would it not?—for the Government either to make time to discuss that Bill or to bring forward proposals of their own.

Finally, I return to the matter of voting during the current emergency. It seems the Government are determined to do just about anything to stop Members voting remotely, including introducing new technology, as we have seen this week. Why do they not stop messing about and do the common sense thing by switching the e-voting system back on: a tried and tested system that not only allows Members who cannot attend to vote but makes it much safer for those who are on the premises?

Mr Rees-Mogg: To take the last point first, voting was carried out using parliamentary passes very effectively last night and with a proxy scheme that means that people can be present in the House. I think my hon.

Friend the deputy Chief Whip voted for more than 40 Members of Parliament, and a similar figure was true for a leading Whip on the Opposition Benches. There are advantages for the Whips in the scheme, but it ensures that people are able to express their views, and that we have Parliament back, which means that we are getting the work done.

We have four Bill Committees up and running. We are working through the legislative programme, which we committed to doing in the manifesto. The British people expect us to be back at work. We are leading by example, and it is right that people are back and that we have made provision for people who cannot be back. In that context, private Members' Bills will be coming back in early July. That will be the opportunity for the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) to introduce his Bill, so that it can be considered in the normal way for private Members' Bills.

As regards money, £3.7 billion has gone from the central Exchequer to the Scottish Government—their share from the extra expenditure in relation to the coronavirus—so the funds that are going through are very substantial. Of course, part of the devolution settlement is that the Scottish Government have discretion regarding how they spend money and what they spend it on, and they have to work within that discretion.

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): The failure of the diplomatic community to end the plight of hundreds of thousands of seafarers stuck at sea is shameful—all down to covid travel restrictions. Without our mariners working in a healthy environment, our supply chains will be damaged and obviously world trade will be as well. Will my right hon. Friend consider an urgent debate to call on the diplomatic network of the Foreign Office and the Prime Minister's global Britain agenda to get an agreement internationally on crew changes?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising an important point that will be of concern to others in the House. There are Transport questions on 2 July, but I suggest that she applies to you, Mr Speaker, for an Adjournment debate to begin the process of the matter being discussed more fully.

Mr Speaker: We are heading up to the north-east with Ian Mearns, the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab) [V]: Thank you, Mr Speaker; I am grateful for your indulgence. I hope that the Leader of the House enjoyed the coronation of George V, which I believe was 110 years ago. Will the Leader of the House let us know when the anticipated estimates days debates are due to take place, and how many days of such debates the Backbench Business Committee will have to allocate? We probably need to do that work next week.

Also, this afternoon the House will debate the effect of covid-19 on black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. Although I welcome the measure of protected time, it would be a great shame if contributions to such an important and well-subscribed debate had to be limited to only two or three minutes.

Lastly, could the Leader of the House crave the indulgence of some of his colleagues in the Business team to look at what Newcastle United are doing in

terms of being an outlier within the premier league by completely and unnecessarily withholding refunds for tickets for games that they know will not be played in front of fans? It is withholding those refunds from fans: paying customers, many of whom, frankly, in the current climate could do with the money.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman asks about the estimates days. I will bring forward business in the normal way. We have, as he will know in terms of Backbench business more generally, been prioritising Government legislative business to start with, but we are beginning to get back to a more normal way of working, with another Opposition day next week, and using time, admittedly for the Petitions Committee next week rather than his Committee, to ensure that all the important subjects that get raised have time to be aired.

Time limits on speeches are really a matter for you, Mr Speaker, rather than me, but we hear the hon. Gentleman's requests for protected time, to ensure that debates have a reasonable amount of time, subject to the other business going on in the House.

As regards refunds, it would not be fair of me to talk specifically about an individual company or sports organisation making refunds. This is an issue across the economy, with many businesses very stretched for cash but consumers expecting to get their money back. It is a problem that the Government are aware of, and there are a variety of routes for people to get their money back. If the company directly is not able to do it, sometimes the credit card company may be able to help.

Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): May I say that Dame Vera was a true friend of our white cliffs country, working with us to see off the planned sell-off of the port? She has the thanks and prayers of our community.

In Dover and Deal, we are already working on an exciting local recovery plan, but we cannot do it by ourselves because it includes duty-free cruises to France, border controls and new trade and customs activities. In drawing up the legislative programme for the remainder of this year, will my right hon. Friend give time for the House to do whatever it takes, for as long as it takes, to maximise the opportunities of Brexit and secure recovery and prosperity for us all?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is right that there are great opportunities to be had from the restoration of powers from the continent to the United Kingdom. She and her predecessor have both been exemplary in their championing of Dover and Deal, to great effect. The town has never been better served than it has been in the past decade. It is thanks to the commitment of Members on both sides of the House, in their role as lawmakers, that we have returned physically and are making progress with key legislation that will allow us to take back control of policy making, whether it be agriculture, immigration or trade. From that, there will be more bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab) [V]: I welcome the robustness of the Government's latest six-monthly report on Hong Kong. I draw the Leader of the House's attention to early-day motion 616 on China's national security law, which I co-signed with the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) and other Members across the House.

[Andrew Gwynne]

[That this House notes with surprise and concern the decision by HSBC Bank Plc and Standard Chartered Plc to support China's proposals for a new National Security Law in Hong Kong; recognises that financial institutions, particularly those enjoying the benefits and protections of being based in the UK, have a duty to uphold and promote democratic principles and human rights around the world, wherever they may trade; warns that the proposed National Security Law is likely to be in direct breach of the Sino-British Joint Declaration; and calls on the Government to set out the measures it will take to encourage HSBC and Standard Chartered to review their support for that proposed legislation from the Chinese Communist Party, which has a serial record of violating human rights and undermining democratic principles.]

What more can we do in the House of Commons to show our fullest support for all the promises made in the joint declaration and the upholding of democratic freedoms and rights enshrined in the Basic Law of Hong Kong and show our unequivocal support for Hongkongers to live peacefully and without fear in a free society?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's question. The rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong are something that the Government take deeply seriously, and I hope I can assure the hon. Gentleman that this is a priority for the Government. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has updated the House and, I am sure, will continue to do so. He last did so on 2 June, when he provided a statement on Hong Kong.

The Government are deeply concerned about China's plan to impose national security legislation on Hong Kong and have urged it to reconsider. Imposition of this law by China would undermine the principle of one country, two systems, under which Hong Kong is guaranteed a high degree of autonomy, and it would be in direct conflict with China's international obligations under the joint declaration—a UN treaty—which was signed on our behalf by Margaret Thatcher and is something that the Chinese Government ought to be proud of. If China continues down this path, we will look to amend the arrangements of those with British national (overseas) status, to allow them to come to the UK and apply to work and study for extendable periods of 12 months. This House will share the role of ensuring that the Chinese Government are under no misapprehension about the fact that Her Majesty's Government are very serious about expecting the joint declaration to be observed.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): Will the Leader of the House consider giving time for a debate in which the House can discuss how the Chancellor could best reshape the economy to lead the country out of recession? Could such a debate take place in good time to inform the Chancellor's deliberations prior to any statement on the economy?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the work of the Chancellor, who has managed an unprecedented crisis with characteristic ableness, crafting a considered and suitably bold approach. Our priority has been to support people, families and businesses

through this crisis, but there will be more steps to be taken, and the wisdom of this House will be invaluable in helping the Government to shape policy for the future. As I announced earlier, there will be a debate next Thursday 25 June that will allow the economic circumstances around the pandemic to be discussed in broad terms, and I am sure that Ministers will pay careful attention to that debate.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): May I first report that yesterday I spoke to Pat Duffy, who not only was in very good spirits and fine form, but was polishing off his first glass of champagne to celebrate his 100th birthday? Yesterday, I also raised with the Equalities Minister the ongoing scandal of the operation of the disclosure and barring service—the DBS. This can blight people's lives, often for minor crimes or even cautions in their youth, for decades. It prevents people from turning their lives around and is highly discriminatory. Members from both sides of Parliament and across the political spectrum recognise this injustice, as indeed did the Equalities Minister yesterday. The blockage seems to be the dead hand of the Home Office, so will the Leader of the House mobilise his office to knock departmental heads together, not for another study, inquiry or commission, but for rapid change, action and then a statement to the House?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The right hon. Gentleman raises a very important point: with the DBS system, it is important to recognise that people can reform and that people ought to be given, in a fair society, a second chance, and that is something we as politicians should be very committed to. I will use my office in whatever way I can to try to encourage other Ministers to come to a conclusion on this and to look at it in the serious way that he suggests, though I may be a bit cautious about knocking heads together, because I am not sure that meets the requirements of social distancing.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con) [V]: Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on procurement practices across the public sector, so that we can ensure that the businesses across the country that stepped up and provided the personal protective equipment we needed have a fair chance to bid for longer-term contracts?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This is an important issue, and we will have considerable freedom in how procurement is developed and used once we have left the European Union, when we will be much less tied in to the very dirigiste approach taken under the single market. The Government have done remarkably well in opening up to other suppliers, especially during this crisis, to try to get the best available equipment where necessary.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP) [V]: The chemical and pharmaceuticals industry is the UK's largest manufacturing exporter, and during the covid-19 pandemic, it has played a positive and essential role. Can we therefore have a debate in Government time, or, at the very least, a statement, on the work of the sector and how we stimulate its economic demand while supporting a decarbonisation-focused national recovery that will provide for a realistic energy transition, enabling the industry to deliver clean water, effective medicines and sufficient food production?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to pay tribute to the pharmaceutical industry. The UK's pharmaceutical industry is world beating and has made an enormous contribution in recent months. In terms of the debate that he is asking for, once again, that is a matter that could be raised under the debate next Thursday in response to the Petitions Committee.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is widely accepted that our coastal communities are set to be most severely impacted on by the coronavirus crisis, and it is reported that the town of Newquay, which I have the honour of representing, is set to be the most severely impacted on in the whole country. May we have a ministerial statement on the Government's strategy for supporting and investing in our coastal communities to ensure that economic recovery happens as soon as possible, as we come out of lockdown?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Again, this is a point of the greatest importance, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question about support for coastal communities. He is a true champion of his community—an idyllic part of the world—as much of the Chamber is for those in the coastal communities he refers to. The communities on our coastline are of huge importance to this country, and their tourist economies have been particularly hit by the economic downturn of the pandemic. This is a matter that can be taken up at the next Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs oral questions on 25 June, but once again, it can also be raised in the debate next week on the general economic effects of the crisis.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): We are a resilient community in the Rhondda, but I honestly do not think that we can take any more without significant help from outside. We had some of the worst flooding in the country earlier this year—hundreds of homes lost everything, many of them without any insurance at all—and last night, we had another bout of flooding, which has affected about 200 homes. I spoke to one woman last night who was in floods of tears because she had only just managed to get builders to sort her home out. She was about to move back in and now it is all ruined all over again. On top of that, we have a tip, half of which has fallen down into the river. Sixty thousand tonnes have to be moved and the whole thing has to be made safe, because we do not want another Aberfan. The council is completely strapped for cash. We know that we need £60 million to mend the culverts, to make sure that this does not happen all over again in three months' time, in six months' time or in a year. We need £2 million to move the 60,000 tonnes of earth. Please—I do not want a debate, if I am honest; I really just want the Leader of the House to make sure that we get the support we need in the Rhondda.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think the whole House will have heard what the hon. Gentleman had to say and the emotion with which he said it, and the effect this must have on his constituents. It is hard to think of anything worse than that which his constituents suffered—just having got back to a house that was redecorated and restored and then having it flooded and destroyed again—and the worry that must remain in any community with a tip in it where people think back to Aberfan and know of the terrible disaster that that caused.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will speak to the leader of the hon. Gentleman's local council today about the flooding overnight. There are significant Government funds available—£2.6 billion—but I am aware that when I speak from this Dispatch Box about large amounts of Government money when people are sitting at home worrying about whether a tip may collapse, that is not enough. I will take it up with Ministers, and I will ensure that the message he has brought to this House is known across government.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on VJ-day on 15 August? Because of the national crisis, VE-day celebrations were somewhat muted. I have been talking to Dame Vera Lynn's daughter, Virginia, and I very much feel that we should make this a very special celebration. We owe her mother a great debt of gratitude for the way her wonderful voice lifted spirits during our darkest hours. To quote Dame Vera, she very much felt that our boys in the far east had been forgotten.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important occasion. The Government fully recognise the importance of VJ-day, 15 August. That is also the feast of the Assumption, so it is a day that many celebrate every year for other reasons, too, but we will be celebrating particularly on this 75th anniversary of VJ-day. I do not actually know what anniversary it is of the Assumption; I am not sure what year that happened in.

This important anniversary is an occasion for us to acknowledge once again the sacrifices made on our behalf by the veterans of the campaign and to remember all those who lost their lives and the many military prisoners of war and civilian internees who suffered in captivity. The Government and our partners will take into careful consideration the changing national situation as we continue to tackle the coronavirus outbreak. We will always put the health and wellbeing of our veterans at the forefront of our plans. We are committed to creating a programme that will allow members of the public to remember and give thanks to the second world war generation in appropriate and fitting ways, but my hon. Friend is right that we must not allow those troops who were in the far east to be forgotten.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP) [V]: May we have a debate on the vital importance of the theatre and arts sector to the economic and social recovery of our societies? Local theatres such as the Howden Park Centre in my constituency bring so much to our community and economy, but in an interview with *The Observer*, Rufus Norris, the artistic director of the National Theatre, revealed that without additional Government support, 70% of theatres will be boarded up by Christmas. Festivals such as the Edinburgh fringe recently received a £1 million support package from the Scottish Government. Will the Leader of the House press for a debate in Government time and put all possible pressure on his colleagues in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Treasury to step up and support these vital sectors?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady is right to raise the concerns of the theatre and the arts. The general context is of a Government that have taken enormous steps to help a wide range of businesses. It is worth bearing in mind that 8.9 million people are currently using the job

[Mr Rees-Mogg]

retention or furlough scheme, which cost taxpayers £19.6 billion. That is in addition to the £7.5 billion that has gone to the 2.6 million self-employed, which is perhaps particularly relevant as so many people in the theatre and the arts are self-employed. In addition to that, there are business bounce-back loans. There are many schemes in place to help businesses survive, but the hon. Lady is none the less right to highlight the particular problems of theatre and the arts.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): It is unusual for me to follow on from an SNP comment that I rather agree with. We do have to look after our arts sector; it is enormously important.

May we, before too long, have an update on the restoration and renewal project? Although the country is going through very difficult times, we must remember that we have a legal duty to maintain this world heritage site. We must not lose sight of the very real problems with this building's infrastructure. If we leave them untouched for too long, it faces disaster. I ask the Leader of the House to provide an update in due course and to remain committed to a project that I believe we have a legal, moral and historic duty to maintain.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My right hon. Friend is a very distinguished predecessor in this role and did a great deal of the work to ensure that people understand the problems that the Palace faces. With the then Leader of the House of Lords, he chaired a Joint Committee, which I served on, that looked into this issue. His question is of great importance. Everyone in the House recognises that the Palace needs a significant amount of work. It is a masterpiece—a showpiece of our belief in our democracy and our willingness to ensure that it is something we can be proud of across the world. As he knows, the Sponsor Body has been established, and it now has the responsibility for the plans to implement the strategy for R and R. It is reviewing the situation that it has inherited and the current circumstances, but it must ensure that whatever is done represents good value for money. There is not a bottomless pit of money.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): May we have a debate on the fact that, yesterday, the UN extraordinarily removed the Saudi-led coalition from the blacklist for violating children's rights in Yemen, despite admitting that it killed or injured 222 children in Yemen in the past year? My constituent Luke Symons, who is held captive by the Houthis, was in Taiz in 2015 when the Saudis bombed and devastated it. He was on the phone to his relatives in Cardiff at the time, and they heard the carnage that was going on. Can we have some pressure from the Foreign Office for a total ceasefire from the Saudi-led coalition so that humanitarian aid can go in and we can arrange for the release of prisoners such as my constituent Luke?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It may be helpful if I give the hon. Gentleman the latest update on Luke Symons that I have from the Foreign Office. Officials are in touch with his family, but we have no consular presence in Yemen, which means that we are unable to provide direct assistance. That has been the case since 2015, but the Government continue to press the Houthis to release Luke on humanitarian grounds. The case is being raised at the

most senior levels within the Houthi regime, and we continue to call for Mr Symons's release regularly, particularly in the light of the coronavirus. The Government are committed to doing everything we can to ensure his release.

The hon. Gentleman is right to raise those broader points about the situation in Yemen. It is troubling, and the Government have previously called for a ceasefire.

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend update the House on when we can expect a statement from the Secretary of State detailing when the tourism and hospitality industry can safely reopen so that it has sufficient time to prepare and put social distancing measures in place?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend represents a constituency that relies heavily on the tourism industry, and this is a particularly difficult time. The strategy for reopening the country is conditional and subject to the five tests being met, but as soon as it is safe to do so, we will be encouraging everyone to get out, book a great British holiday and support our brilliant tourism industry. Ministers have regularly provided statements in the House, and I am sure they will be eager to do so again as soon as we can encourage more of our hospitality and tourism sector to open its doors, and encourage people to have a staycation this year to help boost our domestic economy.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): On Monday 15 June, the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief, which I chair, published a report, which was launched on Zoom, entitled "Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide". The report found that Nigerian Christians are experiencing devastating violence, with attacks by armed groups of Islamist Fulani herders, resulting in the deaths of thousands and the displacement of hundreds of thousands. Will the Leader of the House agree to a statement or a debate on that urgent and dire subject?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The House is always grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his commitment to persecuted minorities and for trying to ensure that their persecution is known around the globe and that Governments who allow persecution are shamed. The Government are trying to do what we can to protect persecuted communities. I cannot promise him time for a debate, but I remind him—he probably knows this already—that Foreign Office questions are coming up on 30 June.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con): Politicians have a duty to set a good example, especially during these difficult times. The missing Mayor of London refuses to condemn mass gatherings during this pandemic. Will the Leader of the House please remind MPs that it is irresponsible and foolish to gather in mass demonstrations, and will he also remind the Mayor of London of his responsibilities to the citizens of London and to our brilliant emergency service workers?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend raises a crucial point. We have put in place clear and strict guidance on social distancing, and I believe that our elected officials have a responsibility to see it upheld. We strongly support the right to protest peacefully, but it is vital that people stick to the rules to protect themselves and their families. These are not normal times, and to protect us

all and stop the spread of coronavirus, any gatherings of more than six people are unlawful. The actions we have seen over the previous weeks were not the right way to be proceeding, with dozens of police officers injured. The police have our full support in tackling any violence, vandalism or disorderly behaviour, and I would like to echo my colleague—my colleague? I mean my right hon. Friend—the Home Secretary’s view that those responsible will face the full force of law. That is the right way to proceed, though I fear it is unlikely that the Mayor of London will take any advice from me, because if I were to advise him, I would say: make way for a Conservative.

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP) [V]: The right hon. Gentleman has been flattering himself with his belief that MPs can only do their job by physically attending a Parliament that can hold only 50 people. Given the fact that £1.3 million has been invested in the hybrid proceedings, allowing Members to vote and participate in debates remotely, it is scandalous that the Government are already attempting to dismantle it at every turn. Would he agree that it is far more cost-effective, inclusive and safe to reinstate full hybrid proceedings and that abandoning them is both undemocratic and discriminatory?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am sorry to disagree with the hon. Lady, interesting though it is to observe the guitar that is behind her, given the fascination that we have in being nosy about where people are calling in from. We have ensured that the proper Parliament can continue. When scrutiny was impossible without hybridity, we had hybridity. Now that it is possible for reasonable numbers to come back, we are coming back as far as possible while continuing to make arrangements for people such as the hon. Lady to vote by proxy if they so wish and to appear remotely in interrogative sessions. That is the right way to proceed. People who can go back to work because they need to be back at work should go back to work, and we are leading by example.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): Mr Speaker,

“Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, creeps in this petty pace from day to day”.

May we therefore not allow another moment to creep by without a debate on British theatre? All the world’s a stage, but today the British stage is dark, from the west end to community theatres such as the Richings Players in the Ivers in my constituency. May we therefore have a debate in Government time on British theatre and the performing arts, in the context of a wider debate on preserving our British cultural heritage?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Indeed,

“All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players”.

My hon. Friend makes her point extremely well. As we have heard previously, these are matters of concern across the House. As I said earlier, the Government are taking steps to help the artistic community, as we are helping the whole of the economy. The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has acknowledged that social distancing makes staging performances exceptionally difficult for theatres and that the industry will need a different approach from other sectors. We might end up with different ways of going to the theatre and with more live streaming and so on. Over the next few weeks, my right hon. Friend will be convening experts in a targeted way and bringing together our leading performers from theatres, choirs and orchestras with medical experts and advisers in the hope that a solution can be found that will preserve our heritage in the way that my hon. Friend suggests.

Mr Speaker: In order to allow the safe exit of hon. Members participating in this item of business and the safe arrival of those participating in the next, I am now suspending the House for three minutes.

Virtual participation in proceedings concluded (Order, 4 June).

12.9 pm

Sitting suspended.

International Development

12.13 pm

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I understand that it is the will of the House that motions 1 to 5 on international development be taken together. The debate will last up to 90 minutes. When the first motion has been decided, I will call the Minister to move the other motions formally. If a Member objects, the motions will be taken separately. I now call the Minister to move the first motion and speak to all five motions.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (James Duddridge): I beg to move,

That the draft African Development Bank (Fifteenth Replenishment of the African Development Fund) Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 19 May, be approved.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That the draft African Development Bank (Further Payments to Capital Stock) Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 19 May, be approved.

That the draft African Development Fund (Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative) (Amendment) Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 19 May, be approved.

That the draft International Development Association (Nineteenth Replenishment) Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 19 May, be approved.

That the draft International Development Association (Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative) (Amendment) Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 19 May, be approved.

James Duddridge: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is good to see you in your place. The orders will permit the UK Government to make financial contributions to the African Development Bank and the African Development Fund, in addition to the World Bank International Development Association, up to the stated values on the orders. I propose to start with the three statutory instruments on the African Development Bank, then move on to the two SIs on the World Bank IDA before concluding.

As the House knows, Africa remains the poorest continent on the planet, and 24 of 30 poorest countries are on that continent. Sadly, by 2030, 90% of extreme poverty is likely to be concentrated on that continent, and instability remains a persistent challenge. Until last year, Africa was growing fast, and in 2019 it experienced 3.4% growth in gross domestic product. Covid has had a significant negative impact, however, and recent World Bank estimates suggest that GDP in Africa will shrink by just under 3%. Sadly, 26 million more people will be pushed into extreme poverty. The African Development Bank is a key regional partner for the UK in delivering development, prosperity and our security objectives in Africa. It has significant financial clout, a strong regional identity and deep knowledge, and it is very much a trusted partner across the continent, which allows it to tackle sensitive issues.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): That is very reassuring. Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that of those scandals that have driven the readers of the *Daily Mail* into a state of apoplexy over the past

decade, 99% of them, I will wager, were administered not by the Department for International Development, but by other Departments? Will he ensure that this reorganisation is a genuine merger and not a hostile takeover?

James Duddridge: I assure my right hon. Friend that it is a genuine merger. As he knows, I am not a betting man, but it is important that official development assistance is used well not only by the Foreign Office but across all Departments. This merger is about taking a step up, not levelling down to the lowest common denominator. There is an opportunity to put development at the heart of everything we are doing more generally, but I will not stray into comments that were made earlier today about the merger, and with the House's permission, I will focus specifically on the African Development Bank, and later on the World Bank.

The ADB's five key areas are to light up and power up Africa, to integrate, to industrialise, to feed and to improve the quality of life across the continent. Those are closely aligned with the UK's priorities. The majority of the bank's lending is targeted at addressing the large infrastructure gap across the continent, and it is focusing very much on transport, energy, water and sanitation issues.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I had a chat to the Minister prior to this debate. In my constituency of Strangford, many churches are involved in work across Africa, particularly the Eden Mission in Newtownards, which does significant work in Eswatini, which those of us from further back know as Swaziland. The Minister referred to infrastructure investment, and there is a real need for investment in the electricity market. South African supplies have a sharply inflated price, which is holding back technology and even learning for children, who have been provided with shared computers from Northern Ireland as learning tools. Will the Minister consider some help for Swaziland, to ensure that it can run those sites with the electricity it needs?

James Duddridge: I know my Big Bend from my Piggs Peak, having lived in Mbabane for a year, a number of years ago, and I knew the problems of flickering lights and power stability. I am saddened to hear that it is still a problem with Eskom and South Africa, but power distribution across the continent is a key issue. I am not absolutely sure whether such funds are the right mechanism, but I would be more than happy to commit to talking to the hon. Gentleman about that, alongside our high commissioner in Eswatini—that is one of the new posts that opened up relatively recently—and to discuss what more we can do in Eswatini on electricity and a number of other issues. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his helpful contribution.

The African Development Fund is also supporting the continent to respond to covid, providing \$10 billion of financing and technical assistance to help to mitigate the economic and social impacts and to support recovery beyond health and humanitarian issues.

Turning to the specifics of the orders, the first order permits the Government to purchase new ADB bank shares. This will maintain our 1.7% shareholding, and to do so we would need to pay £95 million over eight years. This order also makes provision to put in another £50 million of capital provisionally to allow the additional

purchase of shares in the future should the situation and budgets allow. The bank provides non-concessional yet inexpensive loans to middle-income and to credit-worthy low-income countries, and also critically, to the private sector in Africa.

Last October, governors agreed to a 125% increase in their general capital to boost the capital stock, enabling it to lend annually from £5 billion currently to more than £13 billion in 2030. The bank has made strong policy commitments in UK priority areas, expanding its climate facility and private sector operations.

The second order permits the UK Government to provide a contribution of up to £633 million to the African Development Fund's 15th replenishment. The fund provides grants, low-interest loans and technical assistance to Africa's poorest countries, and it is replenished normally every three years. The negotiations for replenishments concluded last November and an overall envelope of £6 billion was agreed, financed by repayments of existing loans and new donor pledges of £3.8 billion over the three-year period. Our pledge would maintain the UK's position, providing significant influence over the fund's operation. Over the next three years, the fund is expected to provide 6 million people with electricity connections. Six million people will benefit from improvements to agriculture and more than 20 million will benefit from improvements to transport. The fund will support 1 million jobs.

The third and final order on the African Development Bank is to amend an existing order and to permit the Government to provide an additional contribution of £66 million to support the African Development Fund's participation in the multilateral debt relief initiative, which is very similar to the final order for a different institution. The multilateral debt relief initiative supports debt relief and enables countries to release resources, or to have released resources, to spend on poverty reduction and development that would otherwise be spent on unserviceable debt. The African Development Bank remains an important strategic partner across the board, particularly on climate change.

Let me turn now to the final two remaining orders relating to the World Bank and the International Development Association. This is the institution that provides grant finance, low interest rates and technical assistance to the world's 76 poorest countries—countries that are not credit-worthy. Many of the most fragile countries at risk of instability and conflict are covered within this number. In recent months, these countries have been particularly hard hit by the covid-19 crisis, making the case for these orders even more poignant. IDA has responded to the covid crisis by making rapidly available additional support. It has a strong record of delivering results—for example, on supporting vaccines to millions of children and supporting childbirth.

IDA combines donor contributions with repayments from previous lending operations and market borrowing to provide more than three times the amount of leverage to get new financial commitments. IDA replenishments have taken place every three years since its establishment in 1960 and discussions took place last December and were concluded in this replenishment round, which includes 50 donors, including the UK, with pledges of more than \$23 billion. The World Bank expects that to be leveraged up to around \$82 billion of financing over the next three years.

The fourth order permits the UK Government to provide a core contribution of up to an average of £1 billion a year to IDA's 19th replenishment over three years. This will help to vaccinate 140 million children and to provide safe childbirth for 80 million women, electricity for 50 million people and a social safety net for 40 million beneficiaries.

