

**Wednesday  
15 July 2020**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 15 July 2020**

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# House of Commons

*Wednesday 15 July 2020*

*The House met at half-past Eleven 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 DEVELOPMENT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Climate Justice: ODA Allocation

**Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to prioritise climate justice in the allocation of official development assistance to developing countries recovering from the effect of the covid-19 pandemic.

[904774]

**The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa (James Cleverly)**: Next year, the United Kingdom will proudly host COP26—a clear demonstration of the UK's commitment to tackling climate change and our desire to secure global action. Development and diplomacy together will be integral to our work. We recognise that there are few global threats more serious than climate change, and its impact will hit the poorest and most vulnerable hardest. It is vital that we build back better from covid-19. We are prioritising activity that delivers clean, resilient, inclusive recovery, and the Government are committed to that task.

**Liz Twist**: One of the greatest achievements of our overseas development aid programme has been working towards improving the position of women, but biodiversity loss has laid extra burdens on women, who, for example, have to walk further for fresh food or water. What steps will the Minister take to mitigate biodiversity loss in developing countries and reduce the burden on women?

**James Cleverly**: The hon. Lady makes an incredibly important and accurate point. The fact that my noble Friend Lord Goldsmith is a Minister across the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office shows the integrated approach that this Government take. Our work on development, our diplomatic work and our work to protect biodiversity and the environment all work together to ensure that women and other people who are vulnerable are not hit harder by changes to our climate.

**Mr Speaker**: I welcome to the Dispatch Box shadow Minister Anna McMorrin.

**Anna McMorrin** (Cardiff North) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Minister may talk the talk, but the hypocrisy is staggering. His Government continue to funnel billions into fossil fuel projects, including £1 billion in Mozambique. Their own impact assessment is damning, saying that it would lead to permanent loss of natural resources, food scarcity and displacement, undoing the very resilience that DFID aid is there to help build. Does he agree that this flies in the face of climate justice and undermines the very people it is his job to protect?

**James Cleverly**: I welcome the hon. Lady to her place. This Government are absolutely committed to ensuring that we build back better, protect the environment and protect the most vulnerable people in the world. Last year, the Prime Minister announced that the UK would contribute £1.44 billion over the next four years to the green climate fund, doubling our commitment to the largest international fund dedicated to supporting developing countries to adopt low-carbon, climate-resilient technologies. That makes the UK the largest single contributor in the world to that fund.

#### Returning to Education after Covid-19

**Sir David Evennett** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to help children in developing countries return to education after the covid-19 pandemic.

[904775]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Anne-Marie Trevelyan)**: The UK is committed to ensuring a safe return to school for children all around the world. We are taking decisive action through our education programmes and will throw our diplomatic and development weight behind global efforts, including the UNICEF-led campaign to support children's return to school. On Monday, we announced £5.3 million of new funding for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to enable over 5,000 teachers to provide education in 10 refugee-hosting countries.

**Sir David Evennett** [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for her response and commend the work that she is doing in the Department. How will the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office assist the Global Partnership for Education replenishment next year?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan**: The UK is proud to be the largest bilateral donor to the Global Partnership for Education, with a commitment of up to £225 million over a three-year period. As a major education multilateral, the GPE has a key role in tackling the global learning crisis. That is more crucial than ever given the covid pandemic, which is having a profound effect on education systems across the world. The GPE is flexing about £400 million to support education stability, and the UK is keen to play an active part in the 2021 replenishment. We are currently exploring the possibility of how we could co-host that replenishment.

**Sarah Champion** (Rotherham) (Lab) [V]: IMC Worldwide was commissioned by DFID to build 31,000 classrooms in Pakistan for a fee of £107 million. It renegotiated to build only a fifth but kept 58% of the initial fee. The majority of the classrooms built were substandard and presented a risk to children. By October last year, only a

quarter had been retrofitted. Will the Secretary of State put the two DFID reviews into what went wrong in the public domain? Why is the same classroom design being used in other countries? Were any children hurt, and when can they go back to school?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** The safety of children will always be our No. 1 priority, and I agree that it is completely unacceptable that children were being taught in tents because buildings funded by UK aid were not being built to the necessary standards. As soon as DFID knew that there was a problem, we took urgent action to ensure that all schools knew that the buildings should not be used, while we worked with the contractor to agree a plan for retrofitting the affected buildings. Covid has caused some delays to that progress, and schools are closed until 15 September, but I understand that the first of the buildings will be handed over shortly, in a state that is considered acceptable. Global education continues to be an absolutely key priority for the Government and, whether in Pakistan or elsewhere, we are working hard to get children back to school.

#### **Rohingya in Bangladesh and Myanmar**

**Paul Bristow** (Peterborough) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to support the Rohingya in (a) Bangladesh and (b) Myanmar. [904776]

**The Minister for Asia (Nigel Adams):** The UK Government are committed to protecting the Rohingya. I thank Bangladesh for its kindness towards vulnerable Rohingya refugees. I recently visited—virtually—Rakhine in Myanmar, where the UK has provided more than £44 million to all communities since 2017, including more than £25 million for the Rohingya. In Bangladesh, we have provided £256 million for the Rohingya response since 2017, including support for food, health and women and girls.

**Paul Bristow:** In Peterborough, the excellent charity Unite 4 Humanity has been raising money for the Rohingya Crisis Appeal and working with those on the ground in Bangladesh since the start of the crisis. Many others, such as the UK Emergency Medical Team, are there too. Will the Government continue to work with charities and others to help to protect the Bangladeshi and Rohingya communities?

**Nigel Adams:** UK aid development work delivered through charities and other organisations will remain a priority, given Bangladesh's vulnerability to climate and man-made disasters. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the excellent work of Peterborough-based Unite 4 Humanity, which I thank for its work, alongside other charities that have stepped up to respond to the Rohingya crisis. Members may have seen on TV adverts this morning that the UK's Disasters Emergency Committee has launched a coronavirus appeal for vulnerable communities—including the Rohingya—in seven countries. I am pleased to confirm that the UK Government will match funds raised by the UK public, up to £5 million.

#### **Sustainable Agriculture**

**Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that UK aid supports sustainable agriculture. [904777]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Wendy Morton):** The transition to sustainable agriculture is critical to achieving food-security, nutrition and climate objectives. We have ensured that the UK is taking a leadership role through its hosting of COP26 and our support for several bilateral and multilateral initiatives promoting sustainable agriculture. That support includes £176 million invested in the global agriculture and food security programme, which directly addresses climate change through the use of mitigation and adaptation technologies such as resilient seed varieties, more efficient irrigation and increased intercropping.

**Theresa Villiers:** Protecting the rainforest in Brazil is crucial for our climate and biodiversity goals, so will the Minister ensure that UK aid supports sustainable agriculture in Brazil so that we prevent deforestation and ensure stable and prosperous communities?

**Wendy Morton:** My right hon. Friend makes an important point. As she will appreciate and understand, rainforests are the world's lungs. Through the Partnerships for Forests programme, the UK supports sustainable agriculture in Brazil, including through support to address deforestation caused by cattle ranching in the Amazon region, as well as through measures to eliminate from the supply chain cattle produced on illegally deforested land. The UK also supports sustainable agriculture in the soya-producing region of Cerrado.

#### **Poverty Reduction: ODA**

**Ian Byrne** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab): Whether poverty reduction will remain the primary focus of official development assistance. [904778]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Anne-Marie Trevelyan):** As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said, the work of the UK to reduce poverty remains central to the objectives of this Government. The way we use ODA will continue to be guided by our responsibilities under the International Development Act 2002, including our commitment to poverty reduction. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office will enhance our ability to be a force for good and partner to countries in need that seek support to help them climb the ladder of the sustainable development goals towards being strong, peaceful, economic states.

**Ian Byrne:** This Government cannot be trusted to tackle poverty here in the UK, nor can they be trusted to tackle poverty overseas. In the middle of a global pandemic that is pushing millions into poverty, this Government have shut down the Department for International Development and dissolved a dedicated parliamentary Committee so that they can avoid scrutiny of aid spending. Will the Secretary of State please inform the House how aid will be scrutinised from now on?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** This Government remain absolutely committed to the 0.7% target, which is enshrined in law, and that will continue in the framework of the new Department. As for scrutiny, clearly it is a question for Parliament how that scrutiny takes place and what

the new framework of Committee assessment might be. However, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary are absolutely clear that scrutiny should continue to be an absolute focus. It is incredibly important, and all of us as parliamentarians know just how important it is, that we watch over, and can provide insight and broader reflection from, all those we talk to, to make sure that the Government do their best possible. The Government are continuing to support that, and the Foreign Secretary will set out where he hopes to do that in due course.

**Preet Kaur Gill** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): It is a great disappointment that this is the last DFID orals, and I want to pay tribute to all those officials in the Department for their work. I want to assure all those who recognise the importance of development and of supporting the world's poorest that we in the Opposition will not follow the misguided path of the Government.

In recent weeks, we have heard the Secretary of State and hundreds of non-governmental organisations contradict the Prime Minister's claim that there was

"massive consultation over a long period"—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 678.]

ahead of his announcement that he would scrap the Department. Can the Secretary of State tell us whether the Prime Minister misled Parliament, whether she misled the Select Committee last week, and when an apology will be forthcoming?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan**: I concur absolutely with the hon. Member that all those who serve—now and in years past—have brought a commitment to helping the UK do as much as it can to support poverty reduction. That commitment will continue and those who are making that their life's work will continue to be part of the FCDO.

The Prime Minister was clear, as I have been, that any announcement is always brought to Parliament first. The ongoing consultation is now working continuously, and Baroness Sugg is leading that. However, consultation with NGOs was going on before that in relation to all sorts of other issues. That relationship with our NGOs and civil society organisations is something we take very seriously, and we will continue to do so.

**Preet Kaur Gill**: The decision to axe the Department was made on a whim by the Prime Minister to try to distract from his handling of the pandemic. That is why there are still no details of what the new Department will look like, how it will operate, or how it will be scrutinised to guarantee value for money for UK taxpayers who are rightly proud of the work DFID has done in tackling poverty around the world. Will the Secretary of State guarantee that funds will be focused on the world's poorest, and that any cuts to the aid budget come from funds that currently go to middle and upper-income countries or have been found to have limited development impact, such as those outlined in the ONE campaign's real aid index?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan**: DFID is world renowned for its focus and programme expertise, and that will continue to be the case. Poverty reduction will continue to be critical to the focus on how we spend the 0.7% the Government continue to be committed to which we enshrined it in law and it will stay: the Prime Minister is

absolutely committed to that. Interestingly, I think there is a real challenge with the sustainable development goals—there are 17 of them—and the ability to help a country become self-sufficient and climb up that ladder will absolutely continue. We will continue to commit to the 0.7% target, based on GNI.

### Supporting Democracies during Covid-19

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to support democracies during the covid-19 pandemic. [904779]

**The Minister for Asia (Nigel Adams)**: The UK must never be afraid to stand up for what it believes in. We have seen this with our support for the people of Hong Kong and the introduction of our own Magnitsky-style sanctions regime. That is why our health and economic responses to covid-19 have also included further support for governance, transparency and freedom of speech. Our development work must support countries to stand strong, and that means supporting democracy.

**Richard Graham**: The Minister is absolutely right to highlight the challenges for democracies from the pandemic and the opportunities for autocracies. In a year when the UK will be in the chair of the G7, the Commonwealth and COP26, does my hon. Friend agree with me that this is an opportunity for the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which I have the honour of chairing, to do more work for the combined Department to promote and strengthen democracies around the world?

**Nigel Adams**: It is a great pleasure to answer what will be my last DFID oral question from my hon. Friend. DFID and the FCO are strong supporters of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy's work, and I thank him for his commitment to democracy via his work as its chair. In 2019-20, FCO funding of £3.3 million and DFID funding of £3.9 million has been allocated. There will be constraints on ODA over the next few months as we respond to covid-19. Via the integrated review, we will examine all options for enhancing UK democracy support. The merger and the establishment of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office present an exciting opportunity to strengthen the UK's support for democracy, governance and open societies.

**Mr Speaker**: Answers are far too long, folks—we are going to have to move on.

### Global South: Covid-19 Funding

**Ian Lavery** (Wansbeck) (Lab): How much of the funding from the UK in response to the covid-19 pandemic has (a) been allocated to and (b) reached the global south. [904780]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Wendy Morton)**: The UK has pledged up to £769 million of aid to support the global health response and vulnerable countries. As the host of the record-breaking Gavi summit and the world's top donor to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness, the UK is leading the way in finding a vaccine that helps the most vulnerable countries. We have also made sure that new funding goes directly to



the immediate response in these countries, and reflects programmes already in place to help people straight away.

**Ian Lavery [V]:** As of last week, the Government had given less than half of the money that is committed to supporting the world's poorest in the face of this devastating global pandemic. It really is not good enough. Have the Government simply outsourced the responsibility to the various multilaterals? Does the Minister have any idea whatsoever of where UK taxpayers' money has actually gone?

**Wendy Morton:** As I explained, the UK is playing a leading role in the international response to the pandemic, with pledges of up to £769 million of UK aid to help to address the urgent needs in vulnerable countries through research and development, through money for the International Monetary Fund's Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust, and in supporting the global health response. We are working with the UN to ensure that our contributions are channelled to NGOs and other recipients as quickly as possible.

### FCO Merger

**Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD):** What assessment the Government made of the potential merits of merging her Department with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office prior to the announcement of the integrated review of security, defence, development and foreign policy on 26 February 2020. [904781]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Anne-Marie Trevelyan):** Both the merger and the integrated review are evidence of this Government's commitment to a unified British foreign and development policy that will maximise our impact around the world, project our values and be a stronger force for good—they go hand in hand.

**Daisy Cooper:** The Bond network says that it has not been consulted on this merger and the integrated review has been restarted behind closed doors. Will the Government commit to meeting Bond and other civil society organisations so that those on the frontline can inform the new Department's aid priorities?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** Baroness Sugg leads in the Department in meeting the CSOs, and regular meetings are ongoing. The integrated review is working over the summer to pull together the key issues, and development is an absolutely critical strand within that.

**Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP) [V]:** Last week I asked the Secretary of State what partner organisations and non-governmental organisations were consulted prior to the announcement of the merger of the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. She said that the statement on the merger was first made to Parliament and that there had been ongoing consultation since then. This stands in stark contradiction to what the Prime Minister said previously when he told this House that there had been "massive consultation over a long period."—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 678.]

Was the Prime Minister aware he had taken a decision without any evidence to support it, or did he mislead Parliament to create an illusion of legitimacy for this ideologically driven, disastrous merger?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** As set out in previous answers, the Prime Minister made the announcement of the new departmental framework to Parliament first, and there are ongoing discussions led by Baroness Sugg and the permanent secretary with the CSOs and the NGOs.

### Topical Questions

[904814] **Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con):** If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Anne-Marie Trevelyan):** This Government are committed to standing up for the right of every girl to 12 years of quality education, building on a strong basis of global leadership, including DFID's education support for at least 5.8 million girls between 2015 and 2019. The new FCDO will deploy our world-class development expertise alongside the UK's diplomatic skills, respected around the world, to get every girl into school.

As this is the last oral questions session for the Department for International Development, I would like to place on record my thanks, and, I know, those of the whole House, to all those who serve now and those who have served in the Department over the past 23 years. I know that their talent, passion and commitment to help to deliver world-class development programming, policy thinking and humanitarian support to the most vulnerable will be at the heart of the new FCDO and will be critical to its future.

**Mr Ellwood:** May I place on record my gratitude to the Secretary of State and her team for what she has done in this important Department? I hope that the spirit of what DFID does will continue. She is aware that in Afghanistan and Iraq it is so easy to win the war but lose the peace. Will she agree to meet me, before she loses her job title, to see whether the military can be given funds to create a stabilisation force that can operate in those difficult environments where it is too dangerous for NGOs to function?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** I would be very happy to meet my right hon. Friend to discuss that. The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund exists to do just that, and we need to think about how we maximise the use of all our UK efforts to help the most vulnerable, so I look forward to debating with him.

[904816] **Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab):** Going into this pandemic, many of the world's poorest countries were spending more on debt payments than on their own healthcare. The current suspension of payments is welcome, but will the Government go further and support the cross-party multi-faith call, co-ordinated by the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, to cancel those debts and enable those poorest countries to focus on tackling the virus and climate change?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** As the hon. Lady is aware, we put £150 million into the IMF emergency fund, and the Treasury continues to lead in the Paris Club discussions and with the G20 to ensure that the right solutions are found for the long-term sustainability that those most vulnerable countries will need.

[904815] **Jacob Young** (Redcar) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for her fantastic work as Secretary of State. What steps are her Department and the new FCDO taking to ensure that UK taxpayers receive value for money for our international aid contributions?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** Ensuring that taxpayers' money is well spent is central to DFID's work and is embedded in all our activity, and it will be at the heart of the new FCDO. Programmes are regularly appraised and monitored to ensure that they are value for money, performing effectively and delivering on manifesto commitments.

[904819] **Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: Nestlé has withdrawn Fairtrade cocoa from its Kit-Kat products, costing some of the poorest farmers £20 million a year during the global crisis due to the pandemic. Will the Minister join me and the Co-operative party in urging Nestlé to restore cocoa from Fairtrade farmers in their Kit-Kats to give the poorest farmers a break and to create a Fairtrade chocolate Kit-Kat?

**The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa (James Cleverly):** I draw the House's attention to my former role as chair of the Trade Out of Poverty all-party parliamentary group. The hon. Gentleman raises an important point about the importance of fair trade as well as free trade. Now that the United Kingdom has left the European Union and we are able to define our own trade policy, we will ensure that fairness is at the heart of all the trade that we do around the world.

[904817] **Marco Longhi** (Dudley North) (Con): Last week, China and Russia vetoed the United Nations Security Council's approving aid to Syria from Turkey. How will the United Kingdom continue to help those in need in Syria?

**James Cleverly:** The United Kingdom is disappointed about the reduction in aid corridors in Syria. We are pleased that the cross-border humanitarian access will continue through Bab al-Hawa, but we are appalled that Russia exercised its veto and restricted aid through Bab al-Salam. The UK remains committed to supporting Syrians, who are the victims of the egregious politicisation of humanitarian aid, and we recently announced £300 million to the Syrian pledging conference.

[904822] **Neale Hanvey** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP) [V]: Five hundred and sixteen—that is the number of known breaches of international law in Yemen by Saudi forces, an increase of at least 200 in recent years. Yet last week, the Government said that these were only isolated events and no pattern existed, as they resumed selling weapons that are killing Yemeni civilians. Given the DFID-FCO merger, can the Minister please explain how they reconcile that with UK stated aims to provide water, food, sanitation and peace for Yemen—and exactly how many breaches of international law are required to establish a pattern?

**James Cleverly:** The UK Government welcome Saudi Arabia's unilateral ceasefire in Yemen, and we are disappointed that the Houthis have not engaged with that ceasefire. The United Kingdom's arms control regime is one of the most robust in the world, and we will ensure that we continue to support the people of Yemen and NGOs working in Yemen, as we have done with our recent funding announcements.

[904818] **Matt Vickers** (Stockton South) (Con): Children have a basic human right to education, but there is huge concern that Palestinian children use textbooks that promote and encourage violence. I welcome the Government's work pushing for an international review of the curriculum ahead of the new academic year. Will my right hon. Friend provide an update on the progress of the interim report on the content of these textbooks, and will he confirm that the findings will be made public and acted on swiftly?

**James Cleverly:** The first call that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made when she entered her post was to the Education Minister in the Palestinian Authority to register our disquiet over the points that my hon. Friend has raised. We will continue to ensure that Palestinian children are educated with our support through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency—half of them are girls—but we will also ensure that that education does not encourage violence or prejudice against Jewish peoples.

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

### Engagements

[904934] **Mark Menzies** (Fylde) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 15 July.

**The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson):** This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

**Mark Menzies** [V]: Last week saw the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the Battle of Britain. As you are aware, Mr Speaker, BAE Systems alone employs more than 10,000 people across Lancashire, supporting the great work of our RAF, and it is taking on more than 250 apprentices in that part of the business this year. Will the Prime Minister come to visit Warton, meet those apprentices, and commit to doing all he can to secure those key jobs through support for defence exports and the Team Tempest programme?

**The Prime Minister:** I have no doubt that I will be coming to Warton in due course. Let me tell my hon. Friend that 1,800 highly skilled engineers and programmers are already involved in the project, going up to 2,500 next year, and that 800 of those are in his constituency. I look forward to his constituency's being at the epicentre of the development of the next UK-led combat air programme.

**Keir Starmer** (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Over the past few months, we have supported many of the economic measures announced by the Government, but the decision last week not to provide sector-specific support to those most at risk could end up costing thousands of jobs. One of the sectors, aviation, has already seen huge redundancies: BA has announced 12,000 redundancies, Virgin 3,000, and easyJet 1,900. If the Government's priority really is to protect jobs, why did the Chancellor not bring forward sector-specific deals that could have done precisely that?

**The Prime Minister:** No one should underestimate the scale of the challenge that this country faces. That is why the Chancellor has brought forward a range of measures, which, by the way, the right hon. and learned Gentleman supported last week. They include the job retention bonus and the kick-starter programme for young people. We are also doing a huge amount to support the aviation sector. One of the companies that he mentions, Virgin, has now come out of the Birch process after extremely difficult, but in the end productive conversations. That is the work of this Government: getting on, helping companies through it and helping our people through it. If I may say so, Mr Speaker, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has to work out whether he will support or oppose the Government's programme to get people back into work. Last week, the shadow Chancellor said here in this House of Commons that she supported our programme. This week, he says that he opposes it. Which is it?

**Keir Starmer:** This is just such rhetorical nonsense. It is perfectly proper and right for the Opposition to set out the parts of the package that we support the Government on and to highlight where there are problems. The problem with the Prime Minister's dismissal of this is that, since the Chancellor set this out last week, around 10,000 people have lost their jobs. The Prime Minister should focus on them, not the rhetoric. The Office for Budget Responsibility yesterday projected 3.5 million unemployed next year.

I want to press the Prime Minister further on the situation at BA, which is a huge employer and the national flag carrier. Alongside the 12,000 redundancies already announced, BA is trying to force through the rehiring of the remaining 30,000 workers on worse terms and conditions. That is totally unacceptable and it is a warning shot to millions of other working people. The Prime Minister sent an email to BA staff in which he said: "I have already made it clear that firms should not be using furlough to cynically keep people on their books and then remove them or change their terms and conditions." That was on 2 June. It is now six weeks on. Will the Prime Minister now personally intervene and make it clear that actions such as those at BA cannot be allowed to stand without consequences for landing slots?

**The Prime Minister:** We have been absolutely clear that we want our great companies across the country to support their workers and keep them in employment where they possibly can. I have made that point clear on the Floor of the House just in the past couple of weeks. Let us be absolutely clear: British Airways and many other companies are in severe difficulties at the moment, and we cannot, I am afraid, simply with a

magic wand ensure that every single job that was being done before the crisis is retained after the crisis. What we can do—and what we are doing—is encourage companies to keep their workers on with the job retention scheme and the job retention bonus, as well as a massive £600 billion investment programme in this country to build, build, build and create jobs, jobs, jobs. That is what we are doing.

**Keir Starmer:** The Prime Minister knows exactly what I am talking about: it is the rehiring of 30,000 people at BA on worse terms and conditions, and he should call it out.

Yesterday, the Government's expert advisory group published a report on the challenges this autumn and winter. It was asked to do so by the Government Office for Science. The report assessed the reasonable worst-case scenario for this autumn and winter, including a second covid spike and seasonal flu, and it set out strong recommended actions to mitigate the risks. The report was clear: July and August must be a period of intense preparation—i.e., now. Could the Prime Minister make it clear that he intends to implement the recommended actions in the report in full and at speed?

**The Prime Minister:** Not only are we getting on with implementing the preparations for a potential new spike, but the right hon. and learned Gentleman will know that the Government are engaged in record investments in the NHS of £34 billion. The House may not realise that, just in the last year that the Government have been in office, there are now 12,000 more nurses in the NHS and 6,000 more doctors. It was thanks to their hard work, and the hard work of the entire NHS, that we were able to prevent our health service from being overwhelmed this spring. We will take steps to ensure that it is not overwhelmed this winter either.

**Keir Starmer:** That is the whole point of this report, which sets out the reasonable worst-case scenario and tells the Government what they need to do about it, so I am surprised that the Prime Minister is not committing himself to fully implementing it. It is vital that the Government learn the lessons from the mistakes that have been made and act now to save lives for the future. One of the key recommendations in the report, commissioned by the Government Office for Science, is that testing and tracing capacity should be significantly expanded to cope with increased demands over the winter. The reality is that trace and track is not working as promised, as it stands today, and the report makes clear that it needs to be significantly expanded to cope with the risks of autumn and winter. What assurance can the Prime Minister give that the system will be fit for both purposes in the timeframe envisaged in the report—i.e., by this September?

**The Prime Minister:** Once again, the right hon. and learned Gentleman attacks the test and trace operation, which is working on an absolutely unprecedented scale: 144,000 people across the country have now agreed to self-isolate to stop the spread of the virus. He keeps saying that the test and trace operation is failing to contact enough people and failing to get enough people to self-isolate. Actually, it is doing fantastic work: 70% or 80% of contacts are found, and it is getting through to the vast majority of people who have the disease. I can certainly give the House the assurance that our test and



trace system is as good as, or better than, any other system anywhere in the world—and yes, it will play a vital part in ensuring that we do not have a second spike this winter. Instead of knocking the confidence of the country in the test and trace system, now is the time for him to return to his previous script and build it up—that is what he needs to do.

**Keir Starmer:** The problem with the Prime Minister quoting the 70% of people who are contacted and asked to self-isolate is that that has gone down. It was 90% just a few weeks ago and every week it has gone down, so I would not quote the latest figure, looking at the trend. But I have to ask, in the light of the last few questions: has the Prime Minister actually read this report that sets out the reasonable worst-case scenario and tells the Government what they need to do about it in the next six weeks? Has he read it?

**The Prime Minister:** I am of course aware of the report and we are of course taking every reasonable step to prepare this country for a second spike. I may say to the right hon. and learned Gentleman that it is up to him, really, whether to get behind what the Government are doing or not. He has previously supported our plan. He has previously come to this House and said that he supports our measures. He now says, I think, that he does not support them. I think what he needs to do is build up the confidence of the people of this country cautiously to get back to work and cautiously to restart our economy, which is what we are trying to do, instead of endlessly knocking the confidence of the people of this country: knocking their confidence in test and trace, knocking their confidence in the safety of our schools, and knocking their confidence in our transport network. Now is the time for him to decide whether he backs the Government or not.

**Keir Starmer:** It is perfectly possible to support track and trace and to point out the problems. Standing up every week saying, “It’s a stunning success” is kidding no one. That is not giving people confidence in the system. They would like a Prime Minister who stands up and says, “There are problems and this is what I am going to do about them,” not this rhetoric about “stunning success” when it is obviously not true.

This afternoon, Prime Minister, I am meeting the families of the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice group, a group of hundreds of families who have lost loved ones. They say this:

“We won’t let the deaths of our loved ones be in vain. And we won’t allow the Government to risk a second wave of deaths without learning from their mistakes.”

They will be listening to the Prime Minister’s answers today, so what would the Prime Minister like to say to them?

**The Prime Minister:** I join with, I think, every Member of the House in mourning the loss of everybody who has died in this epidemic. I can assure the right hon. and learned Gentleman, and through him the victims and their families, that we will do absolutely everything in our power to prevent a second spike in this epidemic. That is why we are taking the steps that we are. That is why we have set up, as I say, an unprecedented test and trace operation. That is why we are investing massively

in our NHS and our frontline staff, as I say, in the last year, recruiting 12,000 more nurses, as part of a programme to recruit 50,000 more, and preparing our NHS for winter. We will do absolutely everything we can to protect our country and to stop a second spike.

What the right hon. and learned Gentleman has to decide is whether he wants to back that programme or not. One day he says it is safe to go back to school. The next day he is taking the line of the unions. One day they are supporting our economic programme. The next day they are saying our stamp duty cut is an unacceptable bung. One day they are saying they accept the result of the Brexit referendum. The next day, today, they are going to tell their troops to do the exact opposite. He needs to make up his mind which brief he is going to take today. At the moment, it looks like he has got more briefs than Calvin Klein. We are getting on with delivering on our agenda for the country, getting this country through this pandemic and taking it forward.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Can I just say to the Prime Minister that we are going to work through the Chair? The audience is not that way, it is this way.

[904937] **Rob Butler** (Aylesbury) (Con): My constituency is home to many farms producing excellent British food. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the new trade deals our Government are working on will safeguard our high food standards and provide fantastic new opportunities for the hard-working farmers in my part of Buckinghamshire?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, I can indeed give my hon. Friend that assurance. We will not only protect high food standards in this country and safeguard animal welfare, but open up new opportunities for farmers in Buckinghamshire and across the UK.

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Tomorrow, this Tory Government will publish legislation for their biggest power grab since the Scottish people voted overwhelmingly for the Scottish Parliament in 1997. Westminster’s plan to impose an unelected, unaccountable body to rule on decisions made by the Scottish Parliament will not be accepted. The decisions of the Scottish Parliament must and will be decided by the Scottish people. We also reject any attempts to impose lower standards from one part of the United Kingdom on Scotland. Knowing that this Tory Government are prepared to sell out the food and agriculture industry to his pal, Donald Trump, will the Prime Minister confirm that his Tory Government are once again ignoring the wishes of the Scottish people and launching their hostile agenda against devolution?

**The Prime Minister:** On the contrary, what we are doing is possibly the biggest single act of devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in modern memory. The right hon. Gentleman should be celebrating the 70 or more powers that are going to be transferred to the elected people in Scotland. What he wants, by contrast, is trade barriers between England and Scotland, and nobody being able to use sterling in Stirling. He talks about unelected and unaccountable people, but what he wants to do is hand the powers that we would give back to Scotland from this Parliament to Brussels, which is neither elected nor accountable.

**Ian Blackford:** Of course, the document that we will see tomorrow is going to talk about the benefits of the single market. It is a pity that the Prime Minister does not understand the economic value of the European single market and customs union.

This Prime Minister often states the need to respect referendum results. He should respect the decision taken by the Scottish people in 1997. We know that this Government are undertaking a full-scale assault on devolution: a Brexit settlement that Scotland rejected is being imposed on Scotland, an immigration system that Scotland rejected is being imposed on Scotland, and a decade of Tory government that Scotland rejected has been imposed on Scotland. It is no wonder that the First Minister's approval rating is three times that of the Prime Minister: effective leadership and respecting the will of the people, contrasted with the bumbling shambles coming from Westminster. Scotland has the right to have our decisions made by those we elect, not by bureaucrats appointed by Westminster. Will the Prime Minister guarantee that his plans will not be imposed on Scotland, and that we in Scotland will have the chance to choose for ourselves?

**The Prime Minister:** First, I must repeat my point. It is extraordinary for the right hon. Gentleman to attack unelected bureaucrats for any role they may have in Scotland when his proposal is to hand back the powers that this place is going to transfer to Scotland back to Brussels, where they are neither elected nor accountable to the people of Scotland. So I really do not know what he means. As for his point about respecting referendum results, the House will recall that there was a referendum on the issue of Scottish independence and breaking up the Union in 2014. They said at the time that it was going to be a once-in-a-generation event. I think they should keep their promises to the people of this country and to the people of Scotland.

[904939] **Sarah Atherton** (Wrexham) (Con): My constituent, Eva Slapa, is a beautiful and brave nine-year-old girl with an inoperable brain tumour. Wrexham has rallied round with the Unbeatable Eva campaign, but with the only suitable treatment option being offered abroad, the family are struggling to make travel arrangements. Will the Prime Minister offer reassurance that he will work with the family to look at ways in which Eva can access treatment?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question. Our thoughts are very much with Eva and her family, and we will of course look at everything we can do to support her and her travel arrangements.

**Sir Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Under this Prime Minister, we have suffered one of the worst death rates in the world and Europe's worst death rate for health and care workers. Previously, he has refused my demand for an immediate independent inquiry, saying that it is too soon, even though, back in 2003, he voted for an independent inquiry into the Iraq war just months after that conflict had started. If he still rejects an immediate inquiry, will he instead commit himself in principle to a future public inquiry: yes or no?

**The Prime Minister:** As I have told the House several times, I do not believe that now, in the middle of combating the pandemic as we are, is the right moment

to devote huge amounts of official time to an inquiry, but of course we will seek to learn the lessons of the pandemic in the future, and certainly we will have an independent inquiry into what happened.

[904940] **Darren Henry** (Broxtowe) (Con): After such a difficult few months for everyone, people with mental health conditions are especially suffering from increased anxiety, the effects of isolation, months without treatment and, most importantly, a lack of early intervention. Will the Prime Minister outline what steps the Government will take to make sure that people with mental health conditions are not left alone or behind?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for campaigning on this issue, which is, of course, incredibly important, and has been particularly so during lockdown. Overall, we have massively increased our funding for mental health care to £12.5 billion, but we are also, as he knows, now publishing our national strategy for disabled people, which will cover all types of disability, including physical and mental health.

[904935] **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): On Monday, in announcing new immigration rules that will prevent people coming to work in social care, Ministers said that care workers should be paid more. That is right—they should. The chair of the Government's Migration Advisory Committee said that they should receive around 50% more than current rates. The Government are the primary funder of social care, so will the Prime Minister commit to providing the additional money to pay those higher rates?

**The Prime Minister:** I can tell the House that we have already taken steps to support local authorities—through another £3.2 billion to support them, a £600 million contribution to fight infection—and we are incredibly proud of what our social care workers do. What this Government have done, in sharp contrast to the previous Government, is not only introduce a national living wage, but increase it by the biggest ever amount.

[904942] **Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): On Friday, the last surviving battle of Britain air crew member, Group Captain John Hemingway, turns 101 in the week that marks the 80th anniversary of the start of that pivotal campaign. In common with that golden generation, he will not seek any recognition for himself, but we ought to shine a spotlight on the sacrifice of those who defended freedom, and particularly the 1,500 from all Commands who fell. Will the Prime Minister give some thought to how we might recognise Group Captain John Hemingway not for himself, but as the final representative of the few?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I will indeed think about what we can do. As he knows, these are matters for the honours committees, which are independent of Government, and I urge him strongly to make his representations to them.

[904936] **Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP) [V]: Last month, the Chancellor received a letter from all Tayside councils, including my proud city of Dundee, requesting urgent action to finally sign off the Tay cities deal after more than 18 months of waiting. Six thousand jobs

hang in the balance while this constant delay continues, and the situation has been described, quite rightly, as “ridiculous” by the chief executive of the region’s chamber of commerce. Two previous Prime Ministers have failed to deliver when asked, so will this Prime Minister personally guarantee that he will sign off this vital city deal without delay?

**The Prime Minister:** I know that we have done a number of growth deals in Scotland recently and that we intend to do more. The best I think I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that I will write to him with an answer about the Tay cities deal.

[904943] **Craig Mackinlay** (South Thanet) (Con): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

There is a sense of great celebration in Thanet and east Kent with the positive development consent order for Manston airport, allowing that asset to fly once more, but we have one part of the jigsaw puzzle to solve—Thanet Parkway station. It was deemed desirable before the DCO; it now has to be deemed essential. Unfortunately, owing to covid pressures, Kent County Council feels unable to raise the £17 million through a Public Works Loan Board loan to support the final part of the jigsaw. Can my right hon. Friend use the influence of his great office to encourage the Chancellor and Ministers to find that £17 million to complete the regeneration of Thanet and east Kent?

**The Prime Minister:** I have good news for my hon. Friend, because the Department for Transport has received a bid for funding Thanet Park railway station. It is going to be assessed in the third round of the new stations fund, and I hope he will hear good news in the near future.

[904938] **Darren Jones** (Bristol North West) (Lab): On 23 June, and again on 24 June, the Prime Minister said to the House in respect of financial support for businesses and workers during local lockdowns that “nobody should be penalised for doing the right thing.”—[*Official Report*, 23 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 1178; *Official Report*, 24 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 1307.]

Last week, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy was unable to give any details to my Committee at all about this vital future local support. Can the Prime Minister today be crystal clear for the towns and cities preparing for local lockdowns about whether he will be penalising businesses and workers for doing the right thing, or not?

**The Prime Minister:** In addition to the £160 billion of support that the Government have given to people and firms across the country, we have supported areas and cities in lockdown with considerable grants. There was £20 million for Leicester, business rates relief of £44 million, and £68 million in spending on business grants. The best thing possible is for all areas to work hard, as Blackburn with Darwen has done, for instance, to get the virus down and to make sure they are able to open up again.

[904947] **Jack Lopresti** (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): In my constituency of Filton and Bradley Stoke, well over 20,000 people are directly employed in the aerospace and defence sectors, and 17,500 people are employed in

the supply chain throughout the south-west region. Those jobs are not only vital to the individuals and families supported by them, but crucial to the economy of our region and our country at large, our future export prospects, connectivity, and our sovereign defence manufacturing capability with programmes such as Tempest, the next generation of fighter aircraft. When will the Prime Minister announce a wide-ranging support package for the aerospace industry, which must include a scrappage scheme for old and highly polluting aircraft? When—

**Mr Speaker:** Prime Minister. We have got to move on.

**The Prime Minister:** I will examine the idea of a scrappage scheme for old and highly polluting aircraft, but I can tell my hon. Friend that long before then, we are putting £3.9 billion into the Aerospace Technology Institute. As I am sure he knows, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has set up, with the Department for Transport, a joint taskforce to create “Jet Zero”, a zero-emissions passenger plane in which this country will lead the world.

[904941] **Naz Shah** (Bradford West) (Lab) [V]: Last week, the Chancellor said that he could not save every job or business. Councils across England are facing a £10 billion black hole, which could see many of them issue section 114 notices, effectively declaring bankruptcy. Many councils are already beginning to make severe lay-offs. Will the Chancellor save local councils? Does the Prime Minister feel that the support that his Government have already provided is enough for our most vulnerable communities, and will not lead to council cuts and another era of austerity?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, indeed. In Bradford alone, we have allocated £30 million to help deal with the pressures of the virus. As I said to the House just now, I think we have now put in £4.2 billion in support for local councils across the country. I pay tribute to the work of local councils and their services for helping us to get through this pandemic, and we will continue to support them.

**Katherine Fletcher** (South Ribble) (Con): Out and about talking to the good people of South Ribble, I find that they are worried about the economic effects of covid, although they do also say, “Thank God that other lot didn’t get in, because I can’t imagine how much trouble we’d be in right now.” Can the Prime Minister confirm that while there might be tough days ahead, this Conservative Government are throwing the kitchen sink at fixing it?

**Mr Speaker:** Come on, Mr Plumber.

**The Prime Minister:** It is not only the kitchen sink, but every part of the kitchen. We are going to build, build, build our way forward. We are going to be supporting the building of 300,000 new homes a year. We are going to do everything we can to ensure that we get jobs, jobs, jobs throughout this country. Whether by installing kitchen sinks or any other part of the house, we will take this country forward.



[904944] **Tracy Brabin** (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): I refer the Prime Minister to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah). Owing to a covid outbreak in Kirklees, we are now an area needing enhanced support. The council is being brilliant. It is testing workforces and closing operations, but there is a cost to that, which is not only to the business, but also to the worker put on statutory sick pay. May I ask the Prime Minister to help us in the council and in communities such as Batley and Spen? Can we have daily postcode data? Will the Prime Minister commit to a package of support so that businesses can close and individuals can do the right thing to benefit all of us?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, of course we are committing to sharing as much data as we have with councils so that they can get on at a local level, as they have been, with dealing with the pandemic. Actually, some of them have been doing an absolutely outstanding job—Kirklees, in particular. We will continue to support councils up and down the land as they engage in local action to make sure that the whole country can start to get back to work.

**Mrs Heather Wheeler** (South Derbyshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to be back, Mr Speaker.

Toyota Motor Manufacturing, which is based in my constituency of South Derbyshire, is the leading producer of low emission hybrid cars in the UK. Its aim, like the Government's, is to achieve zero emissions from its vehicles. Does my right hon. Friend agree with me about the importance of recognising and promoting the role that hybrids can play as we move from the vehicles that we have today to zero emission transport?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, indeed. Hybrids and plug-in cars can certainly make a huge difference and are an important part of our transition to zero emission vehicles, in which this country—certainly in battery technology—leads the world.

**Mr Speaker:** I welcome the new SNP deputy leader, Kirsten Oswald.

[904945] **Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

My constituent Daniel Caplan, who has just turned 17, has been diagnosed with a diffuse midline glioma—a brain stem tumour. That is a terminal diagnosis and an absolutely crushing one. There have been no new treatments for conditions like Daniel's for 40 years, so no progress in treating childhood brain stem tumours. Will the Prime Minister join me in supporting Daniel's family in their call for a renewed focus on research and for a light to be shone on awareness of childhood brain stem cancers, so that other families in future do not have to face the heartbreak that Daniel and his family are facing today?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, indeed. I know that everybody will sympathise very much with Daniel Caplan and his family. I will do what I can to ensure that the hon. Lady is able to make representations to the Department of Health about ensuring that childhood brain stem cancers are properly understood and properly tackled by this country.

**Sir Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): Some people are anxious to return to work and some people find that they are actually as happy and productive working at home as they would be at the office. But does the Prime Minister agree with me that the worst reason for staying at home is to follow blanket Government advice that takes no account of safety? Will he commit himself to revising that Government advice urgently?