The final order, as I said earlier, is similar to an existing order that permits the UK Government to provide an additional contribution of £562 million to support IDA's participation, alongside the ADB, in relation to the multilateral debt relief initiative.

In conclusion, these five orders are in the UK's national interests and also serve our development equities and interests, not only in Africa but around the rest of the world, through the World Bank.

12.25 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome these orders and agree that they should be taken together. We will not be opposing them. I welcome the support that they indicate for tackling poverty and disease and removing the burden of debt in Africa and elsewhere across the world.

However, in the context of the Prime Minister's announcement earlier this week and the urgent question answered by the Foreign Secretary today, it is very important that we recognise that the decision taken will have an impact on our relationship with the African Development Bank and the World Bank institutions, including IDA. It is sad to have to contrast the positive impact of these orders with some of the ill-informed rhetoric that we heard from the Prime Minister on Tuesday on a decision that fundamentally risks undermining our relationship and influence with IDA and the African Development Bank in terms of the impact and oversight of these replenishments and the debt relief. This decision has been criticised from many quarters, including by Members on both sides of the House and by some of the world's leading experts. One of those, of course, is the former Prime Minister, David Cameron, who said that it

“will mean less expertise, less voice for development at the top table”—

that is, the top table of these institutions. Gayle Smith, the former administrator of USAID, also said that it was a dangerous step backwards. Does the Minister agree that in fact, and by contrast to what the Prime Minister said earlier this week, by the majority of contexts there has always been close co-operation and co-ordination between the different arms of UK international policy, including in Africa, and in relation to the IDA part of the World Bank and its other institutions, as well as the African Development Bank?

It has been particularly concerning, given that we are focusing so much on Africa in these orders, to see the false dichotomy that was set up by the Prime Minister's comments. He spoke about Zambia and Tanzania, for example, and contrasted them with priorities in places like Ukraine and the Balkans. This is particularly concerning because Zambia and Tanzania have been supported by funds from the African Development Bank and IDA in the past, and of course by DFID's bilateral programmes. They are both long-standing members of the Commonwealth and countries with which we have had very constructive partnerships over many decades.

[Stephen Doughty]

This is particularly relevant in relation to the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on Africa and elsewhere, which the Minister spoke about. He and I have discussed that issue outside the House. I want to thank him for the courtesy that he has shown me since my taking on this role in discussing a number of matters on which there is no division across this House. For example, the African Development Bank has been supporting the One WASH programme in Ethiopia. The bank and other partners' funding has been supporting that ambitious national programme to serve 110 million people in Africa's second most populous country. As well as the ADB, key partners include the World Bank, the Department for International Development, the Government of Finland and UNICEF. The programme has been embracing safe water development systems, including boreholes, hand pumps, diesel pumps, gravity pumps and electric grid power to bring safe, potable water to Ethiopians. Water Development Commissioner Mogesse said recently:

"The One WASH National Program did not plan for the COVID-19 pandemic. But it has prepared us to fight the pandemic better than we would have been without the program, especially in the unserved rural communities."

That example highlights the sort of impact that the ADB and other funding the UK has provided to the multilaterals has had, not only on tackling covid but on tackling wider water and sanitation issues.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con) *rose*—

Stephen Doughty: I happily give way to the former Secretary of State.

Mr Mitchell: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. May I take him back to his point about Zambia and Tanzania and the Prime Minister's point about how he would rather spend money in Ukraine? Did it not strike him as rather odd that the Prime Minister—he is, after all, the Prime Minister—needs to abolish the Department for International Development to achieve that? Surely he simply needs to pick up the phone to the Secretary of State for International Development, hold a meeting of the National Security Council and say he has decided that those are to be the priorities.

Stephen Doughty: Indeed, and it did strike me as very odd and very concerning, and it will no doubt have been noted with concern in the capitals of many of those countries that we have enjoyed strong partnerships with for many years.

On that note, can the Minister assure our partners in countries across Africa, and indeed across the developing world, including Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zambia, that we will continue to partner with them and their citizens, to tackle the coronavirus pandemic and continue our long-term work to tackle poverty, disease and inequality, tackle gender injustice and urgently deal with the climate change crisis?

The UK role on the boards of the multilateral financial institutions has often been such that we have been able to influence the direction of those institutions, which have not always had the right focus or agenda, for the better. The former Secretary of State will know that well; I know he took a keen interest in these matters, and I am sure the Minister does, too, and I, too, have seen that at first hand.

I want pay tribute to the officials and successive Ministers across the parties that have seen Britain's role as one for global good in these institutions, contributing to multilateral action, so that we can achieve a bigger impact than the mere sum of our parts. That very much, for me, was global Britain in action, and not the Britain that I fear we now seem to be heading towards. So can the Minister confirm who will determine the future role of executive directors at the World Bank and the African Development Bank, and who will they take their orders and policy steer from in future? Will they still have the same mandate to focus efforts on poverty reduction, or do we risk seeing them go the way of, for example, the badly run Newton Fund, overseen by a non-DFID Department, which was recently criticised heavily by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact and the Sub-Committee on the Work of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact—and indeed the Chair of that Sub-Committee, the hon. Member for Stafford (Theo Clarke), who is not in the Chamber at the moment, but I know takes a keen interest in these matters?

Turning to the two specific institutions and the replenishments, the record of global Britain in action is reflected in a history of partnership with the African Development Bank, and we have contributed over many years to programmes and initiatives such as the African water facility, the Congo basin forest fund, the sustainable energy fund for Africa and, indeed, the actions on covid that I have just described in Ethiopia. The Minister spoke about the "high five" focus points of the African Development Bank—power Africa, integrate Africa, feed Africa, industrialise Africa and improve the quality of life in Africa—and I hope that he, in his remarks, can confirm that that will continue to be a UK priority for our role in those funds.

On development for women and girls, we were very happy to see that 80% of the new African Development Bank operations were categorised as having gender-informed design; of course, developments cannot succeed without economic development, health and education for women and girls. So will the Minister and his Department continue to negotiate with the African Development Bank and ADF to ensure that funds go to women-led and women-and-girl-directed programmes? I also understand that the pledge rightly includes an element of performance-based funding dependent on positive results reported at the mid-term review, so will he clarify how much was disbursed or held back at the same point in the last replenishment round? It is important that we hold these institutions fully to account.

On the IDA part of the World Bank—a crucial institution, in which we have played a key role in over many decades—for every £1 of grant finance that the United Kingdom and other donors put in, IDA is expected to deliver more than £3 in development commitments for its clients, and we remain one of the largest donors—in fact, the largest donor in 2019, with an appropriate share of the budget. Can the Minister outline how we will seek to ensure that IDA programmes focus on issues like climate change, public health and education, and women and girls. Given some of the discussions that the Minister and I have had about fragile states, what focus will the new funding round have on investment in those? What performance-related measures will be taken in relation to the replenishment?

I want to ask a specific question about the World Bank's private sector arm, the International Finance Corporation, because that has delivered a proportionate share of its profits as grants to IDA in the past, but in the past few years we have seen the pattern reverse, with IDA now effectively helping to fund IFC shortfalls. I understand that in 2020 it will be a net recipient of \$2 billion-worth of IDA-financing-supported investments. How does the Minister expect IFC returns to be further affected by the global economic crisis relating to the pandemic, and does he expect them therefore to be a greater draw on IDA resources even than was perhaps expected for the year ahead?

I have already mentioned one example of a programme that helps Ethiopia prepare for and mitigate the impacts of covid 19. Over the past few weeks, my Labour colleagues and I have met and been listening to senior experts and African voices from the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organisation and other national agencies and Governments and, indeed, workers on the frontline in countries from Sierra Leone to Zimbabwe. Some of the stories that they have shared with me have obviously been of great concern, and I have discussed those with the Minister. The effects of covid-19 are already having a significant impact on the continent. That impact is on health—whether directly or indirectly—but also on the economic prospects and stability of many countries and regions, although it appears to be diverse and heterogeneous across the continent. That is also the case when we look at who is affected within countries because, as in this country, covid-19 is often a disease of poverty and disadvantage. The worst affected are likely to be the low paid; the marginalised; women and girls; those in conditions exposing them to greater risk, such as care workers, workers in health services, people who provide security, food processing and transport, and those who work in places with low ambient temperatures and poor ventilation such as ships and prisons; and, of course, people who live in the slums and dense settlements that we see in many locations across the global south.

I have been impressed and inspired by the clear and growing African solidarity and leadership on tackling the virus, as in so many other things. We could learn much from that, but it is also clear that there are going to be substantial short, medium and long-term challenges. Global solidarity and support—for example, through this funding and replenishment—is not only a moral duty, but in our common global interests. Will the Minister say a little bit about what he understands about how both IDA and the African Development Bank will seek to focus their programming to deal not only with the immediate short-term needs—obviously there have been substantial changes, which he mentioned, particularly in relation to IDA—but with long-term needs? Has he had discussions with them about how they might facilitate investments that support the roll-out of any vaccine treatments and critical medical supplies on an equitable basis?

Reform is crucial with these institutions, so it is crucial that we continue to seek these reforms. The multilateral aid review rated the African Development Bank and IDA as good—very good, in some cases—but there are areas where they were ranked as weak. Will the Minister say a little bit about how he is going to use our position on the boards of both those institutions to continue to push a reform agenda?

On debt relief, it is almost 15 years ago to the week that I helped to co-ordinate the historic march of a quarter of million people around the streets of Edinburgh in a white band as part of the Make Poverty History movement, which called for life-changing aid, debt cancellation and justice. I know that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) was a strong supporter of that campaign, which happened in the run-up to the historic Gleneagles G8 summit. It was a true example of what global leadership can achieve both for our country and for our fellow human beings.

The multilateral debt relief initiative was one of the proudest achievements of the last Labour Government, and it has enabled us to make substantial progress towards the global goals—both the millennium development goals and their successor, the sustainable development goals. Will the Minister tell us how much debt UK support has enabled IDA and the African Development Bank to cancel over the recent accounting period and what expectations he has in relation to these orders, given the changed global economic output?

We will not oppose these orders today, but I reiterate that the speech that I had hoped to make, which would have been full of positivity and support for the measures, has unfortunately been tempered by the announcement by the Prime Minister earlier this week and the many unanswered questions, particularly in relation to our influence and role in institutions such as the African Development Bank, IDA and the World Bank. I fear that the past global leadership that we have shown—for example, on debt relief—may now be in jeopardy.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Just before we move on, let me say that it is quite important that we focus our remarks on the SIs in front of us, which are quite narrow, and perhaps not relive too many other debates that may have taken place earlier today.

12.38 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): On that point, as we are not allowed to have points of order at this time, may I just say that there has been a statement and an urgent question in the last week on the dismantling of DFID, neither of which, for slightly different reasons, I was able to contribute to under the current rules of the House? Let me say through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I would hope Mr Speaker might keep those rules under strict review and perhaps introduce some discretion if they are to persist in their current form for very much longer. Having said that, I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to contribute to this debate.

I draw the attention of the House to my interests, which are laid out in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, including that I am a strategic adviser to the African Development Bank—something that I do for the sum of £1 a year in order that there should be a contract. The House will no doubt have differing views on whether the bank gets value for money for that sum.

In recent years, the bank has been massively reformed, first by Donald Kaberuka, the highly respected former Finance Minister from Rwanda and, I think, the first elected president of the bank. Those reforms have been continued by his successor, Dr Akin Adesina, whom I advise and who I think will shortly be elected for a second term. During that time, the bank has made huge

[Mr Andrew Mitchell]

progress, as set out by both Front-Bench speakers. I wish to add a little colour to the comments that have been made and to explain why this is such good expenditure and why the UK is absolutely right to focus on building up the African Development Bank and helping it to be ever more effective.

The Minister mentioned the basic programme of the bank, which is encapsulated in the High 5s, which are: first, lighting up Africa; secondly, feeding Africa; thirdly, industrialising Africa; fourthly, integrating Africa, on which the Department for International Development has been extremely good at advising across the continent, where time spent at borders massively disrupts trade—Britain has been good at addressing that; and fifthly, improving the quality of life of African people.

The results over the past five years of President Adesina's time in office have been spectacular. If we take them all together, we see that 18 million more people have access to electricity; 141 million more people have access to better farming techniques, food security and advice; 13 million people have access to finance from private sector investment programmes; 101 million people have had access to better transport, partly for the reasons I described; and 60 million people have access to water and sanitation—in our world today, nearly 2 billion people do not have access to clean water, and that has dire effects. The direct impact of the bank on the lives of a third of a billion Africans over that period is clear: there has been a higher rate of progress than at any time since the bank was established in 1964. The bank has retained its triple A status from all five global rating agencies, thus maintaining financial probity as well.

The Minister's announcements today will ensure that the UK is able to help with the expanding capital base of the bank to accelerate all its objectives. That is the reason for the 125% increase in its capital. Once the money has landed in the African Development Bank, we will see those five key endeavours continue to be built on: 105 million more people will get access to electricity; 204 million people will be able to benefit from better farming technology; 23 million people will benefit from investments in private sector companies; 252 million people will gain access to improved transport and integration; and 128 million will gain access to improved water and sanitation. Those are very important changes to the quality of life of some of the poorest people in the world. The bank directly helps to support low-income countries.

In addition, the bank has shown a strong leadership response to the coronavirus crisis, managing to get together \$10 billion to help African countries with support. It has raised \$3 billion to fight covid-19, through a social bond on the global capital markets. It is the largest ever US dollar-denominated social bond listed on the London stock exchange, underlining how development links in some of the great British institutions that are not immediately seen as part of international development, and it is now over-subscribed, with orders of \$4.6 billion. The Fight Covid-19 bond and the other funds that the bank has managed to bring together will be a huge boost to help private companies—particularly, pharmaceutical companies, which the bank intends to do everything it can to assist, for very obvious reasons—to survive after the crisis is over.

I wish to mention two or three other matters. In the last year, the bank has set up the Desert to Power Initiative, which will ensure that there are 10,000 MW of solar power across 11 countries in the Sahel, that belt of middle Africa. That will result in electricity for 250 million of the poorest people in the world, of whom 90 million are off grid. It is a \$20 billion investment and will be the world's largest solar zone.

There has been very strong input from the United Kingdom, with expertise from specialists at DFID made available to help the bank, and a very good relationship exists between DFID and the bank in making all that happen.

The work on affirmative action for women in Africa is extremely important, and \$3 billion is now available for financing women's businesses, which is the largest ever such initiative. Publish What You Fund lists the African Development Bank as one of the four most transparent institutions of 45 global institutions.

The AfDB has had very strong support from the United Kingdom, as I have tried to set out. DFID has sent some of its cleverest and most effective officials to work in Abidjan to help build up the bank. We want the African Development Bank, rather than the World Bank, to be seen as the Africa bank that brings everything together. Under the leadership of both Donald Kaberuka and Akin Adesina, we are seeing that before our eyes.

I hope the Minister will consider any way in which we might increase our shareholding in the bank, because our influence is much greater than our very small shareholding. It would be helpful to have a continuous presence at the bank in Abidjan, rather than a rotating executive director role. That is not an easy ask, because of the way the bank is set up, but I think the bank would benefit from having the expertise of a British executive director all the time.

Finally, I hope that, just as we have with the World Bank, we will be able to see a much greater use within the African Development Bank of the trust fund structure. That would enable Britain to put money into a particular project or meet a particular ask where we want the bank to have a catalytic effect. The trust fund mechanism is now in common use elsewhere, and greater use of it would greatly benefit the African Development Bank and Britain's desire to drive forward such objectives.

Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to address these points, to support what those on the Front Benches have said and, most importantly of all, to support this replenishment. It will do nothing but good for the overall aims that Britain so clearly has in wanting to do something about the appalling discrepancies of opportunity and wealth that disfigure our world today.

12.47 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I echo the comments of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) about how we often see, through the budget of the Department for International Development, examples of the UK at its best—trying to address the discrepancies, as he put it, in poverty and wealth between nations and peoples across the globe. If we were to use the language of global Britain, that might be one of the best examples to turn to.

The orders are welcome in their attempts to address global poverty. Much mention has been made of Africa, and at first glance it looks as though it will be business

as usual for our international aid budget. However, if you will permit me, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to explain briefly why I do not think that that is the case, welcome though today's announcements are.

Once we discount most—not all, but most—Tory MPs, there is no disguising the fact that the momentous decision and announcement this week has caused great alarm. It will have far-reaching consequences for the poorest people in the world—the poorest people on earth. The overwhelming consensus of opinion would bear that out, certainly among experts who work in the field of international development.

I cannot help but notice that, despite her name being on the Order Paper for the very welcome measures that have been put forward, the outgoing Secretary of State for International Development is not here today. I wonder whether her conspicuous absence should be seen in the light in which it appears. Perhaps she also has concerns about the recent announcement that has been made.

The announcement could not stand in greater contrast with the lesser course that many of us in the House fear is now being steered towards international aid. We have rightly heard today much praise for the work of the Department for International Development, and one wonders why a Department that has garnered so much praise and attracted so much admiration should suddenly find itself downgraded. The move has been described by those working in the field as an “act of political vandalism”. I will leave others to judge for themselves, but in my constituency, questions are being asked about whether this decision is ideological.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): May I remind the hon. Lady that, in the hypothetical situation of an independent Scotland, the policy of the SNP is to have foreign affairs and international development in the same Department?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Before the hon. Lady responds, I want to remind her and other Members in the Chamber that we are addressing the orders, rather than getting into a whole other debate. That is what we are here to scrutinise.

Patricia Gibson: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will endeavour to make my remarks as brief as possible. I would say in response to the right hon. Gentleman's question that the Scottish Government have a Minister in charge of overseas development. The right hon. Gentleman might want to reflect on that, because that is the importance we in Scotland place on overseas development.

The House welcomes these measures, but the fear is for the future. The fear is that putting the word “super” in front of the Foreign Office is not going to cut it, and it will not address the concerns. As set out in the measures, we have historical responsibilities to the poorest nations around the world, as well as moral responsibilities, as we seek to take our place on the international stage.

It is worrying—this is no secret—that aid is now to be used to pursue security and diplomatic aims. There might be an argument to make for that, but that is not what aid is for. Aid must be driven by need. I fear that in the future, we may have fewer of these measures that are so welcome, through which we seek to put a hand out and help up those countries that need and deserve the help of the international community. It must be based on need.

We hear much from Government Members about global Britain—well, whatever floats your boat. If they want to float that particular boat, they may want to take their place on the international stage and lead in the area of international development, instead of downgrading it and using it as a way of pursuing their own diplomatic aims. We in the SNP will not oppose these measures—we welcome them—but we have profound fears about the future and how aid will be administered from hereon in.

12.52 pm

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): I find that my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) has eaten my sandwiches, so I shall be more brief than I intended. I am greatly reassured that my hon. Friend the Minister is in charge of this brief. He will recall that we worked on it together when he was Minister for Africa and I was responsible for the economic development portfolio in DFID. In those halcyon days when travel was permitted, we would cross paths at airports in Africa. As a fellow former regime loyalist, I congratulate him on his survival skills and, indeed, his resurrection. He will recall that I was not so fortunate, but then, to coin a phrase, one might say that I had it coming.

This is the most important agenda. This brief, concentrating on economic development, and particularly infrastructure that promotes the ability of African countries to trade with one another and so generate livelihoods, has to be our focus when the world is in desperate need of jobs to address the growing generation of unemployed and underemployed peoples in sub-Saharan Africa. We know that if we do not provide those livelihoods for them, they will be seeking livelihoods elsewhere, driving this wave of migration. It is the most important brief.

If I may caution the Minister, he may not recall it but I chaired a committee that met monthly. He will know that DFID has an international reputation for transparency. Everything it spends is arrayed for view and scrutiny on its website. However, I chaired a committee that met monthly where we discussed things and there would be requests for them not to be published. Overwhelmingly, those requests came from ambassadors in Africa who did not want relatively small amounts of money, which had been rather embarrassingly misspent, to be revealed. That was the cashpoint in the sky. As I say, they were relatively small amounts of money, but nevertheless that is where the danger lies.

We all understand *realpolitik*. There will be times when we want to oil the wheels of diplomacy by perhaps pushing money towards some pet project—although I will never understand how or why we sponsored a one-armed juggler in the Lebanon. Nevertheless, that is the agenda the Minister must be so careful about, because it undermines, so entirely unfortunately and unjustifiably, the whole international development pitch. We are doing a great job. It is something about which we should be proud. We should not let it be undermined by those niggles.

12.56 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): You will be delighted to know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I do not plan to talk about Government organisations.

I want to speak briefly on one of the key areas in which the African Development Bank operates. We have heard a lot from the Minister, from the Labour

[Chris Grayling]

spokesman, the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), and from my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), a previous Secretary of State, about the important work being done to alleviate poverty, improve infrastructure and bring in water supplies. I want to talk about another aspect of the Bank's work, particularly right now as we head towards a delayed COP summit and the conference on biodiversity next year: the need to stop and then start to reverse the process of deforestation in Africa. The African Development Bank is doing a lot of important work in this area. DFID is also doing a lot of important work, both with the Bank and elsewhere, but we must step up this activity for two reasons.

First, such activity can play a vital role in climate change. We know the impact that deforestation around the world has had on climate change. We tend to talk a lot about the Brazilian rainforest, but there has been a much greater degree of deforestation on the African continent. There is the potential over the next 10 years for that to continue and to get much worse. For example, in the Congo basin there has already been a significant loss of forest cover. It is a politically unstable area and it has not been commercially exploited in the way that some other parts of Africa have been. We cannot afford to see those huge rainforests disappear. We must also start to recreate some of the forestation that has been lost.

The second crucial reason is the protection of endangered species. With the disappearance of forest cover, more and more habitats have disappeared, and more and more species have found themselves in critical danger. We must therefore do more through our development budgets to halt and reverse the process of deforestation. If that is done wisely, it can provide commercial, professional and tourism opportunities that can help to boost those economies.

Our Government are already doing good work. The African Development Bank is also doing good work, for example in Niger. In other parts of Africa, we have seen where it is possible to make a real difference. Ethiopia, a country that has suffered extraordinarily from land degradation over the years, has done an amazing job in starting to replant areas of forest. We also know that planting can generate genuine commercial opportunities. Let us take, for example, the Zambesi teak tree. The general view is that if a 100-year-old tree is lost, it cannot be replanted and brought back, but I have been to a recreated rainforest in Borneo, which 20 years ago was a palm oil plantation. Today, it is a thriving area of rainforest. It can be done. Plants such as the Zambesi teak tree can grow to full height in 20 years. If stewarded carefully, they can provide a resource for economic activity, as well as the opportunity to recreate habitats that have been lost.

So this is an enormously important area. I very much hope that the funding that we are going to approve today—the support that goes into the African Development Fund and through it into the international forest projects—can make a real difference.

I urge the Minister to put absolutely at the heart of what this Government do in the coming years the support that is so desperately needed for the recreation of what were once fertile, forested areas and are now

areas of arid landscape. We should do everything we can to put money into supporting the existing forestation in those parts of Africa where we cannot afford to lose it and where we, in doing so, play a central part in what is going to be necessary in the fight against climate change.

This is not just about electric cars, solar energy, welcome though it is, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield said, and the exploitation that we are seeing of the enormous potential for solar power in Africa; it is also about recreating habitats and replanting forests, protecting and recreating mangrove swamps, and helping African farmers to maximise the potential of what they have, while protecting the environment at the same time.

I feel passionately about recreating habitats and removing the threat caused to so many species by the disappearance of the areas in which they live. We are already doing good things, but my message to the Minister today is: please, as we plan the strategy of our international aid in the future, can we make sure that the recreation of habitats and the protection of forests are absolutely at the heart of what we do in supporting the African Development Bank and projects in Africa and around the world?

1.1 pm

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): I welcome the opportunity to debate these statutory instruments regarding the ADB and IDA. This is clearly a timely moment to discuss how the UK gives its aid, how much it gives and in what form. We should note that this week's announcement has been described as a big, big blow for Africa by one African Minister. The funds the Government intend to release to the ADB will, via the African Development Fund, help the poorest countries in Africa. The general capital increase will improve the bank's lending capacity, allowing it to have an even greater impact. We should laud the fact that the fund's replenishment is estimated to create more than 1 million jobs. I also wish to pay a particular tribute to the leading work the fund is doing to promote clean energy and green growth, not only improving lives, but doing so in a sustainable way. It is good that further commitments have been secured from the bank towards climate finance over the next five years. Of course, that is totally in line with our commitments to help to achieve the sustainable development goals, too.

The UK's funding of the IDA will support £82 billion in development financing, which will have an impact on immunisations, clean growth and measures that will support gender equality. We should be particularly proud that the UK is the largest donor to the IDA and ADF replenishments. That is, no doubt, one thing that has resulted from the UK's statutory commitment to spend 0.7% of gross national income on official development assistance spending. As Members would expect, I will remind them that that commitment was enshrined in law by the Liberal Democrats. Our aid programme is about not just our bilateral partnerships, but our multilateral role. We have our own seat on the World Bank IDA board, which allows us to exert disproportionate influence, because of the reputation of DFID. It is important that we remember that.

It is also important that we continue to make aid available to multilateral institutions and to non-governmental organisations as we seek to combat

coronavirus. When this replenishment was agreed late last year, we knew nothing of how the world would be turned upside down. There is no doubt that the latest tranche of funding committed to these funds will be used to assist vulnerable countries as we fight to recover from this pandemic. We should remember that, although we might be past the peak in the UK, case numbers are picking up in many parts of Africa. The public health challenge is so much greater in very vulnerable countries such as the Central African Republic or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where access even to clean water is limited. Earlier this week, we celebrated the findings that the drug dexamethasone cuts the risk of death by a third for covid patients on ventilators and by a fifth for those on oxygen, but in the most vulnerable places there are minuscule numbers of ventilators and hospitals with oxygen supplies are few and far between.

In conclusion, we welcome these statutory instruments to provide further funding to the ADF and IDA. We are the largest donor to both institutions. The successor funding that this country has provided has helped reduce poverty in some of the most vulnerable countries in the world. These statutory instruments will allow that progress to continue. But following the Government's announcement on Tuesday, there is sadly a question mark over whether we will continue to be a global leader. I urge the Government not to turn their back on that commitment, and I hope that this replenishment of the bank will not be the last that the UK leads on.

1.5 pm

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): There is a saying that charity begins at home, and over the past few months we have witnessed extraordinary acts of charity and kindness across the United Kingdom. Confronted by coronavirus, people have volunteered to help neighbours who are shielding, donated to food banks to help the hungry and contributed to appeals raising funds. We have truly seen the best of British. However, charity does not end at home. Our help is needed not just here, but in other countries and on other continents—perhaps nowhere more so than in Africa. That is why I wholeheartedly support these measures and will speak specifically to those affecting the African Development Bank.

The bank is, as we have heard, an important player in African nations' development and crucial in the reduction of poverty. Right now, there is a pressing need for the bank to help African countries cope with coronavirus. Many of them do not have the resilience that exists here in the UK. A considerable number have to cope with malaria, and Congo is tackling an outbreak of Ebola. There are fears that covid-19 could lead to a wider food and health crisis, and deep concerns of lasting damage to economies that are already fragile. Although there has undoubtedly been considerable progress in economic development over the past 10 years or so, there is a real risk of that being undone. The African Development Bank is being called on to ensure that that does not happen and to provide immediate help in many parts of the continent.

That underlines the role that the African Development Bank has built in recent years. Its High 5s initiative focuses on providing infrastructure through prioritising the needs that are most pressing across the continent: sanitation and water, energy, transport, finance and agriculture. Those are ultimately all about enabling and equipping the people of Africa to improve their own lives.

The UK's contribution to the replenishment of the African Development Fund will undoubtedly have a marked beneficial impact on the objectives of inclusive and green growth. The greater focus on climate and gender in designing projects agreed as part of this replenishment are extremely welcome reforms to the bank. I am also pleased to see a commitment to speedier delivery of project funds. Similarly, it is encouraging to see that approximately £100 million is dependent on a positive mid-term review, underlining the need for contributions from the UK to be based on effective performance. I look forward to hearing more from the Minister about how that will be assessed.

On the instrument on further payment to capital stock, it is worth highlighting the beneficial impact that a relatively modest immediate payment for shares brings, as the increased capital stock then enables the bank to leverage its balance sheet on the capital markets to mobilise private sector financing for projects. It is a matter not simply of giving money, but of demonstrating confidence and thus building even greater capability.

The instrument on the multilateral debt relief initiative honours our commitment to cancelling the debt of some of the poorest nations in the world, and I fervently hope that the UK's financial assistance to the African Development Fund will make a material difference to those countries' ability to tackle poverty and develop economically now that the burden of unmanageable debt has been relieved.

Although the UK's shareholding in the African Development Bank is relatively small, I know from conversations with senior members of staff at the bank that we are seen as a very important stakeholder. Our commitment at this time sends a strong message to other shareholders and donor nations. That is surely welcome.

One reason I was keen to speak on the African Development Bank is that, among multilateral development banks, it is in a unique position. It is headquartered and based in Africa and has teams on the ground that really understand African nations and can interact with Governments to help both public finance management and governance. With technical and financial expertise, it is able to mobilise resources and improve capacity so that countries can reduce their dependence on donor funding.

These instruments today are a reminder of the potential for the UK and African nations to forge closer and stronger relations, especially as we leave the transition period following our departure from the EU. Our historical relationship and, in the case of many African countries, shared membership of the Commonwealth also provides opportunities. The president of the African Development Bank himself said on a visit to London in January:

"As wealth grows in Africa, it leads to wealth growth for the UK."

He pointed out that our strong trading and cultural ties give British investors a head start in Africa, where, as he put it, there are

"huge markets, brimming with enormous investment opportunities."

It is therefore perhaps something of a pity that foreign direct investment from the UK to Africa has fallen by a third since 2015, but I hope that the Government's commitment to the African Development Bank, as demonstrated by this new funding, will provide at least a nudge to investors to consider the potential for imaginative and bold action that could bring mutual benefit.

[Rob Butler]

It is important that the British taxpayer has confidence that the money devoted to development is spent wisely and carefully. There have been too many cases in the past of waste, profligacy and worse. Wherever our development funds are sent, there must be thorough auditing of projects and robust analysis of their real-world impact on the people in greatest need.

Mr Mitchell: Does my hon. Friend agree that the prime way of ensuring that there is really good value for money, apart from all the structures that have been put in place, is the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, which was set up by the coalition Government in 2010? It is the taxpayer's friend. It is independent of government; it reports not to the Executive or to the Department but to Parliament and, at the moment, to a Sub-Committee of the International Development Committee. Does he agree that it is very important, for precisely the purpose he set out, that ICAI should be retained in full?

Rob Butler: I do indeed, and I take the point that my right hon. Friend makes. I was going to mention that I am indeed pleased that the Independent Commission for Aid Impact is currently conducting a review of the effectiveness of DFID's support for the African Development Bank Group. It is perhaps a pity that it was not able to report before the decisions that will be taken today, but that is understandable given the limitations caused by coronavirus. As a general principle, it surely makes a lot of sense to have the independent scrutiny that my right hon. Friend refers to.

Additional scrutiny of how we spend development money is inevitable. As here in the UK we confront the worst recession we have known, it will be vital to demonstrate how supporting development initiatives is beneficial to us all. I feel confident that Ministers will ensure that that is the case with the moneys we are discussing. The Minister may even wish to provide me with some reassurance on that momentarily.

It is right that, even in difficult economic times at home, we continue to support those elsewhere who are much worse off. These funds for the African Development Bank and those for the International Development Association of the World Bank illustrate how Britain can be a force for good by making solid financial and political commitments that contribute towards economic development and social progress around the globe.

1.12 pm

James Duddridge: Glancing down at my notes, I think I have about 50 things to come back on. To assist the House, I will keep my comments to five minutes and then look through the report of the debate forensically and come back with some of the more technical detail where individuals have asked me questions, but I will try to cover everything.

I assure the House that we are completely committed to development. We are completely committed in the longer term to funding through these two long-standing mechanisms. This is not just something for today; it is something for the future. We are committed to the African continent specifically and to our Commonwealth partners, including Tanzania and Zambia, which were mentioned. Sadly, because growth in Asia is in excess of growth in Africa, it is probably inevitable that over the

next 25 years there will be more poor people and people in extreme poverty in Africa than elsewhere. If anything, that will mean that we have to refocus more, not less, assistance on that area, separate from the broader debate that is being had.

A number of points were made about the ADB and how we leverage our shareholding. We leverage our shareholding in many ways, but at a very high level we have helped leverage 40% of investment into climate. There were concerns about money being focused on the poorest; 90% is focused on fragile states, partly because of how we have leveraged our shareholding.

I listened carefully to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell). I do not quite know why he ate the sandwich of my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne), but that is perhaps due to a lack of familiarity with the terminology. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield is incredibly well-informed.

As I go round Africa more generally, his name often comes up not only in obvious places such as Abidjan and Kigali, but across the continent. He is hugely respected. I look forward to working with him. I have already had an initial chat with the previous president, Donald, and look forward to working with the current president and other individuals.

On the important point about the constituency of which we are a member alongside Italy and the Netherlands, we are proud that we have someone from DFID representing that constituency at the moment. I am interested to see how we can build on that and I particularly welcome my right hon. Friend's highlighting of solar energy across the Sahel, which is a really important issue and a really important region. It is the only region that was explicitly mentioned as part of the five shifts in NSC strategy.

There were various contributions from Scotland. I am a little confused because I thought that the Conservative party was moving towards the SNP position of having a single Department, which I agreed with rather than the position that was suggested today. I understand the points that were made. On a more consensual point, let me say that, as well as being the Minister for Africa, I am the Minister for Abercrombie House, and I look forward to visiting it, talking to employees and assuring them of their job security during this transition. I know that it is a concern for individuals, particularly for those who are away from Whitehall.

My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) raised a number of issues, including the inter-relationship between trade and migration, which is important. I remember fondly our meetings at airports around the world. Sometimes I knew that he was going to be there, and sometimes it was a surprise that he was there, thus demonstrating that we need to be a little more co-ordinated across Whitehall.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) went into a little more detail, eloquently, on forestation. I was particularly interested to hear about the work in the Congo basin and would like to speak to him more about that. On the reforestation of palm oil areas, we are very aware of the problems of palm oil more generally.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Rob Butler) talked about effective performance, which was also raised by the Opposition. Let me report back on

some of those figures: we held back 25% of £152 million sterling—£38 million sterling—in June 2018, £30 million of which was released in October, based on progress and a performance plan. In 2019, we did not withhold any further—

Stephen Doughty: Given that these orders are made under the International Development Act 2002, does the Government have any plans to change or amend that Act given the importance of all these orders being focused on poverty eradication?

James Duddridge: That is a legitimate point, but I am not sure how it relates directly to the SI. I am not aware of any changes, which might perhaps give the hon. Gentleman some reassurance. There is some additional information about the other fund, which I will write to him about.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury for his points on foreign direct investment in Africa, which is incredibly important, whether it is through some of these funds or completely independent of Government institutions.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield raised the issue of trust funds. We have very few trust funds at the African Development Bank, but we are supporting initiatives on sustainable energy, climate risk finance and women's economic empowerment and very much welcome a discussion around how we can use trust funds more effectively through that fund. Having lived in Abidjan as a 20 year-old, I am keen to get back there and talk to him more—[*Interruption.*] He is looking shocked. I am not sure whether that is because I was once young, or that I was once in Abidjan. Perhaps it is both. I was aware of the African Development Bank back in my time at Barclays in Abidjan and I look forward to getting back as alternate governor. I was asked who would be representing the bank. I suspect, given the changes, that as deputy governor or alternate governor, I will be spending a bit more time with all the regional development banks. Even prior to the changes, I was going to be the primary person dealing with the African Development Bank.

I welcome the consensual nature of this debate, particularly given the context. I can reassure the House that, in my heart and the heart of government, we are trying to do the right thing by development. This merger is very much about trying to bring the full force of HMG together, not shifting from one foot to an entirely different foot.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft African Development Bank (Fifteenth Replenishment of the African Development Fund) Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 19 May, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft African Development Bank (Further Payments to Capital Stock) Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 19 May, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft African Development Fund (Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative) (Amendment) Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 19 May, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft International Development Association (Nineteenth Replenishment) Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 19 May, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft International Development Association (Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative) (Amendment) Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 19 May, be approved.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. At the end of this month, production of the British passport will cease at the De La Rue plant in my constituency, following the Government's decision some years ago to award the contract to Gemalto. Yesterday, De La Rue announced that the production of bank notes on the site will also stop, with the loss of a further 255 jobs. It is devastating to see this reduction. Are you aware of any statement to be made to the House by a Minister about that issue in the forthcoming business?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Lady for that point of order. I think she may have been here for the business statement. I have not been made aware of any forthcoming statements from Ministers about it, but she has put her concern on the record, and I am sure she will find ways, as she has done today, to raise that concern about her constituents.

To allow the safe exit of Members participating in this item of business and the safe arrival of those participating in the next, I will suspend the House for three minutes.

1.22 pm

Sitting suspended.

Backbench Business

Covid-19: BAME Communities

1.25 pm

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): As I am sure colleagues will have seen, this is a very well-subscribed debate, so I intend to impose a six-minute time limit straight away so that we can get everybody in. I know that the hon. Lady is aware that she has around 15 minutes for her opening speech.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House is concerned about the level of deaths from covid-19 among Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities; notes that structural inequalities and worse health outcomes for Black, Asian and minority ethnic people go hand in hand; calls on the Government to review the data published by the Office for National Statistics on 11 May 2020 on Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by occupation, England and Wales: deaths registered up to and including 20 April 2020, the Report published by the Institute for Fiscal Studies in May 2020 entitled, Are some ethnic groups more vulnerable to COVID-19 than others? and the full report by Public Health England on Disparities in the risk and outcomes of covid-19; and further calls on the Government to set out in detail the scope and timeframe of the Government's review and urgently to put a plan in place to prevent avoidable deaths.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee and its Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), for securing this important debate. Many Members who wanted to speak cannot do so, and it is a shame that they cannot participate remotely. The Government are more focused on subverting democracy than protecting lives, but we will not go into that. Their decisions are increasingly illogical and irrational. They finally did a U-turn the other day and now children will be fed this summer; I am glad the Government are doing U-turns. I thank everyone involved, including the all-party group on school food and Marcus Rashford, who joins celebs such as Raheem Sterling, John Boyega and others who are finding their voice and using their position for change.

This is a sobering debate. We all watched the brutal, very public lynching of George Floyd—our lives were interrupted by the killing—but racism does not just manifest itself in brutal ways that can be caught on camera and shared on social media. “I can't breathe”, the last words of George Floyd, could apply to the disproportionate numbers of black, African-Caribbean and Asian people dying from coronavirus in this country.

Every time the Government get dragged kicking and screaming to do the right thing, I can't breathe. I can't breathe every time the Government hide a report or kick an issue into the long grass by announcing another commission or report. I can't breathe. My breath is taken away by the lack of care, empathy and emotional intelligence shown by the Government time and again. For months, we stood at our doorways and clapped for our key workers, the ones on the frontline—the doctors, the nurses, the carers, the cleaners, the ones driving the buses, the cabs and the forklift trucks or serving people in supermarkets. The people we clapped for are the ones who are being underpaid and who are, disproportionately, dying.

The death rate for covid-19 has exposed and amplified what has been going on in society for decades. The concentration of deaths in areas where people are just

about managing should worry us all. As a country, we are better than this. According to the Office for National Statistics, the burden of covid-19 has been felt more strongly in regions with greater deprivation. In those areas, people are dying from the virus at double the rate of those in more affluent areas. According to the ONS, adjusting for age, black people are more than four times as likely to die from covid as white people. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are more than three times as likely and Indians more than twice as likely.

BAME people account for 13.4% of the population, but they make up 34% of patients admitted to an intensive care unit. My constituency of Brent sadly has the highest number of registered deaths in London. In line with findings from the Office for National Statistics, those areas of greatest deprivation, such as Harlesden, have the highest number of deaths.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for the powerful way in which she makes these crucial points. Does she agree that the approach taken by my constituency colleague and the Welsh Minister for Health and Social Services, Vaughan Gething, on the disproportionate impact of these issues on BAME communities—we have seen tragic deaths in my constituency, too—has been in stark contrast to the approach taken by the UK Government? Vaughan Gething has understood this issue, and led on it from the start.

Dawn Butler: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. We can learn a lot from the approach in Wales, including how people are approaching the disproportionate number of deaths from covid-19 in the BAME community. I thank him for everything he does in his constituency on that issue.

We did not get to this point by accident, and we must make a concerted effort to dismantle the structural and systemic racism that exists in society and that affects life chances from the moment someone is born.

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): I spoke to NHS doctors from EveryDoctor, and they told me that 63% of BAME doctors felt pressured to work in wards treating covid patients, compared with 33% of their white counterparts. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government must do more to address workplace discrimination that affects ethnic minorities?

Dawn Butler: I thank my hon. Friend for that important intervention, and I will come to that point later in my remarks. As constituency MPs, it is important for us to talk to doctors and to understand and learn what is going on. I wish the Government would also take that on board.

Structural and systemic racism is also a health issue, and the Institute for Fiscal Studies revealed that the jobs that are most at risk are over-populated by African, Caribbean, Asian, and minority ethnic people. We must be honest with ourselves and ask why that is. The higher BAME death rate is apparent across all grades of the NHS, even in the highest socioeconomic groups. We must be honest with ourselves and ask why that is. If we shy away from the truth, nothing will change. The publication of the first report on this issue stated that 17 doctors died, 16 of whom were BAME. *Eastern Eye* then reported that, since 2 June, when that report was

published, another 18 doctors died after saving lives, 17 of whom were BAME. We must be honest with ourselves and ask why that is.

The Public Health England report that the Government tried to hide states that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) said, there were numerous examples of doctors who were not able to access appropriate PPE to protect themselves adequately. It also stated that requests for risk assessments or additional PPE from BAME workers were more likely to be refused and that requests were less likely to be made because of the fear of adverse treatment.

Mary Agyeiwaa Agyapong, a nurse, was still working at a hospital while heavily pregnant. She sadly died of covid-19. They managed to save her baby girl by emergency caesarean. That is so tragic, and we must ask ourselves why she was forced to work. Let me give a couple more examples. Two black employees in London, a taxi driver and one transport worker, Belly Mujinga, died after allegedly being spat at by somebody who claimed they had covid-19. Belly had an underlying health condition and should not have been put in danger. She requested to work in the ticket office, but that was refused. We must ask ourselves why such things are happening. The Government must urgently implore and ensure that all employers carry out risk assessments in all workplaces. As lockdown is eased, those most at risk are in greater danger unless the Government introduce structural requirements for employers.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I thank the hon. Lady for what she has said so far. She talks about employers carrying out risk assessments. It is important that that includes Government Departments and the Government's outside contractors, because, as she will be aware, many of the workers in these outside contractors—cleaners, for example—are from the BAME community.

Dawn Butler: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. It is not one rule for Government Departments or Parliament and one rule for the rest of the country: we have seen that play out way too often. He is absolutely right that that has to be taken into consideration.

More than two in 10 black African women are employed in health and social care roles; Indian men are 150% more likely to work in health or social care roles; and 14% of doctors in England and Wales are Indians. Covid-19 does not prefer one person's lungs to those of other ethnicities. It is not the pandemic that discriminates—it is society. It is almost as though being black is a pre-existing condition that results in worse outcomes for health, employment and education. That does not for one moment mean that it cannot be overcome. It is not a victim mentality that has put us in this situation, any more than it was indolence that put British citizens on planes and deported them during the Windrush scandal or bad sportsmanship that subjects our players to abuse on the field. We must call it what it is, because if we do not call it what it is, how can we identify it, how can we cure it, how can we stop it? It is racism, and it has become more structural and systemic. It is not just about individuals. Structural and systemic racism can exist without individual acts of racism, but it is an unfair, unequal discriminatory system—and it is literally killing us.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that at the heart of government there is huge ignorance about this agenda, and we need the Government to learn from what has happened? As we ease lockdown, the Government urgently need to do the risk assessments so that families who are at risk through inter-generational living and all those issues are taken into account and action is taken to protect people from further risks of dying.

Dawn Butler: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. It is absolutely vital that the Government ensure that risk assessments are carried out in workplaces so as to have fewer deaths.

As I say, this is literally killing us, and just like the killing of George Floyd, we can all see it. If anyone does not believe me—if anyone does not believe that structural racism exists—believe the body count.

Incremental changes are no good if structural barriers still exist. Breaking down systemic and structural barriers will build a society that is better for everyone. Every life matters—of course it does, but not all lives are treated equally. Interestingly, some of the things that would most benefit and save black and Asian lives are the same things that will save everybody: risk assessments, test and trace, and easy access to in-date PPE. What the country needs now is a Government who are going to deliver fast and decisive action. Everyone in this House should stand up and say, “No longer should discrimination, cultural exclusion, poverty and class be allowed to determine whether you live or whether you die.”

That is why this debate is so important. It is said that if a house is on fire in a street, of course all the houses in the street are important, but the focus needs to be on the house that is burning—and right now this situation needs fixing for the BAME community. Right now we have a group of people who are dying at four times the rate of anybody else. It is the same demographic as the people who died in Grenfell Tower just three years ago. It is the same group of people who were subjected to the hostile environment just eight years ago. It is the same people who have been told to stop being victims. There is a pattern here, and we need the Government to show some urgency to address the racial inequalities that exist in the UK.

At first the Government said, “We will not publish the PHE report because it is too sensitive in relation to Black Lives Matter.” On 4 June, the Minister stood up and said, “We've asked Professor Kevin Fenton, a black surgeon, to lead on this review,” but apparently he did not lead on it. The Minister then said that the review was not part of the report. Confused? I know I am.

The Minister also stated that PHE did not make recommendations because it was not able to do so, but we know she was aware of the second set of recommendations made by PHE. When she gets to her feet, will she apologise on behalf of the Government for misleading the House? Why did the Government try to bury the PHE report? I was not the only one who was trying to get to the bottom of it. Eastern Eye, Channel 4 and Sky have doggedly pursued the issue because something just did not feel right. That is why people have taken to the streets—they are tired of the dishonesty.

The Government have form on whitewashing reports. Baroness McGregor-Smith's review has seen very little progress. The Lammy review has not had any recommendations

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implemented. The 2018 race disparity audit has not been acted upon. The Windrush lessons learned review was edited and delayed for a year. It was published, had sections deleted and it was still not acted upon. The Government need to stop trying to erase from their reports the injustices towards black and brown people and working-class people. It is a disgrace.

The Government announce reviews and consultations to get themselves out of trouble, and then think that everybody will just forget as we stumble into the next crisis. We see what they are doing and we are calling them out on it, because they produced a document a few years ago that talked about “explain or change”. The Government said:

“When significant disparities between ethnic groups cannot be explained by wider factors, we will commit ourselves to working with partners to change them.”

I ask the Minister: what is stopping the Government from acting? The murder of George Floyd and the death toll of covid have forced us to have these overdue, open and, hopefully, honest conversations about race, so that we can ensure a fairer and more equal society.

As a member of the Science and Technology Committee, I have listened to many scientists talk about covid-19, and it is not genetics that have resulted in a higher death rate. It is not internal, and that means it is external. To back up the findings of the PHE report—the one that the Government tried to hide—it is noted that covid-19 potentially has had a less severe impact in the Caribbean, Africa and the Indian subcontinent. That raises questions as to why BAME communities in England are so severely affected. It is suggested that issues such as structural racism and discrimination and a failure to adequately protect key workers may have contributed disproportionately.

I am pleased that I have a covid testing centre in my constituency in Harlesden, which has been so hard-hit. If anyone is interested, they should register with Brent Council. As we build a better life after covid, we must do better. The UN found that the

“structural socio-economic exclusion of racial and ethnic minority communities in the United Kingdom is striking.”

The Minister and the Government should be embarrassed.

Some people have always had worse health outcomes—that is not new. Poor people have always had worse health outcomes, but the virus has magnified the scale of the inequality. Colour of skin, economic background and social and structural racial barriers and infrastructure are all factors in whether someone has a good chance of surviving this pandemic.

The killing of George Floyd in the middle of a pandemic is a pivotal moment for the world. “I can’t breathe” is as true for covid-19 as it is for racism. History will judge each and every one of us in time on that moment when the world stood still for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. History will judge us on our actions and history will judge the Minister on her response. Minister, before you get to your feet to respond, ask yourself what will be written by your name.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. The hon. Lady knows that she must not address the Minister directly. She speaks through the Chair. She does know that.

Dawn Butler: Apologies, Madam Deputy Speaker.

History will judge each and every one of us. Before the Minister gets to her feet to respond, she must ask herself what will be written by her name.

Government Ministers are revealing trauma on one hand and then saying that racism does not exist on the other; it is cruel. I do not think the Minister should not give a speech. I think the Minister should list actions. What will the Government do and when will they do it? She should tell the House and the country when the Government will start to implement the 150-plus outstanding recommendations from previous reports and reviews, not focus on the new commission that the Prime Minister mentioned. We know that that is designed to agitate and gaslight us, just like the Foreign Secretary’s comments on taking the knee.

Black Lives has more in common with white working-class people, the LGBT+ community and people who are under-represented than this cruel Government do. In the words of the late, amazing Jo Cox, we have

“more in common than that which divides us.”—[*Official Report*, 3 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 674-75.]

I stand to tell the Government that we are done with the games, we are done with the platitudes and we are done with kicking this issue into the long grass. Enough is enough. Now is the time to act. Now is the time for action. Now is the time to get the Government’s knee off the neck of the black, African, Caribbean, Asian, minority ethnic communities.

1.45 pm

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) on having secured this important and timely debate. She picked up on several themes that I will probably echo, but she also spoke about voices, focusing on Marcus Rashford and Raheem Sterling—people who have used their voices effectively. In my speech, I will concentrate on the voices of BAME workers in our health service.

At the very start of the pandemic, we had a debate in this Chamber about the emergency covid legislation. I vividly remember receiving a briefing from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission that spoke about how the pandemic might affect different groups of people differently. It is interesting to read and review that briefing with 20/20 hindsight. When it spoke of BAME communities, it mentioned their employment opportunities, including the likelihood that young BAME people in particular would be working in insecure employment in the gig economy and on zero-hours contracts. What it did not speak about was their health.

I think that the death toll has shocked us all. But it is not only the death toll, is it? As the hon. Member for Brent Central highlighted, BAME people are more likely to be hospitalised. If hospitalised, they are more likely to end up in intensive care units. And if in intensive care units, they will be there for longer. As we have learnt over the course of the pandemic, all those things have a significant impact on people’s wellbeing going forward because the longer that someone is in ICU, the longer it will take them to recover and to return to their home, their family and their employment.

At the start of the pandemic, the Women and Equalities Committee launched an inquiry into the unequal impact of covid. That has now split into three separate inquiries

looking specifically at the impact on disabled people and their access to services; the gendered impact of covid; and—the inquiry that we have launched within the last couple of weeks and on which we have already taken significant evidence—the impact on our BAME community. As I said to Committee members last week before we had the first evidence session, “If there is one thing you can rely on from the Women and Equalities Committee, it is that our inquiry will come up with recommendations for the Government to act.”

Yesterday, we heard from Dr Chaand Nagpaul and Professor Kamlesh Khunti. I do not wish overly to paraphrase their evidence, but I only have six minutes, so I really will have to. They both reiterated what can be found in the NHS England and NHS Improvement briefing on the disproportionate impact of covid—that BAME staff are over-represented in the lower grades of the NHS hierarchy, that there is not enough diversity in management structures and that, as a direct result, BAME staff are worried to speak up when they do not have the right PPE. Those staff are not having their voices heard—or, worse, they are too scared to use their voices. That is Britain in 2020: BAME staff in the NHS are scared to speak up. We have to make sure immediately that channels are open for people to be able to do so, whether they work in the NHS or in other frontline roles such as bus drivers, retail workers and nursery assistants—the people without whom, to be blunt, our country would have ground to a halt over the course of the last 12 weeks.

The Committee heard from Professor Sir Michael Marmot, who did a review back in 2010. He refreshed his review in February this year—hard up against the start of the crisis.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Lady makes a valid point about the NHS, in which there is not a great record on whistleblowing but at least many of those workers would be in regular jobs. Does she agree that there is a disproportionate number of black, Asian and minority ethnic people in insecure employment, for whom raising an issue could mean losing their jobs? They should not have to make that choice.

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. That is why I specifically raised those who are working in transport and the gig economy, who do not have those routes. In the NHS, they should at least be there; in some sectors, they do not exist in the first place.

We heard from the hon. Member for Brent Central some uncomfortable truths—issues that may be difficult for us to hear—but we cannot just listen and review; we must act. When I rather proudly told one of my constituents, as Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, that we had launched an inquiry, her instant response was not great: it was, “Not another inquiry. Not another review. Please, can you come up with some action?” She was right.

The race disparity unit in the Cabinet Office was set up specifically to obtain data, but it needs to do more than just get data. It needs to be able to look at datasets and understand them—of course it does; we have to know where the structural inequalities lie—but it is of no use to accurately record a growing deficit, or perhaps a shrinking deficit. We have to have actions. We need policy levers to effect change, so that the young Caribbean

boy in the constituency of the hon. Member for Brent Central has the same educational opportunities as the white girl in mine; so that the job opportunities and chances of progression in work—and that is absolutely key: it is about not just getting a job but getting a good job getting, a better job—are available whatever someone’s ethnicity; and so that someone’s ability to speak out when they do not have the right PPE is the same regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion, age, sexuality or disability.

I cannot stand here and predict the outcome of my Committee’s inquiry—it would be wrong to do so—but I can predict that we will expect delivery from Ministers, not warm words, not more reviews and not more commitments to get better data. We want action and improvement.

Covid-19 is of course a novel virus and we have been forced to learn about it at pace, but it has highlighted health inequalities that are real and current: if someone lives in overcrowded, poor-quality housing, they are more likely to be negatively impacted; if someone is in frontline, public-facing work, they are more likely to be negatively impacted; if someone’s English is poor or they have learning difficulties, they will not be able to receive the important public health messages that they need; and if someone lives in multigenerational families, they are more likely to be negatively impacted, as are those whose work is insecure. Of course, a person may well have no choice but to carry on working at the height of a pandemic to feed their family. No one can be a careworker, a retail worker or a transport worker from the safety of their own home.

We have not had a public health crisis like this since the Spanish flu 100 years ago, and I do not know whether our generation will see another, but we cannot lurch to another crisis without having worked out how to risk-assess our frontline workers; without having established culturally intelligent ways to disseminate information; and without having empowered people in the workplace to voice their concerns and enabled the routes to redress.

I know that the Minister and her colleagues across Government will work hard on this issue. We heard last week from my hon. Friend the Minister for Equalities about the importance of the work that the race disparity unit is doing, but I urge the Minister present to come forward with what is actually going to happen, because that is what our BAME communities up and down the country wish to hear.

1.53 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) for calling for this debate and to the Backbench Business Committee for granting it. It is a great pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), who is now the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee; I commend her for all the work that she is doing.

I also pay tribute to all the NHS workers in Basingstoke, in Hampshire and throughout the country who, despite all the headlines and despite the fear, kept going. I think particularly of those from different black and ethnic minority groups, who face particular fear and challenges. We should pay tribute to them in this debate.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North talked about the fact that when we discuss issues affecting BME communities, we often

[Mrs Maria Miller]

talk about employment and education. In this pandemic, it has been the differential impact on health that has shocked us all to our core. She is right that we need to give people a voice to speak out on that.