**The Prime Minister:** As I am sure my hon. Friend will see from studying the Government advice, we say very clearly that it is important that business should be carried on and that employers should decide, in consultation with their workers, whether it is safe for those workers to come into work or whether they should continue working from home. I happen to think that employers in this country have made huge strides in making work places safe, and that is the message that we should all be conveying.

[904946] **Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): I am sure that the Prime Minister will agree that men who mock women have no place in our society. Yet according to Baroness Cumberlege's report last week on the hormone pregnancy test Primodos, sodium valproate and vaginal mesh, that is exactly what happened to thousands of women at the hands of some male medical experts. She said that many women were gaslighted and not believed.

Will the Prime Minister commit to implementing all the recommendations in the baroness's report? Will he meet me, Primodos campaigner Marie Lyon and my constituent Wilma Ord, who suffered as a result of Primodos, to ensure that women are heard and not denied essential care, and that those affected get the recompense that they are rightfully due?

**The Prime Minister:** I am sure that I speak for many Members in this House when I say that I have had direct representations as a constituency MP from women who have suffered from exactly the conditions identified by Baroness Cumberlege and her committee. I also assure the hon. Lady that the Government take that issue with extreme seriousness. I have absolutely no hesitation in acceding to her request for a meeting, either with myself or with the Department of Health, to make sure that she feels that we are addressing the issues in the way she would want.

**John Stevenson** (Carlisle) (Con): The Government want green energy. The Government want security of energy supply. The Government want to boost economic development in the regions. The Government want to encourage apprenticeships and youth employment. The Government want to increase innovation investment and to have a dynamic supply chain. That is all on offer in Cumbria. Will the Prime Minister support, with Government financial backing, the building of nuclear power generation facilities in Cumbria?

**The Prime Minister:** We believe that nuclear power is a significant potential contributor to our net zero ambitions, and I look forward to working with my hon. Friend to ensure that Cumbria continues its long, historic tradition as a pioneer of new nuclear technology.

[904948] **Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It is exactly a week since 18-year-old Donnell Rhule was murdered with a knife on the Kingswood estate in my constituency, leaving his family devastated and a close-knit community reeling. It is exactly two years



since the Youth Violence Commission published its interim report, setting out irrefutable evidence for the introduction of a cross-Government approach to tackling serious violence, yet the scourge of knife crime across the country continues. The Youth Violence Commission will publish its final report tomorrow. Will the Prime Minister commit to accepting its recommendations and act immediately to introduce a cross-Government public health approach to tackling serious violence and stop any more families suffering such terrible loss?

**The Prime Minister:** I know that everybody's sympathies will be with the family of the victim in the hon. Lady's constituency, as they are with the families of all victims of knife crime. I think that there are two things we have to do. First, I entirely agree with her that we need a cross-departmental medical approach focused on the needs of the families with the kids who particularly get involved in knife crime, and we need to put our arms around them and stop them being diverted into the gangs that are so often the root cause of the problem.

But we also need a tough policing solution. I have been concerned for the last few years that in London in particular, part of which the hon. Lady represents, we

have not seen the approach that we saw under the previous Mayor, for instance, when there was a significant reduction in knife crime and a significant reduction in murder by dint of having proportionate policing that included the use of stop-and-search to stop young kids carrying knives. We need to have zero tolerance of kids going out on the street armed with a bladed weapon. That is absolutely vital. *[Interruption.]* An Opposition Member says, "Shocking." In my experience, the people who are most supportive of taking the knives off kids on the streets of our city are the mothers of those kids who are most at risk of being killed. They support stop-and-search, and I hope the hon. Lady does, too.

**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 suspend the House for three minutes.

12.38 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

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

## Tree-lined Streets

*Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)*

12.41 pm

**Chris Clarkson** (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require building developers to ensure that the streets of major new developments are lined with trees; and for connected purposes.

In my short time in this place, I have spoken repeatedly about my admiration for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his new deal. However, in introducing my ten-minute rule Bill, I must first turn to the architect of the original new deal, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who remarked:

“Forests are the ‘lungs’ of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people.”

Put simply, trees are good for us, and the presence of trees and other greenery in urban environments has a discernible effect on the physical and mental wellbeing of those who live there. The presence of trees has a particularly important role to play in that philosophy, as they are inextricably linked to cleaner air, increased physical exercise and enhanced health and wellbeing. Trees also play a central role in nature’s recovery and in addressing climate change. This Bill is important, as it would ensure that new developments fully recognise those benefits, and I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Woodland Trust for its tireless work in highlighting the importance of trees in our national and environmental life.

Street trees seem particularly important in supporting this work. Indeed, a recent study of neighbourhood green space and health in large urban areas was able to map the location of 530,000 trees and compare them with the health records of 30,000 residents, concluding that people who live in areas with a higher street tree density report better health perception and fewer cardiometabolic conditions than their peers living in areas with lower density.

The planting of trees is also crucial in our fight against climate change, as trees store carbon and can help to make our towns and cities more resilient. The Bill could therefore make a small contribution to the Government’s aim of eradicating the UK’s net carbon contribution by 2050.

In my seat, we widely welcomed the Government’s £10 million urban tree challenge fund, which was introduced in May 2019 and which will see 130,000 trees planted across towns and cities in England by 2021, and the Bill could also support that ambition. Additionally, it would contribute to the Government’s ambitious target of planting 30,000 hectares of trees across the entire United Kingdom by 2025.

In recent years, we have certainly seen a reluctance among developers and local authorities to promote trees in streets. Frequently, issues such as expense, hassle and liability are levelled as excuses not to rise to this environmental and public health challenge. A Bill placing a requirement on major new developments to ensure that streets were lined with trees would ensure that important environmental health and aesthetic considerations were at the heart of new developments across our country.

The people of Heywood and Middleton, like every great citizen of the four nations of our United Kingdom, love nature and frequently demonstrate their desire to protect it—whether the precious green belt around Bamford, Crimble Mill or Slattocks, or smaller green spaces in the towns of Heywood and Middleton—and their enduring objection to any new developments.

Over 100 years ago, the aims of the Planning Act 1909 were to secure

“the home healthy, the house beautiful, the town pleasant, the city dignified, and the suburb salubrious.”—[*Official Report*, 12 May 1908; Vol. 188, c. 949.]

That seems more relevant now than ever. In our desire to build beautiful we must strive to create an atmosphere that promotes community health and cohesion, and I believe that this Bill will go some way to supporting those values.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Chris Clarkson, Michael Fabricant, Philip Dunne, David Linden, Mrs Maria Miller, Jim Shannon, Paul Holmes, Darren Jones, Sara Britcliffe and Christian Wakeford do present the Bill.

Chris Clarkson accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 October, and to be printed (Bill 164).

## Opposition Day

[10TH ALLOTTED DAY]

### Covid-19: Future UK-EU Relationship

12.46 pm

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House welcomes the European Union's openness to extend the transition period for negotiations; calls on the Government to immediately accept this offer and notes the Scottish Government's publication of 3rd June entitled, "COVID-19: The Case for Extending the Brexit Transition Period", warning of the damage a no deal would cause to the economy in addition to the cost of the covid-19 health crisis.

The Prime Minister, like all of us here, could not have foreseen the covid-19 pandemic when his Government initiated the process of leaving the European Union, but 2020 has become a year like no other, and this Government must adapt and do what is right by their citizens. Our priority must be dealing with this health emergency and the consequent economic challenge; it is definitively not business as normal. That is why my Government in Edinburgh, under the stewardship of Nicola Sturgeon, has prioritised dealing with the crisis above all else. We are demanding that the UK Government do the same—[*Interruption.*] Mr Speaker, it has started already. This is a serious subject, and what we get is laughing and guffawing from the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie). He really should show some respect and grow up.

The SNP is calling on the Government immediately to extend the Brexit transition period while we navigate the unprecedented health and economic crisis we currently face. The European Union has expressed its ongoing openness to extending the transition period for negotiations, and the UK Government now need to accept that offer. The Government will claim that this opportunity ended at the end of June, but we are dealing with realpolitik here. We know that while we are still in the transition period this House can legislate for an extension and the European Union would recognise the mutual benefit. It simply requires political will and leadership.

The Scottish Government have set out their position in "COVID-19: The Case for Extending the Brexit Transition Period", which sets out why it is vital, if we are to ensure the most rapid recovery possible from the covid-19 crisis, that the UK must immediately seek an extension to the Brexit transition period for two years. We are in unprecedented times: a health pandemic, an economic crisis, and the real threat of a second wave of covid-19 later this year. Now is the moment for the UK Government to recognise reality and to reconsider their position.

The United Kingdom is facing an unprecedented economic crisis. The Office for Budget Responsibility and the Bank of England have published various scenarios in which GDP falls by as much as 13% to 14% this year, which would be the largest decline in economic output in 300 years. By comparison, the most recent largest single-year fall in GDP was 4.2% on the back of the financial crisis in 2009. This overshadows anything that any of us will ever face.

At least 1 million jobs have already gone, and many more will go when the Government end the furlough scheme, which is needed as a bridge to secure employment until recovery takes hold. Indeed, we know from the Office for Budget Responsibility that close to 2 million of those on the furlough scheme could face unemployment. Just dwell on that: the threat of unemployment in the UK could perhaps increase to as many as 4 million people. Just dwell on the human misery—the families struggling to make ends meet and pay their bills; a sharp rise in poverty, and the human cost of that for families and their children. That is why a stimulus package is required to build confidence and get folk back to work.

**Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is outlining the stark realities that we currently face across the whole United Kingdom, and indeed the world. Because of that, is he grateful that Scotland is part of the United Kingdom, and that the broad shoulders of this Union are supporting Scotland, with more than £10 billion going from the UK Government to Scotland just during the covid pandemic?

**Ian Blackford**: I must say that I am disappointed in the hon. Gentleman, as I would expect more of him than that. I say to Conservative Members that we must ensure that we have the tools at our disposal in the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government. I spoke about the importance of the furlough scheme, and we welcomed that. We will welcome Government measures that help to deal effectively with the challenge we face. There is a harsh reality, however, for our industries in Scotland, such as the tourism industry, which is important in my constituency and that of the hon. Gentleman, as well as many others.

Effectively, we are facing three winters, and there is a truncated summer season. Our tourist industry barely exists over the winter months, and the last thing we need is to find that the UK Government are kicking the legs away from our industry by ending the furlough scheme early. The challenge for every Conservative Member of Parliament from Scotland is to ensure that if the UK Government do not provide the necessary support for our businesses and our people, those powers have to reside in the Scottish Parliament. Will Scottish Tory MPs stand with us and ensure that the Scottish Parliament has the powers it needs to do its job and protect the people of Scotland? I think we know the answer.

The Chancellor said that the UK is suffering because of covid-19, in common with many other economies around the world. However, the UK economy is likely to suffer worse damage from this crisis than any other country in the developed world. According to the OECD, a slump in the UK's national income of 11.5% during 2020 will outstrip falls in France, Italy, Spain, Germany and the US. With the continued risk of a second wave hitting the economy and our communities in winter, the idea of the UK leaving the European Union at the same time is economic madness.

The outlook is bleak—there is no other way to look at it—and things are about to get much worse, unless the Government end their refusal to extend the Brexit transition period. Refusing to do so is the ultimate act of self-harm. With businesses fighting for survival, a bad deal or no deal will burden businesses with additional costs and red tape. Yesterday, the *Financial Times* told us that UK Government officials had indicated that a

[*Ian Blackford*]

potential additional 215 million customer declarations will be required, at a cost of up to £7 billion. Businesses are fighting for survival, and the UK Government want to send them a bill for £7 billion. I wonder if the Prime Minister will put that on the side of a bus. That is not taking back control; that is self-induced madness.

We can stop this now. We can recognise that this is a price that we cannot pay in the middle of a health and an economic crisis. All it requires is political will. All it requires is leadership.

**Craig Mackinlay** (South Thanet) (Con): Is it not the case that the injudicious dropping of a crisp packet would be enough for the Scottish National party to be asking for the extension of the implementation period or the scrapping of the whole project altogether? Might I remind the SNP—I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman has the figures—that more people voted for Brexit in Scotland than have ever voted for the SNP?

**Ian Blackford**: Really? Is that the best that Thanet can send to the House of Commons? Heaven help them. I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that we were told that if we stayed in the United Kingdom in 2014, Scotland would be respected and that we were to lead the UK. The question for him and for his Government is: why did they not respect the fact that Scotland voted to stay in the EU, with 62% of those living in Scotland voting to do so? At every opportunity in the past few years, the Conservatives, as they have been in every year since 1955, have been thoroughly rejected by the people of Scotland, and it is no wonder. We stood on a platform in the election in December about Scotland's right to choose. The Tories said, "Say no to devolution. Say no to independence." How did that go down? They lost more than half their seats and we increased our representation from 35 to 48. I think he has had his answer.

**Douglas Ross**: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Ian Blackford**: You'll get your opportunity later.

**Douglas Ross**: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker**: I hope it is a point of order.

**Douglas Ross**: It is a point of order, Mr Speaker, because the right hon. Gentleman said that Scottish Conservatives stood on a manifesto commitment against devolution. This Government have given more powers than ever to the Scottish Parliament, and we have never stood on a manifesto against devolution—

**Mr Speaker**: We do not both need to stand at the same time—it is easier if you sit down. As a person who is very good with red cards, you should be aware of what we need to do to keep good order. That is a point of clarification and I am sure you will want to save some of that for when you speak later.

**Ian Blackford**: Mr Speaker, to use football parlance, I think the hon. Gentleman is offside and the Tory party regularly gets a red card from the people of Scotland. The Tories have shown themselves hostile to devolution since time immemorial; a leopard does not change its spots.

Why are this Government intent on this hammer blow hitting the UK economy when we are already in dire straits? We need to create the circumstances for recovery, not make a bad situation even worse. Instead, this UK Government want to spend hundreds of millions of pounds on border infrastructure to prepare for Brexit. Any rational person—I know that not many of those exist on the Tory Benches—would point out the lunacy of such tomfoolery, but of course this is driven by the ideology of those who want to "take back control" whatever the cost, whatever the impact on jobs, whatever the impact on communities, and conveniently blame it on covid-19, rather than admit the reality that it has been self-induced as a result of dogma. This is economic self-harm brought on by the UK Government, cheered on by Dominic Cummings as he holds the reins of power in Downing Street—well, not in our name.

We know that the UK is not even ready for leaving the EU at the end of December. The Government's own International Trade Secretary has warned of possible legal challenges from the World Trade Organisation; increased smuggling from the EU if not all UK ports are ready to carry out checks; concerns about the protocol if EU tariffs are applied to all goods heading for Northern Ireland by default; and the undermining of the UK's international trade policy. The NAO said that the Tory Government's 2019 £100 million Get Ready for Brexit campaign was ineffective and made no clear difference—another monumental waste of scarce resources. Can the Minister, when she rises to respond, tell us how much money will be wasted on the new Let's Get Going campaign?

Then there is the issue of lost EU funding—something that has been so critical for Scotland for so many decades. "Not to worry", we are told, "The UK will step in with a shared prosperity fund". Where is it? Where is the shared prosperity fund? There has been no detailed information from the UK Government on how the fund will operate. Can the Minister update us?

The European Commission's Brexit preparedness publication also makes for grim reading. Certificates of authorisations will no longer be valid for placing products in EU markets. Products certified by UK-based bodies will no longer automatically be allowed into the EU. All service firms will lose access to the single market unless equivalence arrangements are in place to ensure that standards are the same in the UK and the EU. The visa exemption for UK nationals does not provide for the right to work in the EU and is subject to the reciprocity mechanism applying to third countries. It could be suspended if EU citizens ceased to be given visa-free access to the United Kingdom for short stays. The right to work and travel freely in the EU—rights we have enjoyed for more than 47 years—ripped up, opportunities cut off, hopes shattered, dreams crushed, and for what?

Experts and industry figures have been clear: businesses will not be ready for the end of the transition period at the end of this year. More than 100 UK company chiefs, entrepreneurs and business groups have written to the Prime Minister saying that businesses simply do not have the time or capacity to prepare for big changes in trading rules by the end of the year, especially given that we are already grappling with the upheaval caused by coronavirus. They can see that, we can see that; the only people who cannot are those on the Government Front Bench and their cheerleaders on the Back Benches.



**Gareth Johnson** (Dartford) (Con): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the CBI—hardly the biggest fan of Brexit—says that if we extend the implementation period it will create uncertainty for business and completely advises against it? What does he know that the CBI doesn't?

**Ian Blackford**: I could read out statistics from all sorts of business organisations that are, quite frankly, scared stiff about what ending the transition will mean.

A survey by the Institute of Directors tells us that three out of four business leaders believe that their organisation is not ready for the end of the transition period and that one in seven says that dealing with the pandemic has taken up bandwidth that would have been devoted to preparing for Brexit. The Institute for Government says that in normal circumstances meeting “the 31 December deadline would have been heroic: doing so in the midst of an international health crisis, with the energies of governments across Europe focused on their handling of the outbreak, seems out of reach.”

**Jimmy Buchan**, chief executive of the Scottish Seafood Association, said:

“We are within six months of Brexit and we still do not know what the future holds for us.”

That is the uncertainty that businesses are facing. For many businesses that manage to survive the coronavirus crisis, this second, Brexit shock would hit them at their weakest and could be the final straw that puts them out of business—more jobs lost, more households in desperate situations, and all because of the intransigence of the Tory Government.

It does not have to be like this. We on the SNP Benches welcome the EU's openness to extending the transition period for negotiations. Six political parties from every nation of the United Kingdom wrote to Michel Barnier calling for the UK and the EU to agree a two-year extension. In a letter to me, representing the SNP, along with the Lib Dems, Plaid Cymru, the Social Democratic and Labour party, the Green party and the Alliance party, the EU's chief negotiator confirmed:

“an extension of up to one or two years can be agreed jointly by the two parties. The European Union has always said that we remain open on this matter.”

Mr Barnier said that any extension decision should have been taken by the Joint Committee “before 1 July”. We have been given an olive branch—a get-out-of-jail-free card—but the Prime Minister has failed to grasp it. The UK Government have set themselves to crash out of the EU with a devastating bad deal or a catastrophic no-deal.

All the while, EU leaders have highlighted the lack of progress in negotiations. Angela Merkel recently said:

“To put it mildly, progress in the negotiations has been very limited. I will continue to press for a good solution. But we in the EU and also in Germany must and should prepare for the event that an agreement is not reached after all.”

That should deeply worry all of us.

There is still time to change course. The Institute for Government has made it clear that there are mechanisms for an extension. It cites four legal options for extending the transition period: amend the end date of the transition period in the withdrawal agreement; create a new transition period to begin on 1 January 2021, which would mean striking a new agreement alongside future relationship negotiations; include an implementation phase as part of the future relationship treaty; or create an implementation phase to prepare for a potential no-deal exit.

The Scottish Government have set out the evidence to back up the arguments for an extension to the transition. Their analysis has revealed that ending the transition period in 2020 could remove £3 billion from the Scottish economy in just two years—£3 billion in just two years. Are our colleagues from Scottish Tory constituencies prepared to sit back and see that self-harm take place against their constituents, or for once, are they going to stand up for us, stand up with us and stand up for Scotland?

The Scottish Government's analysis revealed that ending the transition period will be calamitous—a £3 billion hit to Scotland made in Westminster and delivered by this Prime Minister and his Government. A no-deal Brexit scenario has greater economic implications and could see the economy 8.5% smaller by 2030 compared with the scenario of continued EU membership. That is the price that Scotland will have to pay if we stay in the Union of the United Kingdom. Those are eye-watering numbers, but behind the statistics is the human cost: unemployment, hardship, poverty—Scotland paying the price for Tory dogma.

I take no pleasure in saying that UK relations with the Scottish Government are worse than ever under this Prime Minister's leadership. We have been increasingly concerned at the lack of any meaningful consultation with the Scottish Government and other devolved nations on the Brexit talks and at the growing threat of a Tory power grab in devolved areas, including agriculture and food standards—all for a Brexit fantasy that Scotland never gave its consent to and that is now being used as a power grab from the Scottish Parliament, and for a future that we never voted for.

It is worth reminding folk in Scotland of the promises that were made in 2014 during the independence campaign. If we stayed in the UK, we would be staying in Europe. Well, we stayed in the UK, and we have been taken out against our will. All the way through this process, the Scottish Government have sought to achieve a compromise to best protect jobs. *[Interruption.]* We talk about compromise, and the Tory MPs laugh at Scotland. That is the way that Scotland is treated by the Tories in this House. They ought to be ashamed of themselves. Carry on, because people in Scotland will be listening.

We have said that staying in the single market and the customs union is the least worst option for jobs and our communities. At every turn, we have been shut out, shouted down and disregarded. It is little wonder that so many who voted to stay in the UK in 2014 now recognise the UK they voted to remain in no longer exists. It is little wonder that poll after poll shows a majority for independence. So many see our future as an independent country in Europe—an outward-looking Scotland, working constructively with others—and see this as a choice of a progressive future with independence, or one of staying with an increasingly inward-looking UK. *[Interruption.]* The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) keeps chuntering away from a sedentary position. If he wants to say something, I will allow him to get in. *[Interruption.]* Well, perhaps he would not continue to shout and chunter; it is most disrespectful to everybody, including his own constituents.

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): My right hon. Friend speaks about the polling, which shows that we are only going in one direction as support for independence

[David Linden]

has gone up. Does he agree with my analysis that the UK Government are clearly carrying out polling on a regular basis—we know that the Cabinet Office is carrying out that polling—and does he, like me, want to see the UK Government publish the polling analysis that is being paid for by taxpayers, which will show that support for Scottish independence is on the rise?

**Ian Blackford:** Indeed, let us have transparency. Let us have some openness. The UK Government should indeed publish that information.

Where does power lie today in the United Kingdom? The Prime Minister has invested political and Executive oversight in an unelected adviser, Dominic Cummings. We know that a Green Paper is to be published tomorrow, ahead of a joint ministerial meeting with the devolved Governments, that is nothing more than a blatant power grab under the guise of the establishment of a UK internal market. When this Tory Government said they wanted to take back control, they did not mean just from Brussels; they meant from Edinburgh, they meant from Cardiff and they meant from Belfast. This Tory Government's contempt for devolution has always been known. They fought against devolution in 1997, and they lost.

Of course, the covid crisis has seen the Scottish Government give effective leadership to the people who live in Scotland. The success of that leadership is reflected in the high standing of our First Minister not just with the public in Scotland, but elsewhere—[*Interruption.*] Again, I hear the laughing and the chuntering. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister and his team have dithered and given out mixed messages. Rather than recognise and applaud the success of the Scottish Government, the Tories want to attack them. The Tories cannot come to terms with our Scottish Government providing effective leadership, so they want to constrain our Parliament—that is the reality—and not just our Parliament, but the Parliaments in Wales and in Northern Ireland.

I am grateful that the Welsh First Minister is standing shoulder to shoulder with us, and I am asking our colleagues in the Labour party—

**Hon. Members:** Where are they?

**Ian Blackford:** Where are they, indeed. Members should not worry, because the SNP will provide an effective opposition.

I am respectfully asking my friends in the Labour party who are present to stand with us. We went through the Lobby together to establish devolution, and devolution is now under attack from this Tory Government. There is a question to be asked of the Labour party: will they stand with us? [*Interruption.*] It would be helpful if they would turn up, but I hope that when it comes to votes—and there is going to be a fight over the coming months—we will stand shoulder to shoulder against this attack on devolution in Scotland, in Wales and in Northern Ireland.

What is now taking place is nothing more than an undignified attempt to neuter the Scottish Parliament. Let me put the Tories on notice that we will stand up for the sovereign rights of our Parliament enshrined by the referendum result and by the establishment of our

Parliament. Let me remind the Tories: our Parliament was established by overwhelming numbers in 1997. It belongs to the people of Scotland.

**The Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury (David Rutley):** Not the SNP!

**Ian Blackford:** “Not the SNP!” Do I really have to take that? I know the hon. Member represents an English seat and perhaps he does not pay much attention, but if he looks at every one of the results of elections to the Scottish Parliament since 2007 and to Westminster since 2015, as well as the European results, he will see that the people of Scotland have put their trust in the SNP to defend them from the kind of attacks that we have from the Tory Benches. [*Interruption.*] I hear, “What about a referendum?” so let me say this. We went to the people of Scotland last December and we stood on the principle of Scotland's right to choose. We got 45% of the vote. There is a bigger gap between us and the Tories than there is between the Tories and Labour in the United Kingdom. We won that election, by any definition. The people of Scotland elected us in 48 of the 59 constituencies. There are six Tories from Scotland. We won that election. I accept that the Conservatives won the election in the UK, but that means that it is incumbent on the Conservatives to recognise that the SNP won in Scotland.

**David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con):** No, it's not.

**Ian Blackford:** “No, it's not”—well, there we are: democracy Tory-style. The Tories think that they can simply ignore the people of Scotland. I say to them: carry on, because people are saying now that support for the SNP and support for independence is rising, and you will not stop the people of Scotland determining our own future. It is ours to choose and we will not be stopped by any Tory Government.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Ian Blackford:** I am going to make some progress.

A Scottish Government assessment of the proposal that is coming tomorrow shows that successful pioneering policies such as minimum unit pricing for alcohol, our no tuition fees policy and the smoking ban would face the unelected body that the Conservatives now want to put in place. The proposed establishment of an unelected external body to determine whether a Bill in the Scottish Parliament has met a new test is outrageous. It is completely undemocratic and will not be accepted. Westminster, under these plans, will have the power to block the legislative process in Scotland under the guise of this new body, so that Scotland's elected representatives could not decide what is best for Scotland. The internal market plan would also require standards in one part of the UK to be automatically accepted in others. This would be a serious threat to Scotland's high food standards.

Any forthcoming legislation on these plans needs the consent of the Scottish Parliament. The decisions of the Scottish Parliament must be respected. Will the Minister confirm that Westminster will recognise the importance of consent from the Scottish Parliament, and accept that if consent is not granted the legislation cannot be passed? That is the historical position.

The internal market plan also suggests that the UK Government will include state aid in their power grab. The Scottish and Welsh Governments have been clear

that state aid policy should be devolved under current legislation. They want to stay closely aligned with the EU state aid rules. Legal experts have noted that Westminster's decision to legislate to make state aid policy a reserved power was an implicit recognition that the UK Government were not confident of winning the argument in court. We already know that this Tory Government will do what they want to Scotland with regard to state aid if they get their way on this. Of course, the Tories have form. In 1992, John Major's Government diverted cash from the highlands to try to boost dwindling Conservative support in south-east England.

Let us be clear: the UK faces a constitutional crisis. Scotland continues to be completely ignored by Westminster and Westminster has proved itself to be utterly incapable of acting in Scotland's interests. With the exception of the Scottish Tories, who have completely isolated themselves, the Scottish Parliament is united against the moves to erode Scotland's devolved settlement. All the Opposition parties, as well as the SNP in government, recognise this threat to devolution coming from the Tories. The Scottish Tories remain tin-eared. The UK Government must recognise that Scotland has a choice: we either accept the downgrading of our Parliament or we choose to become an independent country. Let me appeal to those who live in Scotland to join the momentum. There is another way: we can stop the power grab, we can defend our interests, and we can finish our journey to independence.

People want an extension, and in Scotland people have a right to an extension. Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the European Union. A new poll has put support for Scottish independence at 54%, and that is the second Panelbase poll to show such figures in recent weeks. This marks the highest level of support for the SNP and independence ever, in any poll of its kind. The recent polling on independence shows the unstoppable power of people choosing their own future.

Since the Westminster election of 2019, a majority of polls have shown support for independence in the lead. Commenting on the findings, Professor John Curtice said:

"Never before have the foundations of public support for the Union looked so weak."

He explained that

"the past three months have exemplified how Scotland could govern itself better as an independent, small country".

Even a casual observer could draw that conclusion, based on how the Scottish Government led by Nicola Sturgeon have dealt with the covid-19 crisis compared with this UK Government. Indeed, Nicola Sturgeon scores more highly with English voters than the Prime Minister does—[Laughter.] Conservative Members think the fact that the Prime Minister is unpopular, certainly in Scotland, is funny. We do not think it is funny; we think it is something much worse than that. It is now impossible for the UK Government to deny Scotland a choice over its future. The Prime Minister may be the best recruiting tool for Scottish independence since Margaret Thatcher.

The cost of leaving the EU and managing a health crisis simultaneously is unacceptable, particularly when we could be facing a covid second wave in the winter. If the Prime Minister and the Tories fail to seek an extension, if they push ahead with their power grab, and if they

continue to impose a future on Scotland that we never voted for, the choice will be clear. The only way to protect Scotland's economy and our place at the heart of Europe is to become an independent country, and that day is coming. We can provide our road map to independence. We will have our say. Scotland will become an independent country.

1.22 pm

**The Paymaster General (Penny Mordaunt):** It is a pleasure to respond to this Opposition day debate, not least because it affords me the opportunity to pay tribute to UK and, in particular, Scottish businesses, which have been so resilient and creative during these unprecedented times. It is not just that we want the economy to recover and that we want to beat coronavirus; it is that we can only defeat coronavirus, and whatever might follow it, if the economy recovers. Without businesses and the tax revenue that they generate, we will not have an NHS or a care system, or room for manoeuvre at the Treasury. I want to thank all those businesses for what they have endured and for all the efforts they are making to keep going. I am sure the whole House would agree with that.

**Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP):** Will the Minister give way?

**Penny Mordaunt:** One moment, please. I should also like genuinely and sincerely to congratulate the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) and his party on having a policy on the transition period, which is more than the official Opposition have managed to do to date.

In the time that I have, I want to touch on some of the very understandable issues that concern hard-pressed businesses about next year and about how the Government are helping to mitigate the economic effects of coronavirus and to prepare for when we will take back control of our borders and leave the single market and the customs union. These will bring significant changes, and also opportunities, for which we all need to prepare, which is why we have already undertaken a series of measures to help businesses and individuals to get ready for the end of the transition period, whatever the circumstances are.

Before I do that, however, I want to put this debate in context. I wonder what the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber thinks the odds are of the Government extending the transition period. How likely does he think it is that we would do that, given that its end date is enshrined in law; given that the Government of the UK were elected on a mandate not to extend the transition period; given that the deadline for asking for an extension to the transition period has passed; given that doing so would simply prolong the negotiations and bring uncertainty for our businesses; given that it would hinder our economic recovery; given that an extension would see us paying more to the EU, which is not a good idea; given that we would have to back EU laws and decisions that we had no say in designing, which is an even worse idea; and given that the legislative and economic flexibility that we need to respond to coronavirus would not be possible? What are the chances of the Government doing that? What are the chances of this Opposition day debate succeeding or having any influence? I suggest none.



[Penny Mordaunt]

The Government have been very clear multiple times that we will not extend the transition period. Some might argue that it is not only undesirable to do so but now impossible, so why are we having an Opposition day debate on this issue, on this particular topic, and not on, say, rewards for health and care staff, not on investment in Scottish infrastructure, and not on food standards or Scottish farmers, which my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) debated recently? Why are we having this debate in a week when key negotiations are ramping up and David Frost is going in to bat for Scotland's interests—[*Laughter.*] I am sure that Scottish fishermen do not appreciate Members laughing. Why not have a debate on issues that might strengthen his hand in negotiation? Why not hold a debate on fishing or, indeed, on any practical or tangible issues that Scottish MPs on these Benches have been talking about at every single opportunity they have been given to stand up for their constituents? Why pick this issue? Why pick the issue of the transition period? Sadly, it is because the purpose of this debate is not to influence or secure change, or even to suggest any further practical measures that could help business. There was no mention in the right hon. Gentleman's speech of the phased approach, the Goods Vehicle Movement Service, or Treasury schemes. No, this Opposition day debate is designed to do what Scottish nationalists always try to do, which is, sadly, to further divide, to sow seeds of doubt, to undermine confidence, and to highlight differences right at the moment when everyone should be pulling and working together. Stirring up division is clearly something that SNP Members enjoy, and I have never understood those motivations in politics. Even if that is what floats your boat, to do it now, when we should be maximising the benefits and focusing on those benefits for the whole of the United Kingdom and for the sake of all our citizens, is truly amazing. It shows, sadly, that SNP Members, and anyone else supporting them today, have learned nothing from the past few years.

The sizeable majority that this Government enjoy is, in very great part, down to the fact that the people of this country want to move forward. They want to look to the future, not unpick the past, and they respect democracy. This Opposition day debate is simply an attempt to undermine and prevent an instruction given to this Government by the people of the United Kingdom. The right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues wish to return to division, to chaos, to paralysis, which is what pushing out the deadline for negotiations would do. The motion does not focus on anything practical in the report. That is not surprising really, as that report was written prior to the announcement on the phased border and the border operating model. None the less, it is the SNP's debate today, so, despite the fact that events and people have moved on, I will focus on the issues that those Members have raised.

**Alan Brown:** I thank the Minister for giving way and ending her lecture, telling us what we should be thinking about. If we are talking about division, a lot is predicated on what she said about control of our borders, ending free movement and controlling immigration. Earlier she talked about business resilience. Can she tell me how ending free movement will help businesses, how it will

help the fruit and vegetable growers who already cannot get people to do their work? Can she explain what good that will do for the economy and what it will do for food exports, when we have a reliance on EU vets?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I have been through the detail of the report mentioned in the motion and looked at each sector that it focuses on and mentions. We have not just brought in schemes that help to support business and to mitigate the changes that are going to have to be brought in. The Treasury has also introduced schemes in the wake of coronavirus, and I will come on to that. However, I want to address—

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Penny Mordaunt:** Bear with me.

I want to address the issues the report raises, because the reasons why we are having this debate are illuminating. The report proposes a two-year delay to our timetable and claims that not having one would reduce Scotland's GDP. The version of the report I have seen says that that will be by £1.8 billion, but the hon. Gentleman refers to £3 billion—a figure that many dispute. However, some say that the cost to UK GDP of a delay would be around 2%.

There are a number of interesting graphs to support the right hon. Gentleman's points, but I would ask any SNP Member present to add an additional line—one illustrating the hit to Scottish GDP from the break-up of the United Kingdom. Pre Brexit, the Scottish Economic Association put the cost of Scottish independence at 5.5% of Scottish GDP, stating that that would be even greater after Brexit. So why does £1.8 billion or £3 billion matter, when £5.5 billion does not?

The right hon. Gentleman cannot wring his hands about the 144,000 jobs contingent on exports from Scotland—jobs that we are determined to protect—while discounting the 545,000 jobs reliant on trade with the United Kingdom. He cannot claim to mourn the end of EU funding mechanisms that bring benefits to Scottish citizens—and that will be replaced, I might add—and at the same time discount the very real United Kingdom dividend to the taxpayers of Scotland of about £2,000 per household. He cannot complain about the results of negotiations, on the grounds that he thinks he has not been consulted, and at the same time advocate extending a transition period that would make us subject to EU laws, schemes and decisions over which he has had no say whatever. He cannot claim to use economic forecasts to make one argument, but disregard them for another. And he cannot claim to be a democrat, while ignoring the results of votes.

This debate is simply about creating conflict and division, just as the right hon. Gentleman's press release today is. He has not seen the details of the proposal he alluded to at Prime Minister's questions earlier, but he does not need to, because the facts are irrelevant to his case, as were many of the things he said in his speech about these proposals.

I want to turn to the substance of what we are doing to support business, because, after all, that is what matters. There will be significant changes and opportunities ahead, and we will help businesses and citizens to manage the necessary adjustments in a very practical and flexible



way in order to minimise the challenges and maximise the opportunities. None of those schemes did the right hon. Gentleman mention.

In the withdrawal agreement struck by the Prime Minister, we removed several significant uncertainties that were a feature of our contingency planning ahead of 31 October. We are now taking the necessary steps to ensure that the UK is ready to take advantage of the opportunities. That includes the £705 million of investment announced to make sure we have the right infrastructure, tech and border personnel in place. That is in addition to the £84 million to boost the capacity of the customs intermediary sector. The border operating model and the phased approach we announced earlier have been put in place after extensive consultation with the sector and provide further clarity and certainty for the border industry and businesses.

While we have already made good progress in getting ready for the end of the year, there is still more to do. There are actions that we would strongly encourage businesses and citizens to take now to ensure we are ready to hit the ground running as a fully independent United Kingdom. That is why, earlier this week, we launched a new, major campaign to communicate the steps that we must all take to prepare for the end of the transition period.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I thank the Minister for eventually giving way. She asked many times why we have brought this debate today. Let me just pick out one sector and give her another 1.8 figure. Scotland's quality food sector exports £1.8 billion of food per year, 70% of which goes to the EU. My question to the Minister is, how many businesses in Scotland has she spoken to about the effects on them, because that, in just one sector, is why we are bringing this debate?

**Penny Mordaunt**: When I came into office I spent a considerable amount of time working with the Central Office of Information and all Government Departments to improve our communications with business. An enormous number of meetings and forums take place not just with me and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster but with every single Department across Whitehall. Our officials continue to have those discussions and consultations, as do Ministers.

I would say this to the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber, who mentioned one or two sectors: you have not spoken about any of the Government schemes. You have not spoken about the phased approach. You have not spoken about free services that are available from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and how they can be improved. You have not called for any of that.

The right hon. Gentleman began the debate calling for leadership and for the Government to adapt. Indeed, the past few months have been an inflection point for nations and individuals. I call on the SNP to adapt: try co-operation; try finding some common ground for the sake of all our businesses and citizens. I would say that to you at any time but now more than ever, against the backdrop of this unprecedented time that we face.

**David Linden**: The Minister talks about the need for the SNP and the Scottish Government to compromise. She is in the Cabinet Office and will be aware of the

document "Scotland's place in Europe". Can she name any part of that document, which contains a raft of proposals and compromises from the SNP on the single market and the customs union? On which of those would the United Kingdom Government compromise?

**Penny Mordaunt**: There are many things that I could talk about, but one of the first meetings I held was to put together our negotiating position: we listened carefully to all the devolved Administrations on some of their concerns, particularly on programmes, and we changed our negotiating mandate accordingly. We do listen, and I have taken great pains. I gently point out—I am not going to repeat the vast number of meetings I have had, as I have done that frequently at the Dispatch Box—that as someone who has, in quite difficult circumstances, made sure that I could attend every single meeting that I had planned with the devolved Administrations and the Scottish Government, as I am happy to do, I was stood up by the Scottish Minister. I have shown up for every meeting; the Scottish Minister has not shown up for every meeting.

To conclude, I call on the SNP to adapt—to find common ground—for the sake of all our citizens and businesses, because that is what leadership looks like, and it is what Scotland deserves.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing)**: Before I call the spokesman for the official Opposition, I say to the House that many people in the Chamber are making the serious mistake of calling other people "you"—even the Minister, whom I have never heard make such a mistake before today. I am anxious that people who are new to the House and have not really seen the Chamber operating properly should not be led astray by those who should know better. Throughout Prime Minister's questions today, people called the Prime Minister "you". In the Chamber, "you" means the Chair. One addresses other Members as "the hon. Gentleman", "the hon. Lady" or something else, but not "you". [*Interruption.*] Quite. I call Paul Blomfield.

1.38 pm

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am just reflecting on "something else".

I am pleased to be able to respond to the debate and remind the House that when we debated the withdrawal agreement Bill in January, the Opposition warned of the foolishness of the Government's tying their hands by committing the date for the end of transition to law. We argued that unforeseen events might result in the Government's needing some flexibility, although clearly no one expected a crisis on the scale that we face with covid-19. However, our amendment was rejected and the departure date was locked in law. Clearly, the Government could have changed that before 1 July, but they did not and they must live with the consequences.

We are now past the date when an extension could have been agreed. The Government did not seek one and nor did the EU propose one. That ship has sailed and, frankly, it is the wrong focus for a debate on the negotiations that we need today. The issue is not the time available to the Government, but their approach to the talks. If, instead of the motion, the SNP had tabled something seeking to protect Scottish whisky or Welsh

[Paul Blomfield]

lamb, or to avoid non-tariff barriers in manufacturing, we could have worked together on it, because the country needs the best possible agreement—now more than ever—and we hope the Government will secure that, but it is now five months since we left the European Union. We have had four rounds of formal negotiations. We have had a high-level summit between the Prime Minister and the Presidents of the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament. We are into our third week of intensified talks. But, judging by the Government's own statements, we have seen very little progress.

It was not supposed to be like this. Remember the election campaign? Time and again, the nation was told by the Prime Minister that he had an “oven-ready deal”. That is what the people voted for: a deal negotiated by the Prime Minister himself and signed off last October—the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration. The withdrawal agreement delivered our departure from the European Union and the political declaration set out the principles for our future relationship. The two went together: a single package. As the Prime Minister said:

“The ambition for our future friendship is contained in the revised political declaration”.—[*Official Report*, 19 October 2019; Vol. 666, c. 572.]

That was the deal promised to the British people. It refers to:

“an ambitious, wide-ranging and balanced economic partnership” with

“no tariffs, fees, charges or quantitative restrictions across all sectors”.

It was a deal that would safeguard

“workers’ rights, consumer and environmental protection”

and keep people safe with a

“broad, comprehensive and balanced security partnership”.

There was a promise that the Good Friday agreement would be protected through the proper implementation of the Northern Ireland protocol.

Those are the promises against which the Government's deal will be measured, but it is not going well. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster chilled British business when he warned that the UK may accept tariffs on some goods if that is the price we have to pay to avoid the level playing field provisions. And let us not forget what exactly the level playing field is about: food standards, workers’ rights, environmental protection and consumer protection.

The Government's proposals in this area have been described as “a giant step away” from the political declaration. The UK's chief negotiator, David Frost, has said there is “fundamental disagreement” in most of the important areas. He went on to say:

“there is a big gap”.