It was particularly concerning for me when I was approached by individuals in my constituency from different sectors of my thriving and vibrant BAME community about their fears and about what this meant to them. It struck me that the information available was so vague and general that it was difficult for me to respond to their questions. One particular individual from my Indian community asked, “Does this mean I’m more at risk?” I could not answer that, so I looked carefully at the research from Public Health England when it came out. I will come on to that in a moment.

We have to be careful when we look at this issue. I know that the hon. Member for Brent Central will agree that we have to take great care not to simply treat BAME communities as one homogeneous group. We run the great risk of coming to the wrong conclusions if we speak as though they all have the same challenges—indeed, if any of us have all the same challenges. We know as Members of Parliament that our opportunities in life are too often determined far too much by our socioeconomic backgrounds, by the occupation of our parents or by the healthcare that we receive throughout our childhoods. It is the same for every group in our society. The way that we can address this is by understanding each group individually, and having accurate data is important in trying to disentangle and understand this particular issue, which the hon. Lady so eloquently outlined in her opening speech.

It was with some bemusement that I read the Public Health England analysis, because it was, frankly, incomplete. It did not include a breakdown of individual occupations; it did not look at comorbidities; and it treated people from the BAME community as if they were one homogeneous group, which I think we have just agreed does not exist. This was incredibly concerning, and I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), will be able to address this directly when she speaks at the conclusion of the debate.

I took some time, after reading that Public Health England report, to go back through one of the reports done by the Women and Equalities Committee in September 2018, on the race disparity audit. It was a good report that was well received by the Government, and it called for distinct changes in the way in which Government organisations collected data, precisely so that we did not end up with a homogeneous approach to these issues. In particular, I would be grateful if the Minister updated the House on the work that has been done around the conclusions of that Women and Equalities Committee report, because it is unacceptable in 2020 Britain that Public Health England would not include an analysis of those particular factors in its analysis of this health pandemic.

I know that PHE is reliant on the Office for National Statistics and other organisations for the data that it is given, but that is exactly the issue that we focused on in the Women and Equalities Committee report. We identified the need for the standardisation of data and the need to ensure that we did not have a homogeneous approach,

particularly when we talked about the analysis of data relating to different ethnic minority groups. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister could also update the House on the quality improvement plan that was going to be put in place, where the race disparity audit was going to work with the ONS centre for expertise on inequality. A key recommendation was that the Government should have an action plan to improve data collection to ensure that disaggregation was far easier and that more data was collected. The Select Committee also called for the inter-ministerial group on race disparity to work more closely with the ONS on these issues, and perhaps the Minister could update the House on the work of that particular sub-committee.

It is a tragedy that we are having this debate today, but it is an important debate not just for covid-19 but for the way in which we understand these problems more generally.

1.59 pm

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) for securing this important debate. Without doubt, the nation needs a full independent public inquiry into the Government’s handling of the covid crisis, but one area in particular that demands scrutiny is the Government’s handling of the effects of covid-19 on the black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. Why have Ministers ignored the evidence, dragged their feet and almost certainly contributed to a situation where people from BAME communities have been disproportionately ravaged by this terrible disease?

For me, this is personal. I have lost loved ones to covid, such as Jagir Kaur, my lovely grandmother, our family matriarch, from whom I learnt so much, but whose coffin I was not even able to carry on my shoulder. Satnam Singh Dhesi, my fun-loving, Slough taxi-driver uncle was taken away from us way too early, and then I had to endure the indignity of watching his funeral online via Zoom. Hemraj Jaymal, my brother-in-law’s father, somehow contracted covid in a Slough care home, and, inexcusably, none of us was there to hold his hand when he breathed his last. May they all rest in peace and may we be forgiven for not being there. Families cannot attend bedsides and because the usual rituals and rights of funerals are disrupted, it makes loss even harder and grief even harsher, and there are tens of thousands of people suffering bereavement.

Back in April, we saw BAME people being disproportionately affected by covid-19 as data came in from emergency admissions to hospital from more than three months ago. On 22 May, King’s College London research showed that patients from BAME groups admitted to hospital with covid-19 are, on average, a decade younger than white patients. In May, the Office for National Statistics reported that black people were more than four times more likely to die from covid-19 than their white counterparts; that Bangladeshi and Pakistani people were more than one and a half times more likely to die from covid-19; and that the situation was similar for people with an Indian heritage. That was published more than a month ago.

Of course, Ministers have had a wealth of evidence from BAME organisations presented to Public Health England, which Ministers initially tried to delay, then cover-up and have released under pressure only this week.

The evidence tells us what we already knew: ethnic inequalities in health and wellbeing in the UK existed before COVID-19, and the pandemic has made these disparities more apparent and undoubtedly exacerbated them. Why is this? One major reason is racism, and this racism, unfortunately, is also within our lovely NHS.

Figures released last week by the NHS Confederation show that the number of ethnic minority chairs and non-executive directors of NHS trusts in England has almost halved from 15% in 2010 to a mere 8% in 2018. Quoted in the *Eastern Eye* newspaper, Dr Ramesh Mehta, the president of the British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, said that this was down to “rampant discrimination” and a “club culture” within NHS professions.

Representation matters, and the dismally low number of executive directors of NHS trusts is inexcusable. If BAME doctors and nurses are good enough to die on the frontline, surely they are good enough to lead. While I am proud to be a part of the most diverse party and the most diverse Parliament ever, the lack of leadership positions in most key industries is shocking, including the all-important finance sector, where the majority of FTSE companies still have all-white boards. Rather than just tweeting about Black Lives Matter, those companies need to take a long hard look at themselves to judge whether they are indeed a part of the change that they proclaim to be.

Diversity is crucial because it brings in people with fresh perspectives and different priorities, thereby enhancing and improving the overall performance for us all, so perhaps the Minister can comment on how she intends to tackle the racial discrimination within the NHS. It took until 16 June for Public Health England to publish its seven-point plan, but surely this should have been done from the very start. We do not just want to carry on collating data.

Of course I pay tribute to the frontline NHS staff across my Slough constituency, including at Wexham Park Hospital, who undoubtedly face incredible challenges and risks, but the British Medical Association reports that 90% of doctors and 60% of NHS staff who have died are from BAME backgrounds. Those absolutely staggering statistics should make us realise that something is very wrong.

We are lacking time, so in conclusion I want to ask the Minister to reflect on the plans to commemorate all those who have lost their lives, with a focal point of remembrance, and assure us that we will learn the lessons. More than anything, I hope she can allay my concerns. Black lives matter, and we demand deeds, not words.

2.5 pm

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the passionate speech of the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi). I first want to thank all NHS workers, who have done a tremendous job during this covid period. My speech will not be so friendly, so I want to start by thanking the Minister, who has been tremendous in supporting me in Wealden, where we have a particularly large care home system—I have a lot of older constituents. Regardless of the day of the week and the time of day, she has been incredibly responsive. Unfortunately, the rest of my speech will not be so flattering, so I will just crack on.

Like so many people in this country, I have lost loved ones to covid. I also have loved ones working on the frontline dealing with covid. We had the experience and network to highlight quite early on that we saw a pattern forming, but we were met with, “We don’t have the data”—it is 2020, and we do not have the data. I understand the argument that this is an unusual situation and that we did not have the statistics to deal with this particular pandemic, but we do have data about how viruses spread. We also understand the long-standing institutional biases of NHS England and Public Health England, which have failed in their leadership, are unaccountable and hide behind the catch-all, “We just don’t have the data.” It is shameful.

Caroline Nokes: Does my hon. Friend agree that we did not actually need data, given that we could open up the pages of any newspaper and see the photographs?

Ms Ghani: I agree with my right hon. Friend. That goes back to my earlier point: Public Health England needs far more functioning leadership.

Public Health England’s report says:

“It is clear from discussions with stakeholders the pandemic exposed and exacerbated longstanding inequalities affecting BAME communities in the UK.”

That is nothing new. Moreover, it confirms to me the wilful blindness of Public Health England and NHS England in addressing racial inequalities and their inability to put in place measures to address workplace risk and make sure that so many BAME staff were not exposed. In the time it took for Public Health England to review the disproportionate number of BAME deaths, another 17 doctors passed away. Sixteen of those were BAME.

What else do we know? We know that there is a significantly higher proportion of BAME healthcare workers in England across our health system; without BAME workers, there would not be a health system. We know that BAME workers are in lower-paid jobs and that they cannot work remotely. We know that BAME workers tend to work in high-risk areas and that the families they go home to are high-risk individuals. It was a high-risk strategy, yet Public Health England and NHS England continued to expose high-risk staff to high-risk shifts.

We know that 94% of doctors who died were of a BAME background. In the biggest survey of its kind, ITV News asked the UK’s BAME healthcare community why they thought more of their BAME colleagues were dying than their white counterparts, and 50% felt that discriminatory behaviour played a role in the high death toll. One respondent described the treatment as “very unfair”, adding that “all BAME nurses” have been

“allocated to red wards and my white colleagues”

are “constantly in green wards.” Perhaps more worryingly, ITV found that 53% of BAME respondents said that they felt they could not comfortably raise concerns about deployment, so they risked their health as against their employment.

To me, that suggests that the problem is related not to covid but to long-standing institutional inequalities. I want to hear from the Minister a resolute commitment to hold Public Health England and NHS England to account and to ensure that the recommendations are acted on, reviewed and assessed by the real workers on

[Ms Ghani]

the frontline who are most at risk—by that I mean BAME workers—and that all the data, good and bad, is shared in good time. I hope that the Minister understands that I have very little confidence in particular in Public Health England.

As we champion our frontline key workers, we also need to give them confidence that we have their backs. Like all public workers, they want to do their jobs, but many are concerned that if there is a second wave of covid they will be risking their lives or their families'. The BAME community has already been severely hit. I am not sure that it could take a second wave. For BAME health workers to die at such a rate frankly amounts to negligence on the part of NHS England and Public Health England, but perhaps it is not that surprising. Their leadership boasts 46 individuals; yet only four of them are from BAME backgrounds.

The country was united in tackling covid, but Public Health England and NHS England let down BAME health workers. They have time to put the record straight. Either we are in this together or we are not. I hope that the Minister can confirm that the Department is committed to ensuring that Public Health England and NHS England will treat, manage and support all their staff equally, so that we do not see a second wave of disproportionate BAME health worker deaths.

2.11 pm

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) on securing the debate and on her powerful and moving speech. I also thank the Backbench Business Committee for ensuring that the debate was allocated time this afternoon.

I will not speak for too long, but the impact of covid-19 on black and minority ethnic communities has been so shocking that I feel I must put on record my concerns and add my voice to those calling for urgent and decisive action. We have known for months, as the hon. Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani) has just said, that BAME people are being hit very hard by this pandemic. Last month, the Office for National Statistics found that black men and women are four times more likely to die from covid-19 than white men and women and that people from Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian and mixed ethnic groups also had a raised risk.

The *Health Service Journal* reported that more than 90% of doctors who have died during the pandemic have been BAME—more than double the proportion in the medical workforce as a whole—and that, although BAME groups count for 21% of all NHS staff, they account for 63% of those dying from covid-19. Similar inequalities have been exposed by our universities, the Institute for Fiscal Studies and many others, and of course they have been confirmed by Public Health England's review. However, this is not just about numbers; it is about people. It is about the families and communities that have lost loved ones, including hon. Members present this afternoon.

That is why dozens of my constituents have written to me about Belly Mujinga. They did not know Belly, but they understand that failing to protect black and minority ethnic people from covid-19 leaves behind devastated families. They are appalled by the story of her death and they are demanding action. They want to

know what the Government will do to ensure that things change. They want to know that the inequalities that have produced this disproportionate impact will be tackled, and they want to know that it will be done quickly. The virus has not gone away, and we all know that the risks of a second wave are very real.

Why are we seeing the disproportionate impact? We know that poverty matters. Both ethnicity and income inequality are independently associated with covid-19 mortality. People from the most deprived communities are almost twice as likely to be admitted to intensive care as the least deprived.

We know that housing matters. The Marmot report found that BAME people are more likely to live in overcrowded housing, making self-isolation more difficult. Some 30% of Bangladeshi households and 15% of African households were overcrowded, compared with just 2% of white British households. Where that overcrowding coincides with multi-generational households, it can make shielding impossible.

We know that where you live matters, with links between poor air quality and increased susceptibility to covid-19. The places most affected by pollution are also more likely to have higher BAME populations and are home to more deprived communities.

We know that where you work matters. People from BAME backgrounds are more likely to work in jobs that cannot be done from home, in frontline roles where they are dealing with the public—as taxi, private hire and public transport drivers; security workers; retail workers; and especially health and social care staff, where there is a higher risk of exposure to covid-19. If people do not get sick pay, or if it is so low that they cannot live on it, they might be forced to choose between risking their health and that of others and managing to put food on the table.

We know that racism and race discrimination really matter. If someone has experienced racism at work or already feels isolated, of course it is harder for them to speak up or raise concerns about safety. The British Medical Association found in 2018 that BAME doctors were twice as likely as white doctors to say that they would not feel confident raising safety concerns. More recently, BAME doctors told the BMA that they were more likely to feel pressured to see patients without adequate PPE. If people have had bad experiences of using health services in the past, they are less likely to seek treatment. If someone is worried that they might be challenged about their right to be here, they might not seek hospital help and care. That is a real impact of the hostile environment.

Tackling these inequalities is urgent. It requires efforts across government and by employers and other organisations, and it must be done in collaboration with BAME people themselves. When the Minister responds to the debate, she must tell us that the Government will act now to implement all seven recommendations in the Public Health England report as soon as possible. More than that, we need to hear that there is a detailed plan setting out how they intend to do so. Perhaps most of all, we need to hear that the Government understand that systemic racism is real and that we do not need another review. We need Government to act on the recommendations of not just this report but all the others that are sitting gathering dust—as my hon. Friend said, deeds, not words.

2.16 pm

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) for securing this debate. “Unprecedented” is a word we have heard banded around a lot in the last few months. The new ways of working and interacting with our communities may be unprecedented, but sadly, the effect of covid-19 on black and minority ethnic communities does have precedent. If the Government had taken the findings of previous reports seriously, not only is it possible that many of these black and minority ethnic deaths could have been avoided, but we would not once again have to be asking the Government to ensure that more people do not lose their lives to this horrible disease.

In 2017, the Lammy review and the race disparity audit were published. Both highlighted the structural inequalities experienced by black and minority ethnic communities. Asian and black households and those in other ethnic minority groups were more likely to be poorer and most likely to be in persistent poverty. The ethnic minority population is more likely to live in areas of deprivation—especially black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi people. Around one in 10 adults from black, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or mixed backgrounds were unemployed, compared with one in 25 white British people. Overcrowding affects ethnic minority households disproportionately. London has one of the highest rates of overcrowding of all regions in England. There has been an increase in the number of ethnic minority households accepted by local authorities as statutorily homeless over the last decade.

The Government will tell us that tackling racism is at the core of their efforts. Last week, I asked the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government how much it spends on tackling racism. The response said that the Department

“paid approximately £219,00 to projects specifically to target racism in the financial year 19/20.”

People across this nation are watching. Black and minority ethnic communities have faced structural racism for decades, and we are having to have the same conversations 20 years on. People are concerned and, rightly, angry. Although I support both Show Racism the Red Card and the Anne Frank Trust, which the Government fund, is this the message that the Government want to give—just £219,000 of the Department’s annual budget is spent on racism, yet the Prime Minister is willing to spend £900,000 on rebranding his plane? Can somebody tell me what kind of message that sends to our country? The message is that this Government care more about the colour of a plane than fighting racism, bigotry and discrimination for people of colour. Is this the message the Government are sending? Is that the Government’s priority? And they wonder why people are so angry.

Morally, the Government’s priorities are not in the right place and nor are they economically. The McGregor-Smith review found that black and minority ethnic career progression could add £24 billion a year to the UK’s economy. If we could tackle racial inequality, we would be billions better-off. Yet I ask the Government how much they are spending specifically on tackling this type of race inequality. If the Minister wants to tell the House how much is spent on trying to retrieve up to £24 billion lost to the economy, I am happy to give way.

On 9 April, I also wrote to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. Over the past few months, the Government have published significant material on covid-19 restrictions and guidelines on the Government website, and Ministers have been briefing the nation on air every single day. Yet I have still not received a response, despite me reaching out to the Government to support them in their efforts to reach minority communities. On a community level in Bradford West, the Al Markaz Medics, the Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and the Bradford Council for Mosques all put out their own communication. It did not come from the Government. Nationally, lot of organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain did what they needed to do for their own communities, but the Government did not. We have had to take it upon ourselves. The Government failed to acknowledge the significant language barriers that exist in communities, despite this being a pandemic where everyone has needed to receive clear messaging.

I am a former commissioner. From my commissioning days, I remember the Rocky Bennett inquiry. In 1998, Rocky Bennett was held down by five nurses. He could not breathe either and he died. The report, published over 20 years ago, made recommendations to the Department of Health to

“cure this festering abscess”—

racism—

“which is a blot upon the good name of the NHS.”

Rocky Bennett was a 38-year-old black man with huge ambitions who had been offered a traineeship with Chelsea.

Structural inequalities are what this comes down to. Even in this place last year, a young man who had grown his Afro for years had to cut it to even be considered for an interview. Structural racism exists in this place. The Government need to listen and stop papering over with more reviews. We know what the issues are. Now is the time for action.

2.22 pm

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): It has been deeply disturbing to watch and witness the impact of covid-19 on people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. It has been equally moving to hear the speeches so passionately made this afternoon.

It has been truly heartbreaking to see the photos of the health and care workers who have lost their lives, so many of them from BAME backgrounds. Like others, I want to take this opportunity today to pay tribute to all BAME workers on the frontline in the NHS, in social care, in transport, in council services, in retail and in the police, especially those in my Chipping Barnet constituency. For their sake, and to ensure that we do all we can to protect BAME communities from harm, it is vital that we have intensive research into why covid has had this disproportionate impact.

We also need to get much better at delivering public health messages effectively in a way that works for all communities. As a civilised society, we can no longer tolerate the health inequalities that the covid epidemic has exposed and intensified. The NHS long-term plan has a strong focus on the prevention of ill health. That needs to be turned into results that see people of all backgrounds and ethnicity living longer and healthier lives.

I believe this country has come a long way in recent decades towards tackling discrimination, combating racism and building a more cohesive society that is proud of its

[Theresa Villiers]

ethnic and cultural diversity. I feel that particularly strongly about my constituency and the borough of Barnet, which is one of the most diverse in Britain, but the covid emergency and the cry of pain that has arisen after the appalling killing of George Floyd are wake-up calls—both of them. They are a stark reminder that while we have come a long way, there is still a long road to travel before we can say that everyone in this nation is being given the chance to go as far as their talent and their hard work will take them, whatever their faith, ethnicity or cultural background.

As everyone has pointed out, we have had a long list of reports on this. Now is the time to press on with measures that tackle the problems that those reports have identified and that are holding people of colour back from realising their potential. That includes tackling not just health inequalities but educational under-achievement and the worrying prevalence of young black men in the criminal justice system, and of course it must include doing more to combat racism and prejudice, both conscious and unconscious, structural and individual.

I want to conclude by quoting from a British Tamil intensive care nurse. British Tamils are one of many minority communities represented in my constituency, and I have always been hugely impressed by the immense contribution they make to our national health service. Nurse Thibya Mahasivam told the *Tamil Guardian*:

“Not one of us hesitated to step forward... Yes many of us complained, we had every right to—this was how we were able to unload our stress and worries. But when given the choice to relocate elsewhere the vast majority of us chose to put our lives on the line.”

We owe our BAME doctors, nurses and frontline workers so much. We now need to ensure that gratitude delivers lasting social change that backs aspiration, hope and fairness and gives everyone in this great country, with all its diverse communities, a fair chance to get on and make a success of their lives.

2.27 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr, Dirprwy Lefarydd. I thank the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) for her trenchant speech in opening this debate.

Members have risen to speak in the House on matters relating to inequality and BAME communities with depressing regularity over the years. I thank the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) for saying we have come a long way. I will refer a little to my own history. I am very aware that I am a white woman speaking on this matter, but before moving to Wales I was raised in Eltham, in south-east London. Stephen Lawrence’s murder in 1993 compelled that community—my old home community—to deeply question its values. The Macpherson report in 1999 made 70 recommendations aimed at tackling institutional racism, primarily within the criminal justice system, yet 20 years later and black people in Wales are five times over-represented in the prison population, Asian people are 1.7 times over-represented and people from a mixed ethnic group are 2.7 times over-represented. This is a significant indicator of the structural racism and inequality in our society.

This is the hard reality of criminal justice and inequality. Our police forces are indeed very different from those of 1993, but disproportionately too many young men and

women have blighted lives and spend much of their lives in the criminal justice system. Those figures reveal that all the good intentions of report after review after commission in no way reflect the lived experience of too many black people, and this is the background of today’s debate.

Many hon. Members have spoken already today about the pernicious effect of institutional racism within healthcare and the wider community. Many have questioned why it has taken the covid-19 crisis to make heroes of health and care staff and to show us clearly exactly how many of those frontline workers are from BAME communities. Representing a constituency now in north-west Wales, I hope that one of the messages we can get from this is: look at how dependent we are on people and look at what the outcomes have been for these people. Are we content for our society to ignore this?

Members have pointed out the obvious: there have been enough reviews, enough commissions and enough descriptions of how racism oozes from private attitudes into public experience. Covid-19 and the Black Lives Matter campaign together are reforging our values and forcing us to question our cultural heritage. Thinking again of Stephen Lawrence and all the battles that his brave parents, Neville and Doreen Lawrence, have fought in the intervening years, the people my family knew in Eltham back then did not think of themselves as racists and we did not think of ourselves as racists, but look what happened in Well Hall Road.

People like us would have been horrified to be called racists and people like us are still horrified to be called racists, but that is not enough, is it? It is not enough to be not racist. Our social media feeds tonight will almost certainly include comments that “all lives matter”. Of course all lives matter, but it is not an indictment of anybody for us to be calling for this particular attention. One person’s gain is not another person’s loss. If we are not racists, we must be anti-racist. Do not commission; act on what we already know.

2.31 pm

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): This debate is very important to me and to my constituency of Kensington. As hon. Members may be aware, Kensington has some of the most extreme health inequalities in the country. The difference in average male life expectancy between my richest ward and my poorest ward is a massive 16 years. Clearly, we need to work on levelling up.

I have a very significant BAME community, and I want to start by paying tribute to my BAME community. Many of them are frontline workers—in the health service, in the police, in education—and many are at the forefront of their communities in providing charity and aid.

I welcome the report from Public Health England and the fact that the Equalities Minister will bring this forward, but I cannot stress enough that this cannot be some academic exercise. There need to be practical plans, and they need to be implemented with a sense of urgency.

One of the key tenets of my general election campaign was equality of opportunity throughout the constituency in health, in education and in housing. I want to stress that this is in all our interests. It is in all our interests that we harness the maximum talent of all our citizens. I am proud to be part of a party that values diversity and that has a BAME Chancellor of the Exchequer, a BAME Home Secretary and a BAME Attorney General.

Meg Hillier: I take the hon. Lady's comments in good part, and she is right to highlight the rise of people of all backgrounds in government. However, it still disturbs me and many—most—of my constituents that the Prime Minister under whom she serves has described people as “piccaninnies” with “watermelon smiles”. That is completely against the tone of this debate so far. Does she agree with the Prime Minister, or does she call him out, as we do?

Felicity Buchan: I would agree with the hon. Lady that language is incredibly important in these sensitive times, and it is not language I personally would have used.

I want to talk about levelling up. We talk a lot about levelling up, and normally it is exclusively in the context of the north versus the south, but clearly there are huge disparities in our inner cities. We have already heard that our cities have been worse affected by covid, often due to overcrowding and deprivation. I therefore urge my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that, when we focus on levelling up, we focus on our cities just as much as our regions. I also want to talk about prevention and screening, which are critical, not necessarily in the context of coronavirus but in the context of mitigating health inequalities. Only if we have proper prevention and screening can we extend people's lives. I am glad that the NHS has a diabetes prevention programme, for instance; clearly, that has a comorbidity with coronavirus.

In summary, I thank the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) for securing the debate, and I urge the Minister, on behalf of my constituents, to proceed with pace with this review and to ensure that its recommendations are implemented with a sense of urgency.

2.36 pm

Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) on securing this important debate.

My constituency is one of the most diverse in the country, with a large Bangladeshi population, and it is one of the most deprived, with the highest rate of child poverty in the country—and now we have suffered a high percentage of excess deaths due to covid-19. That is no coincidence. In particular, it is not random that British Bangladeshis are one of the groups most vulnerable to the virus.

Discrimination and structural racism continue to dictate who gets dumped and who gets resources—who suffers events worse. BAME individuals are more likely to work in jobs that cannot be done remotely, obviously increasing their risk of contracting covid-19. Not only are we yet to have justice for workers such as Belly Mujinga, but many are still being forced to work in unsafe conditions. Shockingly, a study by the Royal College of Nursing even revealed that BAME nursing staff experience the greatest PPE shortages.

Data from the annual population survey in 2018 revealed that Bangladeshi workers are disproportionately employed in distribution, hotels and restaurants, and transport and communication, which includes road transport drivers as well as key workers such as sales assistants and retail cashiers. That is one of the many reasons why it is incomprehensible that a full regulatory impact assessment had not been prepared for the statutory instrument relating to health regulations that we considered this week.

Likewise, BAME individuals continue to face an unfair pay gap, on average having lower incomes than their white counterparts. Workers of Bangladeshi heritage have the lowest median hourly pay of any ethnic group and are over-represented in the most deprived neighbourhoods in England—the very areas where deaths from covid-19 occur at double the rate in more affluent areas. Households with a low income are more likely than higher-income households to be overcrowded and have damp problems, because they cannot afford to move to a larger house or fix damp problems. That is highly relevant as covid-19 attacks the respiratory system, which can be compromised by chronic exposure to damp conditions.

I raised the issue of overcrowding when I spoke in the House all the way back on 18 March. Since then, it has become clear that the probability of being infected by covid-19 is likely to be higher in close-contact settings and that social distancing and self-isolation rules are much more difficult to uphold in overcrowded households. Moreover, the evidence points towards an increase in the mortality rate among ethnic minority people living in more densely populated, more polluted and more deprived areas, including among key workers.

According to campaigners, more than 40% of the population in my borough, Tower Hamlets, lives in areas with unacceptable air quality, with the situation predicted to get worse. Our children are growing up with reduced lung capacity due to nitrogen dioxide exposure, and they are at greater risk of developing lifelong breathing disorders—the exact symptoms that affect an individual's vulnerability to covid-19. It is not just that BAME people are held back by economic and health inequalities; research suggests that they also experience poorer access to services and poorer quality of services. Privatisation and underfunding continue to undermine the daily efforts of our health workers. We have demanded urgent measures to safeguard the health and wellbeing of migrants, including an amnesty for undocumented migrants, an immediate suspension of the NHS charging for migrants and the scrapping of the no recourse to public funds policy, yet undocumented migrants, in particular, in my constituency, are still contacting me on a daily basis in despair.

I have been moved and inspired by Black Lives Matters protesters all around the world and I truly hope that the Government are listening. However, last week, as people were calling out the state regarding racism, Islamophobia and discrimination, the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Bill received its Second Reading. That Bill delays the long-awaited review of Prevent, which fosters discrimination against Muslim people and introduces significant curtailments of civil liberties, which will disadvantage BAME communities. It is time for some joined-up thinking and plain speaking: from now on, every decision by government or other public authorities needs to consider and act on addressing the needs of BAME communities. Lockdown restrictions should not be eased further unless it is safe for everyone. I continue to repeat over and over again: urgent and immediate action must be taken; the lives of people in my constituency and all over the UK matter.

2.41 pm

Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) for securing this debate and the Members who

[Dr Ben Spencer]

have made such powerful and thoughtful speeches throughout the debate. I wish to focus on the PHE report and, as it is a theme that has emerged from this debate, a call for action.

The recent PHE report on the disparities in risk and outcomes of covid found that being from a black and minority ethnic background is associated with a significantly increased risk of death from covid. That is a deeply concerning and worrying finding. The researchers were able to control for the effects of age, sex, socioeconomic deprivation and, to a limited extent, occupation, as all those things are increasingly understood as risk factors for death from covid. However, it remains unclear whether the effect of ethnicity is in part mitigated by obesity or other health conditions, such as diabetes or high blood pressure, which are known to be more prevalent in the BME community. That is a health inequality in and of itself, but the study was unable to control for it. It was also unable to provide a detailed and granular understanding of the effect of occupation, especially for those working in public-facing or care roles. The report further concludes that research needs to be done in this area. It is absolutely right that the Government are urgently looking into this. By getting detailed scientific data, we can understand better the complicated relationships between these factors and not only shape our response to covid, but continue to inform future health policy to address the needs of those who are currently being left behind. We have to do that very quickly.

The PHE stakeholder report makes several recommendations for change, which Members have mentioned. The one I wish to highlight in this debate is the need to accelerate efforts to target culturally competent health promotion and disease prevention programmes, as the importance of that cannot be overstated. Broad-brush approaches to interventions may work for the majority, but they can miss out some of the people most in need, and we need to ensure that our public health programme has the right message, at the right time, delivered in the right way, for the individual to exert change.

Many people still face health inequalities in the UK. I have already mentioned socioeconomic deprivation, an important driver of those inequalities that I wish to discuss a little further. Socioeconomic deprivation is a factor in almost all acquired health conditions. I am sure that that is on our minds at this moment, given the possible long-term impacts of the lockdown. We must ensure that everyone has the same opportunities in life, which means tackling inequalities, socioeconomic deprivation and all the factors that drive it, with access to quality education being key.

The coronavirus pandemic is a pandemic of inequalities that hits those who are already worst off the hardest. This Government, and the one before it, have worked hard to tackle health inequalities in the black and minority ethnic communities. For example, one aim of the independent review of the Mental Health Act 1983 was to examine and change the increased likelihood of people from a black and minority ethnic background being detained under that Act. As a mental health doctor, I took part in that review and sat on one of the working groups. That work was to help shape a White Paper and reform our mental health laws for the future. It is now time for us to publish that White Paper and drive forward those much-needed reforms.

This pandemic is likely to have a grave impact on those struggling with mental illness in society, and while I do not know this, I worry that that will disproportionately impact the black and minority ethnic community. Now more than ever is the time for definitive action. We need a public health revolution to tackle the burning injustice of health inequalities in the black and minority ethnic community. We must ensure that the pandemic does not end up entrenching inequality, and the way to do that is to move public health from the margins to the centre of our national health strategy.

2.46 pm

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) on successfully securing the debate, and I share the concerns raised by the Black Lives Matter movement about the stark inequalities and injustices that are faced by black people and other ethnic minorities. Covid-19 has been devastating in our communities, care homes and hospitals. So many hearts have been broken by loss, and today we have heard powerful statements from the heart.

This debate is rightly focused on the impact of coronavirus on black, Asian and minority ethnic communities—a point extremely pertinent to my constituency. In her maiden speech, my predecessor, Jo Cox, said of Batley and Spen:

“Our communities have been deeply enhanced by immigration, be it of Irish Catholics across the constituency, or of Muslims from Gujarat in India or from Pakistan, principally from Kashmir.”—*[Official Report, 3 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 674.]*

I quote Jo Cox in the week of the fourth anniversary of her murder, and she is still desperately missed in this place and in Batley and Spen. That quote perfectly describes the diversity of my constituency. That community is already exposed to underlying health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and asthma, and we now know that there is also a raised risk of death involving covid-19, when compared with people of white ethnicity.

As a proud GMB MP, I know that GMB supports many thousands of ancillary staff, from hospital porters to cleaners, ambulance workers and admin staff, and it has pressed for risk assessments. Sadly, those risk assessments came too late for many staff, and when they did come, they focused on access to PPE and social distancing challenges.

Naz Shah: I think my hon. Friend and I might have been on the EveryDoctor briefing together, which highlighted that although BAME staff make up 17% of the NHS workforce, only 11% of them are in senior management, and that figure then drops to 6.4%. A BMA survey stated that 64% of BAME staff felt pressured into working without PPE, compared with 33% of non-BAME staff.

Tracy Brabin: My hon. Friend makes a powerful comment, and I will get to that point later in my remarks. We must not allow pressure on people to do their job to affect health outcomes for them and their family, and I thank her for that brilliant intervention.

With all that in mind, plus the fact that Pakistani deaths are 2.9 times as high as deaths among white British people, it sadly seems as though my diverse constituency is at a greater risk of being disproportionately affected

by covid-19. It is therefore with some optimism and relief that I note the most recent statistics, which show that the Kirklees local authority area remains one of the lowest affected by covid per size of population, with 179.6 cases per 100,000 people. On Tuesday this week, no new deaths were recorded at Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust over the previous 24 hours. These low figures clearly reflect the sacrifices of the people of Kirklees and of Batley and Spen, who listened to Government advice and followed the guidance to protect our NHS. I would like to thank the leadership of Kirklees Council and of Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust, who have worked tirelessly to keep the public and stakeholders informed so that we can all work together to keep people safe.

One serious worry is that the results of the covid testing regime are being held centrally and not shared with the trust, which could make the most of the data in an increasingly fluid situation. That does seem extremely odd. Our NHS trust is the local expert and the institution that people look to to keep them safe, so if it could factor in testing—how many tests are done and in what geographical location—and build a response based on the breakdown and composition of positive results, we would all be better served.

The impact on my community goes further than falling ill. The economic impact also affects my BAME community more deeply than others as we are a large manufacturing region and manufacturing is particularly exposed in an economic downturn. As the Institute for Fiscal Studies data showed only this week, workers in shut-down sectors are more likely than average to be BAME women and part-time workers, with 15% from BAME backgrounds by comparison with the workforce average of 12%. Let us not forget that these are a group of workers already disadvantaged in the labour market, with the ONS showing pre-covid BAME unemployment at 6.3% in January to March 2020, compared with 3.9% of the whole population. Anxiety about money and job prospects will also have a profound impact on their mental health.

As we know, according to the report from Public Health England, racism can make people from BAME backgrounds less likely to ask for help or insist on PPE. Some 90% of the doctors who died during the pandemic were from BAME backgrounds. Doctors from these communities were three times more likely to say that they had felt pressured to work without protective equipment. We must do more to tackle institutionalised racism in the care sector and the NHS. For that to happen, we need to have better data reporting, to support those in low-paid jobs to speak up, to develop a risk assessment for BAME staff members exposed to large numbers of the general public, to deliver culturally sensitive messaging across the community and to intensify health messages around the conditions that can lead to vulnerability.

Before I finish, let me say that each and every one of the statistics has family and friends mourning their loss. I would like to pay tribute to the wonderful, thoughtful and very well liked Dr Nasir Khan, who worked on one of the medical wards at Dewsbury and District Hospital in my constituency. He fell ill with the virus last month and, as a resident of Bolton, was admitted to Bolton NHS Foundation Trust, where he sadly died. His son made a moving tribute to his father. He ended with the words:

“We strive to achieve the greatness that was my dad and fulfil the dreams he has left behind.”

Let us hope that Dr Khan’s sacrifice was not in vain and that Government will now implement the changes needed to ensure that black, Asian and minority ethnic workers are not allowed to be collateral damage in this fight.

2.52 pm

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): May I start by thanking the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) for securing this debate, while also apologising to her for missing the initial stages of her speech?

Last week in this Chamber, I spoke of forgotten people, particularly in my constituency of Dudley North. Sometimes, it takes an extraordinary event to bring to light weaknesses and underlying problems that perhaps would otherwise simmer below the surface, unseen, leaving people to suffer in silence. So many have lost family, friends and colleagues to this disease, and nearly all are experiencing the impact that this disease is having on their communities, with all the significant social, physical and mental health impacts and complications that come as collateral to the disease.

I want to reiterate today the need to level up support and to listen to and help our forgotten communities—communities that are impacted disproportionately socially and economically and that might have poor experiences of healthcare or at work that mean they are less likely to seek care when they need it or to speak up when they have concerns about their safety and welfare at work.

My election in December gave me an opportunity to make new friends. I think of Haji Malik, who has lived in Dudley for many, many decades, a pillar of the community there. Meeting him and getting to know him and his family, and many others, has been a very real learning experience for me, which I want to continue with as far as lockdown measures allow it.

What is clear to me, having visited Russells Hall Hospital in my constituency on several occasions, is the very noticeable proportion of staff who are from BAME communities, so the very people we are identifying as being at the greatest risk from covid-19 are the ones fighting this disease on the frontline in our health service. I very much welcome the suggestions in a report by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, which highlights structural inequalities such as difficulty in accessing leadership teams and being heard, fewer opportunities for non-mandatory training and higher risks of being bullied. In the longer term, steps towards improving organisational culture and capability will also enhance risk management. This is a leadership question that starts in this place, and it should then be delivered in every trust board in the country and, indeed, in every other institution in the country.

While not comprehensive, there is a lot of data in the recently published Public Health England report, which hon. Friends have already mentioned, that I hope will help our scientific community to better understand and fight this awful disease, to protect the most vulnerable and to help our hospitals cope with potential future pandemics. I am encouraged that PHE has made a series of recommendations that could make a significant difference in improving the lives and experiences of BAME communities specifically. The Government’s commitment to deliver £33.9 billion of investment in

[Marco Longhi]

the NHS—the largest cash boost in its history—can make reducing health inequalities possible by delivering opportunity for change. But change needs to be large-scale and transformative, and action is needed to change structural and societal environments such as homes, neighbourhoods and workplaces, not solely focusing on individuals.

We have a legal duty and a moral responsibility to our constituents to reduce inequalities. There are real, practical measures we can take to help tackle these inequalities and help the victims. The Royal College of Psychiatrists has suggested that every trust carry out a risk assessment on the impacts that covid-19 has on its BAME staff. It has warned of the potential for long-term psychological impacts on healthcare staff, and specifically BAME staff. I would be keen to hear my Government colleagues' plans to support this suggestion and to support the long-term mental health and wellbeing of our healthcare workers, particularly BAME staff, once this initial pandemic is over.

2.57 pm

Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Lab): First, I declare that I am a member of the Backbench Business Committee. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) for bringing this debate to the House today.

As the representative of Leicester East, one of the most diverse constituencies in the country, it has been extremely concerning to see the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus on African, Asian and minority ethnic communities. This was proven by the Government's own report, which they shamefully published only after repeated pressure and which does not outline any protective measures to deal with the disproportionate impact of covid-19. In a constituency like mine, which has a significant number of people from the affected communities, I worry about the processes of tracking, testing and so on, and whether that will be put right, because we can imagine what impact a second outbreak would have on such constituencies.

The Office for National Statistics has found that black people are 1.9 times more likely to die of covid-19 than white people, people of Bangladeshi and Pakistani descent are 1.8 times more likely to die, and people of Indian descent are about 1.5 times more likely to die. Those figures reflect the severe racial disparities in our economy.

We already know from a Resolution Foundation think-tank estimate that black, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi employees experience an annual pay penalty of £3.2 billion. Analysis from Public Health England shows that once in hospital, people from African, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are also more likely to require intensive care. Those communities accounted for 11% of those hospitalised with covid-19, but 36% of those admitted to critical care.

Many have tried to dismiss the imbalance in deaths as being explained by cultural or even genetic factors. I have been dismayed by some of the information that has come through my inbox about what people need to do to tackle these genetic problems. Yet discrimination is not about that; it is deeply ingrained in the social, political and economic structures of our economic system. The scourge of institutional racism results in unequal

access to quality education, unequal access to healthy food and unequal access to liveable wages and affordable housing, which are the foundations of health and wellbeing. That is the context in which the coronavirus crisis is operating. The virus itself may not discriminate, but our economic and social system certainly does.

Existing racial and class inequalities coupled with inadequate Government support mean that working-class communities, migrants and African, Asian and minority ethnic communities are at greater risk from exposure to covid-19. The severe racial disparities in our economy mean that those communities are more likely to fall through the cracks in the Government's financial support and therefore more likely to be forced to work in unsafe conditions. A decade of cruel austerity has deepened the racial and class inequalities that exist in our society. Last year, a UN Human Rights Council special rapporteur reported on discrimination in the UK. We know that one of the grim findings was:

"Austerity measures in the United Kingdom are reinforcing racial subordination."

NHS staff are at considerable risk from the virus, as we know. It is vital that we repay the extraordinary contribution of frontline workers with a permanent extension of migrant rights. That means an end to the hostile environment. That means shutting detention centres and ending them, and it means granting indefinite leave to remain to all NHS workers, to carers and to their dependent families. Recent reports indicate that migrant NHS workers and carers are still being charged for using the health service that they work in. That is despite the Government saying that they would end that.

As the inspiring crowds of protesters across the country have shown in recent weeks, it is crucial that we in the UK do not assume that we are immune from the disease of institutional racism. The failure of the Government to outline any protective measures, despite being evidentially aware of the disproportionate impact of covid-19, is yet another instance of the institutionalised neglect of African, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. We have to move on; the time limit is up.

3.4 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler), who is my great friend, on securing this debate and on the incredible work that she has done—not just today, but over many years—to expose racism, inequality and injustice in our society and to persuade us that we should all learn and teach history much better in this country in order to conquer the inequalities and injustices faced by so many people.

There have been many absolutely brilliant speeches this afternoon, for which I commend colleagues. I particularly want to express my sympathy to another great friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi); to not be able to attend the funerals of close family friends, and not be there to carry the coffin, is something that will live with him for the rest of his life and live with the family forever more. This crisis will have a huge effect on people's lives and mental wellbeing for a long time to come.

The motion that my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central so excellently crafted requires the Government to respond to this debate. I hope that when the Minister

replies, the Government will give us some indication that they do take seriously the health inequalities that have been exposed by the covid crisis.

Some 40% of our doctors and 20% of nurses come from BAME communities, as well as a very large number of people working in social care and a group of people who were decried as unskilled migrants by previous Home Secretaries: the cleaners who clean our care homes, hospitals and schools. They are the heroes in all this because they are the ones who are helping to keep us safe. This virus has exposed the necessity of communities working absolutely together, but it also shows a disproportionate number of deaths among people from the BAME community, who are 50% more likely to die from covid-19 than those who are not from the BAME community. The same figures apply for admissions to emergency care and intensive treatment units in hospitals.

The health inequalities exposed by the pandemic are not actually new. Professor Douglas Black's report was published in 1980—40 years ago—and exposed health inequalities in Britain. The Tory Government then tried to suppress that report. I hope that no Government ever try to suppress the levels of knowledge of inequality that exist in our society. As colleagues have pointed out, it is low wages, overcrowded private rented accommodation and unsafe working conditions that lead to underachievement in schools and to those children having great difficulty getting through.

A couple of days ago, I was talking to a headteacher of a primary school in my constituency. More than three quarters of the children in her school are entitled to free school meals. The school has done its best to deliver food to those children during the crisis. Teachers also want them to learn online, but many of the children do not have access to computers or laptops. If they do, there is one for a very large family and the children end up squabbling over who gets to access it. The school is therefore spending money posting lessons out to children. That is the effect of inequality and injustice in our society.

Life expectancy is shorter for people from BAME communities, and there is a lack of community facilities in so many areas. I want to say thank you to all our public service workers for what they have achieved and for the way in which they have come together. I also thank the volunteers who have come together in the food banks and food hubs, such as the one that I have been working on in my constituency over the last few weeks. I also say a special thank you to the Whittington Hospital in my constituency for its work. Last week, the staff there reported no new covid cases at all; well done them.

Covid has exposed inequality in our health service and society and the injustice in our society. Post covid, let us invest for the future and not cut with yet another new regime of austerity. The virus has also exposed global health inequalities on a massive scale, with the poorest in the poorest countries suffering the most, as the lack of access to any health facilities makes life very difficult and the quality of life that many have makes social distancing absolutely impossible. When the World Health Organisation calls for universal access to healthcare, the response of the west is too often to say, "Introduce a payments scheme or an insurance-based health service" or something like that. No—we are all at risk. If anyone

is at risk anywhere in the world, surely that has to be the lesson from this covid crisis; universal healthcare is very important.

In the last few seconds, let me say this: there are 65 million people on this planet who have no home to call their own, and no country to call their home. They are refugees or internally displaced people. By and large, they have no access to healthcare. They are at a greater risk than absolutely anybody else. Let us ensure that our approach to the coronavirus crisis is fair and just in this country and that we have international trade and development policies that tackle health inequalities and injustices across the world to give us all a better and safer future.

3.10 pm

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) who, as we all know, has campaigned so passionately on many of these issues for a very long time.

This is a deeply troubling moment for many minority communities, not least in my constituency of Ilford South, where minority communities—black communities, Asian communities, people representing nearly every corner of the globe—represent over 53% of the population, and growing every year. Ilford South has a tapestry of communities that coexist, that work together. Through the recent covid crisis, I have had heartening moments with local people, such as when the local gurdwara has provided over 4,000 meals a week to help the vulnerable and those in need. People have been working together—churches alongside mosques alongside synagogues. And yet it is our local community that has suffered so badly. On my Facebook page, I see people from the Bangladeshi community putting up posts asking us to make prayers for their friends and family members who have lost loved ones. The impact has been difficult and dark for many people in my community.

So many people have taken the time to reach out to me, to write in to me—I have had hundreds of emails and letters on this issue. Not just about the death of Belly Mujinga, who was a member of my former union, the TSSA, and rightly took the time, a few weeks ago, to challenge Govia Thameslink directly over the lack of protective equipment and the way that she was forced to go and work on the platform, rather than safely in the ticket office where she normally worked. So many people have lost loved ones during this pandemic and in some cases, I am afraid to say, it appears to be avoidable. Many more have been terrified to leave their homes for fear of contracting this deadly disease.

Actually, in many BAME communities, the proportion of people who work in frontline services, whether bus drivers or people working in the NHS, is incredibly high and people are fearful, and they are angry that they and their communities have not been prioritised by the Government in the way that they should have been. These are rational fears. In my Bangladeshi community—my own friends—the risk of death has been double that of people of white British ethnicity. In other communities—Indian, Pakistani, other Asian, Caribbean, black communities—the risks have been 10% to 50% higher than for white British people, and yet many of those people were the first to be put on furlough, the first to lose their jobs, and have had the greatest burden in terms of how many they have seen die from their own community.

[*Sam Tarry*]

There are many factors behind these deaths. One would appear to be a lack of support, in that they often feel too scared to speak out. But I have been working on it, and this week we are having another Zoom meeting—something that has seemed ubiquitous recently—and I am expecting hundreds of people to join up from local black communities, to talk about these issues. There will be a moment of self-reflection for those of us who have real privilege, about what we can do to be genuine allies to communities facing oppression and always finding themselves at the bottom of the pile. I look forward to that, and I thank the hon. Members who will be joining me for that call later this week.

I would like to talk a little bit about one of the cases that I have had about frontline health care staff. We were quite proactive in Redbridge. When we realised that many of our care homes did not have the PPE that they needed, we sought out what in old-fashioned parlance might be described as a local rag trade company—a manufacturer of garments—and begged them to turn their machinery to producing the garments needed for our care homes, so that people working there could have the protection that they needed. Yet we found too often, time and again, that frontline workers were sent into the firing line, despite being ill-equipped and despite being in vulnerable categories. That is still so unacceptable.

I think that many of us will look back on this period and ask what more we could have done, and our Government could have done, to protect these communities, which have borne such a heavy toll.

Over the past few months, one thing that I have found particularly difficult has been the increase in not just fear but racism—that some communities have almost been targeted, perhaps because of online rumours that their community is more likely to be bringing in this awful disease. That is totally unacceptable. From the Bangladeshi community to the Chinese community, so many communities have faced racism. It has been really tough for my own family. My son happens to be mixed-race Chinese, and some of the comments that his mother has had have been pretty appalling.

We as a nation need to put those who too often find themselves at the very bottom to the very top of our priorities. Comments from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies and decisions by people such as Dominic Cummings have meant that the trust that even some of my constituents had in the Government has been utterly eroded. We can never have a situation—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I am sorry, but we have to move on. I call Christine Jardine.

3.16 pm

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ilford South (Sam Tarry). I add my voice to those paying tribute and thanks to the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) for introducing the debate.

I am disappointed and ashamed that we have got to this stage in our country. Here we are in 2020, and it has taken a pandemic like covid-19 and the protests from BLM to make us recognise something that was in front of us all along. Covid-19 has certainly shone a very

stark spotlight on our society and shown quite clearly that there are cracks that we may have thought we had mended and inequalities that we hoped we had addressed. There are still gaping holes, and inequalities that have gone not just unaddressed but largely unacknowledged.

Our society's acute emotional response to the disproportionate impact of covid-19 on BAME communities has been perhaps the one saving grace in this shocking failure to protect our communities, so many of whom were at the forefront of tackling the virus and have paid the ultimate price. The impact of covid-19 is only part of that unacceptable picture. Another is the economic crisis, which may grow and which is also hitting our BAME communities particularly hard. They are disproportionately likely to be on zero-hours contracts. Only 31% of BAME workers have been furloughed; 20% have already lost their jobs.

If the Government are serious about tackling the systemic racial inequality that is now absolutely and undeniably clear in this country, what we need is not just another review setting out specific points. There are immediate steps that they could take. They could scrap the hostile environment. They could stop suspicionless stop-and-search. They could amend the Domestic Abuse Bill. There are so many steps that they could take now. The review is a first step, and I hope that it will make recommendations, but we already have 35 recommendations in the Lammy report, 110 in the Angiolini review, 30 in the Windrush lessons learned review and 26 in Baroness McGregor-Smith's review. We have reports, reviews and recommendations on the shelves in Whitehall, which are weighed down with them. What we need now is action.

More than that, I believe we need a race equality strategy for the whole UK. If this Government are serious about tackling racial injustice, that is what they need. The commission may be a first step, and it shows that the BLM protests are having an impact, but it must not be a way of avoiding tackling the issues that they have brought to light. We need that racial equality strategy. In truth, we needed it decades ago. So often I have believed that we were turning a corner. So many of us hoped—indeed, believed—that the Macpherson report after the murder of Stephen Lawrence would prove a turning point. We now realise that despite all the work that has been done by so many people, there is so much—too much—still to do. We cannot afford another false dawn in this country.

I am disappointed that I cannot pay tribute to the BAME community in my constituency or anywhere in Scotland and talk about the impact on them, because National Records of Scotland does not record deaths by ethnicity—it is voluntary—so the impact could be anywhere between 1% and 10%. I find it unacceptable that the Scottish Government do not have the figures to recognise that and address the issue in the way that we are at least attempting to in Westminster. I ask them to do that now. In fact, I ask our Ministers here at Westminster to impress on the Government in Scotland the need to act now, so that we can have a cross-government race equality strategy like the one recommended by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, effective across the United Kingdom.

This has been a difficult time for us all. Standing here as a white woman, I acknowledge that, while I might sympathise, I cannot fully feel the injustice that

so many of our communities are feeling today. But I do know that we all feel that this must be our moment for change. We have to change our society, and we have to change it now.

3.21 pm

Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) for giving us the opportunity to speak about this today. It is a pleasure to follow the sage, sad and passionate contribution from the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine).

In Newham, we have statistically the second highest mortality rate from covid in the country. We have lost Ramesh Gunamal, who worked on the front desk at Forest Gate police station. We have lost Dr Louisa Rajakumari, who taught English at Kingsford Community School. We have lost Dr Yusuf Patel, a much missed GP from Forest Gate, and Abdul Karim Sheikh—sometimes a political opponent, mostly a friend, and a man always dedicated to the best for our communities. Those are just a few of the people who Newham and West Ham mourn deeply.

We know that deprivation doubles the risk from covid, and Newham is deprived—of that, there is no doubt. Like many of my friends' areas, we have beautifully diverse communities, which means that they have been hurt massively by the pandemic. Those from our Bangladeshi community have twice the risk of death, and that is more than 12% of my constituents. Those from the Pakistani community have a 44% higher risk, which is 10% of us in Newham. Those from the Indian community have a 22% higher risk, which is 15% of us in Newham. Those from the black Caribbean and black African communities have a 10% and 6% higher risk, which is 4% and 11% of us in Newham.

Some 73% of us in Newham are from an ethnic minority, so we need this Government to act before we see a second wave. We need action so desperately that I have broken shielding to be here today so that I can demand it. The fact that I had to do so is wrong, but that is not nearly as wrong as the denial of equal protection for my constituents from this terrible virus.

I have written to the Minister for Women and Equalities, the Health Secretary and others about this twice. The first letter was sent more than six weeks ago. I do not think the urgency of my language could have been misunderstood. I wrote again two weeks ago, expressing, again, a desperate need for action. I have received absolutely no response of value. However, I was pleased to hear yesterday that there is finally going to be an urgent review of evidence and possible action on vitamin D deficiency. I hope we get that very, very soon, because if there is a second wave and we have constituents dying for the simple lack of a vitamin supplement, the Government know there will be a price to pay.

We know that it goes further than vitamin D. Staggeringly, despite the fact that black and minority ethnic communities are at greater risk of death, they are under-represented in clinical trials. Why? What possible excuse is there for that? In my humble opinion, it is incompetence, at the very best.

Let us look at the Government's approach to covid-19 across this pandemic: it has been about slowing down its spread, which depends on two weeks' full isolation. But in poor communities where there is no spare cash—

there are no savings—excessive living costs have to be met week in, week out. Frankly, we all know that statutory sick pay just is not enough to keep people afloat, so sick people go to work. They put themselves at risk, they put the people on the tube with them at risk, they put the people who are on buses with them at risk, and they put their co-workers at risk, all because they are not paid enough money to enable them to stay at home like the rest of us can do, and recover. The Government have not even suspended the no recourse to public funds policy so that people can isolate. Why? Why do they not understand what these actions mean?

In Newham, many of us live in overcrowded homes—even my home feels a bit overcrowded at the moment with just me and my husband—which means that people at home cannot self-isolate. I accept that the Government are not going to be able to eliminate overcrowding overnight, but it would be great if they made a start. The fact that they cannot means that the other policies, such as track and trace, are really important. If we have a second wave, as I fear, and black and minority ethnic communities die in numbers out of all proportion again, we will be holding the Government to account for those excess deaths.

3.28 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) on securing this important—indeed, essential—debate. Her opening speech was incredibly powerful. She set out eloquently the relationship between the Black Lives Matter movement and black key workers dying. She showed the connection between George Floyd's long, slow death and his dying words, and Belly Mujinga dying of covid-19 here.

My hon. Friend said that being black is a pre-existing condition. It is a condition that I celebrate—I am proud to be a black, Geordie, Nigerian, Irish Brit—but it should not be a comorbidity. My right hon. and hon. Friends have said so much that is so true, so eloquently—one of the joys of being a Labour MP is the support of my brothers and sisters—that I shall focus my remarks on three things: what covid-19 tells us about the reality of racism today; what it tells us about the failure of this Government on racism today; and what it tells us what about what the Government should do.

First, let me address the realities of structural racism today. Like the Home Secretary, I experienced significant racism as a child, including name calling and worse, although I was supported by a strong community, family and school. Over the last few years, name calling, physical abuse and hate crimes have unfortunately risen, but when the name calling stops, that does not mean that racism has gone away. It is instead in the structures and systems that define how we live. That is what we mean by structural racism: crowding BAME people into worse housing; putting up barriers to BAME people going into higher-paid professions; making it more likely for BAME people to live in deprived areas and have to take up precarious jobs; and putting BAME workers in the lower-paid roles in the NHS, while the higher-paid upper echelons remain snowy white. Some 14% of the UK population are black, but 34% of those who work in intensive care are BAME.