The former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), warned her successor that he would not be able to keep our people safe without access to the quantity and quality of data that is currently available through Prüm, passenger name records, the European Criminal Records Information System and SIS II, but her successor will not commit to that. Just yesterday, the Met police Brexit lead said that UK

police forces’ ability to detain criminal suspects from the EU will become slower and less effective if the Government fail to secure a Brexit security deal. At the same time, Northern Ireland businesses are saying:

“we are really in a quandary as to what way to turn... We need a bit of clarity because we haven't a clue where we're heading—It's like walking out into the fog.”

The Government have not even managed to negotiate the continuation of the pet passport.

The weeks ahead are crucial. The Government need to double their efforts to deliver the deal that they promised to the British people. They need to listen to business, whose voice, the CBI, said recently:

“A good deal with the EU will be just one strand of a national recovery plan as the UK responds to the coronavirus pandemic, but it will be one of the most important for the future of our economy, jobs and livelihoods.”

They need to listen to those reeling from the Government's announcement on the border arrangements, which left the chief executive of the Road Haulage Association saying that he was

“completely at a loss to understand how this framework can be achieved by 1 January 2021.”

They should listen to the TUC, which has called on the Government to

“prioritise negotiating a deal with the EU that guarantees good jobs, rights and other protections rather than a deal with the US that stands to undermine these standards.”

**Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con):** We have already heard how important this decision is, so will the hon. Gentleman elaborate on where the Labour party is? Why are the Labour Benches empty? Where are his Back Benchers? Why are they silent on this important issue?

**Paul Blomfield:** I have elaborated on our position clearly: we expect the Government to deliver on the deal that they promised the British people. I understand the anxiety among those on the Conservative Benches when they see how the talks are going and see that they—those who were elected on that pledge—may not be able to turn to their constituents and say that they have done that job.

**Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP):** That really is not good enough from the hon. Gentleman. Not one Labour Back Benchers is down to speak in this important debate. They may not care about these issues, but our constituents do. As part of the official Opposition, surely he should be doing better than this?

**Paul Blomfield:** There is great concern and great appetite to have a serious discussion about the negotiations on the future relationship with the European Union. We have brought the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to the House twice through urgent questions when he had refused to report to Parliament. Some of my colleagues may have anticipated that this debate would not be the one we needed to have, but instead would be framed by the leader of the SNP at Westminster as being about independence, as he did in his final words. We want a serious discussion about the negotiations.

The Government should also listen to voices in every part of our country, and they need to engage effectively with the devolved Administrations—

**Stephen Flynn** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Will the hon. Member give way?

**Paul Blomfield:** I would have thought that the hon. Gentleman might want to hear my point.

**Stephen Flynn:** No, I am quite happy to intervene.

**Paul Blomfield:** Go on then.

**Stephen Flynn:** I thank the hon. Member for giving way. Does he agree that the intransigence of his party on this issue is perhaps why it received 42% of the vote in Scotland in 2010, but just 18% in the general election of 2019?

**Paul Blomfield:** The nature of these interventions indicates why it does not seem that the SNP is serious about having a debate about the actual negotiations on which the future of our country is going to be so dependent. It is all about point scoring, not protecting jobs and protecting the economy.

The Government should listen more effectively to those voices of the devolved Administrations and recognise that the Joint Ministerial Committee is not working. It needs to be put on a formal footing, with its decisions properly recorded and respected. The agreement reached with the European Union will affect the nations and regions of the UK differently, and the devolved Administrations will be on the frontline of delivering it. They must be properly consulted and proper regard must be given to their views. It is not a question of vetoes, but a question of respect for the devolution settlements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as the Government negotiate with and repatriate powers from the European Union. We need—I make this point both to the Government and to the leader of the SNP at Westminster—a spirit of constructive partnership between the four Governments of the United Kingdom, rather than division.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making some important points. To expand on that last point, the concern for the devolved Administrations must be not simply with the UK-EU deal, but with how they are involved in all free trade agreements and in organisations such as the trade remedies authority, with how those deals are put together, and with how the Administrations are engaged and consulted. My real fear is that that will not happen.

**Paul Blomfield:** My hon. Friend is right to have that fear, because the experience over the past months demonstrates that there is not the real consultation that there needs to be. The Government are playing with the future of our country if they do not respect, engage with effectively and have regard to the views of all the devolved Administrations.

There are just five months left until we leave the transition period—months in which we are already facing the biggest hit on jobs and livelihoods in our lifetime as a result of covid-19. The people of this country expect the Government to do everything possible to mitigate that damage, not to add to it. The Government will not be forgiven if we reach the end of the transition without a deal, or with a deal that falls short of the ambition that they signed up to in the political declaration. That was their promise to the British people, and it is that on which they will be judged.

1.51 pm

**John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): It is an absolute honour and a privilege to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I am very grateful to have the opportunity to speak in this SNP Opposition day debate.

The SNP motion calls for an extension to the transition period for negotiations with the European Union. It is important that we are absolutely clear what the motives the SNP's are for calling for that extension to the transition period. It is not about protecting Scotland's economy. It is not about assisting the economic recovery after the coronavirus pandemic. It is all about creating further uncertainty and constitutional chaos to assist in the nationalist dream of breaking up the United Kingdom. That is the SNP's top priority. That is its only priority. That, in fact, is the only reason many SNP Members got involved in politics in the first place—[*Interruption.*] I am pleased that they are nodding in agreement. I am pleased that they are agreeing with me—we agree on something at last. Any proposal from the separatists should be considered in that context. The SNP is aggravating on Brexit simply to push its independence obsession.

There is no doubt that the impact of the coronavirus on Scotland's and the UK's economy will be significant, but the answer is not to add further uncertainty to Scotland's businesses with further dither and delay on Brexit. Businesses want certainty so that they can plan for Scotland's and the UK's future outside the European Union. Businesses are already preparing for life outside the EU at the end of 2020. The last thing they need or want is the further uncertainty that has been advocated by the SNP today, so I fully support the UK Government's commitment not to extend the transition period at the end of 2020, because that would simply risk further economic damage to Scotland's economy.

I also fully endorse the massive support of more than £13 billion that this UK Government have pumped into Scotland so far during the covid-19 outbreak. That includes nearly £5 billion in furlough payments, £1 billion for the job retention scheme, the kick-start scheme, the VAT cuts, the “eat out to help out” scheme, nearly £1 billion in the self-employed income support scheme, hundreds of millions of pounds in business loans and increases to benefits, plus £4.6 billion in Barnett consequentials. That is a £4.6 billion boost to the Scottish Government's budget during this covid-19 outbreak. I know that some in the SNP, including the Scottish Government's Finance Minister, Kate Forbes, like to pretend that this support does not exist unless the Scottish Government logo is branded all over it, if Scotland were no longer in the United Kingdom, the safety net of support that the UK can provide during this pandemic and other crises would not have been there for other parts of these islands or, indeed, for Scotland any more.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): The hon. Member and I have disagreed numerous times about the UK's place in the European Union and what we should do about that, but does he share my confusion about why a party that is so intent on dragging Scotland from one valuable Union—indeed, the most successful economic Union in history—is so intent on using another to do it?

**John Lamont:** I completely agree. The points that the SNP's Westminster leader made earlier could have been made by anybody during the campaign about whether



[John Lamont]

we should leave or remain in the EU; Nigel Farage would be proud of the arguments that he articulated. I am pleased that the hon. Lady is nodding wholeheartedly; it was a very good Farage argument that was put forward by Mr Blackford.

Let me move on to reiterate the support that has been made available by the UK Government and what that means from a practical perspective for Scots. These are not abstract sums of money that have no bearing on everyday lives in Scotland; these are people's jobs and livelihoods, and the economic wellbeing of our families. Some 800,000 jobs in Scotland have been saved so far during the pandemic, highlighting the strength of our Union. The coronavirus job retention scheme has furloughed 628,000 Scottish jobs, and the UK Government have spent £425 million on supporting 146,000 self-employed people in Scotland through the self-employment income support scheme.

Of course, when talking about jobs, it is worth remembering that nearly four times as many jobs in Scotland are linked to trade with the rest of the United Kingdom as are linked to trade with the European Union. The Fraser of Allander Institute estimates that around 545,000 jobs in Scotland are supported by demand for our goods and services from the rest of the UK. That is why it is so important that we do everything we can to protect the strength of the UK single market, ensuring that businesses across the UK can continue to trade easily. Scottish exports to the rest of the UK are worth £51.2 billion, against £16.6 billion in EU exports. Whether they are in my constituency in the Scottish borders or in Eastleigh, West Bromwich, Brecon or Dudley, our businesses should be able to trade freely in every part of Britain.

The importance of the UK internal market is the reason the suggestion from Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, that she may close the Scotland-England border or impose quarantine restrictions on people from England is so damaging to Scotland and to our economy. After the First Minister's announcement, tourism businesses, B&Bs and hotels contacted me to report that their customers from the rest of the UK had started to cancel their bookings because they were so worried about the border being closed and quarantine restrictions being imposed. That should concern us all, because overnight trips from the rest of the UK were worth nearly £3 billion to Scotland in 2018.

To compound matters, we had the horrific scenes on the Scottish-English border in my constituency, on the A1 north of Berwick, of nationalist protesters shouting—and I quote—"Stay the F out" at English people travelling into Scotland. These racist protesters have admitted taking inspiration from the division stoked by the SNP politicians. They were inspired by comments by SNP politicians. One of the protesters has been pictured with Nicola Sturgeon and other senior SNP figures—

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Surely it cannot be allowed to stand that the hon. Gentleman effectively accuses SNP Members of stoking racism. The SNP condemns unreservedly any kind of anti-Englishness or any kind of racism directed at people from south of the border.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** The hon. Gentleman knows—[*Interruption.*] Please do not talk so loudly while I am talking. The hon. Member for Ogmire (Chris Elmore) can heckle other people, but he cannot heckle me. Well, he can try. The hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) knows that his point of order is not a point for the Chair, but a point of debate. The hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) will give way when he is ready to give way, and I look forward to hearing the retort from the hon. Member for Glasgow North.

**John Lamont:** Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am going to take an intervention—don't you worry—but I want to conclude this important point about the completely unacceptable behaviour towards our neighbours, friends and family members trying to cross the border between Scotland and England, coming into my constituency to work, to see family members and to visit friends. Nationalist protesters with "Yes" banners were shouting abuse at them. That is totally unacceptable.

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)  
*rose—*

**John Lamont:** I look forward to hearing from the hon. Member that she will condemn that type of behaviour.

**Patricia Gibson:** I would like to say to the hon. Member, who has made a number of allegations, that the SNP, as he knows, does not have any truck with racism in any of its forms. He seems to suggest that the SNP is an anti-English party; if it makes a country racist to seek self-government, the other 190 members of the United Nations are all racist countries. The First Minister's granny is English, so what possible motivation could the hon. Gentleman have for these hysterical comments? If he is condemning any analysis that suggests that borders may perhaps be temporarily closed to control this virus, perhaps he would like to comment on the practice that has been adopted by Australia, which is doing the same thing between states.

**John Lamont:** The fact that the hon. Lady refused to condemn that behaviour on the border speaks for itself. Similarly, the delay from the First Minister of Scotland to condemn that behaviour also caused great concern, not just in my constituency but across Scotland. That is not the Scotland I represent, and it is not what we are about. That behaviour on the border is unacceptable, and we should condemn it.

**Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I am listening carefully to what he is saying about the situation on the border between England and Scotland. As a border MP representing an English seat that has a border with Wales, I can say that we in Shropshire have also seen real difficulties and problems in our community as a result of Cardiff pulling further and further away from London, which causes confusion for border communities such as mine.

**John Lamont:** I am grateful for that point. As the Minister described so well, in these times of crisis, as a nation—every part of the nation, whether it be Wales or

Scotland or England—we should be coming together to tackle those challenges, not having foul-mouthed nationalist protesters standing at the borders shouting abuse at our English friends and neighbours.

I want to develop the economic point. We can see the economic damage that can be caused to Scotland by statements made by nationalist politicians when they deter people from travelling to Scotland. Even before the current crisis, the SNP's record of managing Scotland's economy has been extremely poor. The SNP is holding Scotland's economy back. Scotland's deficit is six times that of the UK. The rate of unemployment in Scotland is higher than it is anywhere else in the UK.

Even before coronavirus, the SNP had cost Scotland more than a quarter of a million jobs, and then we have its failures in other policy areas, too. Under the SNP, Scottish schools have slipped to their lowest international scores in science and maths. There are 3,600 fewer teachers since the SNP came to power. On the NHS, Nicola Sturgeon's waiting time guarantee has never been met. Crime is on the rise, with most areas of Scotland now having fewer police officers on the frontline. The Scottish Government have missed their own legal emissions targets, and the SNP has broken its promise to extend Scotland's broadband fibre network. That is a catalogue of failure by the SNP, yet SNP Members come here today arguing for more uncertainty, more delay, more constitutional upheaval and yet another independence referendum.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): In thinking of certainties in this debate, I trust that the hon. Member shares with me a great gratitude to the armed forces. Regardless of whether they are Welsh, Scottish, English or Irish, they cross borders into Wales and Scotland to come and help to defeat the virus. I think we can all be proud of the armed forces of the United Kingdom.

**John Lamont:** I am grateful for that important point, which is a useful reminder of the important role that our armed forces have played in tackling this pandemic. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reminding the House of that.

I am not entirely sure why SNP Members claim to support independence for Scotland, because if they had their way, they would be rushing to give that independence straight back to the European Union by joining it again. They would be handing newly acquired powers back from Scotland to the European Commission; handing back control of our fishing waters to the European Commission; and dragging Scotland back into the hated common fisheries policy.

The SNP lacks ambition for our great nation of Scotland. I am sad to see the division and uncertainty in Scotland that the SNP is stoking up in an attempt to score political points. The SNP will use any means to push for its independence obsession. It will not come as any surprise to the House that I will not support the SNP's motion. The SNP is desperately trying to undermine the UK and the UK internal market, putting Scottish jobs and the livelihoods of my constituents and other Scots at risk.

It is the UK Government who are putting the protection of Scottish businesses and jobs at the heart of their approach, both in their EU negotiations and in tackling this pandemic. I support them in everything they are doing to achieve that.

2.6 pm

**Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): It is an experience to follow the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont), with his typical hysterical and emotion-filled contribution. I will resist the temptation to follow a lot of where he attempted to lead this debate.

**Ian Blackford:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Brendan O'Hara:** I will give way in a moment, but first I will thank my right hon. Friend for the thoughtful way in which he opened the debate. He laid out clearly why we believe that it is the best interests of everyone across these islands that the UK Government, even at this late stage, seek an extension to the transition period. He is absolutely correct that at a time of economic crisis, in the middle of a global pandemic for which there is currently no vaccine and when no one knows where or when the next wave will come or how severe it will be, it is beyond madness for this Government to believe that it will be possible to conduct and conclude all the necessary negotiations and implement the results within the next five months. The reality is that the Government know it—they know that that cannot happen.

Without an extension to the transition period, the UK will almost certainly crash out of the European Union at the end of the year, with all the economic chaos that will inevitably follow, and those who in 2016 were regarded as the not to be taken seriously, wide-eyed extremists on the fringes of the Conservative party will have won. They will have achieved their goal.

My right hon. Friend was also absolutely right when he reminded the House that this is being done to Scotland by a Government we did not elect who are pursuing a policy that we overwhelmingly rejected. In the 2016 EU referendum, the people of Scotland said unequivocally that we wished to remain part of the European Union. That message has been reinforced time and again since 2016, in both general elections and in last year's European elections.

**Jacob Young:** Does the hon. Gentleman concede that in the 2014 independence referendum, the people of Scotland voted overwhelmingly to stay in the UK?

**Brendan O'Hara:** I respectfully say to the hon. Gentleman that democracy is a constantly evolving process—it is not a one-off event. I know that this will be a problem for many Government Members, but people have the right to change their minds. Politicians have the right to bring back ideas for themselves and for the public to decide upon. In fact, the Tories' deputy leader in Holyrood has been beaten more times than my granny's old carpet, but he comes back time and again, as is perfectly his right so to do. It ill behoves the hon. Member for Redcar (Jacob Young) to stand there like some kind of imperial overlord telling Scotland that it can only go so far and no further. This Tory Government will not decide Scotland's future. The people of Scotland will decide Scotland's future.

**Ian Blackford:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on the thoughtful way he is dealing with these issues. I just want to respond on the issue of Scotland being open and make it crystal clear that Scotland is open. We are

[Ian Blackford]

an open country; we are an open democracy; and we want people to come to Scotland irrespective of where they come from. We find that there are issues to do with public health that the First Minister is taking responsibility for. That is what responsible Governments do. Let me make it crystal clear that, with Scotland now being open for business, people from England are welcome to come to Scotland, and I know that my hon. Friend will agree with that.

**Brendan O'Hara:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention, and I absolutely agree.

Numerous opinion polls since the referendum of 2016 have shown that the desire of Scots to remain in the European Union is strengthening and hardening as time goes by, because not only are they being dragged out of the European Union against their will, but it is being done by a Government who are seemingly hellbent on doing it in the most damaging and reckless fashion possible, including refusing even to consider extending the transition period. That is why I firmly believe that Scotland is moving towards becoming an independent nation.

The debate in Scotland is not now framed in terms of “should” and “could”. More and more, that debate is framed in terms of how and when Scotland becomes an independent nation. As my right hon. Friend said, the polls bear this out. The highly respected pollster Professor John Curtice of Strathclyde University said just last week:

“Never before have the foundations of public support for the Union looked so weak.”

That is because, increasingly, those Scots with no particular emotional attachment to the United Kingdom who in 2014, after careful consideration, decided against independence for whatever reason are changing their minds. Those Scots who, maybe with a heavy heart but in good faith, decided in 2014 that independence was a step too far and who were perhaps seduced by the idea of being in a partnership of equals or liked the idea of Scotland staying and leading the United Kingdom, who believed the promises that their Parliament in Edinburgh would become the world's strongest devolved Parliament, or who truly believed that only by sticking with the United Kingdom could their citizenship of the European Union be guaranteed are changing their minds. Opinion poll after opinion poll tells us that they are changing their minds in droves.

That crucial, pragmatic group of people who will look at an issue, weigh up the pros and cons and come to a considered decision based on what is best for them, their families, their communities and the country are increasingly saying that an independent Scotland is the only viable option, particularly when set against the madness they see unfolding here. They are doing it quietly. They will not shout about it. Mercifully, they will not go on Twitter and have a fight about it. They will do it, as they have done in the past, by looking at the available options and doing what they honestly believe is the right thing.

Let us be clear: the United Kingdom, by its actions since 2014, has brought about its own demise. The United Kingdom is the architect of its own downfall. Every bit as much as the SNP, under the exceptional leadership of First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, has been

pulling Scotland towards independence, so this Government have been actively pushing Scotland towards the exit door. I am sure that in decades to come, scholars and academics will produce theses on the end days of the United Kingdom. They will debate whether this UK Government were utterly incompetent and arrogant to the point of stupidity or whether this was in fact all part of a great Tory plan.

For what it is worth to students of history reading *Hansard* decades and centuries in the future, I reckon at the moment that it is probably the former. But I can see how someone could come to conclude that it was the latter. If the United Kingdom Government were serious about preserving the Union in 2014, following the narrow no vote in the referendum, they could have decided to make good on their promises to Scotland. If they were serious about preserving the Union in 2015, they could, following the election of 56 SNP MPs to this place, have decided to ensure that in any future EU referendum Scotland's voice would be heard and Scotland's decision respected.

If the Government were serious about preserving the Union in 2016, after every single part of Scotland voted to remain in the European Union, they could have decided that the hard, no-deal Brexit was off the table. If they were serious about preserving the Union in 2019, after they lost more than half their Scottish MPs and saw their vote share in Scotland collapse, they could have decided not to indulge in a shameless power grab, trying to seek back the powers of the Scottish Parliament. If they were serious about preserving the Union in 2020, having seen Scottish public opinion swing towards independence, they could have rowed back from the brink of Brexit calamity, agreed to an extension period and sought to salvage something from the wreckage that is Brexit.

But no, the Government did not. Such is their arrogance and misplaced self-assuredness, and so blind and disdainful are they about what is happening across a border that only last week they told us did not actually exist, that they, like zealots, are ploughing on with the project regardless of the inevitable consequences. It would even appear that their oft-vaunted precious Union is expendable for the project. If someone is a Scottish farmer terrified at being put out of business when the UK is flooded with cheap, low-grade meat and poultry from America, or a Scottish hotelier tearing their hair out wondering where next season's workers are to come from, or a Scottish health board worker trying to work out how to recruit in subsequent years EU nationals to work in our health and social care sector, or a young Scot seeking to live and work in other European nations and take advantage of the opportunities that every single person in this room today has taken advantage of, then that is just too bad. The bottom line is that their voices do not get to be heard. Their opinions do not get to be counted; their fears and concerns are just not important enough to matter. The only thing that matters to this Government is the project.

**Christine Jardine:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

**Brendan O'Hara:** No, thank you.

The Government's insane, narrow British nationalism may well involve driving the UK off a cliff and seeing what emerges from the wreckage. I suppose that in that



respect they have just the man at the wheel of the bus, skulking around between Downing Street and Barnard Castle, but let me tell the House that Scotland is not coming with them.

This week, I and probably millions of others were left slightly bewildered as the UK Government displayed once again their love of a totally meaningless, utterly vacuous three-word slogan. This week's classic was "Let's get going." But perhaps, on reflection, as three-word slogans go it is not that bad, because that is exactly what Scotland is planning to do—we are going to get going, we are going to get out of this deeply damaging Union, into a future as an independent member state in a Union of equals with the European Union.

I honestly believe that Scottish independence is an idea whose time has come, and thankfully there is precious little that Government Members are going to do about it.

2.19 pm

**James Grundy** (Leigh) (Con): I intend to be brief, so I hope the House will forgive me if I do not take interventions.

I wish to speak today on behalf of places that many Members will never have heard of, and whose voices have too rarely been heard. In the referendum, almost two-thirds of my constituency of Leigh voted to leave the EU, but in many of its local communities the vote to leave was more than 70%—in some cases, more than 75%. Communities such as Siddow Common, Hope Carr, Higher Folds, West Leigh, Shakerley, Mosley Common, Derby Road, and Kings Avenue in the Oaklands and Meadows estate, voted most overwhelmingly to leave the EU. In fact, every single polling district in my constituency voted to leave the EU, from those who live in the bungalows and semi-detached houses of Pennington to those in the red-brick terraced streets of southern Atherton and those who live in the new-build houses of Astley.

Not too long ago, in many of those places, we would have been more likely to find the Loch Ness monster than a Conservative voter. I am stood here today because huge numbers of my constituents broke with the political habits of a lifetime to send me here to end the political chaos that had been crippling the country since the EU referendum; and that referendum seems, does it not, like a lifetime ago.

I will not betray the trust of my constituents by supporting the SNP's motion tonight; it would be wrong to do so. Extending the transition period with the EU will only prolong the political turmoil that this country has faced and damage businesses that have tried repeatedly to prepare for Brexit over the past few years, only to face endless frustrating delay. They have been given the certainty of a final deadline to work towards after four years, and now here we are, with some people trying to disrupt the Brexit process yet again.

I have nothing more to say on this matter. This subject has been done to death. My constituents are sick of it. The public are sick of it. Let us get on with it: let us put this matter to bed once and for all.

2.22 pm

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Leigh (James Grundy), who at least tried to make his point, even if I did not agree with a word of it.

He at least tried to make a point that was worth making—by contrast with the bitter and twisted rant by the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont)—and even managed to get the Loch Ness monster in, so he gets an extra point.

The Minister asked why we brought this debate to the Chamber. We did so because it is the right thing to do for people and communities and businesses across Scotland, who are facing a treble whammy of hits in terms of the economy—on their lifestyle, their jobs and their family status. There are people living across Scotland, including in my constituency in the highlands and islands, who will be dealt a serious blow come January if there is no extension to the transition. The UK Government are not sleepwalking into this; they are running towards a cluster crisis.

My constituents—and Scotland—never voted for this and they do not want it. It is bad enough that the combined loss of economic activity in leaving the EU is estimated to be up to £3 billion. But on the covid emergency, the UK Government's language—unlike that of the Scottish Government, whose aim is elimination of the virus—shows that they are planning for a second wave, with the forethought that we shall be going into a second wave while we are faced with a no-deal-Brexit exit—

**Douglas Ross:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Drew Hendry:** I will give way later.

No matter how the Prime Minister tries to cover it up by calling it an Australia-style deal, it is simply nothing, and does no good for any of the people who will be affected in Scotland.

**Douglas Ross:** I seek clarity on the point the hon. Gentleman makes. He seems to be criticising the Government for planning for all eventualities in a pandemic. Is he honestly saying that Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP Scottish Government are not planning for all eventualities on covid-19?

**Drew Hendry:** The hon. Gentleman is a former Minister who resigned because his boss's boss took a trip to Barnard Castle and so broke the covid regulations, so fair play to him, but of course that is the problem. He has left a legacy there and it is now an issue that the Government have to plan for that second wave. To clarify, in Scotland we are planning for elimination of the virus. That is the right thing to do.

We are facing a calamity. The Minister, who is not in her place now, said that she wanted us to focus on the policies of the UK Government—or should we say promises, or rather broken promises. For communities around Scotland, especially in regions such as the highlands and islands, there is another pressure caused by this reckless course. According to research by the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions, locally we will lose over £160 million and, Scotland-wide, over £800 million. That is the extra punch that our communities are losing out on in terms of EU structural funding. This is funding that underpinned further education, youth employment, smart cities, connectivity for islands and communities, small and medium-sized enterprises, apprenticeships, regeneration, innovation, productivity, social inclusion, and a whole lot more.

[Drew Hendry]

People in Scotland, across our cities, towns, villages and communities, are now seeing that the promises will not be delivered through the so-called shared prosperity fund, because it is not coming. Communities and charities have used the EU funding to benefit people, especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. They have been waiting now for years to find out what funding will be available post-Brexit, and in spite of promise after promise it is becoming clear that come January there will be none. The Minister had the opportunity to answer the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) about the shared prosperity fund earlier, and she chose not to do so.

I have been asking for clarification on this point since 2017, as have many others. A succession of Ministers, including the Prime Minister, have all promised details. They said they would consult widely. In 2018, the mantra was: “before the end of the year”. Time and again, they repeated that. In 2019, it turned into “shortly” and “soon”, and in 2020, it is morphing into “in due course”. In fact, we are now at the end point. There is no funding in place. Nobody can bid for anything as we enter 2020. All those promises have been broken, it has all been a laik.

If the fund ever is established—let us imagine that it could happen somehow—it looks as though yet another power grab will be at the centre of it, with, ironically, as is proposed, another unelected body telling the devolved Parliaments what to do about the funding. In Scotland’s case, these should be decisions for the Scottish Parliament. It is no wonder—this has been repeated, because people are noticing these things—that polling in Scotland is showing support for independence consistently above 50%. It is no wonder that people who voted no in 2014, who said, “We just can’t do it”, are now coming to me and my colleagues and saying, “You know what? It was a big mistake. We were sold a packet of goods they had no intention of delivering. If they had, we would have had some of it and we have had none of it.”

As this Government ride roughshod over our people’s rights, and ignore the needs of our communities, it is important that they think again. Let me recall the words of the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), during a Backbench Business Committee debate on shared prosperity that I secured in 2019. He twice made the promise that devolution would be respected. Indeed, his second clarification stated:

“To be absolutely clear and to repeat what I said in my contribution, the Government will fully respect the devolution settlement in respect of the UK shared prosperity fund and, I am sure, in all other respects.”—[*Official Report*, 5 September 2019; Vol. 664, c. 445.]

At that time I told him that he would be judged not on those words, but on the actions of his Government. Let me tell hon. Members, and those watching the debate, that the people of Scotland are making that judgment, and seeing that Westminster is not working for them. It is not listening to them or delivering what they need, and that is why more and more people are convinced that Scotland would be better served by taking our place as an independent nation.

There is another unique hit that we will take as a result of this Government’s actions. This is the worst of all possible times for young people across our constituencies

for the economic crisis to be coupled with Brexit. That is not in Scotland alone, as it affects all nations of the UK, but it is particularly harsh in places such as the highlands and islands, where we have been working incredibly hard to turn around the demographic of losing our young people.

**Christine Jardine:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Drew Hendry:** I am going to continue. The jobs that will be lost in the coming weeks and months will predominantly be of those in the 16 to 25 age bracket. Why? It is because they are cheaper to make redundant; they are usually on zero-hours contracts, if they have a job, and they normally have a lower length of service than anyone else. Young people will be disproportionately affected, so if for no other reason than to protect the next generation who will want to deliver a lifestyle that is suitable for them and their families, to which we should all aspire in this century, surely the Government should now ask for that extension. Nobody would blame them, because everybody understands that this is a unique crisis. They should ask for that extension and protect our young people.

2.32 pm

**Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con):** It is always a pleasure to speak in SNP Opposition-day debates, because we get the opportunity to play Blackford bingo. We heard the regular things from the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) who must always, at some point—today twice—show full outrage at Conservative Members for daring to make any sort of noise when he is speaking during a debate, totally ignoring, of course, the chirling nature of his colleagues behind him, when Government Members choose to make points on behalf of the people of Scotland.

We also had, as we always do during Blackford bingo, the words “power grab”, yet I have never heard a single SNP Member be able to articulate what powers are being grabbed. If it is a power grab, there must be powers that are held by the Scottish Parliament, and enacted by the Scottish Government on behalf of the people of Scotland, that we, the UK Government, are taking away.

**Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP) rose—**

**Douglas Ross:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, because he will be the first SNP Member ever who is able to explain a power held by Holyrood that the UK Government are going to grab away. I look forward to it.

**Alyn Smith:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. The shared prosperity fund has been mentioned by every SNP Member who has spoken thus far. For those present who do not know, that is the successor to the EU funding mechanism that the Scottish Government, and local government, have used productively for 20-odd years to encourage economic growth. The proposal is for the UK to take over that funding and control it from London, via the Scotland Office. That is a power grab, surely, in any objective sense of the word.

**Douglas Ross:** The search goes on, so I will keep asking. What the hon. Gentleman has just described is a power held by the EU that the UK is going to get back, because we chose in a referendum to leave the EU, which the SNP would want to give back to the EU.

**Patrick Grady** *rose—*

**Douglas Ross:** Attempt No. 2—I will give way to the SNP Chief Whip.

**Patrick Grady:** The hon. Gentleman knows that the principle of the devolution settlement is that if it ain't reserved—if it is not scheduled in the Scotland Act—1998 it is devolved. The Government are scheduling these powers that should come from Europe, as he says, to the Scottish Parliament and they are grabbing them and keeping them here in Westminster. That is a power grab.

**Douglas Ross:** It is not. I was very clear, but I will try to be clearer for SNP Members if they need me to be. Can any SNP Member explain just one—not 10, or hundreds—power that the 129 MSPs and the Scottish Government currently have, which, during this “power grab”, the UK Government will somehow take away? *[Interruption.]* None can; SNP Members simply cannot do it, because there is no power grab. As I said in my intervention, this and successive Conservative UK Governments have given more powers to the Scottish Parliament than any other and it is now one of the most powerful devolved Administrations anywhere in the world. The problem, more often than not, is not the lack of powers in the Scottish Parliament, but the lack of desire, will and vision on the part of the Scottish Government to use those powers to the best of their abilities. That is really the crux of the argument.

I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber missed my opening remarks, but I want to come back to his motion, on which the House will divide later. It is about the transition period, the EU and the UK Government. It seems strange to have this debate after the deadline set by the EU and the UK to decide whether to have an extension to the transition period. A decision was taken by the UK Government not to seek an extension and the EU Commissioner said of that decision:

“I take this as a definite conclusion of this discussion”.

The EU Commissioner who responded to the UK Government's decision has decided that that is a definitive conclusion of this matter, and I wish the SNP would accept it as such.

**Jacob Young:** Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating Liberal Democrat, Plaid Cymru and Democratic Unionist party Members on outnumbering the Labour party Members on the Opposition Benches, with not one Labour Back Bencher to speak in this important debate?

**Douglas Ross:** I am always happy to agree with my hon. Friend. Let me add that Scottish Conservatives in the Chamber today would outnumber, if he were here, the one Scottish Labour Member by five or six to one. We continue to be a strong force in Scotland and in this Chamber.

Let me return to the title of this debate and what we are discussing generally this afternoon, because there have been a number of omissions in the SNP speeches we have heard so far—I am sure this will be rectified later. We have not heard the F-word at all during this debate. I represent Moray and the Minister on the Front Bench represents Banff and Buchan. In a debate about the EU, I expect to hear about fishing, particularly from the SNP. So why, might we surmise, would SNP

Members and their leader here, who represents a constituency that has many fishing interests, not mention fishing once during this debate? Is it perhaps that they are ashamed of their policy towards Scottish fishermen?

During this debate, we are speaking about an extension, but what SNP Members have not spoken about is what they would do at the end of that extension, because of course they just want to prolong this period of instability for our businesses, communities and individuals. At the end of it, they do not want another extension or a deal with the EU to be granted by the UK Government; they want to stop us leaving the EU. That is a perfectly acceptable policy for them to hold, but they therefore have to explain to fishing communities in Moray, in Banff and Buchan, and around Scotland, including those that they represent here and at Holyrood, what their plans are for the fishing industry in Scotland. It is very clear: they would say to the 1 million people in Scotland who voted to leave the European Union, many of them in fishing communities: “We don't need you, we don't trust you, we think you were wrong, and we're going to take you straight back into the European Union and straight back into the common fisheries policy, which you have campaigned against throughout your lives and which has been damaging to your business, because we don't trust the result you gave in 2016.” That is a shameful position for Scottish National party Members to hold. Maybe it is not surprising, then, that they have not once mentioned the word “fishing” in this debate.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I would very much appreciate it if just one Conservative Member could explain to me why Conservative Members suggest that there would be total control of the seas around the UK in the event of Brexit when UNCLOS—the United Nations convention on the law of the sea—makes it very clear that that would not be the case, and, on the basis of historical fishing rights, the other countries in the EU will be challenging this in court? I never hear Conservative Members talk about that—all they say is that UK waters will be completely controlled by the UK, and it simply is not true.

**Douglas Ross:** I would say to the hon. Lady that I am her one Conservative Member, because I can explain it to her. When we finally leave the transition period on 31 December, we will become an independent coastal state controlling who fishes what, where and when in our waters—a proud independent state. There are examples of others that are able to do that, and we will follow suit.

Something that is not often considered in this debate is how big a difference a short extension of the transition period would make. Fishing leaders in Scotland have said that a one-day increase in the transition period beyond 31 December this year would be a one-year increase for their industry, because we would go into a whole new round of talks. When the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber suggests that we as a Government and a country should have two years of extra negotiating during the transition period, we should ask what that would mean for our fishing industries. It is something I am not willing to accept.

I represent the constituency in Scotland that came closer than any other to voting leave in 2016: just 122 votes separated leave and remain. So while I know it



[Douglas Ross]

is very convenient for Scottish National party Members, the Scottish Government and others to say that Scotland voted to remain, not everyone in Scotland did. One in two people in Moray voted to leave and one in two people in Moray voted to remain. This argument does foster great passion, understandably, but it is not as black and white as the SNP would often like to make it.

I also want to focus on the points about leadership that we have heard during this debate. I tried to intervene on the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber when he highlighted poll ratings which suggest that Nicola Sturgeon's leadership has been positive during this pandemic. I was going to ask him: was it leadership when Nicola Sturgeon chose not to inform the Scottish people of the first case of covid-19 being identified at the Nike conference? *[Interruption.]* I am sorry if the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) thinks it is funny that the Scottish Government, the First Minister and Scottish Government Ministers withheld information from the Scottish people about the first case of covid-19 in our country, but I do not believe it is a laughing matter. I hope that he will reconsider his actions when I am discussing an important matter about people who have lost their lives.

Is it leadership when the UK Government are carrying out more covid-19 tests in Scotland than the Scottish Government? I am happy that our broad shoulders of the United Kingdom can help the Scottish Government, but I would have thought that the Scottish Government were ambitious enough to have the testing facilities in place to do more than the UK Government, but I am extremely grateful that the UK Government are there to support the Scottish Government.

Is it really leadership when we have senior members of the Scottish National party, and indeed the First Minister, threatening to put up barriers at the border to stop people coming into our country? Given that the Scottish Tourism Alliance criticised those comments by saying that 70% of tourism in Scotland is from the rest of the United Kingdom, any signal from the First Minister, the Scottish Government or the SNP that we are closed for business is unacceptable. This is not a political issue—it is a financial issue for bed and breakfasts, hotels, restaurants and all those who rely on investment and money from people across the United Kingdom to support them. We need to send an unequivocally clear message that Scotland is open for business. I was grateful to hear that from the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber today. Sadly, I would say that the message has come too late.

**Christine Jardine:** While the hon. Gentleman and I do not share the same view of the European Union—and I would not wish to leave at this moment—does he share my confusion at hearing an SNP Member say that this was the worst possible time for the economic dislocation of leaving the European Union, without recognising the economic dislocation that would be caused to Scotland by leaving the United Kingdom? *[Interruption.]*

**Douglas Ross:** I agree with the hon. Lady. The pathetic actions of some SNP Members in response to a legitimate point made by one of my political opponents show their narrow-mindedness, not just in this debate but every time there is a debate in the House of Commons.

That was only one of a number of confusing comments from the SNP in the debate and, sadly, I think we will hear more this afternoon.

I want to come on to a point that I made in my intervention on the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber. It was unbecoming of him and his party not even to recognise the broad shoulders of the United Kingdom during the pandemic. People in Scotland, whether they support the Scottish National party, the Scottish Conservatives, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Scottish Labour party or the Scottish Greens, or have no party affiliation at all, recognise that during a pandemic, when people were looking for health and economic responses, the UK Government went above and beyond, with one of the strongest and most comprehensive arrangements anywhere in the world, to support individuals, businesses and communities.

Almost £13 billion was provided to protect hundreds of thousands of jobs, with support for the self-employed. Support from the UK Treasury went to the Scottish Government, which they sent to local government in Scotland to support businesses with grants of £10,000 to £25,000. That is by any measure the broad shoulders of the United Kingdom supporting every part of the UK: Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. Whether Members disagree with the Government or with the Conservatives more generally, I hope they would all accept that it is because of that that we have got to this stage of the pandemic in as strong a place as possible.

**Ian Blackford:** Let us try to bring some grace to the debate. I agree with the hon. Gentleman on something: when we are dealing with a pandemic, it is important that we work together. I shall use an example of something that happened in my constituency, on the Isle of Skye, where there was an outbreak in Home Farm care home. The testing by NHS Highland and the UK-wide testing was put in place to make sure that we supported the community and we got to a position where we controlled the outbreak. That is an example of the benefits of the two systems coming together, so I am happy to give credit where it is due.

Let me also mention the job retention scheme, which we welcome. I stress on behalf of my colleagues in the Scottish Government and the SNP that, where appropriate, we will work with the UK Government—that is what we have to do in this crisis—but will the hon. Gentleman join me in recognising that we need flexibility in the scheme, particularly to support our rural industries for as long as necessary, so that they can come back with as strong an economy as possible?

**Douglas Ross:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman, particularly for his earlier remarks. It is perhaps a milestone in the debate to have some consensual discussion between the opposing sides. On the job retention scheme, he asked for flexibility and, again, I hope he will accept that the UK Government delivered that. When it was established at pace not just by the Ministers and the Treasury but by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, there were strict rules, which were necessary, but, listening to concerns from Scottish businesses, communities and others across the whole UK, the Chancellor and the UK Government amended it to allow the flexibility that he is asking for. On further flexibility, the right hon. Gentleman will know that many countries across Europe are winding down their job retention schemes, because it is impossible to continue them for much longer.

**Pete Wishart:** The hon. Gentleman has been speaking for 25 minutes.

**Douglas Ross:** I have been speaking for 25 minutes—the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber spoke for 35 minutes.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. That is a criticism of me, not of the right hon. Gentleman. It is obvious to me that some speeches—actually, all speeches bar one—have been long this afternoon. However, I have been counting the number of interventions, and this is a real debate, so I do not see any need to curtail it while it is flowing with equal force on both sides.

**Douglas Ross:** I am very glad, Madam Deputy Speaker. In my other role, I tend to ignore the heckling I get from the sidelines and focus only on the referee. I am glad to get that guidance from you.

**Patricia Gibson:** I was listening with interest to the hon. Gentleman's comments about broad shoulders. There is no doubt that there has been some level of financial co-operation between the rest of the UK and the Treasury. However, if the shoulders are so broad, why has Scotland, with 8.3% of the UK's population, received just over 4% of all UK borrowing, and why, indeed, when the Prime Minister announced his £30 billion the other week, was only 0.1% allocated to Scotland?

**Douglas Ross:** The SNP and the hon. Lady talk about "some", but that is £13 billion—£13 billion going in a matter of months from the UK Government directly to her constituency and my constituency and protecting jobs. Just because the Scottish Government cannot rubber-stamp that money and say that they delivered it to the people of Scotland, that does not devalue what the UK Government are investing directly in Scotland.

I want to bring my remarks to a conclusion by saying—

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Douglas Ross:** I will give way as many times as hon. Members like. Eeny meeny—I will give way to the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady).

**Patrick Grady:** Just before the hon. Gentleman brings his remarks to a conclusion, I just wondered whether, with "independent coastal state", "most powerful devolved Parliament", "barriers at the border" and "broad shoulders of the Union", I can get the prize for Ross bingo.