The statistics that demonstrate the levels of inequality that still exist in our society are one of the reasons why the Black Lives Matter movement has such resonance

[Chi Onwurah]

here. Some 25% of BAME nursing staff have no confidence that their employer is doing enough to protect them from covid-19. BAME staff networks in the north-east have called for the risk assessments to which they are entitled to ensure they are protected.

That is the reality of racism today, and covid illustrates the Government's response to it. Whether it is a Foreign Secretary who thinks that taking the knee is from fantasy fiction or a Prime Minister who speaks of "smiling picninnies", the Government have demonstrated a lack of interest in the racism that we face. We do not need another report; we do not need another investigation. We have enough recommendations. This Government need to take action. Covid-19 has shone a light on the discrimination that so many black and minority ethnic people suffer in this country. The Government need to act to change that and ensure that it does not continue, as it has for so many years. We do not need another review.

I am proud that, in Newcastle, our community stands strong together in its different identities and works together. I was deeply saddened by the violence in our city this weekend. Valuing black lives is not about devaluing white lives; it is about asking why black lives are more likely to be lost. The Government have waited far too long to look for an answer to that question. They must now take action to ensure that we are not in the same situation in a year, five years or 10 years.

3.34 pm

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): I am delighted to speak in this debate, and I want to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) for securing it. I am proud to represent the diverse constituency of Vauxhall in Parliament, not least because my constituents have fought on the frontline of this pandemic, including at St Thomas's Hospital, where our Prime Minister was treated so well. But tragically, we have seen more than 500 deaths in my borough of Lambeth as a result of coronavirus, and 40% of those deaths have been black, Asian and minority ethnic people. Those deaths are not just statistics. They are mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters. They are sons and daughters and they are grandparents. A number of my constituents were not able to say goodbye to their loved ones.

Public Health England has found that the death rate from covid-19 is much higher for people from BAME backgrounds than for white ethnic groups. It has also found that black males are 3.9 times more likely to die than white males and that black females are 3.3 times more likely to die. This is not a coincidence. We should not be surprised or devastated by these statistics—shocked, yes; surprised, no. The report shows that BAME communities continue to catch covid-19 and that they are more likely to live in overcrowded housing, more likely to live in deprived areas and more likely to have jobs that expose them to this deadly disease. I might add that it is those crucial jobs that have kept our country going over the last few months: the bus drivers, the nurses, the midwives, the care workers, the taxi drivers and the security guards. They are really crucial jobs.

Nor should we be surprised to read in the report that the pre-existing structural inequalities that BME communities face are a factor in those high death rates. For me, the most damning sentence in the report reads:

"It confirms that the impact of COVID-19 has replicated existing health inequalities and, in some cases, has increased them."

It is there in black and white. Those deaths cannot and should not be separated from the tragic death of Belly Mujinga here in the UK, or from the shocking death of George Floyd in the USA. Those deaths cannot and should not be separated from the deeply entrenched structural inequality and racism that our BME communities continue to face every single day. We cannot begin to tackle the disproportionate impact of this virus until we acknowledge the deep-rooted cause and the deep-seated racism that still tragically exists in 2020. That is the racism that I and many other colleagues on both sides of this Chamber have faced, and we have spoken about it in this Chamber. We continue to experience that racism.

The report also highlights the direction that we should be taking. It concludes:

"These results improve our understanding of the pandemic and will help in formulating the future public health response to it."

It goes on to say:

"It seems likely that it will be difficult to control the spread of COVID-19 unless these inequalities can be addressed."

They have to be addressed. If the Government are really serious about tackling this real issue and making sure that we have concrete action to tackle racial inequality in our society, they must show leadership by acting on the failures that have led us to this debate today.

3.38 pm

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): I would also like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) for organising this debate this afternoon. As the first black MP for Liverpool, I know only too well the impact of deeply entrenched systemic racism and inequalities, and I welcome the opportunity of speaking in this important debate today on the level of deaths from covid-19 among black communities. The unequal impact is linked to a number of factors, including structural racism, discrimination and health inequalities increasing the risk of serious illness. The Office for National Statistics reports that black men and women are four times more likely to die from covid-19 than white men and women, and it is clear that covid-19 did not create these health inequalities, but rather that the pandemic exposed and exacerbated long-standing inequalities affecting black communities in the UK.

In "Health Equity in England: the Marmot review 10 years on", Professor Marmot stated that health inequality was

"even worse for minority ethnic population groups",

and commented that the pandemic will entrench and make worse existing inequalities. Recent analysis suggests that black individuals account for 63% of all NHS staff deaths from covid-19, including 64% of deaths among nursing and support staff and 95% of deaths among medical staff. Black people are more likely to work in occupations with a higher risk of covid-19 exposure, more likely to use public transport to travel to work and less likely to access the necessary PPE to protect themselves.

Race equality has been firmly placed on the agenda in the past couple of weeks, but we all know only too well that countless reports and commissions tell black people what we already know: that we are disadvantaged simply because of the colour of our skin. I say enough is enough. Now is the time for action and change. I do

not want my grandsons having the same debate in years to come. Public Health England has published two reports now and the Government are setting up another commission that will report back at the end of the year. They must act now to reverse these long-standing, systemic inequalities and move from rhetoric to reality.

3.40 pm

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Kim Johnson) and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) on securing this debate and on how she opened it.

I want to focus on one point. The Public Health England review says:

“People of BAME groups are also more likely than people of white British ethnicity to be born abroad, which means they may face additional barriers in accessing services”.

I want to highlight one barrier in particular, and that is the no recourse to public funds restrictions on leave to remain, which has already been touched on this debate. We are talking about families who have leave to remain in the UK, who are law-abiding and hard-working, often with children born in the UK and who may well be British nationals and have British passports. Typically, they are on a 10-year route to securing indefinite leave to remain, and in the meantime they have to apply four times, getting two and a half years to remain each time. Throughout that 10-year period, when they are working here, typically very hard, doing exactly the kinds of jobs we have been talking about, they have no recourse to public funds.

That is a formidable barrier that those people face. It is exactly the kind of barrier that the Public Health England report refers to. I asked the Prime Minister yesterday about this, and I asked him about it at the Liaison Committee three weeks ago. His answer then was that hard-working families in that position should have help of one kind or another. I absolutely agree. Unfortunately, he did not say that when I asked him about it yesterday, but it is what he said to me at the Liaison Committee, and he was right on that occasion. The problem is that those families are not getting that help.

It comes as a shock to a lot of people to learn that the parents of children who have been born in the UK and might well be British nationals cannot claim child benefit for them, because no recourse to public funds excludes that. The families cannot apply for universal credit either, or access the safety net that so many people have had to depend on during this crisis—2 million additional people have been claiming universal credit since the beginning of the crisis. That safety net is not there for people with no recourse to public funds. That has created a very serious problem of destitution, a huge increase in food bank demand in many parts of the country and, in my area, the return of something I never thought we would see again: soup kitchens, where people are handing out free cooked food just to keep others alive.

Meg Hillier: My right hon. Friend raises a very important point, and a very pertinent point in our London constituencies particularly. No recourse to public funds means no housing benefit, and it is impossible pretty much to rent privately on a low wage, or even quite a good wage, in my constituency. Does he agree that that underlines how this policy is now out of date?

Stephen Timms: I do agree, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point.

How many people are there in this situation? The Home Office does not know how many people it has given the status and refuses to answer even the most basic questions on this subject.

Last month, I asked the Home Office a written parliamentary question: how many people were given leave to remain with no recourse to public funds in 2019? I received the reply on 20 May:

“The information you have requested is not assured to the standard required by ONS for publication and as it would be too costly to do so, we are unable to provide it”—

in other words, “We’re not going to bother answering the question.” I have asked the UK Statistics Authority what it makes of that answer and the attempt to hide behind the Office for National Statistics. I am looking forward to receiving the chair’s reply, which will arrive, I believe, quite shortly. Fortunately, the Children’s Society has made an estimate, drawing on the work of the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford. Its estimate is that at least 1 million people in the UK have leave to remain, but no recourse to public funds, including over 100,000 children.

I think most people in this situation are overseas students who have leave to remain, leave to study, but no recourse to public funds. I must raise the question: is it really right that we want to completely abandon those who—in many cases, at great sacrifice to themselves and their families—have come to the UK to study? They have been supporting themselves through working and their work has stopped. They have absolutely nothing, and they are depending on the soup kitchens I have referred to.

There is a form on gov.uk, which appeared on 3 April, allowing people to apply to be exempted from no recourse to public funds. The Home Office refuses to answer questions about how many people have applied, how long it is taking it to answer those applications and what proportion of the applications are successful, but from the experience of my constituents, it seems to be taking between two months and two and a half months to respond to applications to be exempted from no recourse to public funds. If someone is destitute, they cannot be expected to wait for a couple of months until a struggling Government Department gets around to deciding whether they might be able to get some help. I have had one person in touch with me who has been waiting since the middle of February for an answer.

As we have already been reminded by my hon. Friends, some people have had to carry on working during this crisis who should not have done for their own sake and for the sake of wider public health, but they have had no alternative because it has been the only way they have been able to achieve any sort of income. What would any Member of this House have done in that circumstance, with no money at all?

Finally, I want to pay tribute to organisations in my constituency that have been helping, including the Bonny Downs Baptist church and the Bonny Downs Community Association, a long-standing food bank that has had a massive increase in demand; the Masjid Ibrahim mosque; the Malayalee Association of the UK, representing people from south India; the London Tamil Sangam; and my friend and colleague Councillor Lakmini Shah, who has been supporting—single-handedly, I think—several

[Stephen Timms]

dozen families in this position. The no recourse to public funds restriction must be suspended for the duration of this crisis.

3.48 pm

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) on securing this very important debate.

I would like to begin by marking two anniversaries that speak to the heart of this debate. The first was on Sunday, which marked three years since 72 lives were cruelly cut short in the Grenfell Tower fire. That night will forever be seared in my mind—the blazing inferno of the tower, the live-streamed videos of victims reciting prayers before they passed away, friends and families desperately searching for loved ones, the firefighters exhausted and shellshocked having done everything they could and the multiracial working-class community coming together to support one another.

What happened at Grenfell was a tragedy, but it was not a natural disaster. It was avoidable and foreseeable. Residents raised concerns, but they were not listened to. They were not listened to because they were working class, because many were migrants and because the community was majority black and brown. That is why the structures of power neglected them, exploited them and discarded them. It shames this Government that, three years on, survivors are still living in temporary accommodation, and 56,000 people are still living in homes wrapped in unsafe, flammable cladding.

The second anniversary, which also speaks to this topic, is on Monday. That day marks 72 years since HMS Windrush arrived in the UK. Black Britons came to the UK and helped to rebuild this country after the war, and we know how they were repaid. A Government determined to stoke division and target migrants created the racist hostile environment and had black and brown people detained, deported and denied their rights. Again, the structures of power neglected black and brown people, exploited them and discarded them. Even now, compensation totalling just £360,000 has been paid to just 60 victims of this scandal, so let us call it what it is: systemic racism, and the disproportionate deaths of black and brown people from coronavirus is a third striking example of this.

The evidence is clear that people with Bangladeshi backgrounds face double the risk of dying from covid-19 compared with white people, while people from Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Caribbean and other black ethnicity backgrounds face a 10% to 50% higher risk of death. This is not some innate vulnerability of black and brown people. It is not something natural—it is social. It is because black and brown people are disproportionately poor and that makes them more likely to have ill health. They are disproportionately in overcrowded housing and are therefore more likely to spread this deadly disease, and disproportionately in jobs exposed to the virus, from being over-represented in the NHS, to being in the low-paid, often precarious, frontline key worker roles. Again, what we see is a system that neglects black and brown people, exploits black and brown people, and all too tragically discards black and brown people.

These are neither discrete incidents nor aberrations from the norm. They are reminders of what is painfully clear to many people outside this Chamber: that race

and class are the dividing lines between two very different Britains. The people of Grenfell Tower lived and died in the shadow of immense wealth in Kensington and Chelsea. The Windrush scandal exposed the second-class citizenship for black and brown people in Britain today and the contempt with which migrants are treated. The coronavirus pandemic has revealed the fatal inequities that are rife within our society and are truly a matter of life and death.

This systemic racism is not incidental. It has a history, and thanks to the action of Black Lives Matter campaigners, light is being shed on this history. It is a history of colonialism and conquest, empire and enslavement, and inequality and exploitation. It is a history of the rich and powerful using their influence to maintain control and spread hate. Today, their newspapers run stories spreading fear about migrants arriving on our shores. Tomorrow, it might be about Muslims or young black men or Gypsies or Roma, and it is done with the same purpose: to divide the people, deflect blame and protect their rotten system. That is why they target minorities, and we see it with the threat to the trans community at the moment.

Systemic racism is causing black and brown people to disproportionately die from coronavirus. This needs to be urgently addressed, with workplace risk assessments, PPE and tests for everyone who needs them, but it needs deeper change, too. We need to tackle the system that drives these inequalities and empowers people in this Chamber and in Parliament and the billionaire press barons who whip up fear and exploit and discard working-class people, black, brown and white alike. We need to tackle this system and, in its place, build a society that has equality and freedom at its heart. That is the call of socialism and it is more timely than ever.

3.53 pm

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I speak today not just for my constituents, but to represent my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), which may surprise most people, because in her 33 years in this place, I think everyone would agree that she has never needed anyone to speak for her. She has been perfectly capable, able and talented at speaking up on inequality repeatedly in her 33 years, and she was the first ever black woman to be elected to this place. Sadly, the Government's refusal to allow remote participation means that she is unable to attend today because she is shielding, but she wanted me to speak for our borough together, because of the concerns we both share about the number of deaths from covid-19 of black, Asian and minority ethnic people. I am proud to stand with her. She has spoken up for the marginalised for many years, and I am proud to have her as a neighbouring MP and a friend.

My right hon. Friend highlights that black deaths from covid-19 have been particularly traumatising for the black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, who are very likely to know someone who has died. We have heard that very firmly in the Chamber today. I also want to highlight the very important work of Councillor Carole Williams, a cabinet member on Hackney Council, who highlighted this inequality at an early stage. She was ahead of the curve of many people in this Chamber today and of the Government. It is because we live and work in the community, and understand its needs and its trauma, that we really wanted to raise these points today.

Hackney is the 22nd most deprived local authority district in England and the third most densely populated. Our housing overcrowding is severe, as I have often mentioned in this House. When we break that down in terms of ethnicity, over 70% of people on our housing waiting lists are from ethnic minority backgrounds. These are inequalities that we are all weary of raising. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler), who has done a great job in securing the debate today, highlighted, it is a pattern that we recognise and are weary of having to highlight again and again. I echo the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) about the need for action now. We know a lot of these problems. We have raised them repeatedly. We need to see action.

Hackney has the third-highest death rate per 100,000 people, at 183, of all local authority areas. With 40% of our population from BAME backgrounds, it is not surprising that we have had 175 deaths from covid-19, but 70% of those deaths were of people born outside the UK and 60% of the deaths were of people employed in routine and manual occupations. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington highlighted when we were discussing this matter today, we also know that it is not just a matter of underlying health conditions. Black people are disproportionately employed, as other colleagues have highlighted, in sectors exposed to covid: transport, social care and the NHS. They are more likely to be agency staff or in roles with zero-hour contracts, so feel less empowered to insist on proper PPE. This goes very much to workplace rights as well and the ability to call out something when it is wrong. If people call it out and lose their jobs, it is of course harder to do that.

Mr Dhesi: Does my hon. Friend not agree that with more than 200 recommendations from previous reviews already gathering dust, the reason why so many of us are pointing out, again and again, that we need action and not more reviews and investigations is that we have not even implemented a single recommendation from the previous reviews?

Meg Hillier: I agree with my hon. Friend. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington is calling for a public inquiry into black deaths from covid. I support her in that, but, as my hon. Friend highlights, it must not be an excuse to kick this issue down the road. We need action now for the people at the frontline who are still affected by this. If we have the second peak that we all fear is coming, they need to be protected. If people are moved out of frontline jobs to be shielded and protected because of their greater risk of death, they must not see detriment to their career path. We need action now. We need workplace plans to support people. It is a tragic and visible reminder of the inequalities we see.

Black, Asian and minority ethnic households are nearly five times more likely to be overcrowded than white households. I have repeatedly raised in this place the tragedy of families who are living in double households, with one family in the living room and one in the bedroom. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) highlighted how no recourse to public funds also feeds into that, and 43.9%—so nearly 44%—of London NHS staff are from black, Asian and

minority ethnic backgrounds. A staggering 67% of adult social care staff in our capital are from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.

One interesting and important point is how we communicate public health messages. Sometimes one size does not fit all. If people live in overcrowded households and are told to self-isolate, it is a different challenge than if they live in a home with spare bedrooms, studies, extra living rooms, large gardens and big kitchens. People need advice about how to manage the public health situation in their own domestic situation and their own workplace. The digital divide is a big concern in my constituency when it comes to getting that message across, with 11% of Hackney residents having no access to the internet.

This is near Shoreditch. Shoreditch is part of my constituency—part of the borough that my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington and I represent together—yet just over one in 10 residents have no access to the internet and 20% say they are not confident using the internet.

This has been a thoughtful, measured debate, and I do not doubt that every Member here, and many others who would have liked to have spoken, means every word they say about action now. The Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), is a reasonable and thoughtful woman and I look forward to her response, but I must repeat that the Prime Minister under whom she serves has repeatedly used racist language. Where is the word “piccaninnies” from? I am not going to give a history lesson, but look it up. It is not acceptable for a Prime Minister of this country to have only in recent times described people in those pejorative terms, using the phrase “piccaninnies” with “watermelon smiles” and talking about women in burqas with “letterbox” slits.

That does not set the tone or give me confidence that the Government will act. I believe that there are good people in the Government. There are good people in the Prime Minister’s party, but he needs to shape up. Just as Marcus Rashford educated him about the poverty and hunger of children on free school meals, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington and I stand ready, with our constituents and with colleagues across the House, to educate the Prime Minister about how badly wrong he is getting the messaging on this. He needs to act now.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. We will go to a five-minute limit in order, I hope, to get everybody on the list in.

4.1 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Before I move on to the specific topic of the debate, I think it is important to acknowledge, as many others have, that we cannot debate this in isolation; we have to see it in the context of Black Lives Matter and the grievances stretching back not just decades but, in many cases, centuries. Bristol was of course very much in the forefront of the Black Lives Matter demonstrations earlier this month with what our Mayor, Marvin Rees, the first democratically elected black Mayor in Europe, described as an act of “historical poetry”—the hugely symbolic removal by protesters of the statue of Edward Colston.

[Kerry McCarthy]

The *Observer* headline this Sunday was, “The day Bristol dumped its hated slave trader in the docks and a nation began to search its soul” but in fact the reverberations from the removal of Colston were not just national but global. What is interesting is that the statue of Colston was not erected until 1895, more than 170 years after he died. Professor Madge Dresser says that was part of a bid by the city elite to quell increasingly radical stirrings among the lower classes. They were trying to rally people around a civic identity based, supposedly, on our glory days—our heyday, when the city prospered as a result of slavery—rather than have people rallying around class or an organised labour movement. It is fitting, now that Colston has come down, that we do not just talk about statues and monuments and about place names and road names, although all that discussion is happening, but that we shine a light on structural inequalities, class, poverty, deprivation and health inequalities.

Earlier in the covid crisis, Bristol City Council, under the leadership of Mayor Marvin Rees and our Deputy Mayor Councillor Asher Craig, commissioned a rapid research review from University of Bristol academics. The resulting report on the impact of covid-19 on black, Asian and minority ethnic communities was published on 20 May. The verdict, as we heard from the Public Health England report and we know from our own experience, was that the risk from covid-19 is generally higher among BAME communities, even after adjusting for risk factors such as age, gender, comorbidities, increased likelihood to live in urban areas, and so on. BAME people are more likely to be admitted to critical care and more likely to die. No one factor alone can explain it, but contributing factors include being poorer, where people live, overcrowded housing, types of jobs, other illnesses and access to the health service.

The recommendations in the Bristol report include ensuring adequate income protection for those in low-paid or precarious employment and reducing occupational risk; what other Members said about the increased vulnerability of BAME healthcare staff and other frontline workers, such as Belly Mujinga, is really important. The report also said that we need to improve public health communications and tailor them to culturally specific challenges, such as preventing transmission in overcrowded households or shielding vulnerable people in multi-generational households. It also called for the removal of all NHS charges so that no migrant or individual from a BAME group delays seeking healthcare or risks death through fear of being charged for their NHS care. It was quite shocking, as my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) said, that the Prime Minister did not even seem to know what “no recourse to public funds” meant when he appeared in front of the Liaison Committee. The report also recommended that ethnic groups should be included in health inequalities work, that we should collect more data and that there should be meaningful engagement and involvement of minority ethnic communities in the services. This is now being taken forward by a BAME working group.

In research published in January 2017 looking at ethnic inequalities in education and employment, the Runnymede Trust judged Bristol to be one of the most unequal cities in the UK and one of the worst places when it came to racial equality. We ranked seventh out

of the 348 districts of England and Wales on the index of multiple inequality. We are seemingly prosperous; people think of Bristol as a wealthy, thriving city. We are the only city outside London to make a net contribution to GDP. We are consistently voted as one of the coolest cities and one of the best places to visit. All that gloss masks the underlying inequalities. In the same way that the Colston statue presented a false image of wealth and philanthropy masking the true horrors of how many were enslaved, mistreated and died in the pursuit of that wealth, the gloss is masking the real picture in many of the deprived communities in Bristol. We absolutely know that we have a long way to go in Bristol—that taking down the statue is just one historical marker on a long, sometimes difficult and sometimes daunting journey—but we are absolutely committed to doing this.

4.6 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): It is the pride of my life to represent the big, diverse constituency that I was born and brought up in, from those like my parents who came over in the '40s to the newer communities from west Africa and Sri Lanka. Many of the children in those communities are doing well in our schools and will be the professionals of the future—as long as they manage to get through the circumstances in which they find themselves in overcrowded accommodation and houses in multiple occupation. As soon as we heard the advice about how to avoid getting coronavirus, we knew what would be the likely outcome. For those who do not have their own bathroom or kitchen but instead share them with four or five other families, the advice was impossible to follow.

It is not that I believe that people in positions of authority want to be overtly racist; I sincerely believe that they do not. However, even as we stand here, the health service in my area is ignoring the advice in the Public Health England evidence. There are plans to move the A&E, the maternity unit and all the acute services at St Helier Hospital further away into Sutton, in spite of the evidence that that takes them further away from BAME communities who are more likely to be dependent on them. The evidence is damning. Of the 66 lower output areas in the catchment with the highest proportion of BAME residents, just one is nearest to the proposed site in Belmont. Meanwhile, 64 of the 66 are nearest to St Helier, 32 of which are in the bottom two quintiles of deprivation, increasing their likely reliance on acute services.

The people running the programme know this; it just does not matter enough for them to want to do anything. Their own impact assessment states clearly:

“As higher densities of the BAME community and those with long term health conditions...live within areas in the highest quintile of deprivation, these groups may also be expected to be disproportionately impacted compared with others”.

But the programme carries on. Despite the overwhelming pressures facing the NHS, the programme's consultation culminated at the peak of the pandemic. Yet the impact assessment states:

“A reduction in the number of hospitals providing...acute services could potentially have a negative impact on the resilience of services, if for example, there is an unplanned event...on the single major acute hospital site which may restrict service delivery. It is recognised that the likelihood of such a situation occurring is unlikely”.

It happened—we saw it—and it may come back again, and perhaps in an area with higher BAME density where the services will then be gone.

On 4 June, those at the programme confirmed that they will not have concluded their analysis of the impact of the pandemic on their proposals and that they have no intention of releasing the analysis they are undertaking. Their runaway train carries on full steam ahead, coronavirus or no coronavirus, no matter who dies or who does not; it is irrelevant, it is their plan and they are going to have it, come what may.

In conclusion, I want to ask the Minister about two cases in my constituency. The first is that of Mr Salih Hasan, a cleaner at St George's Hospital for the past 18 years. He worked for two outsourced contractors ISS and Mitie, but he was a part of the team at St George's. Will his family be the beneficiary of the lump-sum payment for those who die of coronavirus in the NHS? The second is that of Mr Antwi, who worked for a private transport company in hospital transport. He died, leaving his family to pay for a funeral they could not be afforded. Surely, his family too should receive some of that fund.

4.11 pm

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): First, I want to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) on securing this important debate. The way in which different groups and communities have been affected by this coronavirus shows how scarred by inequality, and social and racial injustice, we are as a society. Coronavirus has laid bare the deep inequalities, particularly those faced by BAME communities and by white disadvantaged communities. It is truly shocking that BAME communities are more likely to contract the disease, with some groups, such as those of Bangladeshi origin and background, twice as likely to be affected as their white counterparts. As others have pointed out, the disparities report highlighted the fact that other BAME groups are between 10% and 50% more likely to die if they contract coronavirus than their white counterparts. The evidence is very clear. What we need is urgent action, and that is what has been lacking.

The PHE report, coming on top of the work the Office for National Statistics had done, again showed the massive disparities and the dangers for those in certain sectors, particularly in frontline jobs. We have heard a lot about that in terms of the disproportionate impact on those working in the NHS. We have seen the toll taken on those who have worked in those sectors, from BAME communities, in particular. We mourn the loss of all those who have lost their lives, of all backgrounds, but this debate is about how we can ensure that the Government learn the lessons quickly, so that we do not continue in this appalling direction of further fatalities.

My constituency has the highest number of Bangladeshi-origin constituents and a sizeable Somali community, and since this pandemic began my constituents have been mourning the loss of loved ones. In every part of our community, we have seen people having to deal with the fact that they have had to organise burials very quickly, without being able to attend funerals together as a community. I know that experience is shared by all of us across the country, and it is so painful. Those communities that have been hit the hardest, such as the BAME communities and those from white disadvantaged backgrounds, have been hurt the most in our country.

We need to look at how we address these structural inequalities, and how we address race and class discrimination in our country, if we are to learn from this appalling period in our experience as a country and ensure that we do not continue in this way. If there is anything we can gain from what has happened so far, it is by ensuring that we do not see the further loss of life.

Moving forward, we need the Government to look at some of the specific issues that affect BAME communities. They include severe overcrowding and the high prevalence of health inequalities in those communities. People live in intergenerational families, and the Government were too slow to see that, even though we warned them. We need greater investment in housing, and we need to deal with those structural inequalities with more investment in primary health care and prevention to protect different communities. As we ease lockdown, we must ensure that we carry out risk assessments to protect those who are shielded and to ensure that those who have family members who are shielding, but who are being asked by their employers to return to work, are properly protected. Otherwise, more people will die.

We need the Government and Ministers to learn fast as they move towards easing lockdown. If our exit from lockdown is not done properly and responsibly, we will see the double catastrophe of more people in BAME communities dying, as well as more people from poorer backgrounds facing death. I hope that the Minister will reflect on the points that have been raised today and act quickly.

4.16 pm

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) on securing this important and timely debate and on her excellent speech.

Some 16% of the population in my constituency come from a black and minority ethnic background, and even before we knew the hard data about covid-19 deaths, the BAME community could sense that it was disproportionately affected. My local community joined in mourning the tragic death of 26-year-old care worker, Sonya Kaygan. Sonya died from covid-19 in mid-April after being exposed to coronavirus in the care home where she worked. Sonya leaves behind a three-year-old daughter, who is now growing up without a mother.

Sadly, Sonya is one of thousands of people from the BAME community who worked in frontline services and have lost their lives. As we watched the news and heard about the disproportionate number of BAME lives being lost, people rightly asked, "Why is this happening to our community?" Although some of it can be put down to social gatherings between different communities, that is by no means the only explanation.