**Douglas Ross:** I think Blackford bingo has a bit more of a ring to it. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can think of something that rhymes with Ross for the next debate—[*Interruption.*] I said Ross.

**Alan Brown:** Earlier, as the hon. Gentleman was going on about the broad shoulders of the UK and talking about testing during the covid virus pandemic, he said that the UK has done a lot more testing in Scotland than has been done through the Scottish Government. I am looking at the statistics that the Scottish Government put out every single day, and the cumulative total of covid-19 tests carried out by NHS labs was 324,474, while the total number of covid-19 tests carried out

through the UK Government testing programme was 205,000. Does he agree that 324,000 is higher than 205,000?

**Douglas Ross:** What I would say is that if the hon. Gentleman had listened to my speech, rather than trying to google the answer, he would have heard me say that the UK Government are currently testing more people in Scotland than the Scottish Government are, and that is correct. He cannot deny that. The daily testing shows that the UK Government are conducting more tests than the Scottish Government. That is what I said, and that is correct. If the hon. Gentleman gets back on his iPad, I am sure he will have a look at that.

I want to finish by saying something that, sadly, we have to say all too often now in these debates led by the SNP. It has come up time and time again, and it is important because, as the SNP likes to say, the people of Scotland are watching. I gently say to the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber and to members of the SNP that they do not speak for Scotland. The SNP does not equal Scotland. I do not speak for Scotland. The Labour party does not speak for Scotland. The Liberal Democrats do not speak for Scotland. Scotland is a diverse nation, with a range of views that we should all encompass and debate, but in a manner that is befitting of this place and the people who send us here. I am sorry that in every single Opposition day debate we get from the SNP, we hear protests from SNP Members that they are speaking up for Scotland. They are not. They are speaking up for their belief about Scotland. They are speaking up for their party's views in Scotland. But they are not Scotland—nobody is Scotland.

When we get an Opposition day debate that looks at the benefits of our two Governments in Scotland—the UK Government and the Scottish Government—I will join SNP Members in the Lobby and support them. However, as long as they use these Opposition day debates simply as party political events for the Scottish National party, rather than actually trying to achieve something for their constituents or our country, I will not support them—and tonight, I will certainly not be supporting the SNP.

2.54 pm

**Alyn Smith** (Stirling) (SNP): I am struck, as ever, following the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross), that PG Wodehouse really did get it right when he said that a Scotsman is rarely confused with a ray of sunshine. I have to say, though, that we do not need to make a performance art out of it. I will endeavour to strike a sunnier, more consensual note in this discussion, because I am very proudly centrist in my politics. On the centre ground is where I will be found. That is where most people of Scotland are and where most people of Stirling are, and that is where we all need to tend towards in order to find solutions to this debate today.

This debate is not about stopping Brexit. We accept and we regret the fact that it has happened. It is about extending the transition period to avert a self-imposed economic disaster. There are solutions to be found. At the heart of this is the need for us all to take a step back and reboot the conversation. There are several conflicting world views at play in this discussion—all of them legitimate. Scotland voted to remain. Northern Ireland voted by a nuanced vote to remain also. Two of the four home nations voted to remain. Two of the four home

[Alyn Smith]

nations voted to leave. The UK-wide leave vote was 52% to 48%. All those are facts—simultaneously correct and simultaneously legitimate. We have a conundrum to which we need to try to find solutions. Surely those numbers, those facts, suggest that we should have a more nuanced, respectful approach than we have seen from successive Governments since 2016.

There are solutions to be found. I respect England's vote. I particularly respect what the hon. Member for Leigh (James Grundy) said about his constituency and how every ward voted to leave. I respect that. I do not believe that Scotland had a right at any point in the process to stop England leaving the European Union, much as we disagreed with it, so why the hell does that not go the other way round? Respect must be reciprocal if it is to exist at all. The Scottish Government have endeavoured at every stage of this process to engage with the discussion and the conundrum. I was involved intricately with that at the Brussels end of operations. We tried to find nuanced solutions that would have recognised the conundrum that we all faced: we published "Scotland's Place in Europe"; we put forward the idea of a Scotland-Northern Ireland backstop; and we put forward the idea that the UK could leave the European Union but remain within the single market, which would have been a compromise that most people could have lived with. All those proposals were shot down, ignored and belittled by a Government who were so busy trying to negotiate with themselves that they could not spend any time thinking about Edinburgh, Cardiff or Northern Ireland. It is a poor show, and it is a poor show that we are here now, facing into a very negative situation for all the citizens that we serve, however they voted. We need to save the situation and it is not too late to change course. It is not too late to dig up the tram tracks that the UK Government have set for themselves.

All our suggestions were dismissed, but our party is left with fewer and fewer options. We will work within the law. We will work within the constitution. We will work within Scotland and the UK's democracy. We will work within the settlements that we have, but we will not meekly comply because of a vote that happened in another country. We will not meekly go along with it because we are told to by a party that has only recently found a common purpose—for the moment. It will not last long.

Leaving aside the democratic deficit of the United Kingdom, which is clear for everyone in Scotland to see, let us look at the project that is actually being imposed on us against our will and against our democratic vote. Brexit is proceeding on a flawed premise. There were a series of interlocking promises that have not been respected, that have been forgotten about and dismissed. There were the promises on the side of a bus and an oven-ready deal that is neither ready nor anywhere near an oven. We have a deal that is falling apart. In my first speech in this place, I described the withdrawal agreement as a grubby, shabby document and we were proven right, because within seconds of that vote being passed, the governing party walked away from the commitments, which were being viewed in Brussels as solemn commitments—to a level playing field, to a non-competitive aspect, and to various mechanisms. Those were all being treated as solemn commitments from a UK Government who now do not look very solemn, or serious, or at all credible in the eyes of our wider European colleagues.

Brexit has already made the people of these islands poorer on any objective analysis of the economics. All that pain is perhaps necessary, I am willing to accept, if the benefits are there to see and to be explained, but—I believe in intellectual honesty in my politics—all those benefits, surely we must accept, are at best hypothetical, and absolutely none of them has been delivered in the real world in any sense. Conservative Members wonder why we are sceptical on these Benches about this project. It is because we have not seen any advantages spelled out after four years of looking for one.

**Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con)** *rose—*

**Alyn Smith:** Do tell, sir, please.

**Tom Hunt:** Thank you very much for giving way. You said at the start of your speech that this was not about stopping Brexit; it was just about extending the transition period. So why now are you making the case for why we should not leave, and don't you think it is uncanny how everybody who is arguing—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. I would be very grateful if the hon. Gentleman would rephrase his intervention, referring not to "you", which would mean me in the Chair, but to the hon. Gentleman.

**Tom Hunt:** Following on from what I said, does the hon. Gentleman find it uncanny that all those who seem to be arguing for an extension are the people who were previously on the barricades trying to block Brexit completely, full stop?

**Alyn Smith:** I am grateful for the opportunity to perhaps correct if I was unclear. I accept that Brexit has happened. I gave up my seat in the European Parliament because of it; I wanted to come here to fight for Scotland's place in Europe. There was a point in the December election when we could have had that argument. In the halcyon days, we were thinking about a hung Parliament—with a Labour Administration, with SNP support, and a second EU referendum—but I won Stirling with 51% of the vote and my party won Scotland with a massive vote, to a Parliament we do not want to be in, on a pro-EU platform. Because of events elsewhere, it was clear that Brexit was going to happen anyway. I accepted that Brexit had happened in my first speech, so I have made that point. I accept the hon. Gentleman's point. What I am trying to do is extend the transition period to avoid a disaster that Conservative Members are going to inflict on this House out of bone-headed ideology, and when the chickens come home to roost, I do hope they will be as accountable as we have been to the people of Scotland on those points.

I again urge the Minister, for whom I have much respect, on the shared prosperity fund. There has been much talk about the power grab. I see the eyes rolling on the Conservative Benches now, but it is a very concrete example. This was not a power that rested in Brussels. The European frameworks exist in order to empower national and local governments. This was a power that was entirely with the Scottish authorities. The proposal on the table now from the UK Government is to put those powers in the hands of the Scotland Office—a part of the UK Government—removing that budget and



removing that competence from the Scottish authorities. If that is not a power grab, I will need to have a look at the dictionary that Conservative Members are working with because, in any objective sense, it is. The Minister can assure us now that I am wrong. I will happily be proven wrong. I will happily engage with what we can do with the shared prosperity fund in Scotland, but it must be as a matter of respect for devolution under the competence of the Scottish authorities. If it is not, it is a breach of trust, it is a breach of faith and it is a power grab.

As I say, the pain of Brexit or the pain that Brexit is causing could be worth it if the benefits were there to be seen, but beyond warm words and sentiment, and beyond slogans that do not stand analysis, we have not seen that. Let us be generous—I do try to be generous—and say that the one-year negotiating period was heroically ambitious. That was before covid. Covid has intervened and has taken the focus of all our Governments and all our public officials away, rightly, to a health emergency. Extending the transition period is not about fighting old battles. I am not in the business of fighting old battles. Extending the transition period can be done and will give us breathing space and certainty to allow our economy to recover from a health emergency that is turning into an economic emergency. To add a covid-inflicted disaster to that because of Brexit would be flat lunacy.

I was struck by the Paymaster General's previous comments. She is not in her place now, but I was struck when she used the phrase that we are now past the point whereby a request can be made. She said that some might argue it is impossible to apply for an extension. She is not here now, but I will happily give way to anyone on the Conservative Benches who can name anybody in Brussels who is of that view. Anyone—Berlin, Paris, Ljubljana? It is a matter of straightforward principle and pragmatism in Brussels that, if the UK applies for an extension, it will be granted. The EU has, at every stage of the process, accepted with regret the democratic choices of the United Kingdom. It will not engage in our internal discussion, so it is with regret that it accepts that an extension will probably not be applied for.

We have not heard any indication today that the UK Government will change course, but they should, and this is a plea from us to do so, because we can still change course. We must change course. This is not about old battles. I asked whether anybody in Brussels, Berlin or anywhere else shared the Minister's view. How about Dublin? Speaking of Dublin, Ireland is an independent state in north-west Europe that has done quite well lately. With Norway, it was voted on to the UN Security Council. It has the EU Commissioner for Trade in the inestimable Phil Hogan, who is a very strong negotiator in trade deals—Government Members will want to watch that one. It also has the president of the Eurogroup in Paschal Donohoe. The international accolades just keep coming for Ireland, and that is all based on the solidarity, support and encouragement of 26 other EU member states that have its back against the former colonial power.

**Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con):** The hon. Gentleman mentioned the fact that Ireland managed to get itself on to the UN Security Council, but Scotland is a permanent member of the UN Security Council through being

part of one of the most successful unions. Does his attitude not show that he actually wants to downgrade Scotland's place in the world by making it a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council?

**Alyn Smith:** I am happy to engage with that point. I have spent a number of years on the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, and I am now foreign affairs spokesman for my party. The UK is, of course, a P5 member, and Scotland is represented by virtue of that mechanism. I think that it could serve us better if we were an independent member of the UN and an independent member of the EU, working in concert with 27 of our closest neighbours, because I do not have any faith or trust in where the UK is going under the Conservative party. The Brexit process has proven us to be right.

I heard the point made earlier about the 2014 referendum. We do accept that that vote happened; we do accept that arithmetic reality. But a number of people voted no to independence on the basis of specific promises—promises that they cannot risk their European status, that we are a family of equals and a partnership of nations, that the UK is the only way to guarantee economic stability. All those promises and all that airy sentiment now look an awful lot more threadbare than they did, and no amount of bluster from Government Members will disprove that point.

Look at the recent results of votes in Scotland. Under a system where we do not make the rules, we won massively the majority of seats from Scotland in this House. Scotland is represented in this discussion by nobody from the Labour party and by a Minister who represents Milton Keynes. We have no territorial ambitions in Milton Keynes—the Minister can rest easy—but to say that it is part of Scotland is something of a stretch.

The legitimacy of this Government in the eyes of the people of Scotland is really something that Government Members need to have higher up their consciousness, because the people of Scotland are watching. The people of Scotland will have a choice at some point on whether independence in Europe is a better option than being stuck on an island run by the Conservative party. Ireland has shown us what independence in Europe actually looks like, and the Government are showing us what the UK will continue to offer Scotland. I think we have a better choice, and I believe that independence in Europe is coming.

3.8 pm

**Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con):** I would like to say that I am surprised and overwhelmed by the positive atmosphere and constructive tone of the debate and that the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) has come down from his humble croft with a wonderful solution based on his inestimable skills as a slick city financier—but alas, no. Like that one bore at every party who becomes more opinionated as the evening wears on, the right hon. Gentleman has returned to his singular obsession.

This week's excuse for nabbing us by the constitutional vol-au-vents is covid, but let us not pretend that this debate is about anything other than what it is. The SNP has not met a referendum in this century that it did not want to overturn. Whether it is the neverendum of

[Chris Clarkson]

indyref2, or frustrating Brexit by extending the transition period a little bit more, for SNP Members “once in a generation” lasts about 30 minutes. That is a half-life of caesium-130, not a major constitutional change.

I was at the Glasgow count in 2014, watching as authority after authority sent in no votes in result after result. I was there when SNP Members started cheering early when the Inverclyde result came in. Do you know what, Madam Deputy Speaker? They still learned nothing; they were calling for a second referendum before the fine folk of Fife had even sent the final coup de grâce.

Of course, the right hon. Gentleman trots out the line that Scotland voted remain, but I remind him that the United Kingdom voted to leave. My constituency, Heywood and Middleton, voted to leave by well over 60% and, contrary to the groupthink of the bien-pensant Écossais on the Opposition Benches, they did know what they were voting for. They saw the opportunities and the challenges, and they chose to seize them. The heart of the matter is that the right hon. Gentleman remains deeply embittered that his brand of independence did not pass—and if he cannot have what he wants, nobody should have it.

Heywood and Middleton made a pretty bold decision in December by ending Labour’s lease on its votes, and that was in no small part down to the enthusiasm of the right hon. and learned Member the Leader of the Opposition for a second referendum. Let no one forget that that is his position. If nothing else, this debate will be a telling test of whether Her Majesty’s Opposition have learned any lessons. I see not. When it comes to Brexit, the Labour party has had more positions than the “Kama Sutra”, and seems in no position to end the walk of shame that started on 13 December. This country has waited far too long for politicians to get themselves into gear. It wanted an outward-looking global Britain, with control over our money, borders and laws.

In closing, I would like to turn to something—[HON. MEMBERS: “More!”] Quantity from that side, quality here. I wish to turn to something that an SNP Member said in yesterday’s debate on the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill. The hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) made an insightful point, which I shall quote exactly. He said that

“nations are best served when they govern themselves.”—[*Official Report*, 14 July 2020; Vol. 678, c. 1428.]

The United Kingdom can, should and must now govern itself in line with the instruction that the people gave us in 2016.

3.11 pm

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I would like to thank the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) for what was, frankly, patronising drivel about Scotland and how we think, and for his insight into the 2014 referendum. He did get a joke in about the “Kama Sutra”, so obviously that was enough to have those on the Government Benches cheering; it is a joke we have all heard before so it was not very clever.

The motion before the House is all about common sense. It makes sense to extend the transition period during this covid pandemic. Only the Tories and their unelected tsar, Dominic Cummings, can think that a

no-deal crash-out in December, in the midst of this global pandemic, is a good thing. It is quite clear that they are happy to pile chaos upon chaos.

Today’s motion and debate are also about nationalism and those who are obsessed by borders—and by that, of course, I mean the British nationalists, who think that the decline of the UK was due to the malign influence of the EU; those nationalists who are obsessed with controlling the UK borders and keeping people out; the very ones who cling to the glory days of the empire and think that the empire will return. Their idea of independence is so different from what we see as Scotland’s future.

We see a future in which Scotland is a member of the EU—one in which we still have freedom of movement for EU citizens and our students can still participate in the Erasmus scheme. As it stands at the moment, if we remain in a UK that is out of the EU, students from the EU who apply to a Scottish university will initially be given only a three-year study visa—a visa that is not even long enough for them to complete their four-year course in Scotland. That is a simple example of how Scotland does not matter and does not figure when the UK formulates policy, particularly in respect of immigration. It is always based on what the Tory Government think England wants and how the voters in England will react.

We know that Scotland relies on immigration for growth, and we actually value those who come and work for the NHS. Meanwhile, the Tory Government and the Prime Minister had to be shamed into abandoning the health surcharge that they were applying to people who were saving lives and keeping the NHS going. Scotland simply cannot afford to be wedded to an immigration system designed for the south-east of England: as well as being inward-looking, it would cost Scotland financially and economically.

Bizarrely, despite the Tory Government’s obsession with controlling the UK borders, they are not actually in a position to do so if they leave without a deal in December. Throwing £700 million at it this week will not magically create a system that will be in place and operating by 1 January 2021. It certainly will not deal with the problem of the Irish border and the fact that there promises to be no new infrastructure. There is no IT system available at the moment that can actually do what they claim it can.

On that, the one aspect the International Trade Secretary understands is the fact that the UK risks being a smugglers’ charter. It is such a risk that she believes the UK could be subject to a challenge from the World Trade Organisation, basically because of the UK’s desire for no border checks for EU imports to Great Britain for the first six months of 2021. How is that taking control of your borders? The International Trade Secretary highlighted a lack of plans and timescales for tariff declaration systems, border controls and necessary infrastructure for ports in the UK. She also outlined the fear that the dual tariff system will not be in place for 1 January 2021, in breach of prior commitments made to Northern Ireland in the Government’s Command Paper. It is quite clear that the Government are not ready to leave the transition period in December 2020. They really do need to think again about how they go forward.

The hard Brexiteers, of course, still tell us that despite all that, and despite the International Trade Secretary’s highlighting her own concerns to the Cabinet, there is

no need to extend the transition period—that is, hard Brexiteers such as the former Transport Secretary, the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), who, in previous no-deal planning, awarded a ferry contract to a company with no ferries, no money and no assets. But sure, these are the people who can come together and somehow magic all these solutions into place by December 2020! It is a complete and utter fantasy. Fortunately, the people of Scotland can see through that hard-headedness. They did not vote for Brexit and they certainly do not want a no-deal crash-out. A survey has found that 83% of people in Scotland, and even 77% of people across the UK, say that the UK Government should agree to an extension. Why are those views being roundly ignored?

There is a reason why 48 SNP MPs, out of 59 seats, were elected in December. More and more people in Scotland can see that having our independence means that we can steer our own path. We know they see that the Scottish Government have handled the covid-19 pandemic better than the UK Government, despite what the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) was saying earlier. We have now reached a stage at which for over a week there have been no deaths in Scotland. I think everyone in the Chamber should welcome that. It is a shame that the death figures in the UK are still way too high, but I think that is a sign of how we have handled it much better in Scotland.

Polls across the entire UK show that Nicola Sturgeon is showing real leadership, unlike the Prime Minister. It is becoming obvious to all that if we are to have a true economic and green recovery, Scotland needs independence. People can see that the Tories crowing about how grateful we should be for getting Barnett consequentials is no substitute for having our own powers on borrowing and taxation. They can see that the summer financial statement the other week bypassed Scotland altogether.

**Katherine Fletcher** (South Ribble) (Con): To return to the point the hon. Gentleman makes about death rates and figures, in the Science and Technology Committee we have been hearing much about different rates in care homes and lots of the powers that are currently with the Scottish Government to prevent care home deaths. I encourage him to look at the figures, because Scotland is much worse than England.

**Alan Brown:** I would have thought that, as a scrupulous member of that Committee, the hon. Lady would know that the death rate in care homes in Scotland is not actually higher than the death rate in care homes in England. That said, it is much higher than we would have liked, no doubt about it—it would have been much better for all if so many people did not suffer. I go back to the main point: there have been no covid deaths at all for over a week now in Scotland. It is quite clear that we are handling the virus much better, and yesterday there were only five new cases identified in the whole of Scotland.

**Paul Holmes:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, but honestly that comment is beneath him. The population of Scotland is so much smaller than that of England that of course there would be more deaths in England than in Scotland. He should withdraw the accusation that his Government have done more than the UK Government on covid. It is based on population and the point he raises is not a very good one.

**Alan Brown:** I will not withdraw the factual assertion I made that we have handled the covid-19 pandemic in Scotland better than the UK Government. And if we are talking about population, we can do that pro rata. The death rate in England is far, far higher than in Scotland. There are still daily deaths occurring every day in England and, as I have said, there are none in Scotland. That is nothing to do with having a lower population—zero is zero.

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I suggest that it does this House a disservice if people outside see us haggling over which country has had fewer deaths—frankly, I think it does Members on both sides of the House a disservice—so I would like to go back to the hon. Gentleman's comment on the summer statement last week. He spoke about how the UK Government's funding had bypassed Scotland. That is an untrue statement. What it did was bypass the Scottish Government, and once again, that shows that unless the money has the stamp of the Scottish Government on it, the SNP does not accept that money being spent here can benefit the people and businesses of Scotland.

**Alan Brown:** The hon. Gentleman knows that that is part of the debate about a power grab. The UK Government are trying to bypass the Scottish Government, so he is right in that, because they want to stick a Union flag on it—well, that trick does not work either. I go back to my earlier point: he is one of the Scottish Conservative MPs who stand up and brag about Barnett consequentials, but it is a sad state of affairs that we are expected to be grateful for Barnett consequentials, which come from a UK Government plan on how to spend money in England. They look at England's needs and apply money to be spent based on England's needs. We then get a wee share of that money and we are supposed to say, "Thank you very much, UK Government. The broad shoulders do us so well." That is not how it works. In the Budget process, Scotland's needs are never taken into account and people in Scotland understand that.

**Jamie Stone:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way in his characteristically kindly manner. Perhaps I can take him back to the thrust of his speech. Is it not very regrettable that we still do not seem to have any details that lead us to believe anything very much about what the shared prosperity fund will mean for Scotland? Someone who travels in my constituency or that of the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) will see many, many signs with European stars on them. Scotland and the highlands have benefited greatly from European funding. I do not know what will replace it in future and I would like to know.

**Alan Brown:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman, and I thank him for advising me to get back to the thrust of my speech, as I will now, on that very theme. As he correctly points out, in the highlands and islands, so many areas have benefited from European funding over the years. So many road upgrades have been undertaken, with causeways built, to connect islands, all based on European funding. That money is no longer accessible to Scotland. That money was making up for the deficiencies of direct rule from Westminster. Why were all these projects outstanding? Why did they have to be funded by European money? Because Westminster was not taking account of Scotland's needs.



[Alan Brown]

On the shared prosperity fund, as the hon. Gentleman said, we have no clarity. It says it all that responsibility for the fund lies with the Minister for English local government, so, clearly, it will not take into account the needs of Scotland. It is going to be tailored to local communities in England. We will get some money and be told to be grateful and thankful—“Take your money and on you go.” It is not working any more, and the people in Scotland understand that.

We have heard today that this is the most successful political union in the world, and they tell us how lucky we are to have such a powerful devolved Parliament—the most powerful devolved Parliament in the world, apparently. And yet, if we look across the Irish sea to Northern Ireland, we see that the Northern Ireland Assembly has powers over welfare and pensions, and an independent civil service, for example, which the Scottish Parliament does not. Wallonia in Belgium scuppered the EU-Canada trade deal, so there are some other examples of Parliaments that have much greater power and responsibility than the Scottish Parliament. Most federal states in the United States have more powers than the Scottish Parliament, so this myth that it is the most powerful Parliament in the world does not wash. Of course it has done good for the Scottish people. Of course it is much better than direct rule from Westminster, but do not pretend that it is the most powerful Parliament in the world.

The real truth of the matter in terms of Unionist condescension is that they do not even believe that the people of Scotland should choose their own future. We have heard it today—“You had your referendum in 2014. The people voted in 2014 to stay in the UK, so shut your mouths and get on with it.” That does not wash either. The opinion polls show consistently at the moment support for independence at 54%. It ill becomes these people to say, “You’re not getting another referendum.”

**Alexander Stafford** (Rother Valley) (Con): The hon. Gentleman just mentioned opinion polls. Does he not agree that on 10 and 11 September, prior to the independence referendum, opinion polls showed that Scotland was going to vote for independence, yet when it actually came to the vote a few days later, it voted to remain part of the UK? Why should we listen to opinion polls? Should we not listen to the voice of the people as they express it at the ballot box?

**Alan Brown:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for another wonderful insight from afar. Yes, there was one opinion poll and yes, it did excite us, but it was only one opinion poll; all the other opinion polls showed that no was going to win, so I do not understand his point. It is clear that the opinion polls have moved and now consistently show record support for independence.

It is clear from some of the observations from Conservative Members that they do not understand what the Scottish population are thinking and how they feel. Their denial just beggars belief. They can talk in this Chamber about denying Scotland another referendum, but they cannot deny the will of the people in the long run. I assure them that independence is coming, it is coming soon, and then we will rejoin the EU and be an outward-looking, ambitious nation.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** As I said in reply to the point of order from the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), I have let the debate run and put no restriction on time because it has been a very robust debate and I think it has benefited from everyone being able to take a lot of interventions rather than being constrained by a time limit. I hope not to have to introduce a time limit, because we have plenty of time for this extremely important debate, but I would appreciate it now if hon. Members would please hold the floor for around eight minutes. Eight minutes is quite a long time. That time will be reduced later in the debate, but if everybody takes around eight minutes for the time being, everyone who has indicated that they would like to speak will have an opportunity to do so, and that would be fair.

3.26 pm

**Mark Eastwood** (Dewsbury) (Con): First, I reassure the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) that I will not mention the “Kama Sutra”, so no upset caused there. [Interruption.] Oh, sorry—I just did.

I welcome the Minister’s comments about the importance of sticking to the deadline and our promise to the British people. The Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union, of which I am a member, received evidence relating to the effect of covid-19 on the negotiations. The negotiations are progressing and intensifying, but no amount of extra time will resolve the sticking points. The European Union is refusing to follow its own precedent and incorporate terms that it has accepted in other trade deals. The Select Committee’s report spoke of the possibility that covid-19 “may focus minds on arriving at a timely deal.”

I hope that causes the EU to recognise that its position is unreasonable and accept its need to compromise.

The report also highlighted the importance of giving certainty to business. The SNP’s motion would only give way to months more of uncertainty. It is reckless and acts as a thin veil for the party’s desire to cancel the decision taken by the United Kingdom in 2016.

**Lee Anderson** (Ashfield) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that four years is enough time to have negotiated a deal with the EU?

**Mark Eastwood:** I thank my hon. Friend for making that really important point. We have moved on now, and there is no more time for dither and delay. We need to move on.

It is hardly surprising that the SNP called this debate, given its form for disregarding referendum results. Fifty-seven per cent. of the people of Dewsbury, Mirfield, Kirkburton and Denby Dale voted to leave the European Union. I was proud to campaign for a truly global Britain to take back control from Brussels and reclaim our independent trade policy. During the last general election, the spectre of the Brexit party risked splitting the leave vote and allowing the Labour party to hold the seat. Imagine my relief when my Labour opponents, in their infinite wisdom, published election leaflets branding me as the Prime Minister’s chum and a no-deal Brexiteer. I would like to thank the Labour party for its gleaming endorsement, without which I probably would not be

standing here today. I believe in giving credit where credit is due. The fact that the Labour party thought those leaflets would hinder my chances rather than endear me to the electorate just shows how out of touch it is.

I echo my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Jacob Young) in asking where Labour Members are today. Where are they? Looking at the sparse Labour Benches, I see little sign that anything has changed. It is deeply worrying that the Opposition could muster only one Back-Bench Member to speak in this debate—*[Interruption.]* And I am not sure where the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones) is. I want to offer Labour Members—who are, hopefully, watching or listening in their offices—some genuine advice: listen to the British people and accept the result of the referendum and the enormous benefits of being an outward-looking nation. They should unanimously oppose this motion. By doing so, perhaps they would get a little bit closer to reconnecting with their traditional voters.

I must confess that I am not, in fact, a no-deal Brexiteer. That is not to say that we should be fearful of a no-deal Brexit, given adequate preparation. However, I am optimistic that the Government will secure a deal that works for the whole United Kingdom. They are on track to deliver a deal that protects our legal autonomy and takes us out of the single market and the customs union. We will then be able to secure the vast boons of trade deals with countries such as Australia, New Zealand, the USA and Japan. My constituents have no desire to dither and delay, and nor do I. I will be opposing the motion with a spring in my step.

3.32 pm

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) for securing this debate, and it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mark Eastwood). I noted his use of the term “take back control”, which I might use as well, but possibly running in a different direction. I would also like to inform the House that our Senedd in Wales is today holding the first ever debate on annibyniaeth—*independence*. In the light of the fact that we are also holding this debate here, and of the tenor in which it is being conducted, it is fair to say that the scaffolding of the UK is being strained to breaking point by the unprecedented circumstances in which we find ourselves.

One of the dominant themes of our public debate since the 2016 EU referendum has been that power should lie closer to the people. The campaign was largely won on the emotional appeal of autonomy and control. “Vote leave and take back control” was the mantra that was repeated ad nauseam in debates inside this House and elsewhere. There was, and there remains, a clear emotional appeal to that message, and while I regretted Wales’s decision to vote to leave, back in 2016, I recognise that that vote reflected a genuine and justified dissatisfaction with our distance from where decisions are taken in our politics. Therefore, 2016 should have been a turning point and the beginning of a new process of truly bringing power closer to the people. We should have seen more devolution, not only to our national Parliaments but to local authority level. That vote should have started a process of bringing disengaged voters back into the democratic process, and of giving people real control over the decisions affecting their real lives.

The UK Government themselves acknowledged the need for that. The Brexit White Paper released in March 2017 proclaimed:

“As the powers to make these rules are repatriated to the UK from the EU, we have an opportunity to determine the level best placed to make new laws and policies on these issues, ensuring power sits closer to the people of the UK than ever before.”

Instead, what we have had is a centralisation of power—centralisation to these corridors here in Whitehall, standing in the way of powers that should have been in transit from Europe to our national Parliaments rather than empowering Whitehall further. If this were a true Union of equals, these former EU powers would have gone equally, naturally, to all our Parliaments. The process started with the EU withdrawal Act, which ensures that the only Parliament that will take back control is the one most removed from the lives of the ordinary people whom many of us in the Opposition represent.

The UK internal market Bill threatens our powers further, by allowing Westminster to dictate trade, environmental, food and animal welfare standards and provisions and by giving Westminster control over state aid—a clear breach of devolution in spirit and actuality.

Westminster once again undermines our nations when it comes to an extension of the transition. The Welsh Government, as well as the Scottish Government, last month called for the transition period to be extended. They were ignored.

**Jacob Young:** The right hon. Lady mentioned the Welsh Government. Labour is in power in Wales, of course, yet Labour Members have not bothered to turn up to this debate. I congratulate the right hon. Lady and my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones) on representing Wales on both sides of the House when Labour does not care.

**Liz Saville Roberts:** In these extraordinary circumstances, I will agree with the hon. Gentleman. I am deeply disappointed that where Labour is in power, and when it has made a clear statement to an effect that is relevant to the title of this debate, it does not have people here to push that argument.

I return to the UK internal market Bill and beyond. The Westminster Government, in this matter and others, not only disregarded the approaches from the Scottish and Welsh Governments, but did not consult them when they gave official notice to extend the transition.

Now, of course, the coronavirus has affected every nation badly, Wales among them. A recent Office for National Statistics survey found that 46% of Welsh businesses have six months or less of cash reserves—the highest percentage among the UK nations. In just five months’ time, businesses that export to the EU will be subject to customs declarations regardless of whether or not a deal is struck, adding increased costs and immense red tape to businesses that are already struggling.

In 2018, HMRC estimated that each customs declaration form would cost an average of £32.50 to complete. The Government expect that about 400 million additional customs declarations a year will have to be made from next year. The 46% of Welsh businesses that do not have the cash reserves to see them beyond this year will simply be unable to afford the added costs, and we fear that Welsh exports will be deeply affected, even to the point of collapse.

[Liz Saville Roberts]

Thousands of job losses have already been announced in Wales: in aerospace, manufacturing, media, and—most recently, today, with the announcement that 80 full-time jobs and 70 casual workers' jobs are at risk—at the Urdd. The Urdd is a 90-year-old organisation that runs the largest youth festival in Europe. It is critical to Welsh cultural survival, and we have heard today that there is that threat to 150 jobs out of 320, which is deeply concerning.

**Fay Jones** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): The right hon. Lady has mentioned the Urdd Eisteddfod, an important celebration of our Welsh language and culture. Another such example is the Royal Welsh Show, which has not yet received any support from the Welsh Government, despite the additional funding that the UK Government made available. Does she agree that it also deserves support?

**Liz Saville Roberts:** These cultural events are critical for us in Wales, but this year's National Eisteddfod has of course been cancelled. The Urdd is also one of the organisations that encourages our young people not just to learn Welsh at school, but to use it with each other and to have fun through the medium of Welsh. That support for the language is critical.

For a Government to be actively walking towards further disruption in January is reckless in the extreme, and I fear that it is all part of a plan. The disaster capitalists—those who profit from disaster—are now in charge, and they are gambling that the combined shocks caused by covid-19 and a destructive Brexit will allow them to reassemble the broken pieces into a radically different economic system. I urge the other Welsh Member here—I had to think *ex tempore* there—to consider the impact that a crash in January, on top of the covid-19 recession, will have on our constituencies and to consider the effect of the collapse in confidence on our fragile rural and tourism-dependent economies. We need that confidence, yet we see no confidence coming our way.

Plaid Cymru tabled a motion that gained the support of many Members on 13 March—right at the beginning of the pandemic—calling for an extension to the transition. The pandemic has changed everything, and we must now put all our energy into the recovery. The UK Government may have missed the deadline within the withdrawal agreement for a simple extension of the transition period, but that does not mean that we are bound to a January crash. There are other options, as other Members have rightly pointed out. I urge the Government to do the sensible thing—the common-sense thing—and to negotiate a real implementation period to protect our economy from the double blow of the pandemic and Brexit.

3.41 pm

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): Here we go again: another SNP debate, another debate on Brexit. I rise today, surprisingly enough, to oppose the motion in the name of the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), but I do so in a particularly generous and forgiving mood. It was Oscar Wilde who said, “We should always forgive our opponents, because nothing annoys them so much.” So I forgive the Scottish National party for bringing

before the House today this motion on, frankly, a false and flawed assumption: that the covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the Government's negotiations with the European Union to the point that businesses will be left, as the Scottish Government argue in the document described in the motion, with less time to prepare than was previously anticipated. That is quite simply not the case. The process has continued throughout the pandemic, with civil servants working from home and the negotiations taking place virtually.

SNP Members are not the only people to be worried about the efficiency or the productivity of people working from home, but if they truly believe that it is impossible to conduct effective negotiations remotely, that does prompt the question why they were so insistent that we could function effectively as MPs under the virtual Parliament arrangements, which the SNP fought so hard to keep. Indeed, on 8 June in this very place, the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) made a strong and eloquent case for retaining remote working and hybrid arrangements, because they were working properly and should be brought back “in full”. I do not believe for a minute that he believes that it should be one rule for us and another for other people, but I do agree with him that remote working does actually work well, and our negotiating teams have been demonstrating that every day with their continued important work on exiting the European Union.

**Patrick Grady:** Of course, it is unfortunate that we do not have remote participation, because far more SNP Members would have wanted to take part in this debate if they had been able to contribute via the remote screens. If Brexit is heading towards being such a success, as the hon. Gentleman claims, can he explain the opinion polls showing that people in Scotland are moving towards independence by a substantial majority? Are the polls wrong? Are the people misguided? Or is it actually that the misleading principles are coming from the Conservative Benches?

**Andrew Bowie:** I would happily stand and debate opinion polls and their trajectory, but there is only one poll that truly matters, and that is when people get to the ballot box. I am sure the hon. Gentleman would agree that the SNP only managed to get 45% of the vote in December. That is a fantastic total and a very strong result, but it shows that 55% of the Scottish population voted for parties that want to remain in the United Kingdom—a United Kingdom that is, I am afraid, because we believe in democracy, leaving the European Union this year.

Throughout the Brexit debate, there has been a false assumption that the status quo was one of the options that remained available to us. That was never true and has never been less true that it is today. The European Union has been hit just as hard by the pandemic as the UK has, and it will have to make difficult decisions about how to respond to the economic effects, exactly as we will. Our staying in the transitional arrangements with the EU, when the EU is rightly not factoring British interests into its plans for recovery, does not make sense. We need all the flexibility available to us to respond to the economic damage caused by the pandemic, and staying inside the EU's one-size-fits-all framework is simply not conducive to that.



We have had this debate over and over again for the past three to four years. What this country, and businesses in this country, need is certainty, not more dither and delay. It is disappointing and of serious detriment to the interests of the people of Scotland that the SNP has not yet learned how negotiations work. If the past four years have taught us anything, it is that without firm deadlines, negotiations grind to a halt. That is precisely why deadlines exist—to ensure that important tasks are completed in a timely fashion. I am sure that Opposition Members visit schools in their constituencies from time to time, as I do. The next time they visit I invite them to ask teachers how likely it is that their students' coursework would materialise were endless extensions on offer.

The leader of the Scottish National party in this place, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber, spoke today about the importance of economic certainty and putting the economy first. My goodness me! It was a bigger conversion than Paul's on the road to Damascus to finally hear the leader of the SNP making our arguments for us. Surely it means that the SNP has finally accepted our argument against breaking up the United Kingdom, given the huge economic cost that would bring. If the economy comes before all other concerns, the case for Scottish independence is as dead as a dodo.

**Stephen Flynn:** Parking the politics for a moment, in all honesty does the hon. Gentleman not share my concern that our part of the United Kingdom, which we both are elected to represent, is due to be the hardest hit of the entirety of the United Kingdom as a result of Brexit? Does he not have any concerns about that whatever?

**Andrew Bowie:** The hon. Member knows that I share concerns about the economic prospects of our part of the country, which we are both proud to represent, and that is why I, unlike him, welcomed the huge stimulus announced last week by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, so much of which will be going to support Scottish businesses.

**Stephen Flynn** *rose*—

**Andrew Bowie:** Perhaps the hon. Member would like to stand up and welcome the Chancellor's package of announcements that was unveiled last week.

**Stephen Flynn:** I thank the hon. Member for giving way and giving me another opportunity to reflect on the package last week, which he knows was devoid of any support whatever for Scotland's oil and gas sector in terms of an oil and gas sector deal. I see his head go down, because he has just walked into that one, knowing exactly what I was going to say. I go back to my initial point. Does he not in all honesty have concerns that our part of Scotland will be detrimentally impacted by Brexit? Just say it.

**Andrew Bowie:** I may have walked right into that, but that is because last week Oil & Gas UK welcomed the package of support unveiled by the Chancellor. It was very welcoming of the furlough scheme that we put up, and it is looking forward to working with us as we develop the oil and gas sector deal. By the way, that deal and support would not come if Scotland were not in our wider United Kingdom.

I have to say something to the hon. Member and any SNP Members. If, heaven forbid, a second independence referendum took place and, heaven forbid, the result went in their favour, we would respect the result because, after all, we are democrats. I doubt we would see SNP politicians coming back here asking for an extension to any transition period that had been agreed, but the untangling of the Union that we are going through now is nothing compared with what it would be like to untangle an economic, political and military Union that has existed for more than 300 years.

The SNP looks both ways when it comes to leaving Unions. They will find any excuse to drag out the Brexit process for as long as possible, but when it comes to independence, it is full steam ahead—no plan, no timetable, no currency, no mandate, no way. They are simply Euro-Unionists. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) mentions the side of a bus. Earlier, we heard the leader of the Scottish National party talk about what the SNP campaigned on during the December election. Its campaign was solely about “Stop Brexit”; it was not about another Scottish independence referendum. Independence was not even mentioned for the duration of the campaign, so toxic was it to the Scottish National party's platform. On the side of the SNP bus, in black and yellow, was “Stop Brexit”. It failed, we are leaving the European Union at the end of the year, and we will make a success of it.

**Stephen Flynn:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Andrew Bowie:** I will not, because I have already taken two interventions—not even for the hon. Gentleman.

SNP Members know that I campaigned and voted to remain in the European Union, but there is a certain thing called democracy, and we must abide by the results. Otherwise, everything that we stand for in this place, and out in the wider country, falls flat on its face. We fought the referendum. My side lost, the leave side won, and we must respect that, just as one day—hopefully—the Scottish National party will respect the fact that it lost in 2014, and that Scotland is staying as part of the United Kingdom.

At least the Scottish National party is consistent, and has a position on Brexit and the transition agreement, and I am sure we will debate the issue again in the months to come. Sadly, that is more than can be said for the Labour party, which is all but invisible today. I say in all candour to my friends on the Opposition Benches that it does not look likely, with the sort of actions demonstrated today, that they will get back to the position in which they need to be if they are to become a force in Scottish politics again, let alone in UK politics.

I am conscious of what you said earlier, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I will draw my remarks to a close as I know that plenty of people wish to speak. This motion is not about covid, the economy, or people's livelihoods; this motion is about the Scottish National party and its obsession with stymying the democratic role of the British people. We should be proud of voting it down this evening.

3.52 pm

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): It is, for a change, a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine

[Gavin Newlands]

(Andrew Bowie), and I am glad to see him doing better. His more measured approach to this debate has been noted on the SNP Benches, and I wish him well—although, as usual, he was talking guff.

We are in the middle of a health crisis that stretches not just across borders—whether or not the Prime Minister recognises them—but across continents. At least 600,000 people around the world are dead from coronavirus, and many millions more will contract the virus in the future. That situation requires an international response, yet sadly, and predictably, the UK has gone further into its Brexit bunker, and decided to try and opt out of the world.