Two weeks ago Public Health England published its first report on the disparities in the risks and outcomes of covid-19, but although it showed the bare facts it provided no explanations, which led to more questions than answers. Why were BAME Britons who contracted coronavirus twice as likely to die as white Britons? Why do black and Asian groups have the highest death rates from coronavirus? Why was race and ethnicity such a prevalent factor in the death stats?

Last week, we learned of the existence of Public Health England's second report "Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME groups", which had

[*Bambos Charalambous*]

not been released. It made for shocking reading. The report stated that structural racism had significantly impacted the effect of covid-19 on the BAME community and that historical racism had made BAME NHS staff less likely to speak up about a lack of personal protective equipment or the increased risks they faced. Dr Chaand Nagpaul, who chairs the British Medical Association, said in response to the report that more than 90% of doctors who died during the pandemic were from BAME backgrounds and that BAME staff were three times as likely to say that they felt pressured to work without sufficient PPE.

The PHE report echoed those comments and stated:

“Historic racism and poorer experiences of healthcare or at work mean that BAME individuals are less likely to seek care when they needed it”

and they are also less likely to speak up if they have concerns about risks in the workplace. The report further states:

“The unequal impact of covid-19...may be explained by a number of factors ranging from social and economic inequalities, racism, discrimination and stigma,”

as well as differing risks at work and underlying health conditions.

Data published in the *Health Service Journal* on BAME deaths from covid-19 highlighted that BAME groups accounted for 21% of NHS staff, but 63% of covid-19 deaths. Among medical staff, those from BAME backgrounds accounted for 44% of the staff, but 95% of the covid-19 deaths. These figures are truly shocking, and we cannot shy away from the fact that underlying racism is a key factor in these covid-19 deaths.

During the course of this debate, other colleagues have made the point that the BAME community is also over-represented in other frontline services, leading to more public interaction and exposure to covid-19. I shall not dwell on that now, but we must also remember those public transport workers, such as Belly Mujinga, who contracted the virus and died.

The Government's failure to release the second report on time does not inspire confidence that they are serious about taking action. Action is needed to tackle the inequality among health workers. Viewed together with the failure of the Government to implement the recommendations of the Lammy review, the Wendy Williams Windrush review and Baroness McGregor-Smith's review on race in the workplace, we have to wonder whether they have any intention on tackling structural racism at all. I challenge the Government to prove me wrong. Implementing the recommendations of the reports in full would be a start, but if the Government truly believe that black lives matter then they will be judged on their actions.

4.21 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I had to change my seating arrangements earlier as I was told that the microphone where I was originally sitting was not working—not that that has stopped me in the past.

First, let me pay tribute to the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) for her brilliant speech. I thank her for allowing me to intervene so that I could mention some of the topics on which I now wish to start my own speech.

I was standing in this very spot last night when I started my Adjournment debate by condemning completely the far-right violence that we saw in George Square in Glasgow last night. The far right targeted a peaceful protest by asylum seekers who were protesting about the living conditions that they have been put in by the Home Office. Such violence and thuggery must be condemned, and is condemned, by many proud Glaswegians.

There are a number of issues that I have had to deal with on behalf of BAME constituents, which are just plain wrong and which show systematic racism. The first one I will touch on involves the Foreign Office, which was trying to bring back constituents who were stuck abroad. When we made the case that these were individuals who needed to be brought back home, who had health issues that needed to be addressed, those individuals were all of a sudden told by the British consulate that they were not British nationals. Why are they not British nationals? It is because they were given indefinite leave to remain. It was quite ridiculous. Even when the permanent secretary at the Foreign Office told the Foreign Affairs Committee that, yes, they would bring people back home on the basis of their address and where they were resident, consulates were saying that people were not British nationals. That is something that we really need to address. I have been working on the matter with the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi).

I will not revisit my 23-minute address that I made last night on how asylum seekers are treated, but to bundle them into vans and place them in hotels, under what is now known as hotel detention, with culturally inappropriate food and no social distancing is, quite frankly, a disgrace.

We also need to deal with the level of asylum support. A 26p increase in asylum support has been announced by the Government. That is the equivalent of being given a Freddo bar. That is what asylum seekers are being asked to live on in a week. It is an absolute disgrace. What they are being paid is 42% of what someone would expect on social security. I completely echo the comments of my friend the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms), on the issue of no recourse to public funds. He has done a great job on that. He embarrassed the Prime Minister, who did not seem to have a clue about that.

I want to touch on how public services are dealing with risk assessments and with BAME employees in particular. We have seen industrial disputes fairly recently, including here in London, in the Foreign Office, with BAME workers going on strike for not being paid the London living wage. It is an absolute disgrace that a Government Department has allowed a contractor to deal with that, and we really need to deal with equality impact assessments properly. It is no use for Governments to say that they have carried out an equality impact assessment and have come to the conclusion that everybody is being hammered equally, so there is therefore equality in the system. That really is not good enough. Frankly, at times I think the Government ignore their duties on equality impact assessments and the public sector equality duty.

I hope that Members will sign early-day motion 596, on the “Dying for sick pay” campaign, led by the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), which particularly relates to how BAME employees—predominantly female BAME employees—are being

dealt with in the workforce. I also hope Members will sign early-day motion 599 on the Scottish Trades Union Congress's "Break the race ceiling" campaign.

In closing, we need positive action in this country. As secretary of Show Racism the Red Card, I say that we need to use our education system to eliminate racism in this country. I was delighted to see the National Football League having to do a U-turn, forced by NFL players and NFL black players. That shows that action can work.

4.26 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) on securing this very important debate this afternoon.

Coronavirus has laid bare many inequalities in the UK that have been growing and deepening during 10 years of austerity. Racial inequality is central among them. That was clear from the earliest announcements of coronavirus deaths among NHS staff, all of whom were BAME. It was clear from the deaths of comparatively younger people, such as the rapper Ty Chijioke, aged 47, who touched so many lives in Brixton in my constituency and across the music world, that coronavirus was having disproportionate impacts. It is also the case that there are existing long-standing racial inequalities in physical and mental health and high numbers of BAME staff working in frontline occupations in the NHS, social care and transport in particular, where exposure to coronavirus is increased.

That this pandemic would have disproportionate impacts on BAME communities could therefore have been anticipated, yet the Government undertook no equalities-based risk assessments at all to enable increased risk to be mitigated, and it took three months for a Public Health England report to be published. It simply confirmed what so many people already knew, but offered no recommendations or actions to address it.

When tragic deaths have been reported, including that of Belly Mujinga, who died after she was spat at while working at Victoria station, the response has been completely tone-deaf. British Transport police initially chose to close the investigation into Belly Mujinga's death after the suspect tested negative for coronavirus, ignoring the fact that infected or not, spitting is assault, ignoring evidence that Belly had told her employer about underlying health conditions and had asked for mitigation measures, and ignoring evidence that she had not been provided with adequate PPE.

There was an opportunity to highlight increased risks, to show empathy and understanding of the fear and anxiety that so many BAME workers are suffering, to remind employers of their duty of care and to specify steps that should have been taken, but that was entirely missed. In responding to the Public Health England report, the Government have shown absolutely no urgency. There have been many, many reports, commissions and studies into the health inequalities suffered by BAME communities, and many, many reports on racial inequalities more widely, from Lord Macpherson to Wendy Williams to the Lammy review. We do not need more analysis and prevarication, nor do we need another report that will sit on a shelf. Still less do we need a report written by someone who does not acknowledge the existence of institutional racism.

We need urgent action to protect BAME workers from exposure to coronavirus now. Where are the Government's instructions to hospitals, social care providers or transport providers on the steps they need to take to keep their BAME frontline staff safe? Where is the guidance on risk assessments, PPE and working protocols for employers? Where are the sanctions for employers who fail to act?

The racial inequalities of coronavirus do not stop at health. As many schools have reopened in recent weeks, headteachers in my constituency tell me that their BAME students are disproportionately staying at home, often because their parents are very fearful of the increased risks they face from coronavirus and are anxious to avoid infection—yet there is no recognition of that increased risk in the resources provided to schools. That risks a health inequality resulting in educational inequality.

For far too long, racial inequality and racism in the UK has been ignored and, in some cases, perpetuated by the Government, including very directly by this Prime Minister. It is evident in education, where our children are still taught a partial, incomplete and dishonest version of British history that bypasses the contribution that people from all over the world have made to our country's story. It is evident in an immigration system that was unable to recognise as British thousands of Windrush citizens who had built their lives here for decades. It is evident in the over-representation of black men in the criminal justice system and in the disproportionality of stop and search. It is evident in low pay, insecure work and poor housing. It is evident in the pitiful proportion of BAME people in senior leadership roles in so many settings.

The consequences of this Government's complacency and negligence on racial inequality and racism have ultimately proved to be deadly. I hope that the Minister, in responding to the debate, will announce details of the urgent, immediate actions that will be taken to stop preventable BAME coronavirus deaths. Black lives matter because each life is a loved one with hopes, dreams and aspirations. Put simply, race should never be a factor for increased risk of death. That this is the case at all should be a source of national shame.

4.31 pm

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): I encourage anybody here or watching at home who missed the opening speech by the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) to catch up on it, because that would be very worth while. It was a really interesting and informative speech.

I have been self-certifying. The fact that I am here is an indication of how strongly I feel about this subject matter. I speak as the SNP's women and equalities spokesperson in Westminster, as the MP for Glasgow North East—one of the most ethnically diverse constituencies in Scotland—and as an ally. I have no illusion: I will not and should not be leading a campaign against racism; I should be supporting those who experience racism. That is not me, and it is never going to be me.

This report has brought into sharp focus the institutional racism that exists on these islands, so race and racism are what I want to look at. I will focus on three main things. First, I will say something about Scotland, the SNP and race. Secondly, I want to look back in time and cover a bit of history. The third and final thing I

[Anne McLaughlin]

will talk about is what I am going to do about it, how I am going to be an ally and how I am going to support BAME leaders in the fight against racism.

Starting with Scotland and the SNP, here are the good bits. The SNP Government and Parliament clearly stood last week in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. The SNP Government have put equality and human rights at the heart of their response to coronavirus, and Nicola Sturgeon today announced further analysis of the impact on people from BAME communities in Scotland. The hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) is not in her place, but she mentioned the National Records of Scotland figures. So far, the Scottish Government have looked at figures for those who are very sick with covid-19 and in hospital, and an expansion of that was announced today.

The SNP provided the first Muslim Member of the Scottish Parliament, the late, great Bashir Ahmad; I cannot look at my colleagues here, because we will all get emotional. Political leaders in Scotland have long spoken positively and often about migrant communities in Scotland, and that has an impact on the population. They did it when it was not popular to do it, but it does rub off on the population, and this Government might want to take note of that.

I turn now to the not-so-good bits. As a party, we have not built on Bashir Ahmad's legacy. We have one BAME Member of the Scottish Parliament: Humza Yousaf. He is the Justice Secretary, and he is doing a brilliant job. But even he, speaking in the Black Lives Matter debate in the Scottish Parliament last week, checked his own privilege and noted that there are no BAME women in the Scottish Parliament. That is odd, because I know so many who would do a fantastic job in that Parliament. He did that in a very honest speech, in which he also listed all the areas of public life where white people are at the top—I am struggling to think of one where they were not—and I was absolutely horrified.

Humza Yousaf also recently ordered a public inquiry into the death of Sheku Bayoh, whose family have waited five years to know how he died in police custody, and he instructed the inquiry to look at whether race played a part. Sheku's family should not have had to wait five years for that inquiry to be announced, so we do have things that we have to face up to in Scotland.

Looking to the future, I feel a little more positive than I once did. A week ago last Monday, the SNP's black, Asian and minority ethnic convenor organised a Zoom meeting. At two days' notice, 127 BAME people signed up for it, 22 SNP MPs—we only invited SNP MPs, so do not worry; we are not competing—12 SNP MSPs and 12 councillors. That was at two days' notice, and our job was to listen. We were not allowed to speak other than to say our names. Our job was to listen to everybody and hear what they had to say, and we will be building on that—or they will be building on that, and we will be supporting.

I wish to look a little at the history, which I talked about. There are a number of petitions and campaigns about teaching black history in schools. I have long supported that—in fact, I have spoken about it in this place—and I will explain why. I am confident that this is one very significant way to eradicate racism. Children are not born racist, and when they first become aware

of it they find it very difficult to understand. It is not their instinct to be racist, and then they are taught it. If they go through nursery and school with positive role models from all ethnicities, and if their school books reflect those positive role models, they are far less likely to be able to be taught to be racist.

I have spoken to teachers who care deeply about this matter who told me that schools already teach about racism, as they should, but it others people and it portrays those classmates as victims. That is not to say that people are not victims of racism, but there is so much more that we could be doing to stop it in the first place. One of those things is looking at a positive role models in history and demonstrating that the ethnicity of the people who built these islands and this world is many and varied. One of them, whom I talk about a lot and who now has a statue across the road, is Mary Seacole.

The third and final thing that I want to cover— Oh, I have more time than I thought, so actually I will talk about positive images.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. The hon. Lady has about a minute left.

Anne McLaughlin: A minute? I was told I had seven minutes. Right, I had better come on to: what am I going to do about it?

First, I have applied to have my constituency office registered and trained as a third-party hate crime reporting centre. I will very briefly say that the first of my colleagues to come back to me and say, "I want to do that too," was the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Amy Callaghan). I think all Members will join me in wishing her well as she recovers from what happened last week.

Secondly, I have set up the all-party parliamentary group on unconscious bias. Our inaugural meeting will be on 29 June. Members will decide what happens, but my intention is to have a number of distinct investigations. They could be into a number of things, but the first must be into race. I want the group to take evidence from people not necessarily about overt racism but about undercover racism, where even the person doing it does not know that they are doing it.

It is not just about hearing evidence. I want to make recommendations on what we can do to enable people to recognise their own thinking and to undo it—who should be doing that, and how they should be doing it. I want a UK-wide campaign of awareness, but I should not get carried away and pre-empt the findings. I thank the hon. Member for Brent Central for agreeing to be part of that APPG.

The third thing that I will do is keep listening, and listening more to people who experience racism, which, as I said, is not me. I will end on three very brief messages for the Minister and the Government. The first is that Black Lives Matter is not just about saving those lives, but the lives that people are leading when they are here. Secondly, please stop using the Lammy review as a cover. I am sick of hearing the Government answer every question about what they are doing with, "We've got the Lammy review." They should act upon it, and speak about it only when they have actually done something about it. Finally, we can breathe and until we

cannot we should fight racism and call it out wherever we see it, and whoever it is from—and that includes Prime Ministers.

4.39 pm

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) for bringing this important debate to the House.

I also thank my colleagues who have made such vital contributions today: my hon. Friends the Members for Slough (Mr Dhesi) and for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) spoke so movingly about the heartbreaking loss of loved ones; and my hon. Friends the Members for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), for Poplar and Limehouse (Apsana Begum), for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) and for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) rightly raised the important issue of poor-quality housing.

The need for actions, not words, and an end to pointless reports was raised eloquently by my hon. Friends the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah), for West Ham (Ms Brown), for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi) and for Liverpool, Riverside (Kim Johnson); and the importance of acknowledging the negative effects of covid-19 and discrimination on the mental health of BAME people was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin), my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) and my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Sam Tarry).

The poverty experienced by our BAME communities due to Government policies was perfectly highlighted by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) and my hon. Friends the Members for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) and for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana); and my hon. Friends the Members for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) and for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) reminded us of our reliance on those from our BAME communities in our NHS.

The resounding message is clear: our BAME communities are grieving. The priority from the outset of this pandemic should have been to save lives—all lives—but it pains me to have to stand here and state the most obvious point, which has, regrettably, been missed: that no one life is more important than any other.

The Government have liked to describe the fight against coronavirus as a war; to use their analogy, our BAME communities would have been the cannon fodder. These people's lives are not, and should not have been, dispensable. It truly amazes me that in 2020 lives are not valued equally here in the UK, and the covid-19 crisis has shone a much needed spotlight on this stark and most harsh of realities.

It is simply an outrage that people of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage have a 100% greater risk of dying from covid-19 than white British people. The stats are no better for those of Afro-Caribbean descent. The first 10 doctors to die in the UK from coronavirus were all from BAME backgrounds.

If I may, I wish to take some time to honour just a few of the victims of this virus: Ismail Mohamed Abdulwahab, a child aged 13; Sudhir Sharma and his daughter Pooja Sharma; Nadir Nur, a London bus driver; Belly Mujinga, a station worker at Victoria

station, just down the road; Esther Akinsanya, a nurse who died in the intensive care unit at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, where she had worked for more than 20 years; and Dr Fayez Ayache, who aged 76 was still working as a GP—yesterday I had the true honour of talking to his daughter, Layla, who described how her father loved working for the NHS so much because it brought people together, gave a freedom that some have never experienced before and gave hope and light to those who were wandering a darkened path.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab): When we found out that elderly people needed support because of covid-19, we shielded them; when we found that people with comorbidities needed support, we shielded them; but when it came to black communities, all of a sudden we found there had to be a review and a long conversation, and still no measures have been taken to shield them. Does my hon. Friend agree that that amounts to institutional racism and something should be done about it?

Dr Allin-Khan: I thank my hon. Friend for her articulate and eloquent intervention. I agree that our BAME communities must never be an afterthought and deserve to have everything in place to keep them safe, just as we prioritised other members of our community.

I am proud to stand shoulder to shoulder on the frontline of our NHS, where I proudly work alongside doctors, nurses, cleaners, porters and carers from all backgrounds.

Those on the frontline have made huge sacrifices during this pandemic, but far too many have made the ultimate sacrifice and paid for their service with their lives. The health and care workforce in England are significantly over-represented by people from BAME groups. These are jobs that cannot be done from home, and they have been front and centre of the response to covid-19. Can the Minister please outline whether risk assessments will be developed for BAME key workers exposed to a large section of the general public?

It is not just those on the frontline of our NHS paying the price; it is our bus drivers, our posties, our station attendants, our shop workers, our refuse collectors—the very people who have kept our supermarket shelves stocked and cleaned our streets so that we can safely socially distance. They must not be forgotten. We need action from the Government, not simply words. The issue of flagrant inequality cannot be kicked into the long grass by the Government any longer. It would dishonour the memory of those who have sadly lost their lives. Unfortunately, the reality for many of these frontline workers is that they were doing the jobs that nobody else wants to do.

Let us be perfectly clear: there was no option to work from home for these staff and they could not afford not to go to work; they could not risk losing their jobs, for how would they feed their families? So many BAME people are in insecure work and have to carry on with unsafe practices for fear of the repercussions, afraid to speak out—and it has cost them their lives. The bullying of BAME people in the workforce is rife and concerns were so often dismissed that staff felt that they could not raise the issue of inadequate provision of PPE. The BMA has even stated that BAME doctors are twice as likely not to raise concerns for fear of recrimination.

[Dr Allin-Khan]

Does the Minister agree that it is simply unacceptable that cleaners were being sent to clean the rooms of people who had died of covid-19 without adequate PPE?

When we discuss the disproportionately high number of BAME deaths, it is vital that the discourse does not fall into pseudoscience and biological difference. I am a doctor with a public health master's degree. To be clear, it is not simply about people from a BAME background having different receptors in their lungs. People from BAME backgrounds are not a homogenous group of people. We are talking about people with vastly different heritage and racial backgrounds. Other countries have got this virus in check. The risk faced by BAME communities here in the UK is down to structural racism and the precarious work that people are placed in as a result.

The UK has been a warm and welcoming country for so many, but for others—for too many—it has not. We cannot ignore the vast number of deaths in our communities and sweep the memories of our loved ones under the rug. In the early days of the crisis, when communication was crucial, why did the Government not reach out to BAME communities? Can the Minister explain that? Why were vital documents not translated so that public health advice could be easily disseminated into some of our most vulnerable communities? How will that change going forward?

The Government's overlooking of our BAME communities has categorically and catastrophically cost lives. The hurt and pain brought to the fore during the crisis cannot be forgotten. I will never forget standing at the bedside of patients, holding a phone to their ear, as they said their last goodbyes to their loved ones. Those tears, that sound—it never leaves you. It must not be forgotten. We are proudly here today standing shoulder to shoulder with our friends, our families, our communities who have been deeply affected by this pandemic, and it is a scandal that the Government blocked a review that included recommendations that could have helped to save BAME lives during this crisis. What message does that send about how the Government value them?

If, as a country, we truly want to learn from this crisis and treat everyone as equal, we must tackle racism wherever we come across it, and it is everyone's responsibility, regardless of skin colour, ethnicity or socioeconomic status—it is everyone's problem. Our BAME communities have been failed and need to be able to trust that we here in this Chamber, in Parliament, truly represent them. It is our duty to rebuild the trust that has been lost. The pandemic has so brutally stripped humanity of its ability to breathe. It is time for the Government to inject humanity and true equality into all their policies. The time to act is now.

4.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) on securing this debate, and I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting it. I thank all hon. Members for their contributions. To those listed by the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) I want to add my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge

(Dr Spencer), my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) and my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Marco Longhi), to name but a few more.

I think everybody would agree that this debate has been thoughtful and considered, and the topics and challenges that hon. Members have discussed have certainly been broad. The contributions have highlighted to me, as I have sat here for the past three hours, the sheer complexity of the issue. Health inequalities sit in my portfolio. Before covid, they presented enormous challenges; with covid, they have become even more challenging.

Members have passionately articulated the findings, and I concur that they are deeply concerning. There can be no doubt that covid-19 has upended all our lives. As the hon. Member for Tooting said, everybody knows somebody who has been touched. One of the challenges that the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani), whom I failed to mention, articulated is that everybody is somebody's uncle, brother, wife or mother. Everybody has been touched by the challenge of not being able to say goodbye, to carry a coffin, to say those last goodbyes. That is the human face of this dreadful disease, which has changed the way we live and work.

Throughout it all, many frontline organisations have been no less than heroic for turning up on the frontline—not only the doctors who have turned up every day, but everybody in the team. The one thing I have noticed is how people have become teams. People have referenced the fact that those who help around the hospital, cleaning, portering and so on, are just as integral. It has become to feel like those are words of truth and not just expressions. If anything comes out of this appalling situation, it is that we will carry some of those brighter spots forward.

The hon. Member for Tooting said that the BAME community is not a homogenous group: I agree. That highlights one of the challenges. Early in this crisis, it became very clear that some groups of people were more vulnerable to coronavirus, which is why PHE was commissioned to undertake work on who was most at risk and why.

To hon. Members who raised the PHE report, I want to say that it was not censored or delayed. Professor Kevin Fenton has been engaging with significant numbers of individuals and stakeholders to collect views and ideas. Nothing has been removed from the report that was released on Tuesday. It is still in the process of being thought about, because it raised the challenge of additional areas that were not looked at, such as occupation, comorbidities and so on. Duncan Selbie, the head of PHE, has clarified the matter in writing, and a written ministerial statement was laid to clarify the point to the House. The research was done at pace and I thank those involved for pulling it together so quickly.

Far from being a great leveller, covid-19 cruelly discriminates, but it discriminates more broadly than we have probably touched on today. People who are old, people who—as was mentioned by several Members—live in cities, people who work in public-facing jobs and people from BAME backgrounds are at a heightened risk.

This early research also revealed gaps in our knowledge. As we have clearly heard, the situation is complex. My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke highlighted

the importance of how we address the situation. Crucially, we do not know how different risk factors overlap and interact. I know that the calls for action now are heartfelt, but we need to understand different risk factors, including comorbidities and occupation, so that we can ensure that there is a standardisation in the data and recommendations actually do what we need them to do. For example, we need to understand how much of the increased risk for those from BAME communities is driven by comorbidities and occupation. This challenge was highlighted by the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse and my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North.

We do not have all the answers, as the Welsh Health Minister acknowledged recently. People from BME backgrounds have made enormous contributions to the healthcare system and other key areas including transport, public services and the care sector, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) articulated. We must address the injustice of these ethnic disparities right across the board; so many right hon. and hon. Members have pointed out the breadth. That is precisely why the Prime Minister announced on the weekend the establishment of a commission to examine ethnic disparities in this country. It will have an independent chair, will report by the end of this year—within a very short timeframe—and will play an important role in driving the agenda forward. It will be overseen by the Minister for Equalities, my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Kemi Badenoch).

Helen Hayes: Let me simply ask the Minister this: how many more preventable BAME deaths will we have seen by the end of the year?

Jo Churchill: The articulation of the challenge is not simple, and to frame it as if it is does an injustice to all those people who are living with all the various challenges. We have worked to shield people, irrespective. It is important that we act on the evidence. I am really sorry. I am so aware that I have sat and listened, and I will think. Inequalities are stubborn, persistent and difficult to change, but that is no reason to accept them. As hon. Members have said, this is a shared problem and the response must be a shared one, too. That is our goal.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy *rose*—

Jo Churchill: I am so sorry but there has been so little time at the end of the debate, and I want to leave the hon. Member for Brent Central some time to speak.

4.58 pm

Dawn Butler: In the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi), I am disappointed but not surprised. The Minister may not have all the answers, but she has some of the answers, which span back to 2010. All the Government need to do is start implementing those answers. If they want to run a review in parallel—fine, do that. But they should implement the nearly 200 recommendations that already exist. There is no excuse for the Government not to act.

We have been in agreement across the House in this debate. I am sure that if this motion were put to a vote, we would win against the Government. The motion states that this House

“calls on the Government to set out in detail the scope and timeframe of the Government’s review”,

which the Minister has not done, and

“urgently to put a plan in place to prevent avoidable deaths.”

The Minister has not done that. The Government will be responsible, because they know what is happening and they have failed to act. The Minister should be ashamed of her Government.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House is concerned about the level of deaths from covid-19 among Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities; notes that structural inequalities and worse health outcomes for Black, Asian and minority ethnic people go hand in hand; calls on the Government to review the data published by the Office for National Statistics on 11 May 2020 on Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by occupation, England and Wales: deaths registered up to and including 20 April 2020, the Report published by the Institute for Fiscal Studies in May 2020 entitled, Are some ethnic groups more vulnerable to COVID-19 than others? and the full report by Public Health England on Disparities in the risk and outcomes of covid-19; and further calls on the Government to set out in detail the scope and timeframe of the Government’s review and urgently to put a plan in place to prevent avoidable deaths.

PETITION

Establishment of a Food Standards Commission

5 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I rise on behalf of the constituents of the constituency of Kilmarnock and Loudoun who have sent this petition in the consideration of a food standards commission. They are rightly concerned about food quality in the UK post Brexit. They understand that, despite assurances of the UK Government about keeping out the likes of chlorinated chicken and hormone-injected beef, proof of the UK’s intent was evidenced by the refusal to accept a cross-party amendment to the Agriculture Bill. They know that all bets are off when it comes to a trade deal with the US. They understand that trading under WTO rules in a no-deal Brexit crash-out means that these products cannot be banned; that is the position under most-favoured nation rules. They know that, with the number of free marketeers within the Tory Cabinet, there needs to be an independent food standards commission to protect the standards of food and drink on our shelves and to protect the Scottish farmers, who produce such high-quality goods.

The petition states:

The Petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the UK Government has not put proper safeguards in place to protect food standards post the United Kingdom’s exit from the European Union; notes that the Government has rejected cross party amendments to the Agricultural Bill that aimed to protect standards of imports and ensure that any imports would not be able to undercut UK producers; further notes that leaving the European Union without a deal on 31 December 2020 will mean trading on World Trade Organisation (WTO) terms, and that the most favoured nation status will mean that the UK cannot prevent the import of hormone injected beef or chlorinated chicken from the US; further notes that the consumer group Which? has stated that a US trade deal poses the biggest risk to food standards since the BSE crisis and notes that the current deals struck by the EU provide the necessary protections; further declares that an extension to the transition period would create a short term protection against low standard imports, and that a Food Standards Commission with the remit of ensuring quality and welfare standards of food and drink imports in any trade deals could provide longer term protections for our farmers and growers in Scotland and the wider UK.