We have heard repeatedly about how Ministers want the UK to remain close friends with our EU allies, but what sort of friend insists on diverting the resources of the EU and its member states away from dealing with the most serious health emergency in modern history, and to negotiating with an obstinate and childish ex-member that seems to use a “Dad’s Army” script as its terms of reference? The EU has made clear time after time that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith) said, it would be more than amenable to an extension to the negotiations, to allow it and the UK the space and time that is needed to deal with the public health emergency consuming us all. The response from the UK? “No thanks. I’m all right Jack.” What sort of relationship does it think will emerge on the other side?

Scotland is being dragged into a bombastic mix of exceptionalism, isolationism, and outright self-destruction. Ministers and Conservative Members have said that we voted as a Union, but people in Scotland have heard that before. People in Scotland also know that our democratic wish to work alongside our longstanding partners and allies has been torn up and chucked in the Brexit bin. Again, we are seeing that the British state is fundamentally incapable of good governance for Scotland or the rest of the UK. A clique of self-congratulatory Oxbridge graduates would steer their own country on to the rocks in the name of Brexit if they even knew where the steering wheel was. Instead, they have allowed their country to drift over the decades, taking the rest of us with them.

Scotland has never endorsed this self-immolation. For all that Ruth Davidson was lauded to the heavens by her high-profile supporters in the press, her crowning triumph was 28% of the vote in 2017—a figure that dropped two years later. The Tory record at election after election has been an unbroken streak of dismal failure for decades, yet our entire society and economy have been reshaped and allowed to wither on the vine, because that same Tory party has governed the UK for nearly 28 out of my 40 years. Now they expect us to keep silent and meekly go along with their back-of-a-fag-packet Brexit.

As I have said a few times in this place in the past few weeks, my constituency is facing the biggest challenge to our economy for decades. Rolls-Royce, Glasgow airport, easyJet, British Airways, Menzies Aviation and Swissport—I could go on to list company after company, and sector after sector—are in the process of collectively laying off thousands of my constituents. I have asked time after time what the UK Government plan to do to support constituencies such as mine, which are staring

economic disaster in the face, but there has been no answer and no sign of a plan. But EU countries do have plans and they are implementing them now. They want to save jobs and key industries, and they have their levers and powers to do that. The Danish Government do not have to send missives to the Germans asking permission to have an industrial or macroeconomic policy. The French Government are implementing their plan for aviation now, yet there is no plan in the UK—none. Aerospace and aviation are left to rot; there is no sectoral support and no sign of any.

Businesses face a double whammy of coronavirus and Brexit, both accentuated by UK Government incompetence, ideology and arrogance. The exporters in my constituency still do not know what and where they will be able to export to the EU in the new year. Our manufacturers still do not know whether they will be massively disadvantaged by trade barriers that their EU competitors regard as fit only for the history books. The service industries still do not know what access, if any, they will have to the single market after 1 January, all while every business and individual in the country grapples with the impact of coronavirus, and the massive dislocation it is causing and will continue to cause.

This is history repeating itself. Our country lived through decades of de-industrialisation as asset-strippers and spivs were allowed to run riot and destroy hundreds of thousands of jobs in the name of ideology—the UK Government sat back and let it happen. Emigration from Scotland ran into the hundreds of thousands as families moved anywhere and everywhere they could to find a skilled job—the UK Government sat back and let it happen. Our towns and cities became victims of the post-industrial economy—the UK Government sat back and let it happen.

**Tom Hunt:** The hon. Gentleman talks about the uncertainty that many businesses in his constituency face, but surely that uncertainty would drag on if we were to extend the transition deadline today. Surely it would be far better to focus on getting a deal and providing greater certainty through a clear framework of where we are going to be in the years ahead, rather than extending and pushing it down the road.

**Gavin Newlands:** I am very grateful for that intervention, but I have just listed all the circumstances in which businesses do not know what is going to happen after 1 January, so what certainty is the hon. Gentleman talking about? I have no idea and neither do businesses in my constituency. If he has some certainty to give us, I would be happy to give way again so that he can tell us what that is.

The UK has shown itself unfit and unwilling to govern Scotland properly, with, more often than not, zero democratic mandate to do so. I know that an independent Scotland, with its governance, capability and capacity, could plot a better course than the one we are locked into. I know that we could take our place back in the EU alongside the other small independent countries that make up the majority of its members. Do the Government want to carry on telling the people of Scotland that somehow we, on our own, are an economic basket case propped up by the largesse of the Treasury, as has been indicated? That is their concern, but I urge them not to be hypocritical; they should deliver that message to the people of Denmark, Ireland, Sweden, Portugal, Austria, Finland, Luxembourg, Slovenia and

all the other nations, self-governing, sovereign and independent, that make up the EU. The UK Government should pop up in the national news programmes of those countries telling the electorate that they are doing it wrong. They should be firing out press releases and extending the Prime Minister's role as Minister for the Union to cover all these countries, Britsplaining their way across the continent. But they will not find a receptive audience and they do not find one in Scotland. More and more, the rot at the heart of the UK is laid bare for all to see and people are saying enough is enough—enough of jingoism, isolationism and palling up with Trump; enough of watching the poorest in society being punished by a welfare state that is meant to help them; enough of rhetoric towards our friends in the EU that, until very recently, was the sole preserve of the *Daily Mail* letters page.

We want a Scotland that protects our citizens and works to protect others. We want a Scotland that values Europe and the benefits we bring each other when working in partnership. The Minister for the Union and his colleagues should realise now that to block the democratic will of the people to achieve these goals would be another nail in the coffin for the UK and another example for the Scottish people of how the UK works against our interests, not for them.

Scotland belongs in Europe, and the people of Scotland will make that happen sooner rather than later. The Government, despite what they may think, cannot stop democracy, and they cannot and will not stop the people of Scotland choosing their own future.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. After the next speaker we will have to have a time limit of five minutes, but that does not apply to Wendy Chamberlain.

4 pm

**Wendy Chamberlain** (North East Fife) (LD): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. There have been relatively few opportunities for me, as a new MP, to debate the current negotiations with the EU during this Session, so I welcome the debate. It is timely because, after several years of bluster since 2016, this week we have finally started to see some more details of what Brexit will mean in practice.

On Monday, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster set out the £705 million cost of new border infrastructure and a new comms plan, which has been reported to cost £93 million on top of last year's £100 million defunct Get Ready for Brexit campaign. On Tuesday, the Government confirmed that some 250 million customs declarations will be required every year, at a cost of £13 billion per annum.

Some of us in this Chamber are old enough to remember that the current Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster promised that if we voted leave, the NHS would receive £350 million a week. We were told that leaving the EU would be easy and frictionless, but now this Vote Leave Government are spending, on my calculations, around £250 million a week to prepare us for the realities of Brexit, and that is just the tip of the iceberg. These were preparatory measures; we have no idea what the exact cost of our exit will be. There will be tariffs; the question is on what scale, and

we now know that that means a deterioration in our terms of trade. It means higher costs for business, and ultimately it will mean a rise in the cost of living, which will hit the poorest in this country hardest.

I acknowledge that that means that, in many cases, those who voted for Brexit will be hit hardest, but this is not the Brexit that they were promised—all at a time when the country faces unprecedented economic disaster and the greatest public health crisis this century. This is not Project Fear; the Government's announcements, slowly though they may have come, have continually confirmed that this is Project Reality. Members on the Government Benches might criticise me for talking Britain down, but as I highlighted in my question to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster earlier this week, the current actual financial opportunities identified by the Government equate to absolutely zero.

Back in 2016, we were told that Britain would be welcomed, as we left the EU, with open arms by the international community. Despite lots of rhetoric around trade discussions, that welcome is far from certain. The rhetoric of leaving one Union to be welcomed by a host of nations is also used by Scottish National party Members, and that is not the only parallel between the campaign to leave the union in Europe and that to leave the Union of these four nations.

I have to question the consistency of advocating, on the one hand, that Brexit is doing a great deal of damage—with which I agree; so much, in fact, that delay is required—while, on the other, failing to acknowledge that leaving the UK would be even more fiscally damaging. The UK has many similarities to the EU. The UK has a single market—one which, I acknowledge, is currently being undermined by our EU departure a customs union—and a single currency. We share a currency, and other far closer and deeper economic and social ties.

Britain carries out 40% of its trade with the European Union, and I agree with the SNP that leaving that institution is causing, and will continue to cause, profound economic shocks, but Scotland does over 60% of its trade with Wales, England and Northern Ireland, and impacting that would be cataclysmic.

The current crisis has been a clear indicator of the fact that working together can achieve better outcomes. It is likely that we will hear that, had Scotland voted for independence in 2014, with the obvious difficulties of separating from a 300-year-old Union, coupled with a likely currency crisis, it would potentially be in a very precarious place at this time, as it dealt with covid.

Earlier, I mentioned consistency. If the pandemic had struck in a world in which Scotland had voted for independence and was in a period of transition out of the UK, do we really think the Scottish Government would have been pressing for an extension to the date of Scotland's departure owing to covid? I do not think so; it is very likely that the SNP would be ploughing on. They would probably have had the same thinking as the current UK Government: given the scale of the crisis, no one will notice a bit more chaos, and if they do, we can point to the crisis. And why? Because they, like those on the Government Benches, do not acknowledge the costs of their beliefs.

The hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) stated that the SNP looks both ways on Unions. So do those on the Government Benches. If the argument is that coronavirus has such



[Wendy Chamberlain]

an impact on the UK that an extension to Brexit is required, why is the SNP continuing to push for a referendum on Scottish independence?

The First Minister claims that anyone who says anything contrary to the Scottish Government at present is being a political opportunist, but, too often, her party is happy to foster the politics of grievance. Last week, the Finance Cabinet Secretary, Kate Forbes, dismissed the financial support that went directly from the UK Treasury to Scottish people and businesses as if it did not exist. We have also talked about the Barnett formula today, and one of the benefits of the support that has been delivered directly by the UK Treasury is that it has not been subject to Barnett consequential and has been absolutely based on the needs of UK businesses and employees.

I fear that responsible politics are in short supply these days, not least at the top of the UK Government. I mentioned a commitment made by the Prime Minister back in 2016, and he made another one almost a year ago on the steps of Downing Street, when he promised he would govern as a one nation leader. If that is the Prime Minister's intention, he makes it very difficult to recognise it in his actions and those of his Government. In relation to the pandemic, what started as a four-nations approach with movement in lockstep—I have heard this on the Scottish Affairs Committee—quickly degenerated into acrimonious briefings and a breakdown in communications.

We have heard frequently in this Chamber from those on the Government Benches about the precious Union, but for me, the terminology “Union” and “Unionist” rings hollow. If the way the Government have handled relations with Scotland and the other devolved nations during the pandemic is Unionist, I am certainly something different. I am a Liberal. I am a federalist. I am an internationalist: I believe not in erecting borders but in dismantling them, and I do not think the politics of nationalism—on either side of this House—the politics of grievance and, ultimately, the politics of division are any way in which to conduct truly progressive politics. I am proud to stand here representing a constituency that voted both to remain in the UK and to remain in the EU.

As the Government look towards the end of this year, I urge them to remember that two constituent parts of the UK voted decisively to remain in the EU. The failure to take that properly into account in negotiations weakens the bonds of the UK. The pandemic has shown that devolution can deliver financial support, while nations and regions make different choices on their social and public health responses. On Brexit, it is incumbent on the Government to be a Government for all four parts of the country, not just England.

We have clearly missed the opportunity of an extension, so now the Government must do all they can to seek a deal that will give us the closest possible relationship to the EU and minimise the impact of our departure during the covid crisis.

4.7 pm

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I want to start by talking about the catalogue of demonstrated Brexit costs, which grows almost unceasingly. I continue

to be told by constituents of how it will cause massive damage to their businesses, and I am going to highlight just one of the most recent examples.

Leith and Edinburgh have a long association with the European wine trade—back as far as the 13th century—and it continues today. Raeburn Fine Wines, with premises in Leith, Edinburgh and London, has been telling me about the effects of the Brexit proposal on the wine trade. Perhaps surprisingly, the UK accounts for a large share of the world trade in fine wines, but that is under threat. Import certificates for EU wines will add business costs and near impossible bureaucracy to the uphill challenge of surviving the covid recession.

Wine is not the only high-quality sector facing an uncertain future. The recent announcement of the membership of the Trade and Agriculture Commission showed that the Government intend to break their promise to farmers to protect food standards post Brexit. The financial services sector also features heavily in my constituency, and it faces being locked out of EU markets or migrating to EU nations to protect its access. Universities face losing research cash. The health service faces losing access to essential supplies, including any new vaccine for the virus causing the current pandemic. Our fishing industry is about to be sold out by this Government, who will be handing out quotas with abandon. The list goes on and on.

Brexit was already a damaging prospect. Add the global pandemic, the trade negotiations going worse than anyone predicted and the OBR forecast of one in eight soon being out of work, and it is not clear to me and many others why anyone other than the blindest zealot would plough on unthinkingly. Now those zealots want to tie an unwilling Scotland to the handcart on the road to hell, with an internal market that once again renders the wellbeing of the people of Scotland secondary to the financial considerations of the south-east of England. No room for nuance or subtlety in the brave new Brexit; no room for devolution in the sunny uplands of broken Britain.

The Government are so frightened of debate that the Minister for the Cabinet Office is in hiding and they have sent expendable cannon fodder instead. That points to the fact that Government Ministers do not seem to understand the four nations. Some of them famously think that there is no border. They think that wisdom rests in Whitehall and all must comply. They have lost even the limited vision that once embraced England's northern powerhouse—that, too, will be ground down in the new Tory version of Mao's long march. No dissent will be tolerated, no differentiation accepted. At a time when the best economic solutions for Scotland, Wales and huge parts of England diverge hugely from the solutions offered in Parliament, uniformity will be enforced. Four legs shall be good and two legs shall be bad.

The proposed UK internal market is an infernal insult to nations that need different frameworks and support; to the people who will suffer the aftermath of the pandemic; and to those who aspire to something better than the fag end of British imperialism and exceptionalism. What has become breathtakingly clear during the coronavirus pandemic is that the UK Government are dysfunctional and incompetent. I shall give a few examples. Ministers and Spads who went roaming around England in flagrant abuse of the rules

remain in post; confusing and inconsistent messages are sent out; financial help for those affected was provided at first, then withdrawn; figures on testing capacity have been massaged until they are meaningless.

It is a shambolic mess, much like the Government's Brexit negotiations and trade talks. Failure mounts upon failure's shoulders until the combined weight is too much to bear. The bluster and bravado are no substitute for clear thinking and proper action. The confusion and dither, the stumbling up cul-de-sacs and falling over kerbstones are not statesmanship—they are just bluster and bombast. It is a sad and embarrassing caricature of a Government who talk populism and serve elitism.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Order. I think we have to move on—sorry. I call Lee Anderson.

4.13 pm

**Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con):** This debate has nothing to do with covid or the negotiations with the EU. It has more to do with the Opposition once again refusing to accept democracy. Of course, Opposition parties have form in refusing to accept the democratic will of the people. Let us remind ourselves that we voted to leave as the United Kingdom—not as Northern Ireland, not as Scotland, not as Wales, not as England. Look at the Conservatives—we are the 109s, and we are here because of the Opposition's reluctance to accept democracy. Most of us are from leave constituencies, and we were voted in because of the Opposition. That is a fact.

On 23 June 2016, my phone did not stop ringing. People all over Ashfield were ringing to ask where they could go to vote. They were people who had never voted before; people of all ages who wanted their voice to be heard. When the results came in the next day, the same people called me again to say that their vote really did count. The referendum result went a long way towards restoring confidence in democracy in left-behind areas like mine—the same areas that the Opposition told us would suffer if we left the EU. In Ashfield, our pits, factories and swathes of manufacturing industry have vanished over the past 40-odd years, and during the same period we have been part of the wonderful EU. People in Ashfield cannot see the benefits of being in the EU, and no one has ever explained it to them—I wonder why? Perhaps the Opposition do not realise that in places like Ashfield they cannot threaten us any longer.

**Alyn Smith:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Lee Anderson:** No, I will not.

The Opposition cannot tell us that we will suffer, lose our jobs and homes if we do not listen to them. We have suffered in the past, we have lost jobs and seen our area decline and be ignored, but we are fighters in Ashfield and we are coming back stronger. For the first time in decades we have hope, we know we can make a success of things, and we know that Ashfield can once again become a force to be reckoned with in a UK that is not controlled by the EU. But four years later, the Brexit blockers—

**Alan Brown:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Lee Anderson:** No, I am not giving way.

Four years later, the Brexit blockers are still at it. The majority of people in Ashfield and the first-time voters are not happy with them. Even the remain voters are

not happy with them. We are all democrats and we should respect that. My voters were not happy with the Labour party last December when the people of Ashfield voted me in, and many of my colleagues across the midlands and the north. Just after the election, Labour started knocking on doors in Ashfield to ask why its voters had left it. I was sort of hoping that there would be more Labour MPs here today, but perhaps they have some extra guidelines on social distancing—that is probably why they are not here. Imagine ignoring your core voters for four years and then telling them that they did not know what they were voting for, or that we should have a confirmatory second vote, and then telling them that no one voted for a hard Brexit, a no-deal Brexit or any other type of Brexit. The people of Ashfield voted for Brexit, deal or no deal. The fact that the SNP is now using covid as another excuse to prolong the agony just shows how low it is prepared to sink. But we still do not know what the Labour party's policy is on this—perhaps in a couple of years' time Captain Hindsight will tell us all.

The good news is that I have some oven-ready advice for the Labour party. It needs to start knocking on doors before an election and actually asking people what they want rather than telling them what they should want. It was easy for me: I asked the voters, "What do you want?", and they answered, "Get Brexit done." I promised to get it done, they voted for me, and here I am, eight months later, after decades—

**Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP):** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Lee Anderson:** No, I am not giving way.

Here I am, after decades of Labour MPs in Ashfield and after four years of Labour telling the people of Ashfield they did not know what they were voting for. Yes, I am here, and I am sticking up for people in Ashfield. The same Opposition parties keep ignoring my people, but that will not go on for much longer. The Labour party still does not get it. It does not understand its own voters in the midlands and in the north. The SNP is a bit smarter than the Labour party: it does not really want to be a part of the EU, but sees continued membership as a way of forcing independence and splitting up the Union. But have no fear—I will be waving my Union Jack at midnight on 31 December to celebrate the United Kingdom finally getting to make its own way in the world, and I hope that the SNP will be joining me.

4.17 pm

**Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP):** I must say to the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) that I think that is highly unlikely.

It is clear that the path being steered by the UK Government is compounding the economic uncertainty caused by covid, and is at odds with the interests and the wishes of the people in Scotland. It is certainly at odds with the interests and the wishes of the people in my constituency, who rejected Brexit by three to one. I am really confident that as an independent country Scotland would not be on this path. People in Scotland see through the spin, the bluster and the deceit that are at the core of this Government and the strategy they are pursuing.

[Kirsten Oswald]

Scotland's Government are taking a considered and cautious approach to getting us out from under this dreadful pandemic. There is no way the same could be said of the UK Government's response. That is not a party political point: 70% of Scots who voted Labour or Conservative in 2019 approve of the Scottish Government's handling of the pandemic. With the full powers of independence, we could have made different choices reflecting our different circumstances. It is notable that across the UK fewer than half the people think that the UK Government have handled the pandemic well—a figure that bumps along the bottom of international rankings alongside their pal Trump's shambolic Administration. This lack of planning and structure bodes very poorly for Brexit.

This is as much about the way that the UK Government consider the needs of all our communities. To borrow a phrase, "lions led by donkeys" is a not unreasonable description of the relationship between the UK's Government and its citizens. Ironically, the donkeys of yesteryear and those of today, some of whom sometimes lounge on the Government Front Benches, share a remarkably similar outlook: dismissive yet underprepared, and uninterested in experts but well-schooled in Latin soundbites—not of much practical use given the circumstances we are dealing with.

Why would anyone think that this Government—a Government who are all over the place on this pandemic, and whose mismanagement of it has affected all four nations of the UK—are capable of rebuilding the economy in a sustainable and fairer way, while they say nothing at all on issues such as child poverty? Why would anyone think that that kind of Government are capable of negotiating an exit from the EU other than by crashing us out, which many on the Government Benches appear to want to do, no matter what harm it does?

It may be late in the day, but it is not too late to do the right thing by delaying the end of the transition. The problem is that leading members of this Government and their advisers have no interest or track record in doing the right thing. It is not just in their dealings with the EU that that is the approach. Inability to negotiate is often associated with a domineering culture. That is how the UK Government conduct their relationship with the devolved Administrations. Having failed to get their way through the four-nation approach to the pandemic, the UK Government simply wandered away down a path of U-turn and confusion. In typical domineering style, their solution is not improving their ability to work with others, but planning to use the powers of this place to undermine those they should be working with.

Brexit, as it is now appearing from under the desk of Dominic Cummings, will not come quietly. The devolved Administrations tried to work with the UK Government on a post-Brexit settlement that respected the democratically expressed wishes of the people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but when the UK Government's proposals emerge, they will represent a power grab from the devolved Administrations on a grand scale. Having seen the chaos that this Government have presided over in recent months, few voters in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will welcome these proposals.

The best recruiting sergeants for the cause of Scottish independence are those who are wilfully charging on with their plans for Brexit and riding roughshod over our votes in Scotland once again, while the rest of the world watches in disbelief as they put at risk the wellbeing and economic future of their citizens. My message to the UK Government is clear, as they set about pushing down this road that Scotland expressly voted to avoid: as you set out to shake the Union to its foundations, do not be surprised if it is not left standing when you are finished.

4.22 pm

**Alexander Stafford** (Rother Valley) (Con): This debate purports to examine the effect of the coronavirus pandemic on negotiations for a future UK-EU relationship. In fact, it has become clear that the Scottish National party, with the Labour party in hock, is still pushing the agenda of frustrating Brexit by calling on the Government to accept the EU's offer of an extension to the transition period.

It should be abundantly clear to the SNP-Labour axis that after all these years the people of the United Kingdom are tired of endless delay and remain subterfuge. The British people voted for Brexit four years ago, yet they are still waiting for us to fully extricate ourselves from the EU's stranglehold. We hear those on the SNP Benches ask, "Where are Labour?" I agree—where are Labour? The fact that they cannot even be bothered to turn up to the debate shows that they support this rather than opposing it. They are happy not to make up their minds, and they are happy to support this ludicrous motion to try to stop Brexit. That says it all about the Labour party.

The results of the 2016 referendum and December's election made clear what the mission of this House must be: to fully leave at the end of the year, come what may. It is critical to the health of our democracy that people have faith in our political system and know that the results of elections and referendums are obeyed, including ones on independence for Scotland. In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, now more than ever we need the certainty of exiting the transition period for a number of reasons.

**Alan Brown:** Is the hon. Member firmly in the camp which says that we had the referendum in 2014 in Scotland and that is it—we never get the chance to have another referendum, and people do not get to change their minds in a democracy? Is that what he is saying?

**Alexander Stafford:** I am saying that we voted in a once-in-a-lifetime, once-in-a-generation referendum, and we cannot keep going back and asking the same question again and again. Nothing is more undemocratic than asking the same question again. In fact, one organisation that kept going back and asking countries to vote again and again was the European Union. Time after time, it asked countries to vote again because it did not like a decision. We are democrats: we must stand up for democracy. Even when we do not like democracy, we have to support it; otherwise, the mandate of every single one of us in this House is null and void, because we can go back again and again. For Members to argue for another referendum on Scottish independence now is for them to argue for their own position in this House not to be secure—to argue that the people who elected



all of us do not know what they voted for. If they do that, they have no authority to call for a referendum. It is a bizarre argument for the SNP to make.

Let me return to what this debate should be about: the EU and coronavirus. We need to leave for numerous reasons. Business investors need confidence and stability; we need to end the transition period so that we can get the Brexit dividends that will turbo-charge our economy; and, given the ongoing challenges presented by coronavirus and various geopolitical tensions, we must move forward from this Brexit paralysis.

The people of this country are tired of scaremongering and of this great country being talked down. Everyone on all sides of the debate just wants the best possible deal for Britain—or they should do. The Government are working hard to achieve exactly that: an ambitious, comprehensive, Canada-style free trade agreement with our European friends and allies, built on mutual respect and co-operation. We are making good progress in the negotiations and they are proceeding apace. In fact, the reason why we got rid of the virtual Parliament and came back was to get the legislation passed. The SNP was against our coming back to a physical Parliament—another of its delaying tactics that would have delayed Brexit even longer.

I remind the House that those on the Opposition Benches told us that we would not get a deal in respect of Northern Ireland, yet here we are today. We must not be distracted by the Labour and SNP naysayers who seek to talk down our nation down—*[Interruption.]* They are even chuntering to talk our great nation down.

Regardless of what type of deal we agree with the EU, I am absolutely certain that Brexit will provide great opportunities for the whole of the UK. My priority is to protect jobs and livelihoods in the areas—such as my constituency of Rother Valley—that have been long forgotten and often left behind. Brexit offers us a chance to create many high-quality British jobs in all four corners of the nation and truly to level up. We can promote UK plc by exporting our skills and goods globally to whomever and wherever we please.

It is necessary to point out that all four nations of the United Kingdom will benefit from the Brexit boom. Our friends in the SNP offer little for the people of Scotland beyond shameless and insidious separatist rhetoric. They neglect to mention that the UK single market is worth over three times more to Scotland than the EU single market—*[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) wish to intervene, or does he wish to chunter? I will happily take an intervention from a chuntering man.

**Gavin Newlands:** The hon. Gentleman talks about rhetoric; has he listened to the first half of his own speech? It has been replete with rhetoric the entire time. He should really read his own speech before he finishes it.

**Alexander Stafford:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for intervening about rhetoric; after all, this debate is more about rhetoric. I was told it was about the European Union and Brexit, but all I am hearing about is Scottish separatism and Scottish nationalism from this nationalistic party. It is all about trying to bang the tartan drum and trying to get things back, but we had a referendum. Let us move forward and talk about the debate that matters:

the Brexit boom that we are going to get and the things that this whole Government were elected to do. We will fulfil our mandate.

I remind the Scottish nationalists—the separatists on the other side of the House—that every single person in Scotland receives a dividend of £1,968 per year more. That is £2,000 per person; it is a great deal for the people of Scotland. However bad the SNP's separatist rhetoric is, though, Labour's position is even worse—its Members cannot be bothered to turn up to this debate. After years of flip-flopping and changing their mind on Brexit, they still do not support our exit from the EU. If they did, they would be here, arguing with Government Members against the nationalists, but they cannot be bothered to turn up. My constituents in Rother Valley know only too well that if Labour had won power—with the help of the SNP, because Labour would have been propped up by an SNP Government—Brexit would have been abandoned. That would have gone against the good, ordinary working people of my constituency.

In stark contrast, the Conservative party has kept its promise by taking the UK out of the EU on 31 January. We shall exit the transition period in the same decisive fashion, in order finally to take our rightful place among the nations of the world.

4.29 pm

**Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP): Mr Deputy Speaker, you would think it would be a no-brainer for the Government to extend the timetable for our Brexit transition. Given the global crisis that has engulfed all our lives, to do anything else would be ludicrous—it would be like someone driving 30 miles to test their eyesight.

Trade agreements are long and complex processes, and the transition period was already tight before the covid crisis put a spanner in the works. Now any decent deal is looking beyond reach, and there is not enough parliamentary time to properly scrutinise whatever might be agreed. Yet we have a Government who do not care about doing decent deals in the full light of day and have set their face against the scrutiny of their actions. Nailing the detail even on far easier questions is not a strength of this Administration. On the covid-19 strategy, for example, you would have thought that they would have an angle on what they actually want to achieve by now. Yet when I asked the Government whether elimination was part of their plan, I received a holding reply on 6 July, telling me that the Government could not answer the question within the normal timeframe. How can we trust them with the timeframe for Brexit when they still do not even know what they expect to achieve from this situation?

This is not a principled Government, but a reckless one. We know that they were reckless with public health advice: Dominic Cummings's hazy drive to Durham during lockdown is testimony to that. Public anger over the hypocrisy was brushed off, and we were told to move on. It was another case of, "Do as we say, not as we do."

The signs do not look good for post-Brexit decisions either. Refusal to negotiate sensibly with our European partners has locked the UK out of the successful Galileo satellite programme. The Government have recently gambled £500 million in a share of a bankrupt satellite company, OneWeb, hoping that they can tack navigation capabilities on to the wrong type of satellites. I say

[Owen Thompson]

£500 million because that is what has been reported in the media, but when I asked the question formally, I was told that the figure could not be disclosed as it was commercially sensitive. There is no public scrutiny, no business plan and no risk assessment published for this decision, which, by all accounts, goes against the better judgment of experts such as those in the UK Space Agency. With activities such as these, is it any wonder that many people question whether this Government can even tell their arse from their elbow?

In 1995, George Robertson, the then shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, famously said:

“Devolution will kill Scottish nationalism stone dead.”

Here we are 25 years later, and the Scottish independence cause is very much alive and stronger than ever. Meanwhile, the uncompromising actions of British Brexiteers look like the actual move that will kill the Union stone dead. Devolution, albeit in its limited present form, has allowed the people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to develop their own solutions, rather than toeing the line from the Tories. It has let people across these isles know that their voices matter and that we can aspire to more, instead of just simply taking what we are given.

With Scotland’s modern, transparent Parliament in Holyrood, people have elected a Government who better reflect their views, respect evidence, listen to experts and care about the poor, but this current Tory Administration cannot allow such a thing. They seek to put us back in our box. They will dismantle the democratic structures which were so hard won by the people of Scotland. Lord Robertson may not have had the most honourable intentions in backing a Scottish Parliament, but there were many in the Labour party who recognised and cherished its role. We in the SNP were together with Labour at that time, and we must stand together again now as the institutions are disgracefully disrespected by the actions of this Government.

As recently as 2015, Gordon Brown was promising greater devolution and home rule. It is unfortunate, therefore, that the party of home rule has apparently forgotten its roots, and that is certainly shown by the fact that there are so few of them here today, which is a pity.

**Jacob Young:** One.

**Owen Thompson:** Well, few.

This is a Government who have torn up the respect agenda, which was at least given lip service by their predecessors. The growing culture of disrespect has been brought into sharp focus with Brexit. Scotland voted to stay in the European Union by a strong majority in every constituent part. The hostility displayed towards Europe by Brexiteers—there was a thinly veiled xenophobia from some—was as abhorrent to those on these Benches as it was to the people whom we represent.

After the Brexit vote, the Scottish Government tried to find the least damaging compromise, yet it was rejected. On devolved competences, this Government have seen no need to negotiate and reach agreement with the Scottish Parliament, and just press ahead regardless. Their actions have not gone unnoticed. Now is the time for Scotland to rejoin our European cousins as an equal independent nation.

4.34 pm

**Matt Vickers** (Stockton South) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson), with his wonderful accent, huge passion and interesting perspective.

After so much dilly-dally, dither and delay, the United Kingdom finally left the EU on 31 January, and on 31 December it will be job done. Back in 2016, there were a whole range of opinions on whether we should be in or out, but a democratic decision was made and it must be delivered. Now, on doorsteps and in boardrooms across the UK, there are lots of opinions on what the future relationship with the EU will look like and how to make the most of the opportunities that await.

I have heard from many businesses in my part of the world about what they think—from people who voted to remain and those who voted to leave—and there is one common ground that unites sensible, forward-looking business people from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. They want no more debate about in, out or shake it all about. They want certainty, and on 31 December they will get it—potential-unleashing, investment-encouraging certainty.

An independent, trading United Kingdom will look out to the world, instead of purely inward to Europe, hooking up to trade with the biggest and fastest-growing economies on the planet. I do not think even the most ardent remainer would argue that Europe is the place to be for economic growth, so it is right that, while we will continue to trade with Europe on mutually agreed terms, we will broaden our horizons with new and better trade deals with the US, Japan, New Zealand, Australia and others. Moreover, the potential for free ports is something that should be welcomed, across the UK and across the political divide, as an amazing opportunity to turbocharge our economy. But others will need to join the queue, because Teesside asked first. We are champing at the bit and we are ready to roll.

The Government are delivering on the referendum result. We are taking back control of our borders, with a points-based system whereby people would be judged not on where they come from, but what they can contribute here to the UK. This is another opportunity to reach on up, with the best scientists, clinicians and entrepreneurs coming to play their part in a global Britain.

The naysayers and democracy-denying Brexit blockers who said that a vote to leave the EU would see confidence crash or that the sky would fall—many of them were on the wrong side in the single currency debate as well—do not know better than the 17.4 million people in the UK who voted to leave. We have left, and we are going to make a success of it. Some of the 17.4 million people live in Stockton South, some are represented by SNP Members, and some elected Labour Members as well. I realise that Labour and the SNP seem to adopt a creative approach to referendums—keep asking until they get the answer they want—but it is time to move on.

It is time to move forward together. Let us look forward to our shared future and make the most of trade opportunities that will unleash the UK’s potential. The Government are investing £705 million to fund new infrastructure, jobs and technology at the EU border, so we will be ready to take full advantage of our new sovereign status on day one. So let us talk up the UK.

Our amazing, dedicated workforce and fantastic, innovative businesses are about to prove they can succeed on the world stage.

4.38 pm

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): As we emerge from a health crisis, we are grappling with an economic crisis that could scarcely be more serious. To leave the EU in December with no extension of the Brexit transition period, something which the EU has offered, is complete madness. This oven-baked Brexit touted by the Prime Minister truly is half-baked. Those on the Conservative Benches have told us that we need to stick to this timetable to create certainty. The only thing that is certain is that we are heading for a no-deal Brexit, and that does not provide certainty for business or our constituents at all.

As for this myth about the broad shoulders that Scottish taxpayers have been subjected to out of the goodness of this Government's heart, in Scotland we have actually received merely just over 4% of the entire borrowing of the UK. Given that we have 8.3% of the UK's population, I would suggest that Scotland is being sold short, and that is before I even talk about the £30 billion that was announced last week, of which Scotland received 0.1%—far less than the 8.3% our population suggests we should have got. While we on the SNP Benches welcome the furlough scheme, it has to be said that it has more holes in it than a spaghetti strainer.

Unless the UK Government, wedded as they are to Brexit ideology, extend the transition period for leaving the EU, productivity in Scotland, and indeed across the UK, is seriously threatened. Unemployment in Scotland could conceivably reach 10%. If the Government head off this Brexit cliff, to which 63% of Scots are opposed, they will rob Scotland of jobs, opportunities and prosperity, and it is something the people of Scotland have rejected over and over again.

This so-called oven-ready Brexit continues to be, and always has been, a con. The much-vaunted easy trade deals we were promised are of course nowhere in sight. These fears are not just expressed by the SNP. The chorus of concern from the business world is deafening. And still the Government close their ears. Only days ago, Angela Merkel talked about the EU preparing for a no-deal Brexit, but rather than listen to these concerns, raised across the devolved nations, the Prime Minister has chosen to treat the leaders of the nations of the UK like disobedient children who will not take their medicine and sit quietly. While he drives the UK off the Brexit cliff—we remember the words about this being a Union of equals—we know that at the same time he is doing his best to dismantle the entire devolution settlement.

We know that the Tories have always been hostile to devolution, so much so that in 2016 the Tory party in Scotland was reduced to advertising in newspapers to find candidates—to find paid guns for hire; they could not find enough true believers in their cause. You can imagine, Mr Deputy Speaker, the quality of the candidates who applied and were eventually elected as a result. The Tory contempt for devolution is shown in the increasing attacks we have seen on the Parliament that belongs to the people of Scotland.

**Craig Williams** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): Will the hon. Member give way?

**Patricia Gibson:** I will not give way; there is a shortage of time.

Clearly, the Government's philosophy is this: if they cannot win elections in the constituent parts of the UK, they simply seek to dismantle the institutions that they cannot control. If this Tory Government actually believe they can prevent Scotland from having the opportunity to choose her own future in this or any landscape, they are sadly deluded. They cannot stem the tide of independence, which they themselves have helped to strengthen and give rise to. We stood on a manifesto of Scotland deciding her own future—much as that may be uncomfortable for some Tories on the opposite Benches—and the Tories stood on a manifesto in Scotland of getting Brexit done. The result of that election tells us what the people of Scotland feel.

Democracy did not end in Scotland in 2014 and the reality is that the UK Government are now frightened of the inevitable referendum that is to come, because they know that support is growing as they ride roughshod over Scotland's democratic wishes.

4.43 pm

**Claire Coutinho** (East Surrey) (Con): I am somewhat bemused by the motion today because on the very first page of the document to which it refers the Scottish Government say:

"This transition period is due to finish on December 31, but it can be extended... as long as that is agreed by the end of June. After that date, it will not be possible to extend under the terms of the Withdrawal Agreement—and no other plausible route to an extension has been put forward."

So I would be interested to hear from SNP Members what route they know of to extend, and why they have not shared that with their colleagues in the Scottish Government.

Conservative Members believe that the whole United Kingdom is stronger when we work together and that the real threat to recovery would be the SNP's policy of separating Scotland from the rest of the UK. We value this Union, this family of nations, which, formed more than 300 years ago, has been the most successful union in history. While 17% of Scottish exports go to the 27 member states of the EU, 60%—over three times more—of Scottish trade goes to the rest of the United Kingdom, and a similar value flows back over the border.

Fifty years ago, my mum and dad moved to the UK, leaving behind their families and friends, because the UK represented the values that meant so much to them and which mean so much to me as well—indeed, they are referenced in the Scottish document: human dignity, freedom, democracy and equality of opportunity. The UK does not just talk about those values; it embodies them. Recently, when Hong Kong's freedoms were threatened, the UK stepped up to the plate, not just by raising concerns with China but by inviting up to 3 million British national overseas passport holders and their dependants, with open arms, to move to the UK.

As someone from an immigrant background, I can say that these islands represent hope and opportunity. This is a Union not just of nations but of people, and it is personal for me. My mother works in the NHS in England; my cousin works in the NHS in Scotland. The whole United Kingdom has opened its arms and become a home to my family, and for that I am very grateful.



[Claire Coutinho]

The optimistic vision for Britain after 31 December is of more trade. It is a vision of a global Britain, engaged around the world, representing our British values of decency and progress, and boosting British exports, from the sparkling wines of Surrey to the slightly better known—for now—Scotch whisky. Scotland will benefit from these trade deals. The rest of the UK is by far Scotland's biggest market, with trade worth £51 billion, dwarfing that with the EU—and the EU trade is likely to suffer because of US sanctions to the EU, which have targeted Scottish products.

The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership provides the opportunity for a trade deal centred on the world's fastest-growing region, covering a population of 495 million people—greater than that of the EU—and, crucially, opening up opportunities in the services sector, which constitutes 70% of the Scottish and, indeed, UK economies. Accession would be a key step in realising our ambition for 80% of UK trade to be covered by free trade agreements in the next three years.

Our vision means more control over our fisheries, ensuring that more Scottish fish are caught by Scottish fishermen. It means an agriculture policy designed not for the needs of 27 diverse nations but by the Scottish Parliament for Scottish farmers. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers) mentioned, it means free ports, which I think would benefit many coastal communities in Scotland. And leaving on 31 December will mean more powers for the Scottish Parliament; I note that the Institute for Government says it will gain powers in 63 different policy areas.

I hope that we can continue to work together for our common future and to ensure the best possible recovery from the epidemic. The covid-19 recovery has highlighted the strength of our shared institutions, with the UK Government working with devolved Governments to ensure the best possible provision for our people; devolved Governments tailoring policies to local requirements; the NHS, formed across the UK, providing care on the basis of need; the British Army building hospitals and testing people across our four nations; and the Treasury using the financial firepower of our strong Union to ensure that money is distributed to England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland on the basis of need. Our resources are pooled and shared. The best hope for our recovery and the future of the British people is our continued co-operation—working together in a national effort to get the whole country back on its feet.

Crucially, even if it were possible to extend, I am not convinced that that would bear fruit. At the beginning of my career, I worked on a trading floor, and I had a frontline view as the Greek credit crisis unfolded. There are very few questions that the EU has to bring its 27 countries to terms on to which the answer is more time. We saw last year that extensions do not change the fundamentals. There is no use hiding from the decisions that need to be taken. Perhaps someone should tell the Labour party that.

4.48 pm

**Stephen Flynn** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): It has been all too apparent to me, as a new Member, that one of the hallmarks of this Chamber is repetition. I am afraid

that, as I am quite far down the call list, I will repeat some of the points that have already been made, very eloquently, by my colleagues on the SNP Benches.

However, before I get to that, I want to reflect on the fact that when the whole Brexit debacle was being debated last year, I was not here. I was one of the many millions who were sitting at home watching the chaos unfold—people leaving parties; votes not happening; votes happening and the Government being defeated, and then, obviously, a general election. As I watched all that unfold, I had a sense of overriding emotion; I was dismayed and disappointed, but I was also hopeful. I will come back to hopeful, but for now I will focus on dismayed and disappointed.

Aberdeen voted 61.1% to remain in the European Union. The people of Scotland voted 62% to remain in the European Union. The city that I represent is expected to be the hardest hit by Brexit—be that a hard Brexit, a soft Brexit, or whatever machination of Boris Brexit comes back later this year—but our views are not being considered by this Government. The views of the people of Scotland are being flatly ignored. We have heard Conservative Members stating passionately that their constituencies voted to leave and we therefore need to leave the European Union. I say to them: show some respect for the fact that Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain, and show some respect for the fact that my constituency is going to be absolutely hammered by Brexit, irrespective of which study we look at.

This cuts to the heart of the debate that we are having here today, in relation to the democratic deficit that exists on these islands. In 1997, when the Scottish Parliament was voted on by the Scottish people, devolution was created. The people of Scotland were able to vote for elected Members to sit in the Scottish Parliament, who would then vote on a raft of policy proposals that would impact the people of Scotland. Subsequently, in 2016, we voted to remain in the European Union, but our views have been completely ignored and we are going to be dragged out. The powers that sit within the European Union that directly relate to devolution are not going to come to the Scottish Parliament in their totality; they are going to come to this place, to a Government whom we neither support nor voted for. Where is the democracy in that? From procurement to food standards to minimum unit pricing, the policies of Scotland are different from the policies of this United Kingdom. We have taken a different path on so many issues, and the powers that the UK Government seek to take back from the European Union will put all those positive changes at risk. Irrespective of the rhetoric from Conservative Members, those are the facts in front of us.

Looking towards the Scottish Parliament elections in 2021, if we want to have a discussion about what the role of the Scottish Parliament should be, I say to Scottish Conservative Members, bring it on. The views of the people of Scotland have changed. We have seen it in opinion polls. They want a Scottish Parliament that is empowered and emboldened. This UK Government do not want to deliver that, and the Scottish Conservatives do not want to deliver that. So we are going to have a discussion about the future of the Scottish Parliament. Let's do it. Let's see if we want a Scottish Parliament that has the same powers or fewer powers. Or let's have a discussion about whether we want the Scottish Parliament

to have the full powers of an independent nation—a nation able to make its own policy decisions. If this UK Government continue to ignore the democratic will of the people of Scotland in relation to their views on the European Union, they will be sleepwalking into the end of their precious Union.

4.52 pm

**Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn). He speaks passionately for Aberdeen, and I commend him for that.

I am grateful to the Scottish National party for tabling this motion to extend the transition period, as it allows me to remind my constituents why they voted for me last year. On 31 January, the UK left the EU nearly three years after article 50 was triggered, and the people of Redcar and Cleveland celebrated with a great party at the Citz Club in Redcar. They celebrated this passage into the new Europe with a deep sense of relief because, time and again during those three years, their choice had been questioned, their will ignored and their views belittled. They were told that they had not known what they were voting for, that the people should not have had a say, or that a decision that big should not have been left to the public. So they were asked again, and in December last year, the public backed the Conservatives and gave them their biggest majority since 1987 on a promise that we would deliver on the mandate from the 2016 referendum.

Until now, Redcar has never had a Tory MP, and neither have West Bromwich West, Heywood and Middleton, Dudley North and Rother Valley. I and many of my colleagues on the Government Benches are here because people trusted us to make their voice heard. They put their faith in the Prime Minister and a Conservative Government for the first time ever in our constituencies, because they felt let down by a Labour party that had ignored them for so long. I draw the attention of the House to the empty Labour Benches. Tonight, the Labour party looks set to ignore them once again. Here we are, nearly six months since we left, debating yet another motion aimed at extending the transition period, put forward again by those who refuse to accept the result simply because they did not want it.

It is no surprise to anyone on the Government Benches, or to the public at large, that those who still reject the result of the EU referendum are the very same ones who still refuse to acknowledge that the people of Scotland rejected independence in the 2014 referendum. It seems that the Scottish separatists simply cannot accept the result of any referendum. Well, we on the Conservative Benches trust the people of the United Kingdom, wherever they may be, to make the right choices for them. They put their trust in us to deliver on those choices.

As we count down the days towards the end of the transition period, all the motion would do is add yet more delay and betray that unprecedented trust. What we still do not know, however, is how Sir Keir will vote tonight. We know that he was the architect of Labour's failed Brexit policy, a rigged second referendum between staying in the EU or staying in the EU without calling it that, but what is his position now? Will he jump on this delaying Brexit bandwagon, or will he respect the result of the referendum? Will he return to blocking, delaying, preventing and doing all he can to stop Brexit, or will he show true leadership and listen to the voice of the people who used to vote for his party?

There is no doubt that the Scottish independence party, the illiberal un-democrats and whatever is left of the Labour party are still hoping for Brexit to be reversed. They are still hoping that it will never properly happen. They do not trust the people of this country, just as the SNP still refuse to trust the people in Scotland in the 2014 referendum. The Opposition parties tonight are revealing their true colours and we must do everything in our power to stand strong while they turn their backs.

I am under no illusion about the fact that the principal reason I was elected in December was to get Brexit done for the people of Redcar and Cleveland, which is why I was so proud, as one of my first votes in Parliament, to vote Brexit through. It is why I will proudly walk through the Lobby tonight to vote against any extension of the transition period. We want to reach an agreement with the EU by the end of December, based on a Canada-style free trade agreement. We can achieve that in the time ahead. We are not asking for anything that the EU has not already given to other countries, but if they do not want to extend that to us, we must do what is best for Britain and leave without.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Just a gentle reminder—I did not want to interrupt the full flow—but please do not refer to current sitting Members by their names. Thank you very much.

4.57 pm

**Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP):** My constituency in the north-east of Scotland is one which very emphatically did not vote to get Brexit done. In fact, the reason I stand here today is that I stood on a pledge saying that we needed two referendums: first one for the putative withdrawal agreement, and the secondly, in light of all that the people of Scotland have experienced since 2014, a chance to reconsider the issue of Scottish independence. It is the very fact that the UK refused to consider the first of those positions that the second is now a near certainty.

Brexit is going to happen—I absolutely accept that—but my real disappointment is not so much with the result as with the treatment handed out by the UK Government afterwards, when they confused 52% of the British people as if they spoke for 100%. The Scottish Government sought to find an accommodation that would have kept us in the single market and mitigated some of the very worst impacts of Brexit right across these islands. At every stage, they were met not with courtesy or accommodation, but instead with bone-headed obduracy, witless statements about red, white and blue Brexits or Brexit meaning Brexit, and hardline exceptionalist dogma.

When it comes to our current Prime Minister, it is very tempting to conclude that his place in history will be as the worst Prime Minister since the last one, but his culpability for the shambles we are in at this point goes far, far deeper than that as the architect, the clown prince and the front man of the Brexit campaign. Frankly, it speaks volumes for the sheer and utter desperation of the Conservative party towards the end of last year that the only reason it stumbled towards the withdrawal agreement was that it was prepared to scrap the sacred red line about the relationship between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. It replaced the backstop and took that red line and laid it down the Irish sea instead.

[Richard Thomson]

What, I ask, have we got in return? After four years of negotiations, we certainly do not have a deal, but what we know will happen, deal or not, is that the Government have managed to create that border between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We are going to sacrifice the freedom of movement and the freedom we have come to take for granted over the past few decades of being able to live, work, love and study right across the continent, freely and without hindrance. We know that there is a threat to those parts of our economy where we have been blessed with immigrant labour to help us, and I am thinking particularly of the fish processing sector in the north-east of Scotland, the agricultural sector, the care sector and our NHS. We know that importers face increased costs, and we know that exporters will face huge delays.

We know that in Scotland and the devolved institutions, we are facing a power grab that will drive a coach and horses through the principle that that which is not reserved is explicitly devolved. We also face a race to the bottom on food standards, animal welfare and workers' rights.

Is it any wonder that people in my constituency and right across Scotland are looking at the political shambles created by this Government and their predecessors and what they now represent and deciding, "This is not who we are. This is not who we wish to be. This is not how we wish to be represented. This is not how we wish to be seen in the world."?

We are clearly approaching a constitutional endgame when it comes to Brexit and Scottish independence. I care very much indeed about having a stable, prosperous neighbour in the nations of the rest of the United Kingdom, but I am a democrat. If the rest of the UK is determined to go down this reckless path, I have to accept that there is nothing that I or any other Scottish MP or any other Scottish voter can do to halt that process. If the UK is determined to crash out of its closest European alliances in a state of dishevelment and disarray, that absolutely has to be respected, even if it does not have to be seen as the best future we can go for.

Frankly, an extension to the negotiations seems a no-brainer. It would give time to negotiate a stable landing point, but what cannot be ignored is that the Union that Scots were invited to vote for in 2014 no longer exists. That 55% opposition to independence has turned into 54% support in the most recent opinion polls. It is no longer acceptable for the UK Government to stand in the way of that support finding its expression at the ballot box and the Scottish people being able to choose their own future.

5.2 pm

**Virginia Crosbie** (Ynys Môn) (Con): In June 2016, Ynys Môn voted to leave the European Union. Three and a half years later, I was elected as the first Conservative MP for the constituency for 32 years on a manifesto committed to delivering on the decision of those constituents. They wanted and still want a UK that sits outside the EU.

Over the past four months, we have seen our British community come together as a truly United Kingdom in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. The people of

the UK are intent on supporting British businesses to build back better. The UK Government are providing financial strategies to enable the country to recover successfully. What this nation does not need now is the uncertainty of a further delay to Brexit. We need to build. We need to build on the Union that has helped us through coronavirus. Businesses across the UK, whether in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, need to know where they are going. They need clear foundations and timescales on which to plan. Constantly redrawing a line in the sand offers only uncertainty and frustration.

We have seen and continue to see investment from the UK Government that is outside any support offered by the EU. Like Scotland, the devolved Government in Wales benefit from the direct support of the UK Government. The 2020 Budget saw the largest year-on-year increase in direct funding for Wales in a decade. The UK Government are investing across Wales, including £1.5 billion for our railway infrastructure, £120 million for the north Wales growth deal, and £5 million for connected communities. The Welsh Government also received £2.8 billion through the Barnett formula from the UK Government to support individuals, businesses and public services through covid-19. More than 316,000 jobs in Wales were furloughed, and 100,000 self-employed people received financial support.

As central and devolved Governments, we need to focus now on helping businesses and individuals to prepare for the opportunities available to us from 1 January 2021. I believe that, as an independent United Kingdom, we can deliver what this country needs to succeed.

I conclude by putting on the record that I fully support the UK Government in their focus on achieving the best outcome for us as we leave the EU. I believe that an extension of the transition period would not be in the best interests of Ynys Môn, Wales, Scotland or the UK.

5.5 pm

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie), even from this slightly disconcerting and unusual location. That, however, has nothing to do with the fact that I have become increasingly frustrated on the Opposition Benches this afternoon. The debate has been more about political point-scoring than the interests of the people of Scotland, or any other part of the United Kingdom for that matter.

I find myself increasingly torn—torn between my belief that our Government really should have asked for an extension and my recognition that the time when it was possible has passed; between my belief in the European Union and my acceptance that that particular battle has been lost—we are leaving; and between actually supporting the SNP in this last-ditch attempt and turning my back on its frankly hypocritical self-serving, narrow, nationalist argument.

There is no good outcome to this debate for Scotland; the people of Scotland cannot gain anything from it. When I saw that it was a nationalist Opposition day debate, I expected that we would talk about the state of our oil industry, the pressure on our airlines and airports or the state of our health and education. No—we have another process debate aimed at independence. I am tired, so very tired, of listening to the nationalists claim to speak for the people of Scotland. The nationalists speak



for fewer than half the people of Scotland. They do not speak for the majority; they speak for 45% at the last count. The people of Scotland deserve so much better than that.

**Pete Wishart:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Christine Jardine:** I will not, thank you.

We have heard SNP Members claim today that tearing Scotland out of the European Union will be bad for its economy—and yes, I agree that it will be dreadful for its economy—but I am then astonished that they can keep a straight face and tell the people of Scotland that tearing Scotland out of the UK will not be just as bad, if not worse, for its economy. Please, give the people of Scotland the credit we deserve.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) had a lot to say about democracy, but what about the democratic decision in 2014? Did the nationalists not turn a deaf ear to those 55% of the people of Scotland—the same 55% who did not vote for them in 2019? There is a familiar ring to that: 45%, and 55% against.

We have been warned from the SNP Benches about zealots with no thought for anything but the project, and I have to ask myself: which zealots are they talking about? Perhaps they are pointing in the wrong direction. I also have to ask myself about the amount of time that we are wasting in talking about process. I am tired of listening to this vision of British politics that has no Scots in it. There are Scots in the current Government and there were in the last Government, and there are Scots on the Opposition Benches and in Committees throughout this House. Can members of a party obsessed with Scottish history not stretch their minds back a decade to when a Scottish Prime Minister was standing at the Dispatch Box?

At the conclusion of this debate, I will in all probability—in fact, I shall—support the SNP in the Lobby, but not because of anything that they have said today: not a single word. It will be in spite of every word that they have said today. I believe that our Government should have asked for an extension, but I also believe that it will be in the best interests of every person in this country—I mean the United Kingdom, of which I will argue to my last breath for Scotland to remain part—that we put the argument behind us and move on to building a stronger economy, creating a better society and getting ourselves through what we are told will be the worst recession in 300 years. Those of us north of the border will need all our friends in the south to help us through it together.

5.10 pm

**Sara Britcliffe** (Hyndburn) (Con): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine). I absolutely agree that it is time we moved on from this debate, and that is what we Government Members want to do and promised to our constituents.

I am pleased to be able to speak in this debate, because this Government have always made it clear that we need to get Brexit done. My constituents in Hyndburn and Haslingden made that crystal clear when they voted overwhelmingly to leave the EU and then, in the general election in December, elected a representative—I highlight that word—who respects their decision. The Opposition were out of touch, telling my constituents that they did not understand what they were voting for,

and they are still—well, Labour Members are not here today, so I will move on from there. When I spoke to businesses in December and since then, they told me that uncertainty worried them the most and that they needed clarity. That is exactly what this Conservative Government have given them: no more dither and no more delay.

We have passed the deadline for an extension to the transition period, and rather than looking backward, we should be looking forward to the possibilities. I support this Government's pledge to forge new trade agreements with countries that are specific to our market and benefit our economy. These agreements will strengthen businesses and provide more job opportunities as the UK escapes the control of the EU.

The news that the Government are unwilling to extend the transition deadline should not come as a shock. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster set out the Government's intentions to the First Ministers of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in April, and has reiterated that position many times. The Government remain committed to emphasising the opportunities presented to Scotland and all the devolved powers. They have also signalled benefits for the UK in taking back control of our borders and laws, with extensive powers already in the hands of the devolved Administrations. I am pleased that the Prime Minister reminded us today that the Scottish people voted to remain part of the UK and that the UK voted to leave the EU.

I stand firmly against the SNP proposal to extend the transition, and I stand here on behalf of my constituents as Hyndburn's and Haslingden's representative voice, because I listen to my constituents—something that they have not experienced since the referendum. I hope that all parts of the Union can work together to recover from the pandemic to action a green recovery and to contribute towards a future in which our United Kingdom prospers as a whole.

5.13 pm

**Stephen Farry** (North Down) (Alliance): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe), although I suspect that I will disagree fundamentally with most of what she said. I will support the motion this evening. The debate has largely focused on the Scotland-UK relationship—I take no formal position on that other than to wish the people of Scotland well and to respect whatever choice they make down the line—but the transition period affects the entire UK, and it certainly deeply affects Northern Ireland.

Brexit, of course, is a great disrupter to the UK and, indeed, to our situation in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland only works on the basis of sharing and interdependence. The difficulty with Brexit is that it entails some degree of new divisions, barriers and friction, and that will create tension however those lines fall. Of course, the withdrawal agreement respects the principle of consent, and that will be an entirely different process, but none the less, it is important to acknowledge the challenges posed by Brexit to Northern Ireland's future stability and operation. Northern Ireland did say no to Brexit, but once Brexit occurred, there was a need to protect the Good Friday agreement. The backstop was a better attempt at doing that, but the protocol is there as the next best alternative. However, it poses very significant challenges, and we are not ready yet for that to be properly implemented.

[Stephen Farry]

The Northern Ireland Assembly has voted on a majority basis to support an extension to Brexit. While we may be past the 30 June deadline, as others have said, there are options that still can be taken, and I am not entirely dismissing the possibility that the Government may see the light towards the end of the year—far too late when more instability has been caused, but given the current state of readiness, that may well be where we end up.

One year was always going to be challenging in the best of circumstances, but with covid, we have the worst of circumstances. We are already facing up to a very significant economic hit on the back of the covid pandemic. Indeed, the OECD is predicting that the UK economy will be one of the economies around the world that suffers the most, so there is a sense of madness that we are proceeding with a further shock from the disruption of Brexit at that time.

We are told that with Brexit and the end of the transition, the Government can be better placed to address covid, but that belies the fact that the European Union, in many respects, is doing better in addressing the situation with the pandemic and in the way that it will potentially recover, not least in terms of the scale of investment that comes forward. The UK, in particular, will suffer if there is no free trade agreement in place at the end of the year, and even with an agreement in place, there will still be challenges, because whatever way we cut it, the UK is stepping back from its closest and nearest market. Whatever trade deals are done around the rest of the world, they will not replace the loss that comes from stepping back from the European Union. There is not a contest between the internal market of the UK and the European Union market. Until now, the two were complementary. In the same way, the UK could go out and cut more trade deals with the rest of the world through the European Union. The term “global Britain”, I fear, is a bit of a misnomer and we are missing the point in that respect.

In closing, I will focus particularly on the lack of preparation. There are five and a half months to go. It is only now that the UK Government are releasing information on the GB-EU interface and, even then, there are many questions that still need to be answered on investment in IT and infrastructure, but that can be phased in. Northern Ireland does not have that degree of luxury. The protocol will be in place from 1 January, whatever way this falls. While some people may say, “Well, in the context of a no deal, Northern Ireland does have some degree of protection in that we still have access to the EU single market in terms of goods,” that does not apply to services. In particular, if we see a situation where there is no trade deal, tariffs will be charged down the Irish sea, and that will have major implications for the cost pressures for Northern Ireland businesses and households.

Five and a half months out, there are many questions still to be addressed for Northern Ireland on IT, infrastructure, staffing and what will be required from declarations and costs. All those are important issues and, at this stage, businesses have been left in the lurch without transparency around that crucial information. Every day that goes past, that uncertainty is damaging the economy of Northern Ireland, so for all those reasons, I urge the Government to reconsider their

position on the transition. There is no shame in reconsidering, because it makes sense for the UK economy. Let us get this done correctly.

5.18 pm

**Antony Higginbotham** (Burnley) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in today's debate and to follow the hon. Member for North Down (Stephen Farry), even if I disagree with almost everything he said. I thank Opposition Members for giving us the opportunity not only to praise the Union, which we on the Government side of the House always welcome the chance to do, but to reconfirm our commitment to the millions of people up and down the country—including more than 1 million people in Scotland and a clear majority of people in my constituency—when they voted to leave the European Union: we will still deliver on that commitment.

We entered the European Union as one United Kingdom, and we exited the European Union as one United Kingdom—England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—because together we are stronger. The covid-19 pandemic has shown exactly that. Scotland has been able to benefit from over £13 billion of support from this Government—a Government of the Conservative and Unionist party who are protecting jobs, businesses and livelihoods across every part of our Union.

Despite all that support, SNP Members still believe in tearing themselves away from their most important trading partner. As they know, the UK single market is more than three times more important to Scotland than the EU single market. Ripping that up would be the real act of economic self-harm. However, if SNP Members are saying in this debate that they have seen the light and now value the economic certainty and financial protection they get from being part of the Union, all of us on the Government Benches would be delighted, and we could finally wave goodbye to their divisive separatist agenda.

SNP Members are right that businesses need certainty, and that is exactly what we have provided since I was privileged enough to come to this House in December. Businesses in every part of the UK now know that on 1 January next year, the UK will operate its own independent trade policy, with our own tariff schedule.

The covid-19 pandemic has created great challenges around the world, but we have risen to them and we have adapted. People are working from home. Businesses are using new technology, and our negotiators have done the same. As a member of the Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union, I know that the impact of covid has been a key topic of our discussions, and we addressed it last month, in the interim report that was unanimously agreed by the Committee, including SNP Members. As part of that report, we took evidence from Mr Frost, Mr Barnier, trade experts and others. That evidence highlighted the fact that, while the pandemic has disrupted negotiations, they have slipped by only a matter of weeks. They are still taking place virtually—and now face to face—and they have been intensified. There is a real impetus to get a deal done.

Whatever the outcome, things will change at the border. As a result of this Government's announcements, those changes are known and already being prepared for by businesses across the country. Those on the SNP Benches should therefore be transparent about their motives. This is not about the UK leaving the EU; this is about their separatist agenda. Even if it was

about the transitional period, they know as well as anyone else in the House that it sometimes does not matter how long negotiations last: if positions remain diametrically opposed, no amount of stalling will result in an agreement. I for one will not break the promise I made to my constituents because of EU intransigence—as the Committee's report also made clear, the EU needs to change its mandate if an agreement is to be reached.

On a final point, we must address the elephant in the room—or, rather, those not in the room—and that is the Labour party. Looking through the list of speakers, I was, like most of my colleagues, perplexed to see that no one from the Labour Back Benches had put in to speak. I considered why that might be. On the Union, Brexit and covid, no one had anything to say. Could it be that their position on Brexit has flip-flopped so many times that none of them knows what to say? Or is it that they, like the Scottish nationalists opposite, believe that democratic decisions taken by referendum should just be ignored? Either way, they appear out of step with the country, with the Leader of the Opposition missing in action.

5.23 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Covid-19 has absolutely affected every walk of life. It is my belief that no person in this nation has been untouched by it, and the first words in the debate title are “covid-19”. There are those who grieve the loss of good people—upstanding members of our communities and families—and people we have been unable to grieve appropriately. As we move into a closer approximation of normal, that loss of life is felt more keenly.

I want to speak about covid-19, and then comment on where we—or rather I—stand. We have lost businesses and jobs. I have a big hospitality business in my area that is in the resort game. It has invested £150,000 of its money, and it is at a loss at the moment to find a way forward. I am very aware of its circumstances, which may be only the tip of the job loss iceberg. The action of the Government has prevented a crash for a great many business—that is true—but we will undoubtedly be fighting economically for many years to come; indeed, our grandchildren may feel the pinch in their working life if we do not get this right.

Just in my small office of six members of staff and myself, one member of staff lost her sister at the end of March to coronavirus. She was unable to bid her a final goodbye and is deeply hurting. Another member of staff was due to be married in Italy at the end of June, but she has seen her plans decimated and brought to nothing. Another staff member is originally from Australia but now lives in Northern Ireland. She heard sad news of her sister in Australia who is in an intensive care unit, but again she could not visit her family or speak to them. I have another staff member whose mother-in-law was diagnosed with terminal cancer, but again, they were not able to do anything about that. My parliamentary aide has two wee daughters, one of whom has uncontrolled asthma. She has been shielding for 16 weeks, and will be until the end of August.

I say those things because, as with my staff members and many others across this great nation, people's quality of life and mental health has been massively affected by coronavirus. I say that to put a human aspect into this

debate, and to underline what the cost has been to normal, everyday people. The negotiations that we are now doing must be carried out with less grandstanding, and by sorting these problems out.

I cannot create jobs out of nothing for those who have lost businesses—I do not have that ability—but this Government can, the Northern Ireland Assembly can, the Scottish Parliament can, and the Welsh Assembly can. I can, however, be part of the solution in this House when making decisions to promote employment, and ensure that the Government do their best for Northern Ireland. I cannot undo the mental trauma that has affected my nation, but I can be a positive force for a bright future, and that is what I wish to highlight today.

I am very fond of my Gaelic cousins on the SNP Benches, and I genuinely mean that in all honesty. However, I am so divorced from their point of view given what they have said—that is respectful to them all, and they know that—that this is one cousin who will not be voting for their proposal tonight. I do not want this to be a sniping opportunity to rehash the old “deal or no deal” arguments that we can all repeat in our sleep; I believe our role as MPs is to think sensibly and create hope, and having the same old arguments about the pros and cons of the European Union does not give hope for our future. Instead, constructive dialogue about a sensible way to carry out the wishes of the people is the way to do that.

In the 2016 referendum, my constituency of Strangford voted by 56% to 44% to leave—unlike the constituency of the hon. Member for North Down (Stephen Farry), where it was very marginal at 50.1%. That is all it was.

**Stephen Farry:** 52%.

**Jim Shannon:** Can we take a moment to consider what we hope to achieve in today's debate? My desire is simple: it is to say on behalf of Strangford, let us stop the tearing down and start the building up. Let us work for our agrifood sector—I look to the Government to ensure that that happens—and for our fishing villages in Portavogie, Ardglass and Kilkeel. Let us put pride and confidence back into the fishing community, grow that economy, and create jobs. We can do that after Brexit. We can do that when we leave—I very much believe that in my heart, and boy do I look forward to that day.

Let us work together in this place to present a united front to Europe to say—possibly for the first time—that although we want the best for our country, that does not mean that the European Union has to be the loser. If we think and work sensibly together, and build up trading partnerships that are beneficial, we all can win—that is everybody; all regions together—and help our economies and our constituents who have been ravaged by this unseen enemy. As my mother would say, today we should say, “Enough of the messing and more of the achieving!” Where there is a will there is a way. We should respect the will of our people, who made it very clear in June 2016. We must get the best possible future in place, with sensible dialogue and the end of senseless rhetoric. We all voted together in that referendum, and we voted to leave.

5.28 pm

**Paul Holmes** (Eastleigh) (Con): Can I finally say congratulations, Mr Deputy Speaker? You are where you belong and I am glad to see you there.



[Paul Holmes]

We are here all over again. The ability of SNP Members to focus on their narrow-minded, party interests at a time of national importance is becoming legendary. If there was ever a sight that showed why we must protect the Union, it was the vision of a Labour party that could not be bothered to show up, with SNP Members behind those Benches. If the Labour party ever has the opportunity to form the next Government, it will be at the price of a referendum on independence to get the SNP onside. Conservative Members do not back that at all.

The SNP has not changed much in not respecting referendum results. It lost the 2014 referendum, and yet it pursues that agenda, with no thought to getting on with the day job in Scotland. SNP Members lost the 2016 referendum, but they are now trying by any means necessary to thwart the will of the British people. This debate is once again a thinly disguised attempt by SNP Members to undermine democracy—nothing else. The irony of that is not lost on me. If they had voted for a deal when they were offered one—three times—we would not be here today. Knowing them, however, we probably would be.

Like any good Unionist, I read the newspapers north of the border. In these difficult times, we all have to spend a few more hours at home, and humour plays an increasingly important role in making sure that we can all get by, so you can imagine my reaction, Mr Deputy Speaker, when, browsing *The National* I found that the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) was quoted as saying that Scottish taxpayers were “footing the bill” as the UK prepared to leave the EU. Indeed, without a hint of irony, SNP Members are trying to claim that they would somehow save money by being out of the Union and part of the EU, when we know that public spending in Scotland is 17% higher than the UK average. Treasury figures, verified by the House of Commons Library, show that per head of population, Scotland receives £11,200; England, £9,200; and my constituents in Eastleigh, £8,600.

I will always lobby for resources for my constituency, but I accept that that difference is the price that my constituents pay because we are stronger together—and we are stronger together as one United Kingdom. We are stronger together culturally, with our shared history, and we are stronger together economically. It was this Government who introduced the coronavirus job retention scheme, which has protected the income of 630,000 people in Scotland. It is the Government of the United Kingdom who have supported 146,000 self-employed people through the self-employment support scheme, and it is this Government—the United Kingdom Government—who have provided over £2.7 billion to the Scottish Government for rates relief, small business grants and grants for businesses in the retail, leisure and hospitality sector.

We need to ensure that we are prepared for Brexit and that our borders are fit for purpose. That investment will help us to maximise the opportunity created by Brexit as we continue to trade with our European partners and to forge new and exciting trade deals across the world. While the SNP like to reject referendum results—the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) said that it was a narrow gap, but I do not think that 10% is a narrow gap—I take the expression

of my constituents’ will seriously. It is a shame that the SNP do not do that for their constituents. My constituents in Eastleigh voted to leave the European Union, and I will support the Government as we make good our promise to leave the EU and seize the opportunities presented by global Britain. The SNP should focus on the day job to fix the lack of educational attainment that harms Scottish children; to fix their dire record in government and public service; and to stop the political gimmicks. We deliver; they delay. It is time to get Brexit done, and I will vote against the motion this evening.

5.32 pm

**Craig Williams** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): I would say that it is a great pleasure to take part in the debate, but many of my colleagues have touched on the meaningless rhetoric that we have heard from some Opposition Members. However, I want to say at the outset that I agreed with pretty much everything said by the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine)—sadly, she is not in her place—but, in true Liberal Democrat fashion, she U-turned at the end of her speech and is going to vote with the SNP, so she has let me down on that score.

I want to talk about the strength of the Union and reflect on the strength of democracy in this country. There was a referendum on independence—that has been an undertone of the debate. Our democracy and this Parliament had that referendum; we voted for the legislation that created the referendum, which we honoured. Something that is often missed is the strength of this Parliament and this democracy, which is such that we can ask the fundamental question, “Do you still want to be part of the Union?” SNP Members, however, campaigned over and over on the basis that it was a once-in-a-generation opportunity. I do not know about generations in Scotland, but we have a bit further to go in Wales before our generation is over.

I think it is worth reflecting in this debate on the strength of our Union in the response to covid-19. In my constituency—a Welsh constituency: fellow Celts please pay attention—11,000 jobs have been saved by a furlough scheme. That is above and beyond the billions that have been given to our partners in the Welsh Government. I really woke up to the meaninglessness of today’s debate when the Welsh Labour Government issued a statement saying that they supported the motion: that is what got me on my feet. However, on many aspects of covid-19, they have done a good job, although not on everything. Just like the UK Government, they have done a good job and they are partners, but they have been underwritten in that. It has been incredibly important to our response to covid-19 to be a member of the United Kingdom, with that strong support and all the deep pockets that we can call on to support the economy at this time. That will be more important than ever in the coming months.

I caution SNP Members, who are riding high and taking huge comfort from polls at the moment, that I fought the 2017 election on the back of a very successful polling organisation, and it was not that successful for me. So I caution them about polls and their independence. I also caution them about the prism of any future referendums. In at least a generation, of course, any referendum would be about of rejoining the European Union, because we are leaving, and are on course, and

have left legally. It would be on rejoining the European Union, presumably for Scotland, and leaving a Union that provides 60% of its trade, valued at £51 billion, and on joining a Union, whatever that looks like then, which would mean adopting the euro instead of the pound. It would mean working with partners such as Spain. I know that SNP Members hold the European Commission in high regard—mainly, I should imagine, because of the seriousness with which it takes referendums, repeating them until it gets the right answer—but let us look at the European Commission's relationship with Catalonia and the questions in Spain. It goes back to my opening remarks about the strengths of this place, and the strength of our democracy, that enables us to ask these serious questions. We can campaign robustly but seek those answers.

I speak in this debate as a fellow Celt, a Welsh Member of Parliament, who has valued no end the UK Government's support for my constituents' businesses and my nation of Wales. Underlying that is the fact that the UK and our relationship with the outside world are more important to my constituents than the UK-EU relationship that we currently have. That is ending, and we move on. While I always take heart from getting to my feet and waxing lyrical in his marvellous Chamber, I wish we were talking about something more relevant to my constituents.

5.37 pm

**Shaun Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams), who, in his usual manner, gave us sage words and even sager advice.

The first thing I would say, without fear of repetition, is where are the official Opposition? Last week, when we were talking about educational opportunities for deprived children, they were absent. They sit there and they carp and they virtue-signal. I represent a community where the majority of kids would fall into that category. Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, many of whom represent similar seats, were here, and we were having those arguments. The official Opposition were silent, and it is an utter disgrace.

I commend the Scottish National party because it has done the job of an Opposition party. SNP Members have probed; they have debated; they have turned up. I would say to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart)—[*Interruption.*] They do not want to leave. The honourable Gentleman might well shimmy over to the Opposition Front Bench, because he would probably be more suitable there.

I want to talk about some of the words we have heard today, particularly the descriptions of people who voted to leave the European Union, as 70% of my constituents did. Some of the words that came to me in conversations on the doorstep were, "I am being called thick"; "I am being told that this decision should not be given to me"; "I am being told that I don't know what I am talking about." We have heard that today as well, with words such as "xenophobia" and "cannon fodder". It is absolutely disgusting. My constituents are not xenophobes. The constituents of my hon. Friends from the Black Country and more widely are not xenophobes. We welcome people from all parts of the world. We built our industrial heritage on welcoming people here, and I take real exception when Opposition Members accuse my constituents of

being xenophobic and racist—they are absolutely not. What they are is proud of where they come from. They are proud of the fact that this United Kingdom is a country where—I will say it again—a lad from a council house can sit in this Chamber as a Member of Parliament. Where else on earth can we see that? There are few examples. I stand by those values, because it is those values that made me.

I lived for a time in Wales. I taught myself Welsh and can speak it reasonably, conversationally. I was interested by the contributions from the right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) and my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones). They are right—there is a cultural history that sometimes gets forgotten. I have long advocated that, as a Union, we need to share the diverse culture that we have internally. Kids in England should be learning about the "Mabinogi" and Welsh history and culture, just like kids in Scotland should. Equally, kids in Tipton should learn about the history of Scotland and come to understand that shared culture and heritage, because that is where we have gone wrong. We have built internal borders, and rather than focusing on bringing them down, we have the rhetoric back and forth that has been highlighted today.

As I said, 70% of my constituents voted to leave the European Union. They have waited four years for it, and they have waited 50 years to be liberated from the Labour party. We see it constantly. We see it locally, with the fourth leader of Sandwell Council in about the same number of years and the revolving door leadership that sees my communities shafted. When I was canvassing, I saw grown men breaking down in tears because they realised that everything they had been brought up to believe was a lie. The people who had basically told them their life view, which was ingrained in their blood, had stabbed them in their back and said, "You don't count any more." That is what we have heard from the rhetoric today—"You don't count. We don't care." An extension would just reinforce that. We have to get this done, because that is what my communities in Wednesbury, Oldbury and Tipton deserve.

5.42 pm

**Fay Jones** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to be part of the debate, particularly this Tory tour de force at the end of it, most powerfully illustrated by my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey).

When I knocked on doorsteps at the end of last year, the overwhelming response was, "Just get on with it." That is what this Government are determined to do. I was not surprised to see the SNP table the motion, but I am surprised to see the First Minister of Wales support this revisionist exercise. It shows not just his lack of awareness and his ignorance of the election results, but his lack of influence, because the First Minister of Wales—the leader of Welsh Labour—was not able to persuade one Member on the Labour Back Benches to turn up in support of this cause.

Our future relationship with the European Union is of great interest to my constituents in Brecon and Radnorshire, but I wholeheartedly endorse the comments of the Paymaster General—why are we even having this debate? In the thick of a global pandemic, when we could be talking about economic recovery, jobs, green growth and food standards, we are talking about Brexit yet again.

[Fay Jones]

The coronavirus pandemic has understandably posed a challenge to the negotiation timetable. Unlike the Opposition, rather than occupying ourselves with causing further uncertainty and yet more delay, this Government have been steadfast in ensuring that, as we move towards the end of the transition period, the whole United Kingdom is prepared. I hear more and more often how local businesses and those in the farming sector are eager to see the UK being opened up to new markets across the world, while maintaining a close relationship with our European neighbours. It has been greatly reassuring that, despite the challenges presented by covid, five rounds of negotiations between the UK and the EU have already been completed.

Although there are those who seek to test it, the coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated the strength of our Union. The unprecedented amount of support made available by the UK Government has reached around the entire UK. Just like 11,000 of my constituents, across Scotland more than 600,000 people have benefited from the UK Government's job retention scheme. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has boosted Scotland's budget by £4.6 billion through various support schemes, which is yet more evidence that we are far stronger as one United Kingdom in the face of this crisis and as we exit the transition period into a new and prosperous chapter.

The EU is the single largest market for Welsh lamb, and I know it is also a huge market for Scottish produce. There is no room for the uncertainty and small-minded approach that the Opposition call for in again flirting with an extension. My local farmers do not want to be involved in a party political scaremongering tactic, with the worry that accompanies this kind of discussion. They want to be able to take advantage of the ambitious Canada-style deals that this Government are working hard to secure. I am sure that the same excitement felt by Welsh sheep farmers is felt by Scottish fishermen. Rather than continuing to demand yet more delay, this Government want all UK fishermen to be able to fish in our sovereign waters. With our promise to take back control, they have every right to be excited. The rising tide that will accompany the end of the transition period will no doubt raise all Scottish fishing boats. Yesterday I received a letter from Wales for Europe urging me to call for an extension, because Wales already lags

"at the bottom of economic league tables".

After 22 years of Labour running Wales, it is not an extension we need, but a Conservative Government in Cardiff.

This debate is all about our borders. I represent a border constituency, and our economy is being held back by the decisions of the Welsh Labour Government, who see jobs, growth and economic prosperity as an inconvenience. Dan Yr Ogof caves in my constituency are a hugely popular visitor attraction, but they are prevented from reopening today by the Welsh Government, despite their own guidelines saying that they are allowed to do so, simply because the caves are underground. Forty jobs have already been lost and today the owner told me, "We have survived two world wars, depressions, recessions, the foot and mouth epidemic, but at this rate we are not going to survive Welsh Labour."

I am proud to support the UK's Government's resolve. As it continues the negotiations during this international pandemic, it is the strength and power of our United Kingdom that will ensure we prosper, and for that there can be no delay.

5.47 pm

**Mark Fletcher** (Bolsover) (Con): Dear oh dear oh dear, it is groundhog day again. We are back to discussing Brexit. I feel almost nostalgic; it is the 2017 Parliament arguments all over again. Why should we delay? What more excuses can we find to hold up Brexit? How can we make working-class communities in Bolsover wrong again? To be honest, I am not so keen on this groundhog day. The people have spoken. We need to deliver Brexit. The argument that we have a pandemic and we need to extend because that will create more certainty is nonsense. It is the wrong end of the lens. The only way that we can give our businesses and our nation certainty is by sticking to the deadlines we have set out, and I am so proud that this Government are holding firm.

**Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree with the director general of the CBI that there is no interest in further delaying transition and that business now wants to get on with it?

**Mark Fletcher:** It is an unusual experience to agree with a director general of the CBI, after so many years in which I have disagreed with them, but in this instance it is a delight to agree.

However much I disagree with SNP Members on almost everything, I do at least give them credit for turning up. As I cast my eyes over the Opposition Benches, it is an unusual experience to see only the same number of Members on those Benches as there are in my fan club; they usually way outnumber me on that front. The Labour party has once again abandoned the pitch. Its Members have straddled for so long, trying to keep their true feelings on Brexit hidden. [HON. MEMBERS: "They are hiding."] They are indeed hiding. Here we are today with three hon. Members sat on the Labour Benches. I feel sorry for the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), who is sitting by the Dispatch Box; I cannot help but feel he will have to summarise all the various Labour opinions that have been expressed today and make them seem like an eloquent argument.

**Stephen Farry:** For the record, I am just socially distancing; I am not part of the Labour party.

**Mark Fletcher:** That may be my favourite intervention of the day so far.

The interesting thing is that the Labour party is desperately hoping we forget that its new leader was the architect of its previous policy. We have not forgotten. The people of Bolsover have not forgotten. We remember the stupendous ways in which Labour Members weaved through the various ins and outs of Brexit to make it seem they were supportive, but not really—and then where did they end up? On the wrong side of the argument and on the wrong side of the last general election. I am one of many hon. Members speaking from the Government Benches today who would not be here without Labour's help, so thank you very much for that.



The Opposition's policy kind of resembles a well-known Swedish furniture store, in my opinion: the instructions from the unions are almost impossible to follow; the policy is taking forever to assemble; they are missing a few nuts and bolts; and there is a very clear pro-European design. Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition will be better known as Sir Ikea Starmer from now on. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is the architect of the situation in which we find ourselves. At least his predecessor would always make sure that the Labour party put up a fight; the Labour party is not even doing that now.

Today is a wasted day. However nostalgic we feel, the Brexit argument is done: we will be leaving this year. Whether we have a deal or not is to be determined. The European Union needs to create greater flexibility in its negotiating stance—that is the biggest barrier that we have—and this Government need to get on with levelling up all parts of our country. They should start in Bolsover.

5.52 pm

**Marco Longhi** (Dudley North) (Con): It is an enormous pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher).

It is obvious to absolutely everybody that this debate has absolutely nothing to do with covid and its impact on any EU negotiations and everything to do with the SNP, which, true to form, just wants to do everything to stop Brexit happening. It must be galling for all Labour voters in Dudley and beyond to see not a single Labour Back-Bench MP stand up to speak on this matter. Not even the current Labour leader, one of the main architects of Labour's remain stance, is present.

**Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): Where is he hiding?

**Marco Longhi**: He is indeed hiding.

As a new Member of Parliament, I have watched this place tear itself apart. I have watched it become an object of derision and despair. I have watched it lose the most fundamental element that differentiates our democracy from other Governments: this place acts on the will of its people.

Some Opposition Members might have more in common with people like the MEP Guy Verhofstadt. Just a couple of days ago he tweeted, with the delicate irony that so distinguishes his style and his deprecation of anything democratic:

"In 1988, Margaret Thatcher proudly declared that the barriers to trade in Europe were coming down",

but, he thinks, with our leaving the EU, that the Conservative party—my party—

"is putting the barriers back up."

So let us educate Mr Verhofstadt, shall we? We are quite happy to have a free trade agreement with the EU, just as the EU has with other non-EU member countries, and consequently there would be no border checks if that were to happen. However, we all know that the truth is that he and his European colleagues—and, it would seem, Opposition colleagues—want to make it as difficult as possible for us to leave and respect the democratic will of our people. He knows the truth, Mr Verhofstadt does, but he can't handle the truth. As we forge free trade agreements worldwide, trade barriers will only continue to fall, whatever other patronising statements he might decide to make.