[Alan Brown]

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to consider the establishment of a Food Standards Commission to monitor any trade deals involving food and drink products and to protect UK welfare standards and value our farmers and growers who produce in Scotland and the wider UK.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002581]

Education Standards: Stoke-on-Trent

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Michael Tomlinson).

5.1 pm

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): We live in challenging times. Coronavirus has disrupted many of our plans and dreams and many have lost loved ones. My sympathies go to all those who have lost friends and family. The virus has had a devastating impact across the globe, testing human ingenuity and resilience. Not least, it has disrupted education, and in a city like Stoke-on-Trent, where education outcomes, despite significant progress, still are not where we want them to be, the disruption has been the last thing that we needed. The immediate challenge is to get more pupils back to school.

I have been engaging with local headteachers and wish to place on the record my admiration for them and the work they are doing to facilitate reopening with new distancing measures. I have certainly been feeding back to the Secretary of State and the Department for Education the thoughts of our heads and any issues of concern. Almost every school in Stoke-on-Trent has stayed open throughout the lockdown for vulnerable and key worker children, and all of them have opened to more children now, with varying degrees of attendance.

For example, between 1 and 16 June, the recorded percentage of available sessions attended by nursery pupils across the city has ranged from just 2% to 100%—the 100% being recorded at the Clarice Cliff Primary School in my constituency. But even though 100% of sessions were attended, just 10% of nursery children enrolled at Clarice Cliff attended at least one of those sessions. I think the reporting of that attendance does not seem especially robust—indeed, teachers have told me off the record that they find the daily reporting forms over-onerous—but there does seem to be a link between disadvantage and non-attendance, with schools with high percentages of pupil premium children recording lower percentages of educational sessions attended.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend and co-city Member of Parliament. Before covid, 27 of our schools had 4% persistent absence or higher. Does he see that as an ongoing issue that we need to tackle now, and have needed to tackle since before the crisis?

Jack Brereton: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. We have seen from some schools excellent examples of the work that has been put in place to address attendance. We need to see that mirrored across all our schools throughout the city, so that we can get attendance rates up.

Clearly, getting children back into school will take further effort, but I should like to thank all our teachers, who have been working incredibly hard to get schools ready and accommodating the necessary changes. They have made huge efforts to ensure that it is safe for those pupils to return. All children who are allowed to return should now do so. Parents need to be assured that it is safe, but I like to think that I am preaching by example, given that my son William is returning to nursery—he returned at the start of the month.

It is vital that we get pupils back to school as soon as possible, because the sad truth is that the children from the far less affluent communities that I represent in Fenton, Blurton, Longton and Meir will now have to go even further to catch up with the more typical middle-class communities elsewhere in England. It is time to start getting many more schools open again and, when they are open, to ensure that they are delivering even better outcomes and standards of education.

Stoke-on-Trent is on the up, and all credit must go to the work that has seen youth unemployment more than halve across the city over the past decade. I applaud the schools and the incredible efforts already made by the teachers in my constituency who have grasped the nettle and ensured that their pupils had the skills needed to find work. Before covid-19 hit, we were realising even more of the potential that will be the basis for our success in decades to come, but after this health crisis, we need to be more ambitious in the city and more ambitious about what our young people can achieve. I want to see a sharpening of the upward trajectory that we have been seeing. Nowhere is this more important than for our children and young people. Every person in our city should have the ability to achieve their full potential and be their best.

The concept of a job for life, which was so common in the past and which naturally suited honest, hard-working Stokies, is disappearing all around the world. People now change careers on average five to seven times in their working life, and they need the transferable skills to take the greatest advantage of that. If the security of a job for life is gone, the reassurance of meaningful multiple career options really needs to be there.

Jonathan Gullis: There is no finer advocate than my hon. Friend for the city that I am also proud to serve. Does he agree that we need to turbocharge apprenticeships in our city in order to create much better opportunities, rather than just the same old A-level and going-on-to-university option?

Jack Brereton: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments; I fear he is slightly too kind. Absolutely; with apprenticeships and with all types of education, we need to focus on ensuring that more of our young people take those steps into higher education and into furthering their careers.

It is difficult to keep up with the pace of change when you are already behind, and although we have made great strides from where we were, we are, sadly, still behind in many areas. The problems that we are having to reverse in Stoke-on-Trent are deep-seated. As recently as December 2016, nearly half of all learners in secondary education were in schools judged by Ofsted to be less than good, and at key stage 2, Stoke-on-Trent's children are behind the national average in reading, writing, maths and science. At key stage 4, the city's outcomes are also too low. It pains me to say that little more than half of Stoke-on-Trent's pupils achieve grades 9 to 4 in English and maths GCSE, compared with nearly two thirds of pupils nationally. Also, 33% of Stoke-on-Trent's schools are categorised by Ofsted as requiring improvement.

Educational outcomes remain below the national average and significantly below for disadvantaged children. The city sits in the lowest quartile banding for the number of pupils achieving a level 3 qualification by the

age of 19, and poor pupil attainment and progress are prevalent in a significant number of schools. The likelihood of a young person from Stoke-on-Trent progressing to higher education is significantly lower than the national average. It is 28% locally, compared with 38% nationally. The rates of exclusion from school are high. A concerted effort, backed up with innovation and transferable good practice, is needed across the schools in the city, and I certainly support enhancing the active role of Ofsted in driving standards up. Ofsted's promise to offer non-judgmental support to schools that have stubborn difficulty in improving standards is welcome news. Schools and teachers should be receiving the support they need to properly tackle the challenges that they face. I know that many schools in the R1 category would welcome that additional support. A number of them have been keen to make the huge efforts that are likely to see them move up to the good category at inspection.

We also need to see more outstanding practice, especially in secondary schools. We have seen some fantastic examples of outstanding practice across the city, and it is certainly on the rise, but we need to see more of it spreading across all our schools. There are currently no outstanding non-selective secondary schools in Stoke-on-Trent, although I slightly dispute this, as I think that the Ormiston Sir Stanley Matthews Academy in my constituency is outstanding. Although it is currently rated good, the fantastic leadership of the head, Mark Stanyer, and the work of teachers and pupils have resulted in it moving up to performing above average in its Progress 8, which is an incredible achievement of which it should be very proud.

Jonathan Gullis: My hon. Friend has some amazing schools in the south of the city. I could not miss the opportunity to plug Whitfield Valley Primary Academy, which has 84% of students meeting the expected standard and 25% meeting the higher expected standard. Does he agree that we need to ensure these schools, these beacons of light in Stoke-on-Trent, are given the opportunity? Perhaps they can meet the Minister who is present today to demonstrate the very best that we have in Stoke-on-Trent.

Jack Brereton: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. I absolutely agree with him. At Whitfield Valley and all the schools we see outstanding levels of progress; it is very high at Whitfield Valley. We need to support that and for that good practice to flow out and be shared across all schools. Going back to the Sir Stanley Matthews Academy, it was recently the only school that was nominated in my constituency for one of my unsung hero awards for the amazing work it has been doing to support the local community in Blurton during the coronavirus outbreak.

Ambition and a lack of opportunity have been key issues locally. Stoke-on-Trent very much relates to the Government's levelling-up agenda. We desperately need to increase the ambition of our children and get them fully engaged in purposeful, high-quality education.

In the 2016 social mobility index, Stoke-on-Trent was ranked 298th out of 324 districts. That is mirrored across a number of indicators of multiple deprivation. Levels of pay and the number of people with higher level qualifications in Stoke-on-Trent are much lower than in other parts of the country. On average, people can be

[Jack Brereton]

expected to be paid nearly £100 less a week in Stoke-on-Trent than nationally, which is totally unacceptable. Improving opportunities and instilling in pupils the confidence that they can achieve is vital. That goes hand-in-hand with improving educational outcomes. Careers advice is crucial to tackling that. Whether for more vocational or academic pathways, we need to keep engaging with universities to address the city's low application rates for further education.

Levelling up is needed. I say to the Government: please do work with us on the levelling-up agenda. They will find no city more eager to engage or more relevant to this agenda. It is certainly welcome that the Careers & Enterprise Company is working to ensure that every secondary school and post-16 provider in Stoke-on-Trent will have access to an enterprise adviser, someone senior from business volunteering their time and a share of a £2 million investment, so that every secondary school pupil has access to at least four high-quality business encounters.

I am also very supportive of the education employers' Primary Futures programme, which is designed to link up schools with role models from different career backgrounds to help pupils to think more from an early age about the ambitions they might have for the future. This is about broadening horizons for our children, the myriad opportunities out there, breaking down some of the perceived stereotypical boundaries, and the big ambitions that start at an early age. I encourage more people from different walks of life and in senior careers to volunteer their time for this fantastic initiative.

I am also delighted to say that recent efforts to increase applications to Oxford and Cambridge from A-level students in Stoke-on-Trent seem to be working, but there is much more to do. We must open up new educational options for children from deprived backgrounds across the city. The industry is full of exciting new prospects calling Stoke-on-Trent their home. Ensuring our children and young people have the best possible education is vital for the future prosperity of our city. Stoke-on-Trent is a key cluster of advanced manufacturing, with absolutely top-end, world-leading manufacturing. These industries can offer amazing careers for local people.

An undeniable problem in achieving that, however, particularly in secondary education, is the real lack of school places. In Staffordshire last year, not including Stoke-on-Trent, 92% of pupils moving from primary school to secondary school got into their first choice of school and 90% did in neighbouring Cheshire. However, in Stoke-on-Trent first choice places were secured by only 82%. In fact, dozens of local parents contacted me to say that not only did their children not secure their first preference, but they did not secure a place at any of their chosen three. That means more than twice as many children are missing out in Stoke-on-Trent than in the rest of Staffordshire. Every one of the city's 14 secondary schools is full and 11 are over-subscribed. Some pupils have been left facing a commute across the entire city into Newcastle-under-Lyme and back again every morning and evening, with no bus services that would realistically ever get them to school on time. Such a situation does not create the best conditions for pupils to learn or for teachers to teach. We must change that

by creating more high-quality school places that will push up standards and increase local opportunities. That is no less than our young people in Stoke-on-Trent deserve.

That is why I am delighted to support plans for a new free school, the Florence MacWilliams Academy run by the Educo Trust, on part of the former Longton High School site. If permission is granted, the school will alleviate the challenges around admissions policy at a time of a projected increase in pupil numbers in what is now a rather youthful city. Sadly, that demographic shift was not planned for, and in addition we now see further significant growth from new residential development, which has not been factored into secondary places.

Jonathan Gullis: I wholeheartedly support my hon. Friend in his efforts to bring about progress on a free school in the south of the city. Does he firmly believe that Stoke-on-Trent should be the beating heart of a free school revolution and that we should have one to drive up standards in the north of the city, too?

Jack Brereton: Of course, my top priority is one for the south of the city, but we do need good and outstanding places across the whole of our city.

As recently as 2008, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, under Building Schools for the Future, pursued a policy of school closures and mergers due to falling student numbers. Thank goodness that Trentham Academy, which was also threatened with closure, was saved thanks to a hard-fought campaign led by the community in Hanford and Trentham. If we had lost that school, too, the situation would now be a whole lot worse, so it is fantastic that instead, Trentham Academy's results have been turned around and it is now performing very well. However, it is much in need of investment, given that it did not benefit from the BSF programme. Trentham Academy has probably had the least spent on it of any secondary school in the city in recent times. Serious consideration should be given to such investment, especially for improving sports and wider facilities in schools.

One of the schools to go altogether was Longton High School. Other than the section that is now used by Abbey Hill special school, much of the brownfield site remains empty. The motto of Longton High School was "Renascor", or "I am born again". Indeed, Longton High School was born again on the site in the 1950s, but its roots went right back to 1760, when the endowment founded what was called none other than the Longton Free School.

Much has changed since the closure programme of 2008, not least the political leadership and representation of the city of Stoke-on-Trent, and I am pleased to say that today's Conservative-led city council has supported the application by Educo to take the Florence MacWilliams Academy forward. I am also pleased that the school has attracted support from a number of key partners of both local and national significance, with a number of influential figures making up the governing body.

Florence MacWilliams herself was an exceptional mathematician. She is renowned for contributing the MacWilliams identities to coding theory. I am afraid that my coding theory is a little rusty, but I do know my local history, and I can tell the House that Florence MacWilliams was born in Stoke-on-Trent during the first world war and was commonly known by her middle

name, Jessie. At a time when it was still extremely rare for women to get the opportunity to go to university, she embarked on an education that culminated in a Cambridge MA and a Harvard PhD. She is a superb local role model in a city where life chances and social mobility continue to need close attention and where ambition and aspiration need to be pursued higher.

I particularly welcome Educo's promise that there will be an intense programme of study for those pupils who fall behind and struggle, to help them master a strong core of knowledge and skills. A mathematics excellence partnership will be developed to support a maths hub, and literacy, including the spoken word, will be the key focus. It is expected that some 22% of pupils will come from households where English is not the first language.

As the Secretary of State for Education knows from the number of letters I have sent him and times I have spoken to him about this, the new school is for both improving standards and helping to address pressures on secondary places. The Minister will know that I recently went to see the Secretary of State with other local MPs, including my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis), and the leader of Stoke-on-Trent City Council to ensure that officials in Whitehall understand exactly why we need this new school and how it will improve outcomes in the opportunity area.

It is certainly important that we realise every bit of value possible from the opportunity area work. There have already been successes. Our opportunity area is focusing on four areas identified as key priorities locally: early years education; English, maths and science outcomes; pupil engagement; and the choices young people make from 16. The opportunity area does much to leverage partnership funding, volunteering and expertise from both national organisations and local stakeholders. It embeds national policy in particular local contexts or, seen the other way, it embeds particular local priorities into contexts of national policy.

The opportunity area enables workstreams locally that will be of national benefit by further raising the skills and productivity of a city on the up, with a ceramics industry and a wider creative and advanced manufacturing economy undergoing a real resurgence. Like many towns and cities outside London, we need not only to improve our rates of educational attainment, but to retain educated graduates and skilled workers who are too often lured to the metropolitan honey pots and the wider south-east.

We need to see more of our young people undertaking higher education, including university. As a graduate of one of our local universities, Keele, I would strongly advocate that our young people give this their consideration. Perhaps by studying locally, people would be more likely to embed their roots and be retained locally in Stoke-on-Trent, as I have been.

Of course, educational pathways to advancement need to be broad and to lead to sectors, not particular specialisms. Alongside academic excellence, the Government are right about the need to make a success of sectoral T-levels and apprenticeships, including for lifelong learning and retraining, by investing in their success and by ensuring their prestige. Nothing promotes ambition like a clear route to employment and advancement, with a tangible career path that is not covered in doubts and

the roadblocks that disadvantage can bring. I am delighted that Stoke on Trent College is one of the very first colleges to offer T-level qualifications.

Staffordshire University will be massively expanding the provision of degree apprenticeship education in the city, in partnership with local industries and employers. Sadly, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Jo Gideon) cannot be here tonight due to self-isolation, but she is a key champion of apprenticeships in the city, including at Staffordshire University's £40 million Catalyst centre, which has been developed in her constituency.

Local partnerships between academia and industry have an undoubted role in economic success. Despite the sheer hard work of my constituents to improve local levels of productivity—and productivity locally is indeed up—gross value added in Stoke-on-Trent is still comparatively low against the rest of the country. Part of the effort to level up the productivity gap between the UK and our international competitors must be to close the gap between sub-regions such as Stoke-on-Trent and the rest of the country. GVA per head is about a fifth lower in Stoke-on-Trent than the national average.

It can be tempting to say that this is all a function of trends in economic geography, yet we have shown in recent years that we can indeed increase our local rates of productivity through advanced manufacturing. Prior to the coronavirus outbreak, Stoke-on-Trent benefited from one of the fastest growing economies of any city nationally. It has been rated as one of the best places to start a new business and for business retention. Fortunes are changing for the better after decades of decline, and our huge untapped potential in the Potteries is starting to be unlocked.

Just as there is an internationally important Cheshire life sciences corridor to the north of Stoke-on-Trent, with schools and colleges in the area gearing themselves towards skilling pupils for the science industry, so there can be an advanced design and manufacturing cluster in Stoke-on-Trent itself. The UK ceramics industry is hugely ambitious. It is seeking to secure significantly increased year-on-year growth and to increase our international market share. We are getting clay back into the classroom, and there is a plan for an advanced ceramics campus in an international centre for research excellence to provide the highly skilled jobs for our young people to progress to in the future. My colleagues and I from the Potteries constituencies are lobbying to get the research centre in place as soon as possible.

The teachers at all our local schools do a fantastic job not only in teaching our children the curriculum, but in inspiring them to work hard for their futures. Our headteachers are working hard to overcome the immediate crisis and get our schools open again. We have seen improving standards across the board, and we must now go further so that every child in the city is learning in a good or outstanding school. Our longer-term challenge is to continue to push up standards, especially at 16. Although we have historical challenges locally, stemming from the sorry decline of the mass-manufacturing ceramics industry, these can no longer be used as excuses for poor standards, nor should they be a barrier to unlocking our potential.

There are many fantastic examples of excellent schools defying the odds throughout the city. In fact, the resurgence in local industries, especially with the advanced manufacturing-based ceramics industry, means

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that it is imperative that we raise local school standards so that we can keep that industry in the Potteries, the world capital of ceramics, as a key employer offering high-skilled, high-reward and high-satisfaction jobs to local people.

As it says in the Department for Education's delivery plans for the Stoke-on-Trent opportunity area,

"Stoke-on-Trent is leading the way in innovative practice".

It is

"a city with so much to offer, but too many children and young people leave school on the back foot, and do not have the skills and tools required to access the opportunities on their doorstep."

This needs to change, and I will not rest until every child in our city is able to benefit from the best possible start in life. We need more choice, more places, greater rigour and purposeful opportunities. In that way, we can deliver higher standards of education in Stoke-on-Trent.

5.26 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) on securing this important debate. I know that he is particularly passionate about schools in his constituency, and he continues to feed back his views and the views of his constituents about various local education issues. The Stoke-on-Trent area is one of huge potential, as he said, and an area targeted by the Government for additional support through the opportunity area policy, which I will talk about in a moment. He also shares the Government's ambition that every state school is a good school, providing a world-class education that helps every child and young person to reach his or her potential, regardless of background.

Since 2010, the Government have worked hard to drive up academic standards in all our schools, and we continue to provide support to the schools that require it most. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that some schools are still on a journey of improvement, and those schools continue to benefit from the Government's commitment of support.

An example of that support was the introduction of opportunity areas in October 2016, when the then Education Secretary announced that six social mobility coldspots would become opportunity areas. These opportunity areas were expanded further in January 2017, with six additional areas, including Stoke-on-Trent. As part of this announcement, £72 million of funding was made available to those areas to support education and communities. Stoke-on-Trent and those 11 other areas are benefiting from a range of additional support, which I think will have a huge impact in the long run in Stoke-on-Trent.

I join my hon. Friend in recognising the tremendous work of headteachers and teachers in Stoke-on-Trent, which has resulted in 80% of schools being judged good

or better by Ofsted. Part of the support that the Government offer to all schools nationally is through the academies programme, which my hon. Friend talked about. This programme builds on our ongoing vision to develop a world-class, school-led system, giving school leaders the freedom to run their schools as they see fit. We now have more than 9,000 open academies. This system is working. My hon. Friend will have seen improvements in Whitfield Valley Primary School, which my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) also mentioned, reflecting the strength of the academies programme. The school joined the Inspirational Learning Academies Trust as a sponsored academy, and following its sponsorship, performance improved rapidly. The school was judged good in January last year, and its 2019 academic performance places it well above the national average. The trust also includes Newstead Primary Academy, located in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South.

In a bid to support academy trusts in Stoke-on-Trent and nationally, we have launched a trust capacity fund, which will help trusts to expand. As my hon. Friend knows, the statutory duty to provide sufficient school places sits with local authorities. We provide capital funding for every place that is needed, based on local authorities' own data on pupil forecasts. They can use that funding to build new schools or expand existing schools. Stoke-on-Trent has been allocated £32.7 million to provide new schools and new school places between 2011 and 2022.

Building on the need for more school places nationally, the Government have delivered a hugely ambitious free schools programme, through which we have funded thousands of good school places and opened hundreds of new schools across the country. That happens in waves, and we are now on wave 14. My hon. Friend mentioned Florence MacWilliams Academy. There have been 89 applications received for wave 14 of free schools, two of which came from Stoke-on-Trent. One application has been withdrawn. Florence MacWilliams Academy is a free school proposal submitted by the newly formed trust, Educo Academies. The application seeks to establish a co-educational 11-to-16 school in the south of the city of Stoke-on-Trent. We will make an announcement on the successful bidders to that scheme in due course.

In the final seconds left, I again pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his commitment to education in general and to the schools in his constituency in particular.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): What a race! The Minister managed to get it all in with hardly any time.

Question put and agreed to.

5.31 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 18 June 2020

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Contingencies Fund Advance

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): The Department of Health and Social Care's vote on account cash limit has been used in full between April 2020 and June 2020 to support the running costs of the department, NHS and arm's length bodies, including expenditure on the covid-19 pandemic. This application from the contingencies fund is to access the budgetary cover already included in the 2020-21 Main Supply Estimate, as set out below.

Parliamentary approval for additional resources of £24,250,000,000 and additional capital of £750,000,000 will be sought in a main estimate for Department of Health and Social Care. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £25,000,000,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the contingencies fund.

[HCWS300]

JUSTICE

Youth Custody

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): Youth offending has fallen—to 38.4% in the latest youth justice statistics—thanks to successive Governments' efforts to improve education, social care and mental health support. Clear guidance to the judiciary that custody should be an absolute last resort for children has also seen numbers fall by 78% between 2008 and 2019. There are now fewer than 700 children currently held in young offender institutions, secure training centres and secure children's homes. This is an unprecedented low, and down from a peak of 3,200 in October 2002.

This is a success that as a society we should be incredibly proud of. These early interventions have meant that thousands of children each year avoid heading into adulthood as criminals, into a life of crime that is much harder to break once ingrained. This Government's efforts to support children and upgrade their life chances continue at pace—whether that be the additional funding being put into our schools or the extra support now available to children's mental health services.

But we know there is far more still to do, particularly for those who still enter custody—a much more concentrated mix of children with complex issues, over 50% of whom have convictions for serious violence. We are spending £5 million putting each prison officer who works in the youth custody estate through a specialist degree programme, giving them a greater understanding of child and adolescent development. We have also increased the number of staff in young offender institutions by a third in the last four years.

We are investing in the development of enhanced support units (ESUs) to provide specialist psychological support and services for children with the most complex needs, with ESUs now at Feltham and Wetherby YOIs. We are also working with NHS England on a new

integrated approach to strengthen the provision of health care and support (“SECURE STAIRS”) which is rolling out across the youth secure estate.

But there are elements of practice in youth custody which, frankly, have not been good enough. Today I have published two reports on the use of restraint and separation in the secure youth justice estate.

Staff in the youth estate are trained to use behaviour management and de-escalation techniques and only resort to physical restraint when there is no alternative and either their safety or that of children is at further risk.

However, keen to ensure those prison officers working with children were receiving adequate training and were using such techniques appropriately, the Government commissioned Charlie Taylor, then the chair of the Youth Justice Board, to carry out an independent review into the use of pain-inducing restraint.

In his report, Charlie Taylor references a number of incidents in which he believes the use of a pain-inducing restraint potentially saved a child's life. He is therefore clear that staff must retain the ability to intervene safely when there is a clear and imminent risk of serious harm to a child, themselves or another member of staff. However, he also found instances where it was used inappropriately and, now, I want to ensure the use of such restraint is proportionate and reasonable and only used when there is no other alternative.

That is why the Government have accepted all 15 recommendations in Charlie Taylor's report, and the youth custody service has developed a programme of work which will implement them. Techniques that cause pain, albeit in order to prevent further serious harm, will no longer be taught alongside other methods to manage behaviour, to make it even clearer that these are a last resort designed only to protect children or staff from further injury. This will ensure that such techniques are only used when there is no alternative in order to prevent serious harm and therefore protect children and staff from trauma wherever possible. A panel will also be established to carefully scrutinise incidents in which a pain-inducing restraint has been used to ensure they are being used appropriately and that the welfare of children and staff is a key consideration.

The second report I have published today builds on our initial response to the thematic report on separation in young offender institutions, which HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) published in January.

The findings in the report made for some challenging reading at the time and I was pleased with the exceptional effort from the youth custody service in acting so swiftly to address the regime provided for separated children.

It is extremely unfortunate that at the point at which we were starting to see improvements for separated children we went into a period, that because of coronavirus, has forced us into a situation where all children in custody have unfortunately had to spend more time behind their doors than we would wish.

I accepted the overarching recommendation for a new system of separation to be implemented, which was called for by HMIP in their thematic report. As we look to restart aspects of daily life for children in custody I am determined that we do not return to the practices of old. This new, child-centred policy will draw on best practice from other establishments to ensure consistency across the youth estate.

Inappropriate use of these techniques must not happen again. Our response to these findings will help to ensure all children in custody have all the support they need to turn their lives around.

I will place a copy of both reports in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS302]

TRANSPORT

Contingencies Fund

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps):

I hereby give notice of the Department for Transport having drawn advances from the contingencies fund totalling £7,000,000,000 to enable expenditure on covid-19 support packages for transport to be spent ahead of the passage of the Supply and Appropriation Act. The schemes include:

Emergency measures agreements with the train operating companies; the covid-19 bus services support grant; safeguarding critical ferry freight routes; and supporting regional transport networks such as Transport for London and light rail networks. Furthermore, the Department brought-forward the payment of local authority road maintenance grants announced in the Budget. Barnett consequentialia have already been applied in the usual way to any funding on top of the Department for Transport's current budgets.

Parliamentary approval for additional resources of £5,253,000,000 and additional capital of £603,000,000 and £1,144,000,000 of cash will be sought in a Main Estimate for the Department for Transport. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £7,000,000,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the contingencies fund.

The cash advance will be repaid upon receiving Royal assent of the Supply and Appropriation Bill.

[HCWS299]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensions: Interim Guidance for Superfunds

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): The pensions regulator has today published an interim regulatory regime for defined benefit pension “superfunds”.

A superfund is a privately funded “for profit” consolidation vehicle, which takes over responsibility for defined benefit pension schemes liabilities from the sponsoring employer. To enter a superfund, sponsoring employers are required to pay a significant, upfront sum to improve the funding level of their scheme, in exchange for discharging their pensions liabilities.

This is an interim regime. The Government will continue to develop the permanent regime before legislating, with full and proper parliamentary scrutiny in the usual way.

Operation of the interim regime will be kept under review by the Government to ensure that it is properly protecting and advancing the interests of pension scheme members and the pension protection fund.

The Government will continue to develop a permanent regime for superfunds. This is an innovative area and market participants should not assume that the permanent regime will automatically replicate the interim regime. Alongside responses to the defined benefit pension scheme consolidation consultation, the Government will be informed by experience gained during the interim regime when considering the features of the permanent regime, including those relating to capital adequacy. The permanent regime may include an alternative set of requirements, including more prudent requirements, compared to the interim regime, but we cannot pre-empt the parliamentary process.

The permanent regime will be designed to protect pension scheme members and the pension protection fund, including by ensuring that superfunds have the necessary flexibility to continue contributing to a strong pensions ecosystem in which sponsoring companies and scheme trustees have a range of options open to them.

The Government believe that superfunds have the potential to improve the likelihood of members getting their benefits in full whilst providing employers with a new, affordable option to manage their legacy pension liabilities. However, if at any point it appears that changes to the interim regime are required in order to protect and advance the interests of scheme members, the Government and the pensions regulator will take prompt, robust action.

Today's publication will mean that the pensions regulator will have a much firmer basis to take action against a superfund should they deem it a necessary and proportionate step.

The guidance can be accessed at the following address:

<https://www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk/en/document-librarv/regulatorv-guidance/db-superfunds>

[HCWS301]

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