I should probably refer to the effect of covid on the negotiations, even though we know that that is nothing to do with the real merits of this debate. If we are to react quickly to the economic downturn caused by this pandemic, we must keep as much regulatory freedom as possible. We need to turbocharge our free trade agreements and we need the ability to deliver services at pace. Adopting the so-called level playing field, or even continuing with the European Court's jurisdiction in the UK, would put the brakes on our recovery as well as being utterly unacceptable, from a democratic perspective, to the people who voted. The people in my constituency of Dudley North overwhelmingly voted to leave the European Union. The general election in December last year proved yet again, at the fourth time of asking, that the United Kingdom wants to leave. Leave we shall, whatever agreement is reached, so let us just get on with it.

5.57 pm

**Aaron Bell** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Marco Longhi), and indeed, before that, my hon. Friends the Members for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher) and for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones). I thought this was supposed to be an Opposition day debate, but here we are with the last hour taken up by speeches from the Conservative Benches, mostly from new MPs—and MPs who, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover pointed out, took seats from the Opposition.

But I do thank the SNP for putting on this debate. Naively, I assumed that we would be talking about the European Union's

"openness to extend the transition period for negotiations",

but it seems that most of the day has instead been spent talking about Scottish independence—plus *ça change*. To be fair to SNP Members, I enjoy debating with them because they believe in something: they know where they stand. They know where they stand on Brexit and they know where they stand on Scottish independence. They will not let a referendum get in the way of that, but it is an honest position. Whereas, as many colleagues have said, where are Labour Members? I acknowledge that the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) is there on the Opposition Front Bench. In fact, he made a good point when he informed the SNP, with regard to today's motion, that that ship has sailed, as indeed it has. There is no possibility of extending the transition period under the terms that were available because we chose not to do that, because, as the Paymaster General said, we enshrined in law our intention to leave on 31 December. We were elected on that mandate. Why would we go against that? Why would we prolong the uncertainty and hinder our recovery?

Covid makes it even more important that we get things sorted out and leave on 31 December. Businesses are already facing a huge amount of uncertainty as we come out of this terrible pandemic, with all the economic carnage it is causing. We must resolve our situation, one way or the other, with the European Union at the same time, rather than asking businesses to go back to work—putting the people of this nation back to work—and then having further disruption at whatever point we extend the transition period to. It is really very important that we resolve this.

That brings me to my next point about the tactics for negotiation and why this motion is fundamentally misconceived. We saw again and again in the previous

[Aaron Bell]

Parliament the consequences of Parliament trying to usurp the Executive's authority to negotiate, and what an awful mess that made. We allowed a situation to develop where the EU chose to pursue parallel negotiations with other Members, including the new Leader of the Opposition. Where is he on this?

**Jonathan Gullis:** We are still looking.

**Aaron Bell:** We are still looking not just for him but for his position. We all remember him standing up at the Labour party conference going against his leader at the time and inserting a line in his speech about an option to remain. We will not forget, and neither will the voters of Newcastle-under-Lyme.

I have never been a no-dealer—I would much rather we had a positive relationship with the EU going forward, and I would like a comprehensive free trade agreement—but I will support leaving without one if one cannot be negotiated. It takes two to tango, but we will have to leave on 31 December. We will take back control of our laws, our borders and our money, as we promised.

As we all know, whether we have been Members here for a long time or only for six months, EU deals happen at the eleventh hour. What is the point of creating a new eleventh hour six months down the line, and then perhaps another one six months down the line after that? That way lies more and more uncertainty. It is resolution we seek, and it is resolution that the Opposition are trying to avoid for the purposes of trying to bind us closer to Europe, even as the people of this country have had their say again and again.

I represent Newcastle-under-Lyme and 63% of the constituency voted to leave, but the areas that people would characterise as left behind—the former mining communities in places such as Silverdale, Knutton and Chesterton—voted even more heavily to leave. They used to be Labour areas and they voted for me in December. I am sure it was partly my campaign, but it was mostly the fact that they felt so disrespected by everything that had gone on since the vote.

We voted to leave in June 2016, more than four years ago—SNP Members would call that at least a generation. The good people of Newcastle-under-Lyme have put up with endless delay, wrecking tactics and, regrettably, a Government who were not able to pursue their agenda, partly because of the tactics employed by people on the Opposition side and, regrettably, by the internal opposition on this side. No more: they put up with this with great good humour, but no more.

We will vote against this motion today. I assume SNP Members will divide the House. I am glad to go through the No Lobby. I am sure they will be glad to go through the Aye Lobby. I have no idea what the Labour party is going to do. I cannot wait to find out.

6.1 pm

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I must admit that I thought we had left this sort of debate behind in the previous Parliament. It has been very refreshing, actually, sitting here through most of this afternoon and feeling a bit like the experienced old hand. For those of us who went through the previous Parliament—the late-night, knife-edge votes, really not knowing what was happening, and the whole uncertainty—it

has been refreshing to sit here and listen to the new intake of Conservative MPs who have been elected speak with such clarity, passion and commitment to deliver on what the people of this country voted for both in the referendum and in the recent general election. So I commend everyone who has contributed to what has actually been a proper debate. We have not been able to have enough of these proper debates, given the way Parliament is currently operating. Let us hope that, when we return after the summer recess, we can get back to something more like normality and have proper debates again.

I must admit that, although I really hoped we had left these debates behind, it was not a great surprise to see the SNP put forward this motion, because it does have a consistent reputation of wanting to overturn referendum results. It just seems that whatever people vote for in a referendum, the SNP is going to disagree with it and try to reverse it. Let us not pretend this is anything other than once again trying to delay Brexit in order to serve the SNP's own political agenda, rather than doing what is right for our country. This Government were elected just over six months ago with a very clear mandate to get Brexit done and to deliver on that referendum result, and with a very firm commitment not to delay the transition period and not to extend negotiations any further. I believe I owe it to my constituents and we owe it to the British people to keep our promise and deliver on that very firm commitment.

One thing that I know is absolutely clear is that the last thing we need in these negotiations is more time. I guarantee that, if we extended for another year, six months before the next deadline we would be in exactly this same position and having exactly the same discussions. It is not more time that is needed; it is political will that is needed to get a deal done and come to some mutually beneficial agreement with the European Union on the terms of what our future relationship will be. Let us be clear. We often seem to forget that we actually left the European Union six months ago. We have left the European Union. This debate is not about whether or not we are leaving the European Union. That has been settled. The only thing up for discussion with the EU is what it will agree with us in terms of our future relationship. That is absolutely clear.

Interestingly, many of those—in fact, I would say most of those—in the last Parliament who chose to try to undermine the democratic decision of the British people and to thwart, delay and muddy the waters of Brexit are no longer here. They paid a heavy price when they came face to face with the British electorate. One thing that the last referendum clearly showed is that the British people have a very clear sense of fair play. They expect that, when they vote for something, it will get done. That is true of the 2016 referendum and it is true of the last general election. They elected this Government to deliver on that promise, not to delay any further, to get Brexit done and to make sure that we leave on time.

We have heard it said a few times that we should handle only one crisis at a time. I do not quite understand that, because I see Brexit not as a crisis, but as a huge opportunity to deliver for the British people. But we are in the middle of a public health and an economic crisis and I respectfully say to SNP Members: if they think that we can handle only one crisis at the time, why are they trying to create another one by taking Scotland

out of the Union and creating further uncertainty and disruption? What we need to do is pull together to deal with the challenges that we are currently facing.

It is quite clear that, over the past few months, the Union has been part of our strength in handling this crisis, and we need to continue that. Scotland has benefited hugely, to the tune of billions and billions of pounds from the UK Government supporting its economy. We need to stick together, and we need to get Brexit done.

6.6 pm

**Robbie Moore** (Keighley) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow all right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken in this debate. It is perhaps unsurprising that we have heard from one—or perhaps no—Labour Member in what has been a very important debate. Perhaps that highlights to the whole House, to the country and to the hard-working people in Keighley and Ilkley that, once again, we are seeing, just as we have seen over many months and years, a real lack of decisiveness, a real lack of any decision making, and a real lack of any leadership from Her Majesty's Opposition. I could say lost in action, but there has been no action—so just lost.

I know that Labour Members would rather sit on the fence and see how the wind blows before taking any real stance, so it will be interesting to see how they vote this evening. Will they sit on the coat-tails of the SNP Members, or will they be bold and decisive and back this Conservative Government, who are determined to deliver on the will of the people? Ruling out extending the transition period gives businesses the certainty that they need to crack on. Time and again, people right across my constituency have been telling me that it is even more important now that we get this delivered.

I note that the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), who is no longer in his place, said that there has been much repetition in this debate, and he is absolutely right. Listening to SNP Members is like listening to a broken record going on about independence. I say to the SNP that, rather than just pressing the case for another extension, for more frustration and for more uncertainty for British businesses by seeking more dither and delay through an enhanced extension period, it should look a little closer to home and focus its efforts on the great failures that its leader and its party seem to be completely incapable of addressing.

It is clear from listening to SNP Members that their party seems to be more interested in promoting the fear factor of exiting the EU, along with its continued insistence on independence, than in tackling head-on the improvements to the education system in Scotland that are so desperately needed. In fact, one could conclude that the SNP is so obsessed with pursuing independence—to which, I remind SNP Members, people in Scotland said no—that it would rather put this ahead of any young child growing up in Scotland who wants to get on and get the best education in order to go on and thrive.

It gets worse. It is inexcusable that SNP Members here, along with their colleagues in Scotland, cannot even bring themselves to acknowledge that there is a problem with education in Scotland. Time and again we see stats, reports and information highlighting the SNP's failure to tackle the downward spiral in the Scottish education system. Just earlier this year, reports showed that the number of school leavers who had at least one

pass at higher level dropped from 62% in 2017-18 to 60% last year. The figures also dropped for advanced higher, and the attainment gap between the richest and poorest students in Scotland is growing again in certain areas.

The SNP has already pulled one education Bill, and on its watch there are far fewer teachers. The results among students in science and maths are down. New ideas and fresh thinking from the SNP are noted for their absence, and the suspicion lingers that, for all its rhetoric, the SNP is still reluctant to accept the true scale of the problem. So I say to the Scottish First Minister and her Education Secretary, and to every hon. Member on the SNP Benches here, that they should get a grip of the situation, because right now they are failing the young people of Scotland, and Scotland deserves much better.

6.11 pm

**Paul Bristow** (Peterborough) (Con): What a pleasure it is to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Robbie Moore) and a whole host of wise, well-mannered and intelligent contributions from these Benches. This debate is primarily about three things: what is best for our economy, broken promises and what is best for our politics, and what is best for our country. Let us talk about the economy. It is undoubtedly true that our economy has been and will continue to be affected by the covid-19 crisis. Peterborough's economy has been hit by the crisis. Jobs have been lost, and the Social Market Foundation has said that Peterborough is at risk of long-term economic disruption.

But I am fed up with bogus surveys and people talking down my city. Peterborough is a city on the up. We have a new university coming to Peterborough, which will bring research, innovation and new jobs. We have DALROD, a company that is celebrating 35 years in the fantastic city of Peterborough, creating more jobs. We have new jobs being created by Waitrose, by Aldi and by the homeware retailer URBN. Peterborough is on the A1, and it is 50 minutes from London. Peterborough is a city on the up, and the last thing we need is more uncertainty caused by further Brexit delay and dither. I am afraid that, if we extend the transition agreement, we will be back in this place in just a year or two's.

This is also about broken promises and what is best for our politics. My journey to this House came with a bump in the road, and it was called the Peterborough by-election in 2019. I understand what the destination will be if we do not keep our promises, and unfortunately it will be to come third in a by-election behind Nigel Farage. I do not want to be there again, and that is why I am proud that this Government will keep our promises. The people of Bretton, the people of Paston, the people of Werrington, the people of Westwood—the people of Peterborough—are fed up with being called uneducated, thick and unsophisticated because they believed in their country, believed in Brexit and voted to leave.

This is also about what is good for our country. I live in a country called the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. That is a country that includes England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland—equal partners in this Union. Do you know something, Mr Deputy Speaker? I speak regularly to Scottish people



[Paul Bristow]

who have moved to my city, Peterborough, and they weep for the politics of the nationalists on the SNP Benches. They weep for their divisive nature and they weep about what they are doing to them in this great country. It is the strength of this Union that will get us through this covid-19 crisis and power us on.

I almost feel sorry for the Labour party and its activists in my constituency—but the key word is “almost”. I know what the Labour social media trolls will do when they see this video of me talking passionately about my city. They will talk about why their economic policies are best for this country and why they need investment. But where are they? Where is the Labour party? Labour Members may have abandoned the playing field and they may think people are not watching, but I will make sure that the people of Peterborough know that the Labour party has abandoned them when it comes to Brexit.

6.16 pm

**Andrew Griffith** (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow so many of my colleagues, including my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow), but that is as nothing compared with my enormous pleasure at seeing the empty Labour Benches, which provide the perfect visual metaphor for the party's absence of a policy on Europe.

Let me turn to the motion and talk about the economy. This week, the Office for Budget Responsibility predicted that covid-19 could, and probably will, cause the biggest slump in the UK economy for 300 years. In these difficult times, we need to provide business with as much certainty as possible and do everything we can to help the Scottish economy bounce back after the effects of the pandemic. That includes the enormous generosity of the UK Exchequer, which has stretched to largesse of £13 billion across the job retention scheme, bounce-back loans, kick-start, the VAT cut and “eat out to help out”, funded by the most successful economic union in history.

But more than anything else, Scotland needs an economy that is confident and outward looking. Although I personally have no doubts about the individual commitment of SNP Members to parliamentary democracy, it is a matter of great concern that the activists behind the anti-English, xenophobic and illegal demonstrations say that they took their inspiration from senior SNP figures.

The right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) himself has been reported as having tweeted an image, with an expletive, to the effect that Scotland was shut and that visitors should perform a less polite version of going away. He has slunk away from the debate; perhaps the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) will tell us the truth about whether any of those involved in setting up those illegal roadblocks were members of his party. Will he give the House a commitment that, if that does turn out to be the case, anyone involved will be expelled?

As a direct result of the SNP's delay in condemning that behaviour at the border, businesses in the tourism sector, one of the largest parts of the Scottish economy, are receiving cancellations of bookings over concerns about whether Scotland will be open and welcoming to them. The right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber

has returned to his place, but I have to say that, at a time when nationalism globally is on the rise, that is not a good look for his party at all. SNP Members claim to be worried about adding to the costs of covid-19, but they themselves are compounding the damage to the Scottish economy.

SNP Members talk about a power grab from Edinburgh to London. I have much sympathy for the position of a people feeling disenfranchised by decisions taken in a capital hundreds of miles away, but that is why I celebrate the 2016 referendum verdict and am keen to put it into practice with as much haste as possible. Powers held today in Brussels, over which the right hon. Member has no influence, are being returned to Westminster and to the devolved Assembly. Scotland will have over 100 additional powers that it does not currently enjoy. Talk of an erosion of the powers of the Scottish Parliament is fallacious given that that Parliament did not exist until 1999. and our membership of the European Union far predates that.

It is not too late. It is never too late for the SNP to turn around, to be on the side of democracy and to join us on the Government side of the House, seizing back our independence, seizing back control, and making a success of global Britain in the world.

6.20 pm

**Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): It is an honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Andrew Griffith). Let me be clear that it is because of our United Kingdom that, by the end of June, nearly 900,000 jobs across Scotland had been protected by the UK Government's unprecedented support, and the Scottish Government have been allocated an extra £4.6 billion for coronavirus funding.

However, today's debate is really about revisiting two questions that have been answered: Scotland leaving the UK, which was rejected in 2014, to join, if allowed, the European Union, which the UK collectively voted to leave in 2016. Both referendums were once-in-a-generation votes, and it is our duty to respect the people's voices. The nationalists' obsession with separating themselves from our United Kingdom risks at least half a million jobs, throwing Scottish business into chaos with dither and delay while they wait to see whether they are allowed into the protectionist racket, and the opportunity to export the best of Scotland around the world could be lost. The SNP is desperate to rejoin the European Union and would do so at the cost of its own workers and industries, and fishermen and women are a prime example. Remaining in the common fisheries policy would be detrimental to the health and success of the Scottish fishing industry, and we know that the European Union's oppressive one-size-fits-all approach simply does not work.

The SNP could have talked about topics that are more pressing to the people of Scotland. In January this year, Scotland had the joint biggest fall in the social and economic wellbeing index. Why the decline? Education is one major part of the fall. Since 2006, PISA—the programme for international student assessment—shows that Scotland has dropped from 11th to 23rd in reading, 11th to 24th in maths, and 10th to 19th in science. Teacher numbers are lower today than when the SNP took power.

However, it is not just PISA that points to the failure of the nationalists in Holyrood. A survey on literacy and numeracy, which the SNP set up, came out with damning figures about what is happening, so what was the First Minister's response? It was to close it down, dismiss it, and tell the professional statisticians they were wrong. Instead of adopting Scottish Government a data-driven approach, they asked teachers what they thought about every pupil relative to a test that might have been taken at any point in the year. That does not allow proper moderation and applies unfair pressure on teachers, causing impartiality to be thrown into doubt. The SNP choose to play party politics over helping to improve the educational outcomes and destinations of the youth in Scotland.

However, before the SNP tells me that positive destinations have increased, let me point out that it happened because the Scottish Government chose to include zero-hour contracts in their figures—a system that SNP Members regularly lambast. The Scottish Government will also praise their flagship curriculum for excellence, but it is to be investigated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—failure after failure after failure. Let us talk about these issues instead, rather than revisiting the same old arguments that the public of the United Kingdom wish to move on from.

On top of educational failure, let us not forget the new children's hospital in Edinburgh that was meant to be delivered in 2012 and is now mothballed for the remainder of 2020, costing the taxpayer £1.4 million a month. Let us not forget the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital in Glasgow, which tragically saw two children die due to water contamination in 2017, and which saw NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde placed in special measures. Scotland is also now the worst place in Europe for drug deaths, after the highest ever rise in fatalities following an 80% reduction in rehabilitation beds since the SNP came to power.

Let me offer something that Members from the Scottish National party and we on the Government Benches can agree on: where is the Labour party? Rather than showing that it has learned the lessons of December 2019, its Members are hiding. Dodge, duck, dip, dive and dodge—they try to avoid discussing Brexit, because in private they want to stop it. It is one of the many reasons that people of Stoke-on-Trent North, of Kidsgrove and of Talke rejected them at the ballot box. My constituents overwhelmingly asked to leave the EU in 2016, but they were ignored time and again by the Labour party.

Let us not forget that the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), the architect of Labour's disastrous Brexit policy, said to Labour members in Dudley in March that he wants to campaign to go back in. Then he told the media in May that he wants to stay out of the EU, yet he cannot walk through the Division Lobbies with us this evening to reject an extension. Time and again, Labour is failing the people of Stoke-on-Trent and the United Kingdom. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** No clapping, please.

6.26 pm

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): What can one say? It has been an absolutely fascinating debate. We have learned so much about where we are

with the Government's chaotic and tortuous Brexit. I think we have also learned a little more about what Conservative Members feel and believe about Scotland. *[Interruption.]* Take it easy. Relax. I say to those Members that Scotland is watching this debate. Scotland is observing all the insults, all the disparaging remarks, all the putdowns and all the attempts to take our powers. They have no idea how that comes across in Scotland. They can bawl, scream, shout and disparage. They can shout us down and ignore us, but do they know what it does? I will tell them exactly what it does: it drives support for independence sky-high.

Let me tell them a couple of things in case they have missed them, both to help them a little bit and to help diplomatic relations, because this has all gone badly wrong for them. We in Scotland are now at 54% support for Scottish independence. Let me tell them what else has happened this year. Every opinion poll since the turn of the year has suggested that we are now at majority support. For the first time ever in the history of Scottish independence, we are in a position where there is sustained majority support for the proposition. That has never happened before.

After today, that support is only going to go up. We do not need to do anything in this place. I do not need to get to my feet and make a speech. All we need to do is to show the contributions made by Conservative Members to the people of Scotland. My main job, as a supporter of Scottish independence, is just to get them to make speeches like that, and then show them back to the Scottish people. The thing is, it does not matter; they will keep on doing it.

A couple of things are going to happen in the next year. We have a Scottish parliamentary election in less than 10 months. If Conservative Members think that support for independence is bad for them, wait until they hear how well the Scottish National party is doing in opinion polls. Do they know where we are? We are at 55% support. Do the Conservatives want to know where they stand for the next election? They are at 20%. *[Interruption.]* They say, "Wait for the day." Absolutely. We will take nothing for granted, and that is why I am getting all the little clips of all those speeches and making sure that they are transmitted to the Scottish people, because support for the Scottish National party will then just go further up.

**Aaron Bell:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I am intrigued to know about the opinion polls in Scotland—they are great—but would he care to answer any of the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) made about the record of the Scottish Government?

**Pete Wishart:** Let me tell the hon. Gentleman something about the record of the Scottish Government, because it will come as a bigger disappointment to him. Not only is support for Scottish independence at 54% and not only is support for the Scottish National party at 55%, but does he want to know the satisfaction rating for the Scottish Government? He does not want to know, but I will tell him anyway. It is 74%. That is the satisfaction rating for the Scottish Government. We are a popular Government doing things on behalf of the Scottish people that the Scottish people overwhelmingly approve of.

**Douglas Ross:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Pete Wishart:** I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman, as he took half an hour—sorry.

This is where we are in Scotland, and I thank Conservative Members from the bottom of my heart for helping me in my ambition and quest to deliver independence for Scotland.

It is so unnecessary. There are a couple of ways that we could do these things. We could have a separation of the ways peacefully and amicably, respecting each other, or Conservative Members could do the thing of shouting us down, disparaging us and trying to take the powers of the Scottish Parliament. I suggest this to the hon. Gentleman and hon. Ladies on the Conservative Benches: why don't we do it the friendly way? I will tell them something. They won their Brexit; have it. Please have it. If that is what England wants, please have it. I will be the first person to applaud them, cheer them and wish them all the best. We do not want it. We don't want it—that is the simple thing. Why can we not both have what we both want? Why can't they have their Brexit, have their splendid isolation and have their fantastic trade deals that they have in the bag? What we will do is reflect on what the Scottish people want, which is to be an independent nation within the European Union.

I am here to sum up today's proceedings, so let us see if I can make a little bit of a job just about that. There have been some fantastic contributions. Looking around, even the Tories, with their disparaging remarks about Scotland, have been pretty interesting. *[Interruption.]* They have been great. They have been fantastic for us, and we are so looking forward to putting a compendium together.

The opening speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) was a trademark tour de force accurately summarising the situation in and condition of Scotland: talking about the power grab, the threat to the Scottish Parliament in terms of the devolution settlement, talking about where the Scottish people are in relation to Brexit, and saying why it is necessary to have an extension to Brexit. That is what he laid down so very effectively in his speech today.

We then had some fantastic speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara), for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), for Stirling (Alyn Smith), for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown), for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) and for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson). From Glasgow to Aberdeenshire to Lothian, there were fantastic speeches from my hon. Friends. "They do not speak for Scotland." I do not know which one of the disparaging remarks that is from. But my hon. Friends speak on behalf of nearly every single community in Scotland. We have 80% of the Members representing Scotland in this House. From Ayrshire to Argyll to Aberdeenshire to everywhere, we have SNP Members who will put the views of their constituents. On no issue do they speak on behalf of those people more than on Brexit. Scotland voted overwhelmingly to reject Brexit. Every single constituency in Scotland voted to remain in the EU. What my hon. Friends did here today was to stand up for their community,

represent their views, and make sure that they were properly represented and that their voice was heard. They did a fantastic job of that today.

Then, of course, there were the Conservative speeches. I am not going to say any more about them, because that was just great. But there is something I have observed—[HON. MEMBERS: "More!"] Okay. They are saying, "More." How about this, then? I have been in this House for 20 years and I have never observed a Conservative party quite like it: the new model Conservatives, the red wall Tories, the Commons commandos—how about that one? That is the way to describe them, or Boris's Brexit bombardiers! How about that one? I cannot tell them apart. They are all the same. They are nearly all male and they are all standing there. They all beat the Labour party and they are all really thrilled about that. Well done. Gosh, we tanked the Labour party 10 years ago! It is not a big deal or a big feat.

The poor hon. Gentleman, the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), sitting there having to take all this. I actually feel sorry for him. The Labour party could not even be bothered to turn up. It was just appalling. For goodness' sake, they must have something to say about Brexit. Even if they turned up and just asked to open the window or something, at least they would have been on the record, but they could not be bothered to even do that. Does he want to say something? I'll give way to him.

**Paul Blomfield** indicated dissent.

**Pete Wishart:** He doesn't. I do really feel sorry for the hon. Gentleman. There is the one Scottish Labour Member, the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray), who always has lots to say about the Union. He is not even here today—I would have thought that he might at least have turned up.

**Paul Holmes:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Pete Wishart:** Okay, for this last time.

**Paul Holmes:** Does it surprise the hon. Gentleman, as it has me, that, according to what I hear, the Labour party are actually on a one-line Whip? Does that not show that although we come from opposing sides of the argument, the Labour party do not take the future of Scotland seriously?

**Pete Wishart:** Well, they never really have. They are no longer a force in Scottish politics—they have been well beaten into third place. But we do not really bother about the Labour party in Scotland, just as we are increasingly not bothering about the Conservative party, which we are now beginning to trounce once again.

Then there are the Liberals, none of whom have turned up. *[Interruption.]* No; the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) may have turned up to make a speech, but she is not here for the wind-ups—which is rather discourteous, Madam Deputy Speaker, though I say so myself. She is not here, and neither are the other Scottish Liberals who made speeches today.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. May I clarify? Owing to social distancing restrictions, people are not always required to be here, as previously. I know that the hon. Gentleman would not want to cast any aspersions.



**Pete Wishart:** I note that, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I apologise. But there are empty seats; if any of them want to come down, they will still find a few seats where they could sit down and participate in this debate.

The curious thing about the Liberal Democrats and their speeches is that they were not congratulated by these Benches but cheered on by the Tories. They made better Unionist speeches than you Tories! Probably the most thorough Unionists in the whole of Scotland just now are Liberal Democrats. Again, it is no wonder that they are down to God knows how many Members.

Back to the Conservative speeches. There is one that I have to single out, from the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont). It was absolutely and utterly appalling. He tried to suggest that a constitutional political party that has done nothing other than promote our cause civically and democratically is somehow anti-English and racist. That was an appalling slur, for which he should apologise. He is not here, but I tell him something—[*Interruption.*]

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. Please—no yelling at each other. It is very unseemly.

**Pete Wishart:** I will tell the hon. Gentleman something about condemning things. I condemned what happened on the border a couple of weeks ago within an hour. I will condemn any of that type of activity: whether it is Unionists and loyalists protesting in Glasgow's George Square, or whether it is activists on the border, I will condemn them. I invite the Scottish Conservatives to condemn those other protests too.

We all have great fun observing what is happening with the “negotiations”—these things that the Government turn up to with the EU. We in Scotland, I suppose, are just a bit more dispassionate about these things. We observe what is happening.

On the one side, we see the EU negotiating team, briefed to the eyeballs, with intimate knowledge of every detail of the withdrawal agreement and political declaration, negotiating in good faith and determined to protect the integrity of the single market and the institutions that have been built up over the decades. Then the UK team turn up, and before they have even had the chance to lace up their clown shoes, the EU are running all over them.

The UK team are clueless—no idea what they want, constantly shifting the goal posts. I will tell the House what it is like: it is like the Scotland team of the 2020s out there on the field against the Brazil team of the 1970s. It is that one-sided. It is no wonder that the Europeans are running circles around them just now. It might all just be a clever ploy: perhaps the Government are setting things up to fail so that they get their coveted no deal, which is exactly what they are after. Nobody could be negotiating as badly and poorly as the UK team just now.

Scotland is making up its mind. A majority of people in Scotland now want it to be an independent nation; we have now reached sustained majority support. The thing is that we are doing well not just in the traditional communities; middle Scotland is joining us now. Do Members know who the most passionate supporters of Scottish independence are now? They are “no” voting remainers, who are flooding to our cause. I thank them

for being the biggest recruiting sergeants for Scottish independence that we could possibly get. I thank them for driving many more people to the cause of Scottish independence.

**Ian Blackford:** Will my hon. Friend join me in giving some friendly advice to the Government? Devolution has been around for only 20 years—it is a relatively short time in our history. We are proud of our Parliament, and we want it to be independent. People have a real sense of pride, right across Scotland, in what our Parliament has achieved. I have to say in friendly terms to the Government that tomorrow they will introduce a White Paper—we know more about that now—and crucially, in that White Paper, they set up an unelected body that will determine whether or not the Acts of the Scottish Parliament are competent within the new framework that the UK is establishing. It is really quite remarkable—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. That is quite a long intervention. Pete Wishart.

**Ian Blackford:** If you say so, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is the most crucial measure on devolution, and it is right that we raise the issue properly. I say to the Deputy Speaker that Scotland's voice will be heard.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. That was extremely rude.

**Ian Blackford:** I beg to differ—[*Interruption.*]

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I know they are, but there should be—[*Interruption.*] The right hon. Gentleman must resume his seat. Pete Wishart.

**Pete Wishart:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

My right hon. Friend is absolutely right and spot on to be absolutely furious about what is planned for Scotland. Let me tell Government Members something. They are all bawling and screaming. Put the cameras on them—we want Scotland to see them screaming at us. We want to see them screaming at us—that builds support for us. [*Interruption.*] Keep on doing it.

**Several hon. Members** rose—

**Pete Wishart:** I will not give way, as I have heard enough screaming. Can I say one word to my hon. colleagues over there: super-state?

**Gary Sambrook:** The EU.

**Pete Wishart:** The hon. Gentleman says the EU. The super-state has arrived, and people will not find it in Brussels; they will find it in Whitehall, because the unelected body that my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber described is coming Scotland's way. Remember unelected bureaucrats? Remember that one? We have found their offices. They are not in Brussels, Frankfurt or Paris. They are sitting in Whitehall. An unelected advisory body will determine what type of Scottish parliamentary legislation will or will not be introduced. The super-state has arrived; unelected bureaucrats have arrived. That super-state is not dressed in gold stars on a blue background. It is coming to Scotland, presented in a Union Jack—that will be the arrival of the super-state for Scotland—and God help them trying to get it through the Scottish Parliament.

[Pete Wishart]

We have made it clear that we are not going to participate in that. We are going to do everything in our power to thwart it. No longer will they impose their view on Scotland, which has rejected them and their Brexit. Those days are passing. They are leaving—they are in the departure lounge. Scotland is deciding that it wants an entirely different future from the one that they want to project on us. We are going to make up our mind and Scotland will become an independent nation in the next year. Again, I appeal to them—work with us to do this. We could do it in two ways. We could do it easily, conveniently and democratically in participation and partnership. We could do that—we could arrange a referendum to make sure Scottish people have a choice; or they can dig in for a process of attrition that will not serve either of our nations and countries. It will end up the same way. Whatever they decide to do, we win. You cannot beat sustained majority support. It is all over. Why do they not work with us to deliver and achieve that result for Scotland, which the Scottish people want?

I have thoroughly enjoyed myself—I think you can tell, Madam Deputy Speaker—and I am absolutely going to sit down. All that I can say to Government Members is, keep going. Every disparaging put-down is a badge of honour for SNP Members here. Every time you talk down Scotland and try to deprive us of our powers, our support builds. I say one thing to you: keep going.

6.45 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Iain Stewart):** I am grateful for the opportunity to wind up this important debate. It has been passionate, robust and, on the whole, good-natured. We have had over 40 contributions over the past six hours or so. I will do my best to respond to all the points that Members have made, but if I forget or do not have time to respond to every individual point, I hope Members will accept my apologies.

Let me start with the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart). I do not want to sully his reputation, but I have long admired his passion and humour and the theatrics with which he puts forward his cause. However, on the substance—this will not surprise him, and I do not want to disappoint him—I profoundly disagree.

Let me let me start by debunking this manufactured grievance that the UK internal market proposals, which will be published tomorrow, somehow amount to a power grab or to disrespect for the devolution settlement. That is absolutely not the case. Many Opposition Members have confected another row, before the document is even published and before they have seen it. That says it all.

We have already had some overtures—

**Ian Blackford:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I have to say to him that I have received a press release from his Government. Why are the Government briefing on a White Paper, when Parliament has not been informed of this? It is a matter of record between the two Governments that a body will be established that will have oversight over the Bills and Acts that come in front of the Scottish Parliament. That utterly disrespects the referendum in Scotland in 1997, and the

Minister needs to think about not just the SNP and the Scottish Government, but the people of Scotland, who voted for devolution.

**Iain Stewart:** A press release! If the right hon. Gentleman bides his time, my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary will make a statement, quite properly, to this House tomorrow. Hon. Members will have a full opportunity to discuss many of the—

**Ian Blackford** *rose*—

**Iain Stewart:** How rude of the right hon. Gentleman. That says it all. SNP Members do not have the courtesy to listen to the answers that have been given.

**Douglas Ross:** Perhaps I could provide clarity for the Minister, because he has been assiduous at the Dispatch Box all afternoon—for six hours. I have also received a copy of the embargoed UK Government press release. I received it from “Newsnight” because the right hon. Gentleman and I are both appearing on it to discuss this issue. This is not the Government issuing things early; this is “Newsnight” trying to help those going on it. If the right hon. Gentleman is so confident in his argument, I would have thought that he would have been willing to have a debate with me, rather than wanting to go on 10 minutes before.

**Iain Stewart:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. When the publication is made available tomorrow, and this House has its proper opportunity to scrutinise it, Members will see that these proposals are all about helping businesses across the United Kingdom. An internal market is not a novel concept. Any country that has a powerful system of federal arrangements or devolution has an internal market structure. These proposals are about making sure that Scottish businesses can continue to trade throughout the rest of the United Kingdom, unfettered, without additional restrictions, barriers or costs, and that they can sell their goods or acquire their supply chain products. That is what this is about. We will see that these are just tired old claims of a power grab. Nothing can be further from the truth. In fact, the truth is that many more powers will be coming not just to the Scottish Parliament, but to all the devolved Administrations of the United Kingdom.

The right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts), the leader of Plaid Cymru, said in her contribution that there should be more devolution. I am happy to say that Brexit means that there will be more devolution. Let me give some of the policy areas where that will happen: agriculture, fisheries, chemical regulation, food safety, procurement, waste management, carbon capture, aviation—I could go on and on. There is a long list of powers currently residing with unelected bureaucrats in Brussels that will go down either to this House or, more importantly, to the devolved Administrations, where they will be subject to democratic decision making.

Of course, these will complement the strong existing powers that Holyrood and the other devolved Parliaments have. The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown), among others, moaned that the Scottish Parliament did not get any more powers after the 2014 referendum. Did he not see the Scotland Act 2016, which devolves significantly more taxation and welfare

powers to the Scottish Parliament? That is the reality, but all we get from the SNP is manufactured grievances that are straight out of the separatist playbook.

**Alan Brown:** Will the Minister give way?

**Iain Stewart:** No, we have heard enough from the hon. Gentleman over the course of the afternoon. I am going to reply to some of the points that have been made in the debate.

We have heard the great passion about both referendums in 2014 and 2016. Brexit and Scottish separation aroused great passions, but we have to respect the results of both referendums, and it is deeply patronising to say that people did not know what they were voting for in either case. The SNP says that the people of Scotland did not know about Brexit. I invite it to look at page 217 of its prospectus for independence, where the prospect of Brexit was raised. Is the SNP saying that the Scottish people were too stupid to read it and understand it? We should respect the result of the 2014 referendum, and we should respect the result of the 2016 referendum.

Many of my hon. Friends made this point, but I particularly highlight the contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe) and for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey), who are absolutely right that they are now representing what their constituents voted for, unlike their predecessors. It is disappointing that there are so few Members from the official Opposition here. What is their Brexit policy now? Are they going to respect the result? Are they going to join us in the Lobby to make sure that we do not extend the transition period at the end of tonight, or is their absence today indicative of the fact that they still secretly want to stop Brexit, but dare not admit it?

Let me turn to the issue of extending the transition. As many hon. Members have said—especially the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine)—the Brexit debate is over. If the SNP truly believed that, we would not be having this debate today. We do not need, as my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) said, a “neverendum”. Business does not need the psychodrama of the last couple of years to endure. Those who say that we will not get a trade deal with the EU are probably the very same people who said that we would not get a Brexit deal concluded at all. We did, and we will.

Let us imagine that this motion today achieved its aims. What would be the consequences? Cost—what would we have to pay to the EU to support its covid recovery programmes as well as all its other expenditure, and as well as our own? Has the SNP quantified that, and if not, what financial support for business and public services would it be willing to see forgone in order that that bill would be footed? What new laws and regulations over which neither this House nor Holyrood had any say would businesses and organisations have to abide by? What would be the cost for the fishing communities of Scotland of being forced to remain part of the wasteful and disastrous common fisheries policy? As my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) rightly said, the European Union will not be thinking of the United Kingdom’s interests when shaping its future policies.

Would extending the deadline make it any more likely that we will reach a conclusion of these matters? I very much doubt it. Having a deadline concentrates minds.

If we extend the transition period by a year, I would put serious money on our being back in this Chamber for another debate about extending it for another period. Negotiations are ongoing with renewed vigour, and I do not agree with the prophets of doom who say that we cannot reach a satisfactory conclusion. After all, we are not asking for something new. There is already a trade agreement between the EU and Canada, which we simply want to replicate.

I reject the characterisation of the UK outside the EU as some insular, narrow-minded, protectionist little island—far from it. We want to be an open, welcoming, tolerant, ambitious and free-trading country with global horizons. My hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho) was on the money when she referred to our generous offer to the people of Hong Kong to find a home here in the face of Chinese oppression. That is what this country is about.

There will be huge trading opportunities for businesses in Scotland and across the UK as a result of the trade deals we strike. The hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock), who characterised me as “cannon fodder”, mentioned the wine trade in her constituency. I used to live in her constituency, and I was very pleased that the headquarters of the Scotch Malt Whisky Society was based there—it was my local. I want to see Scotch whisky exports go much further than they currently are, and the trade deals that we strike will enable that. That is the sort of ambition we should have.

While there are huge opportunities, threats remain. The right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber spent much of his speech detailing what he saw as the potential disruptions to trade between Scotland and the EU, but what about the disruptions to trade between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom if he and his colleagues had their way? They have set their face against the internal market proposals without even seeing them. They walked away from the engagement discussions that this Government were having with the Scottish Government. As I have said, these proposals will guarantee the rights of Scottish firms to trade and source their products across the UK. The last thing Scottish business needs as we rebuild post covid are the barriers, costs, division and confusion that another independence referendum and separation would entail.

Of course, covid has posed huge challenges for us all. I just find it astonishing that some Opposition Members seek to trivialise and moan about the support that the United Kingdom Government have given. The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) said that Scotland got less than 1% of the package announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor last week. Did she not see that Scottish businesses and people will benefit from the job retention bonus, the kick-start programme and many other schemes? Did she not factor that in? I am afraid that I do not accept this whining, moaning trivialisation of the support that this United Kingdom gives. If ever we needed an example to show that this United Kingdom is greater than the sum of its parts, this response to covid proves it.

Of course there are challenges, to all parts of the Scottish economy. My hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont)



[Iain Stewart]

told me some concerning things about the impact on Scottish tourism as a result of the measures and announcements of the Scottish First Minister—

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP) *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

*Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.*

*Question agreed to.*

*Main Question accordingly put.*

*The House divided: Ayes 57, Noes 321.*

## Division No. 77]

[7 pm

### AYES

|                            |                           |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Bardell, Hannah            | Hendry, Drew              |
| Black, Mhairi              | Hosie, Stewart            |
| Blackford, rh Ian          | Jardine, Christine        |
| Blackman, Kirsty           | Lake, Ben                 |
| Bonnar, Steven             | Law, Chris                |
| Brock, Deidre              | Linden, David             |
| Brown, Alan                | MacAskill, Kenny          |
| Cameron, Dr Lisa           | Mc Nally, John            |
| Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair | McDonald, Stewart Malcolm |
| Chapman, Douglas           | McDonald, Stuart C.       |
| Cherry, Joanna             | McLaughlin, Anne          |
| Cooper, Daisy              | Monaghan, Carol           |
| Cowan, Ronnie              | Nicolson, John            |
| Crawley, Angela            | O'Hara, Brendan           |
| Day, Martyn                | Olney, Sarah              |
| Docherty-Hughes, Martin    | Oswald, Kirsten           |
| Doogan, Dave               | Saville Roberts, rh Liz   |
| Dorans, Allan              | Sheppard, Tommy           |
| Eastwood, Colum            | Smith, Alyn               |
| Edwards, Jonathan          | Stephens, Chris           |
| Farry, Stephen             | Stone, Jamie              |
| Fellows, Marion            | Thewliss, Alison          |
| Ferrier, Margaret          | Thomson, Richard          |
| Flynn, Stephen             | Whitford, Dr Philippa     |
| Gibson, Patricia           | Williams, Hywel           |
| Grady, Patrick             | Wishart, Pete             |
| Grant, Peter               |                           |
| Gray, Neil                 |                           |
| Hanna, Claire              |                           |
| Hanvey, Neale              |                           |

### Tellers for the Ayes:

**Owen Thompson and  
Gavin Newlands**

### NOES

|                   |                      |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| Adams, Nigel      | Baker, Duncan        |
| Afolami, Bim      | Baker, Mr Steve      |
| Afriyie, Adam     | Baldwin, Harriett    |
| Ahmad Khan, Imran | Baron, Mr John       |
| Aiken, Nickie     | Baynes, Simon        |
| Aldous, Peter     | Bell, Aaron          |
| Allan, Lucy       | Benton, Scott        |
| Amess, Sir David  | Beresford, Sir Paul  |
| Anderson, Lee     | Berry, rh Jake       |
| Anderson, Stuart  | Bhatti, Saqib        |
| Andrew, Stuart    | Blackman, Bob        |
| Argar, Edward     | Bone, Mr Peter       |
| Atherton, Sarah   | Bowie, Andrew        |
| Atkins, Victoria  | Bradley, Ben         |
| Bacon, Gareth     | Bradley, rh Karen    |
| Bacon, Mr Richard | Brady, Sir Graham    |
| Badenoch, Kemi    | Braverman, rh Suella |
| Bailey, Shaun     | Brereton, Jack       |
| Baillie, Siobhan  |                      |

|                             |                        |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Bridgen, Andrew             | Foster, Kevin          |
| Bristow, Paul               | Francois, rh Mr Mark   |
| Britcliffe, Sara            | Frazer, Lucy           |
| Brokenshire, rh James       | Freeman, George        |
| Browne, Anthony             | Freer, Mike            |
| Bruce, Fiona                | Fuller, Richard        |
| Buchan, Felicity            | Fysh, Mr Marcus        |
| Buckland, rh Robert         | Gale, rh Sir Roger     |
| Burghart, Alex              | Garnier, Mark          |
| Burns, rh Conor             | Ghani, Ms Nusrat       |
| Butler, Rob                 | Gideon, Jo             |
| Cairns, rh Alun             | Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl |
| Carter, Andy                | Glen, John             |
| Cartlidge, James            | Goodwill, rh Mr Robert |
| Cash, Sir William           | Grant, Mrs Helen       |
| Caulfield, Maria            | Grayling, rh Chris     |
| Chalk, Alex                 | Green, Chris           |
| Chishti, Rehman             | Green, rh Damian       |
| Churchill, Jo               | Griffith, Andrew       |
| Clark, rh Greg              | Griffiths, Kate        |
| Clarke, Mr Simon            | Grundy, James          |
| Clarke, Theo                | Gullis, Jonathan       |
| Clarke-Smith, Brendan       | Halfon, rh Robert      |
| Clarkson, Chris             | Hall, Luke             |
| Cleverly, rh James          | Hammond, Stephen       |
| Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey | Hands, rh Greg         |
| Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse       | Harper, rh Mr Mark     |
| Collins, Damian             | Harris, Rebecca        |
| Costa, Alberto              | Harrison, Trudy        |
| Courts, Robert              | Hart, Sally-Ann        |
| Coutinho, Claire            | Hart, rh Simon         |
| Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey         | Heald, rh Sir Oliver   |
| Crosbie, Virginia           | Heapey, James          |
| Crouch, Tracey              | Heaton-Harris, Chris   |
| Daly, James                 | Henderson, Gordon      |
| Davies, David T. C.         | Henry, Darren          |
| Davies, Gareth              | Higginbotham, Antony   |
| Davies, Dr James            | Hinds, rh Damian       |
| Davies, Mims                | Holden, Mr Richard     |
| Davis, rh Mr David          | Hollinrake, Kevin      |
| Davison, Dehenna            | Hollobone, Mr Philip   |
| Dinenage, Caroline          | Holloway, Adam         |
| Dines, Miss Sarah           | Holmes, Paul           |
| Djanogly, Mr Jonathan       | Howell, John           |
| Docherty, Leo               | Howell, Paul           |
| Donelan, Michelle           | Huddleston, Nigel      |
| Dorries, Ms Nadine          | Hudson, Dr Neil        |
| Double, Steve               | Hunt, Jane             |
| Dowden, rh Oliver           | Hunt, rh Jeremy        |
| Doyle-Price, Jackie         | Hunt, Tom              |
| Drax, Richard               | Jack, rh Mr Alister    |
| Drummond, Mrs Flick         | Javid, rh Sajid        |
| Duguid, David               | Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  |
| Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain   | Jenkin, Sir Bernard    |
| Dunne, rh Philip            | Jenkinson, Mark        |
| Eastwood, Mark              | Jenkyne, Andrea        |
| Edwards, Ruth               | Johnson, Dr Caroline   |
| Ellis, rh Michael           | Johnson, Gareth        |
| Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias       | Johnston, David        |
| Eustice, rh George          | Jones, Andrew          |
| Evans, Dr Luke              | Jones, rh Mr David     |
| Evennett, rh Sir David      | Jones, Fay             |
| Everitt, Ben                | Jones, Mr Marcus       |
| Fabricant, Michael          | Jupp, Simon            |
| Farris, Laura               | Kawczynski, Daniel     |
| Fell, Simon                 | Kearns, Alicia         |
| Fletcher, Katherine         | Keegan, Gillian        |
| Fletcher, Mark              | Knight, rh Sir Greg    |
| Fletcher, Nick              | Knight, Julian         |
| Ford, Vicky                 | Kruger, Danny          |
|                             | Kwarteng, rh Kwasi     |
|                             | Lamont, John           |

Largan, Robert  
 Latham, Mrs Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Andrea  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Levy, Ian  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Loder, Chris  
 Logan, Mark  
 Longhi, Marco  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackrory, Cherilyn  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mangnall, Anthony  
 Mann, Scott  
 Marson, Julie  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Mayhew, Jerome  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Millar, Robin  
 Milling, rh Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Moore, Damien  
 Moore, Robbie  
 Mordaunt, rh Penny  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morrissey, Joy  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mullan, Dr Kieran  
 Mumby-Croft, Holly  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Sir Robert  
 Nici, Lia  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Parish, Neil  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, rh Christopher  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Randall, Tom  
 Redwood, rh John

Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
 Richards, Nicola  
 Richardson, Angela  
 Roberts, Rob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Ross, Douglas  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Russell, Dean  
 Rutley, David  
 Sambrook, Gary  
 Saxby, Selaine  
 Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec  
 Simmonds, David  
 Skidmore, rh Chris  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Stafford, Alexander  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, Jane  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Streeter, Sir Gary  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunderland, James  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie  
 Trott, Laura  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Walker, Sir Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
 Wallis, Dr Jamie  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles  
 Webb, Suzanne  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Wild, James  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Young, Jacob  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Michael Tomlinson and  
 Eddie Hughes

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.*

**Ian Blackford:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you; I am most grateful. I have received a press release, which has come from the UK Government this afternoon, about a White Paper that will be issued tomorrow morning. It covers the issues of the devolved institutions and the establishment of a UK-wide market. I have to say that we on this side of the House are absolutely furious that this matter has been briefed to the press. I have not, as was suggested earlier, been informed by "Newsnight", but from elsewhere. Moreover, not only has this been briefed to the press, which I would suggest is discourteous to this House, but none of the devolved institutions has been informed of this White Paper ahead of the media briefings this evening. Can I ask what mechanisms are open to us, now that we know this is in the public domain—yet the Minister has not sought to inform the House—to summon the Minister to explain that this evening?

Moreover, the reason for the importance of this, despite what has been said from the Government Front Bench, is that it will lead, if it is passed, to the establishment of a body that will have oversight of legislation that comes in front of the devolved institutions. We will have to justify, for example, what we have done on tuition fees, or what we have done on the minimum pricing of alcohol. It is an attack on devolution pure and simple, and we must have the opportunity, now that the Government have communicated this to the media, to make sure that we hold this Government to account this evening and without delay.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order, and for giving me notice of it. I certainly got the impression that he made his feelings known about this during the debate. I think the House is not unaware of that. With regard to a Minister coming to the House this evening, I have no notice of that, but I believe there is to be a statement tomorrow on this issue, and I am sure at that point he will have the opportunity to reiterate his views. In the meantime, those on the Treasury Bench have heard what he had to say, will have noted it, and will, I am sure, report back.

**Jacob Young:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I believe it was the right hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) who previously claimed it was "jaw-dropping" that the Government had not voted on an Opposition day motion, and she described abstaining as cynical. Given that the Labour party has chosen not even to show up to today's Opposition day debate, may I seek your advice on how the House can know the right hon. Lady's thoughts on the Labour party hiding from tonight's vote?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** First, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will have given notice that he is referring to another Member before raising a point of order. Has he done that?

**Jacob Young:** No, I have not.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Well, the hon. Gentleman really ought to do that. If he is making comments about anybody else or what they have said, they absolutely have the right to be in the Chamber. Before we go any further—because, as I say, it is disrespectful not to have done that—it is very important that each Member of Parliament and each of us has the right to decide which way we vote. Sometimes hon. Members vote Aye, sometimes they vote No, sometimes they abstain. There may well come a point when the hon. Gentleman needs to make such a decision, so I do think it is important that in this House we respect each other's right to make decisions about which way to vote.

**Shaun Bailey:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As a relatively new Member, I seek your clarification. My understanding is that it is our basic duty to our constituents to ensure that we turn up to debates and that we vote, irrespective of who instigates those debates. How is it compatible with that duty that the official Opposition both do not turn up to a debate and do not vote?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman did not quite hear what I just said. I can repeat it, but basically it was that I think it is very important that we all respect each other's right to make decisions on the issue of voting. There may well come a point when the hon. Gentleman is not able to participate in a debate or does not want to participate in a debate, and at that point he may decide that he wishes to abstain. That is his right: it is the right of all of us. That is what I just said, so let us hope we are not going to have any further discussion on this issue.

#### DEFERRED DIVISIONS

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 41A(3)),*

That at this day's sitting, Standing Order 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply to the Motion in the name of Secretary Priti Patel relating to the Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism.—  
(*Eddie Hughes.*)

*Question agreed to.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** We will have a brief two-minute suspension, just to make sure that the Dispatch Boxes are clean.

7.20 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism

7.22 pm

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Before I call the Minister, I ask Liz Twist, on behalf of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, to make an announcement.

**Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab):** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The House will see the note on the Order Paper that says:

"The Instrument has not yet been considered by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments."

However, I can confirm that the Joint Committee met this afternoon, considered the instrument and has nothing to report concerning the draft order.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster):** I beg to move,

That the draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Proscribed Organisations) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 13 July, be approved.

That confirmation from the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) is very welcome. Subject to the agreement of this House and the other place, the draft order will come into force on Friday 17 July 2020.

The threat we face from terrorism remains significant, but, as assistant commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service and national lead for counter-terrorism policing Neil Basu has said, right-wing terrorism is the fastest-growing terror threat in the United Kingdom. We can never entirely eliminate the threat from terrorism, but the Government are determined to do all we can to minimise the danger it poses and keep the public safe.

The nature of terrorism is constantly evolving. There are organisations that recruit, radicalise, promote and encourage terrorism, as well as those that actually commit terrible acts of violence against innocent people with the aim of undermining our democracy. Proscription is therefore an important part of the Government's strategy to disrupt the full range of terrorist activities.

The group that we propose to add to the list of terrorist organisations, amending schedule 2 to the Terrorism Act 2000, is Feuerkrieg Division, or FKD. This is the 25th order under section 3(3)(a) of that Act. FKD is a white supremacist group whose ideology stands in direct contrast to the core values of our United Kingdom. Its actions, which seek to divide communities, stir up hatred and glorify violence, are reminders of the darkest times in Europe. Proscribing this group will prevent its membership from growing and help to stop the spread of propaganda that allows a culture of hatred and division to thrive. It will also help to prevent FKD from radicalising people who may be vulnerable to extreme ideologies and at risk of emulating the terrorist acts that they glorify.

Under section 3 of the Terrorism Act 2000, the Home Secretary has the power to proscribe an organisation if she believes that it is currently concerned with terrorism. If the statutory test is met, the Home Secretary will then exercise her discretion to proscribe the organisation. The Home Secretary takes into account a number of factors in considering whether to exercise this discretion. They include the nature and scale of an organisation's activities and the need to support other members of the



international community in tackling terrorism. The effect of proscription is to outlaw a listed organisation and ensure that it is unable to operate in the United Kingdom. It is a criminal offence for a person to belong to, support or arrange a meeting in support of a proscribed organisation, or to wear clothing or carry articles in public that arouse reasonable suspicion that they are a member or supporter of a proscribed organisation. Proscription acts to halt fundraising and recruitment while making it possible to seize cash associated with the organisation.

Given its wide-ranging impact, the Home Secretary exercises her power to proscribe only after thoroughly reviewing the available evidence on an organisation, including open-source material, intelligence material, and advice reflecting consultation across Government, which includes the intelligence and law enforcement agencies. The cross-Government Proscription Review Group supports the Home Secretary in her decision-making process.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the Minister for bringing this legislation to the House. It is very important to have it in place so that these groups are outlawed at a very early stage. He mentioned the police. Are there, and will there be, enough resources set aside for police forces to ensure that they can keep an eye on all the people who are involved in these activities?

**Kevin Foster:** The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I cannot get into commenting on particular police operations in relation to this group or any other group that may be of interest in connection with terrorism activities. However, he will be aware of the investment we are putting into the police and the resources that we have made available to counter-terrorism policing more generally, as well as resources for tackling the rise of far-right extremism.

Having carefully considered all the evidence, the Home Secretary believes that FKD is currently concerned with terrorism and the discretionary powers weigh in favour of proscription. Although I am unable to comment on specific intelligence, I can provide the House with a summary of the group's activities. FKD is a white supremacist group founded in late 2018 that has an international footprint, with members across North America and Europe. The group celebrates the concepts promoted in a collection of essays that advocate the use of violence and mass murder in pursuit of an apocalyptic race war. While the bulk of FKD's activity is online, members have engaged in distributing violent, racist and antisemitic propaganda. In mid-2019, the group reportedly called for the deaths of a European Parliament politician and YouTube's chief executive officer.

FKD's members have been arrested on terrorism charges both in the UK and overseas. In 2019, US authorities charged several individuals with a variety of offences, including weapons charges, plotting to bomb a synagogue and attack members of the LGBTQ community, plotting to bomb a major news network, and distributing information related to explosives and weapons of mass destruction. In September 2019, UK police apprehended a 16-year-old on suspicion of the commission, preparation and instigation of acts of terrorism. As a result, the group distributed among its members a list of police buildings and an image of the chief constable of West Midlands

police with a gun to his head and the words "race traitor" across his eyes, urging members to carry out attacks in retaliation for the arrest of one of its followers. In October 2019, a 21-year-old appeared in court in London charged with terror offences relating to his purported support for FKD. He allegedly encouraged the mass murder of members of the Jewish and LGBTQ communities.

Our strategy to combat terrorism looks at the full spectrum of activity. This includes ensuring that groups who call for violence and mass murder, and who unlawfully glorify horrific terrorist acts, are prevented from continuing to stir up hatred and encouraging violence. It is therefore right that this House agrees to add FKD to the list of proscribed organisations in schedule 2 to the Terrorism Act 2000.

7.29 pm

**Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): I want first to make it clear that the Opposition's overriding priority is, and always will be, to keep the public and the country safe, so we welcome this proscription order, which will provide clarity and direction in respect of this organisation and its members. It also sends a strong and unambiguous message that condoning or glorifying acts of terrorism will never be tolerated. That is a message with which we on the Labour Benches fully agree. We therefore support this motion, and, as with all Government proscription decisions, we will work constructively with the Government and carefully scrutinise it.

As has been outlined, Feuerkrieg Division—or FKD—is a white supremacist group that was formed in late 2018 with an international outreach, and members situated across north America and Europe. Its abhorrent, racist, antisemitic and violent messages were predominantly spread via online networks, where vulnerable and young individuals would be targeted on social media, but also physically, with the FKD disseminating its vile propaganda in person.

We know that the authorities in the UK and the United States have apprehended FKD members on terrorism charges, such as for planning heinous atrocities, including the targeted attacks against synagogues and members of the Jewish and LGBT communities, threatening senior UK police officers, and disseminating information about explosives and weapons of mass destruction. We must do everything we can to tackle such repulsive manifestations of extremism and terrorism, and we therefore believe that there is a powerful case to be made for FKD's proscription today.

In her letter to the shadow Home Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), the Home Secretary made it clear that the FKD had dissolved itself in February of this year. The task now, I put it to the Minister, must surely be to monitor and intercept any FKD activity operating through new aliases and alternative channels. This also leads me to wonder whether the timing of the proscription order suggests in that perhaps the current processes are too slow and less effective in the contemporary context—one in which organisation names and affiliations are quickly disposed of and regenerated in the dark depths of the online sphere. We want and need these orders to have maximum impact, so we must know, first, that the processes are robust and agile and, secondly, that counter-terrorism police and their strategic partners have the right resources to deal with these challenges.

[Conor McGinn]

Today's order also reflects the concerning fact that the menace of far-right extremism and terrorism, of which FKD is an expression, is growing at an alarming rate on UK streets and on those of other countries across the globe. It is welcome that the Government are taking this threat seriously, but, of course, there is much more work to be done. First and foremost, that includes having a coherent and comprehensive strategy in place to tackle far-right extremism, which I have called for, and indeed all other such manifestations, which the shadow Home Secretary has called for in relation to commissioning a judge-led inquiry on lone attacker terrorists. I urge the Government to take our proposals on this seriously and work constructively with us on them.

We must also see to it that other groups we know to be promoting violence and terrorism are dealt with in similarly robust fashion, and here I commend the work undertaken by HOPE not hate in its annual "State of Hate" report, which highlights so clearly the threat posed by groups on the far right. The organisation the Order of Nine Angles is a case in point. Disturbingly, it remains active today, using social media channels to inspire people to become terrorists and incite violence, often horrifically using sexual violence as a political tool. Will the Government undertake to look closely at such vile groups in the context of proscription, which is something that will, I suspect, be raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) and for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock), who have done incredible work to raise awareness of this growing threat?

There is also little doubt that covid-19 is being used globally by opportunists on the extreme far right to promote chaos, disorder and violence. We cannot let this crisis become another opportunity for those who seek to divide us, spread fear and promote violence. We need to know how the Government are responding to these defining issues and what their plan is for the future.

Our priority is to keep the public and our community safe. Today's proscription order is welcome in relation to that most important of goals, and the official Opposition wholeheartedly support it.

7.34 pm

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I start by thanking the Minister for the advance discussions that we have had about this matter.

The Scottish National party abhors all forms of terrorism, and we consider it very important that this Parliament is alive to the risks posed by the far right and white supremacists. We must never forget that one of our own number was murdered by a far-right racist terrorist only four years ago, and I pay tribute to the memory of Jo Cox. The risks from these far-right groups persist. During the evidence session of the Committee on the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Bill, on which I served, the Independent Reviewer of Terrorist Legislation, Jonathan Hall QC, stated that

"an increasing number of quite young people are being caught up in terrorism, including new forms of terrorism—not just conventional Islamist, extremist or right-wing terrorism, but other new emerging forms, such as the incel movement, or even things at the very boundaries of what you might consider to be terrorism that are very violent."—[*Official Report, Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Bill Public Bill Committee*, 25 June 2020; c. 10, Q15.]

I think his warning was well made. The group that the Government seek to proscribe today seems to fall into the categories that Jonathan Hall warned us to be particularly alive to.

On the basis of what the Government have said, the SNP is satisfied that the statutory test for proscription is met, and that the Home Secretary in this instance is doing the right thing in the exercise of her discretion. The Government have our support on this matter.

7.36 pm

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I wholeheartedly welcome this order and endorse the comments made by my hon. Friends and from the SNP Benches. Across the House, one thing we all have in common is the view that these groups are utterly despicable and need the strongest action to be taken against them. The tactics, ideology, and methods that the Minister rightly outlined in relation to FKD are deeply disturbing, and are unfortunately shared by a range of other organisations. While this order is welcome, the description that the Minister gave of antisemitism, racism and encouragement of attacks on minority groups, our police and public figures, as well as the use of the online world to groom and radicalise individuals into these organisations, is an all-too-familiar tale. I looked at this issue in great detail during my time on the Home Affairs Committee, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock), and other Members. We have also raised the matter in the House on a number of occasions, including in the past few weeks.

I urge the Minister to look carefully at groups that are using similar tactics or ideologies, or pose a similar clear and present danger to the citizens of this country, and indeed globally. I commend the remarks about the Order of Nine Angles. That group was rightly raised by HOPE not hate, which does incredible work on this issue. The Order of Nine Angles is a Nazi satanist group that is deeply antisemitic and advocates the use of sexual violence and murder. It was founded by an individual who spent 50 years in satanism and in organisations such as the British Movement, Column 88, Combat 18, and the National Socialist Movement. We must not forget the London nail bomber—we were discussing the anniversary of that tragic event that targeted the black community, the Muslim community and the LGBT community with terror, violence and murder on our streets. The London nail bomber was a member of the National Socialist Movement.

Such groups present a clear and present danger. HOPE not hate has identified how four people linked to that organisation in the past 12 months have been convicted, including individuals in this country and the United States, where a soldier was linked to providing classified information in order to be able to attack his own unit. Such groups also use the online world that the Minister spoke of in relation to FKD, using a disgusting channel, Rapewaffen, via the channel Telegram, to encourage disgusting sexual violence.

We saw a similar pattern with an organisation that has now been proscribed, and I raised that over many years with the Government, in private and public. The System Resistance Network and the Sonnenkrieg Division were effectively rebrands of National Action, which targeted a Member of this House with severe violence and threats of murder, for which individuals were convicted.

I share the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) about the length of time that it is taking the Government to proscribe these organisations, even in the face of very clear, undisputed evidence about their activities. The system is simply moving too slowly. I know that the Minister has good intentions, and I know that many in the law enforcement community wish to see this move much more quickly. But when evidence has been presented by HOPE not hate about the Order of Nine Angles and individuals have been convicted, the Government need to act, and they are not doing so quickly enough at the moment.

The online world is a key factor in the way that these organisations groom, organise and spread their vile ideology. It is therefore deeply concerning to have heard in the last few weeks of potential further delays to the online harms Bill. The Government introduced the online harms White Paper, and there is much in it that many of us across the House agree with, particularly in relation to the use of online space by extremists in extreme right-wing organisations, Islamist organisations, organisations involved in terrorism in Northern Ireland and so on. However, the reality is that the voluntary approach has not worked in tackling such organisations online. Every week it is easy to find information relating to these extreme organisations and their ideology. They are not hiding—they are active in plain sight, encouraging people down a dark, despicable well of hatred and on to other platforms where there are direct encouragements to murder, rape and attack minority groups and public figures. Let us not forget that these people want to attack the institutions of our state. They want to attack the police, our armed forces, public figures and those in the justice system because they believe them to be traitors to their sick and twisted ideologies.

The Government must act on platforms such as Telegram, where many of these organisations are organising and sharing information. Stephen Yaxley-Lennon regularly uses Telegram, and these very extreme organisations use it as well. The Government simply have not acted. Channels in the gaming world are being used to recruit and encourage young men in particular. We have seen some disturbing examples of that in south Wales, where individuals have been interdicted. I have seen it in my own community, where an individual was recently convicted for involvement in the System Resistance Network and Sonnenkrieg Division. He spread vile Nazi graffiti around Cardiff South and Penarth, encouraging people to join their local Nazis, with some very advanced imagery being shared to recruit and radicalise individuals.

While I welcome the order, there is a clear case for proscribing a number of other organisations, including the Order of Nine Angles, for the Government to move much faster on this, and for tackling the way that these organisations operate online.

7.42 pm

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): I welcome the banning of the FKD. Far-right terrorism is the fastest-growing terror threat in this country, and that is why Government action is very welcome. There is, however, an enforcement gap. For proscription measures to have the maximum possible impact, they cannot become an end in themselves. Banning an organisation should be the start of the enforcement process. When

National Action was banned in 2016, not enough was done to track the activity of those involved in the National Action network. As recent events have shown, including the charging of a police officer, National Action still had a presence in this country after it was formally prohibited. Today's ban must mark the beginning of new police efforts to track FKD members and their activities.

While this proposed ban is welcome, I firmly believe that another neo-Nazi organisation already mentioned more than once in the debate—the Order of Nine Angles—represents a greater threat to UK citizens. As parliamentary chair of HOPE not hate, an anti-fascist campaign group, I co-ordinated a letter from a group of cross-party MPs to the Home Secretary. We called for the organisation to be banned. HOPE not hate has provided a clear case for the proscription of the O9A. It is active today. Its members make use of largely unmonitored, encrypted social media platforms to incite hatred and inspire people to commit acts of terror.

The recent events in the US outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) show a clear case for the proscription of this organisation. Since we wrote to the Home Secretary in March, a United States soldier has been indicted for plotting with the O9A to murder members of his unit. In the past year, four people linked to the O9A have been convicted of terror offences in the UK. Using social media channels such as Telegram, it radicalises vulnerable people, promoting neo-Nazi, antisemitic, Satanist beliefs and glorifying unspeakable acts of terror. So I, along with many other Members across the House, am calling for the Government to ban the Order of Nine Angles. It belongs, along with other neo-Nazi groups such as National Action and now the FKD, on the list of proscribed terrorist organisations.

Groups like these operate in dark online spaces. Their names, aliases and affiliations can be changed at a moment's notice. This makes tracking and monitoring their activities incredibly difficult. Will the Minister give me assurances that our police, intelligence and security services have the resources they need to continue to monitor organisations once they take their activities underground? Will he outline what steps his Department has taken, in partnership with social media platforms such as Telegram, to break up these online networks? The proscription of the FKD comes four months after it dissolved itself in February this year. On that basis, may I ask what recent assessment the Government have made of the performance of the proscription review group and the current proscription process?

I urge the Government to follow through with action by targeting other far right extremists. The Order of Nine Angles is active today, and we must act now to stop its members conspiring to commit acts of terror and to protect our communities.

7.45 pm

**Kevin Foster:** I start by welcoming the overall support for this measure from the Opposition Benches and in particular the constructive tone struck by the Labour and SNP spokespeople in responding to my speech. In terms of the process, I hear what the shadow Security Minister says. He will appreciate that, in a democracy, criminalising joining an organisation should be something that we do only when there is significant evidence and intelligence that it has gone beyond holding views that



[Kevin Foster]

we would all disagree with or dislike and into an area of extremism, violence and inciting hatred. I can assure him that the process to deal with aliases is more truncated, in allowing the Home Secretary to deal with that via a negative instrument rather than the full process of proscription. Again, we welcome the hon. Gentleman's support.

The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) hit the nail on the head when she said that this was a growing threat. We see what is happening online, and those of us who were elected alongside her in 2015 in particular will remember the contributions of the former hon. Member for Batley and Spen. We will always remember her message that we have more in common than the values of the person who took her life away.

The hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), a fellow Royal College of Defence Studies alumnus, gave a typically powerful performance. I welcome his overall comments, but I hope he will appreciate that it is inappropriate for me, at the Dispatch Box, to go into any considerations we are making of other groups or the nature of the intelligence involved. We recognise that the methods these groups are using are changing. They are adapting online and using different types of platforms, particularly moving away from some of the larger ones and on to the smaller ones. I can reassure him that we plan to publish a full Government response to the online harms White Paper and to bring in online harms legislation in this Session of Parliament.

I very much appreciated the speech from the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock), and the work that she is doing to tackle these issues. Again, it would not be right for me to comment on what the police and intelligence agencies may or may not be doing in relation to particular groups or investigations, but we are conscious of these matters. We have the new Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Bill going through, and other ongoing work. I would just caution her that, although the FKD claimed on one of its social media feeds to have dissolved, the Home Secretary is satisfied, on the basis of the intelligence, that an active group is still engaged in terrorism and that it meets the statutory test. I am loth to take the group's own proclamation that it has dissolved as the final word on these things. As I say, I cannot go into the intelligence behind the decision, but we are satisfied that it meets the statutory test of being active, and that proscription was therefore essential.

As has rightly been pointed out, proscription is just part of the process and, sadly, does not in itself eliminate these types of group and their activities. It is important that we, the police and the intelligence agencies—and the courts, when people come before them—work to ensure that appropriate action is taken, and that the cases are considered fairly under a type of justice that, sadly, they do not believe in themselves. We, as a values-based democracy, must ensure that they receive a fair trial.

I welcome the overall support that has been expressed and the constructive nature of the debate. I thank Members for their support.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Railway Station: Gamesley

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(Eddie Hughes.)

7.49 pm

**Robert Largan** (High Peak) (Con): About 2,000 years ago, the Romans built a fort near Gamesley in my constituency; some say that that was the last time central Government put major investment into the area. When residents first moved into their homes on the newly built housing estate at Gamesley, they were told, “Yes, the transport links are poor, but don't worry: a new railway station will be built shortly so that you can easily get to Manchester or Glossop town centre.” That was in 1968. The world has changed in many ways over the past 50 years, but Gamesley still does not have a station.

Before I was elected, the last time that an MP had even mentioned Gamesley station in Parliament was in 1968. Since December, I have been working hard to get Gamesley back on the agenda. I am grateful to the rail Minister for meeting me several times already to discuss the proposals, and for the way the Government have been prepared to listen. The fact that we are having this debate shows how far we have come. The truth is that over the past 50 years, Governments of all parties have failed properly to invest in transport infrastructure outside London and the south-east, and especially in places such as Gamesley.

Gamesley is a great place to live and people are rightly proud to live there. It is a tight-knit community where people really look out for each other. That has never been more clear than during the lockdown, when organisations such as G52 have done amazing work supporting the most vulnerable. But Gamesley is also one of the most deprived communities in the whole country—on some measures, it is in the top 1% most deprived. A huge part of the reason for that is that local transport links are simply not good enough.

The Local Trust has carried out really important research on what it calls “left behind” communities, and has identified Gamesley as one of the areas most in need of support. According to the Local Trust, 46% of households in Gamesley do not have a car, compared with the national average of 26%. It takes an estimated 53 minutes for people in Gamesley to travel to the nearest hospital by public transport—that is 36% longer than the national average.

Local bus services are also in a poor state: the 341 bus from Glossop to Gamesley stops running at five o'clock, which is not much help to anyone who finishes work later than that. Many of my constituents end up having to pay for a taxi to get back home to Gamesley after their shift ends. Local bus services are now set to get even worse: Stagecoach has just announced its intention to scrap the 236 bus between Glossop and Ashton, which will leave people in nearby Brookfield and Woolley Bridge without any direct service.

Travel is not the only barrier facing people in Gamesley. The national average broadband speed is 45.1 megabits per second; Gamesley's is just 28 megabits per second. Low digital connectivity is just another reminder of how places such as Gamesley have been left behind, denied the essential infrastructure that they need to unleash their full potential. The lack of infrastructure

and public transport connections to places such as Glossop and Manchester has had a significant and negative impact on the lives of local people. It has led to fewer job opportunities and a real impact on people's quality of life.

Building Gamesley station will help to transform the life chances of local people. The case for a station is very strong. Transport for Greater Manchester and Derbyshire County Council are currently working jointly on a strategic outline business case, and they have already said: "Gamesley station has a good strategic case and excellent local support." I can certainly attest to the strong local support. A huge number of local people have signed my long-standing petition in support of the station. As it stands today, more than 30% of the entire population of Gamesley have now signed my petition; by any yardstick that shows pretty strong support.

The strategic case is clear: the cost is relatively low, sidings already exist and trains already pause before going over Dinting viaduct, so a new station would have only a minimal impact on the current timetable of around one or two extra minutes' journey time. That would be a small price to pay for the huge benefits that the station would bring to the people of Gamesley.

**Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con):** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who is making an exceptional argument for the need for a railway station at Gamesley in his constituency. Pinxton in the Bolsover constituency is in a similar situation: a train track runs through it but it does not currently have a station. Passenger services to Pinxton could have a transformative effect; does my hon. Friend support such a proposal?

**Robert Largan:** My hon. Friend and county neighbour is an excellent champion for the people of Bolsover, and I absolutely agree with him.

Gamesley station will not just benefit the people of Gamesley. The nearest station to Gamesley is Dinting. Demand at Dinting has grown significantly in recent years as more and more houses are built in the Glossop area, which has led to growing parking pressures at Dinting. Building the new station will help reduce those pressures, shorten commuting times for many people who drive to Dinting and, crucially, get more cars off the road. That would help to address the notoriously bad traffic problems in the Glossop area.

Traffic is not a new problem. The need for the Mottram bypass has been talked about for over half a century, and traffic is now worse than ever. For many in the region, Glossop has become synonymous with traffic jams, so I am pleased the Government recognise that, and that the Prime Minister recently backed building the bypass. It would not just be a gamechanger for people in places such as Glossop, Hadfield and Charlesworth, but would help to address a major bottleneck in the national strategic road network between Manchester and Sheffield. We also need to address the traffic problems at Tintwistle, and I am pleased that the Government continue to study proposals for the trans-Pennine tunnel, which would reduce journey times in the region by around 30 minutes.

To solve the problem in the long term, however, we need not just to build the Mottram bypass, but to get more cars off the road, and Gamesley station would be a key part of that. People in High Peak are serious

about tackling climate change, and Gamesley station would play a part in reducing carbon emissions and getting the local economy to net zero carbon. An awful lot of rat-running goes through Gamesley and Charlesworth to Broadbottom station, and Gamesley station would remove the need for that. If done right, there is also an opportunity to link the new station to the Trans Pennine Trail, and the station can be linked by footpath to Simmondley.

I said at the start of my speech that Governments of all parties had failed to invest in our transport infrastructure for decades, but we now have a Government who have promised to build, build, build. The political will is clearly there, but we need more than just political will. We need to change our whole approach to infrastructure, and that means sorting out the Treasury Green Book rules and traditional WebTAG approach.

**Chris Loder (West Dorset) (Con):** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. I agree with what he says about the Green Book, which the Government and the Treasury use in determining the economic value of infrastructure enhancements, particularly for rail. While the coronavirus has been devastating across the country, does he agree that there are many opportunities in terms of infrastructure, levelling up and ensuring that the models to which he refers can be recalibrated to help station projects such as Gamesley?

**Robert Largan:** My hon. Friend is an expert in rail matters and infrastructure projects and a real asset to this House. He is absolutely right that the current approaches just do not properly assess the true value of infrastructure projects. They fail to take fully into account the wider economic and social benefits of levelling up, and that has helped to contribute to the bias in spending on infrastructure projects towards London and the south-east.

When Transport for Greater Manchester and Derbyshire County Council complete the business case later this month, I hope the Government will assess the proposals based on the wider benefits, rather than just narrowly focusing on outdated Treasury cost-benefit ratios. The cost of Gamesley station is modest—perhaps we could call it a rounding error in the Crossrail budget. We can also help to reduce the cost of infrastructure projects by getting the nuts and bolts of delivery right, focusing on things such as our infrastructure industries. The Chancellor's great announcement about training schemes was welcome, and we should be thinking about focusing that on the industries that we need to deliver infrastructure investments.

**Chris Loder:** Does my hon. Friend also agree that leaving the European Union gives us an enormous opportunity to shed some of the shackles, rules and regulations that we have had to contend with for decades and that have massively increased the costs of building train stations such as Gamesley?

**Robert Largan:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. There are huge opportunities ahead for places such as Gamesley.

By building Gamesley station, the Government can offer a helping hand and send a clear message to the people of Gamesley that they are not forgotten. It is time to deliver on the promise made 52 years ago, and build Gamesley station.

7.59 pm

**Chris Clarkson** (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Robert Langan) for securing this important debate. It is widely known among his fellow northern MPs that he is a doughty champion for his constituents on a range of issues, not least this important project. In that vein, I wish to take Members on a brief journey, one that I hope will be as enriching and swift as commuters will soon enjoy from Gamesley to Manchester. That journey begins where else but in ancient Rome. In the senates of the Roman republic there was an august member of that body known as Cato Censorius, who was convinced that war was coming between the republic and the city of Carthage for control of the Mediterranean. So convinced of that was he that he began to end every oration with

*“Ceterum autem censeo Carthaginem esse delendam”*

or, “Moreover, I consider that Carthage must be destroyed.” It did not matter what the debate was on; be it taxation, agriculture or the most auspicious date on; which to go to the Circus Maximus, each and every speech would end the same way. That was helpfully shortened by 19th century historians to “Carthago delenda est”, which is less of a mouthful.

It was another 2,237 years before there would be another orator to match that clarity of purpose and single-mindedness—Robertus Architectus, or Robert the builder. This champion of the people of Alto Cacumen—High Peak to us mere Anglo-Saxons—has skilfully worked the building of Gamesley station into no fewer than eight debates, covering topics as diverse as rail fares, the economy and the Greater Manchester spatial framework. He has mentioned Gamesley station more times in his eight months as a Member of this House than all his predecessors combined.

That might all be to put a humorous spin on things, and I do so because my hon. Friend is a great friend of mine, but it does not diminish the fact that he is doing what we all came here promising to do—to put the interests of those who elected us first. The construction of Gamesley station will, much that is like the extension of the Metrolink to Middleton, do a great deal of good for the local economy, the environment, jobs and the prosperity of the region he represents. We are all seized with the idea that we need to get cars off the road and improve transport infrastructure, as well as boost our economy in the post-covid era. As Cato may well have said, this is bonum commune communitatis—for the good of the whole community.

It is an absolute pleasure to participate in this debate and I will bring my thoughts to a close by simply saying: *ceterum autem censeo Stationem Ardotaliæ esse ædificandam!*

8.2 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris):** What do you say after that? I did two years of Latin at secondary school and I hated every second of it—I am sorry, Mr Patterson. I just feel sorry for the *Hansard* transcribers at this point.

It has been a pleasure to listen to this debate on plans to build a railway station at Gamesley, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Robert Langan) for securing it. I also thank the other Members who have made contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for

Bolsover (Mark Fletcher) never misses an opportunity to remind me that other bids for Government spending on railways are available. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) is an expert on rail matters. I am not sure whether he managed eventually to get Gamesley into his contribution, but he proved that he knows what he is talking about. My hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) has confused me no end with what he said, but he made the point that my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak does bang on about Gamesley station a lot. Before he was elected the proposal for a station at Gamesley had not been mentioned in Parliament since 1968, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton said, since he came here only a few months ago it has been mentioned in eight debates. Gamesley is definitely on the levelling up agenda, at least for contributions in the Chamber and, we hope, for development economically as well.

Hon. Members may be aware that I was an MEP for 10 years—this is like Alcoholics Anonymous, and we can admit to things in this Chamber. I represented High Peak, in the glorious region of the East Midlands, and I have been to Gamesley. So not only does the rail Minister know what he is talking about when it comes to stations, but I know exactly the location that my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak is talking about. As Members will be aware, this Government are investing record levels in rail funding to deliver the biggest rail modernisation programme for more than a century. We are spending £48 billion over what in the industry lingo we call “control period 6”, which runs from 2019 to 2024, to improve rail services for passengers and freight customers, while maintaining current high levels of safety and reliability.

I was pleased to hear that my hon. Friend had supported a bid to the new stations fund to build a station at Gamesley. As I understand it, and as he has mentioned to me on a number of occasions, the people of Gamesley have waited a long time to have a train station. As Members will know, we launched another—£20 million—round of funding for the new stations fund, to open new train stations across the country, in a fresh boost for towns that lost their rail lines in the Beeching closures. Applications for the fund closed on 5 June, and we hope to announce the successful applications in the autumn. The fund was very over-subscribed because, as Members can tell from the contributions in tonight’s debate, there are lots of places that need to be connected to our rail network, having lost their connections in the past.

My hon. Friend will recall that earlier this year the Secretary of State invited Members, local authorities and community groups from across England and Wales to come forward with proposals on how they could use funding to reinstate axed local services, in an initiative called “Restoring Your Railway”, reversing the Beeching cuts. Thanks to the Government’s £500 million fund, long isolated communities across the country will benefit from better rail connections that will level up regional economies, boost access to jobs and education, and kick-start the restoration of lines closed more than 50 years ago. A sum of £300,000 has been committed to an ideas fund to kick-start the process and encourage innovative ideas that would then be considered for



future funding. I suggest to my hon. Friend that this agenda fits very nicely with what he is trying to achieve for his constituents.

I have taken note of the fact that the Transport for Greater Manchester strategy delivery plan for 2020 to 2025 outlines Gamesley as a potential location for a new station. The Transport for Greater Manchester new rail and Metrolink study in 2018, which was commissioned in conjunction with authorities including Derbyshire County Council, identified that further work, including a strategic outline business case, should be produced with regard to Gamesley station. I really do think that we are getting on the right track in terms of my hon. Friend's plans.

Northern Trains had written to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to provide assurances that it will provide full support for all further work commissioned by Transport for Greater Manchester and Derbyshire County Council, and for the development of the business case. With my hon. Friend's cajoling, a number of key factors have been lined up to get Gamesley station firmly in front of planners.

I would therefore like to reassure my hon. Friend and other Members who took part in the debate that the Government are committed to investing billions of pounds to improve rail services for passengers and freight customers, while maintaining the current high levels of safety and reliability. We are committed to levelling up the country and to build, build, build. That is why we launched that new stations fund to open up new train stations across the country, providing a fresh boost for towns that lost their rail lines in the Beeching closures. I really do hope that the people of Gamesley will be able to benefit from our initiative.

There is some way to go down this route before winners are selected, but the Government are genuinely committed to levelling up opportunity across the United Kingdom, and my hon. Friend has made an extremely powerful case for Gamesley in his constituency.

*Question put and agreed to.*

8.8 pm

*House adjourned.*

## Members Eligible for a Proxy Vote

*The following is the list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy:*

| Member eligible for proxy vote                             | Nominated proxy   |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington)        | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth)              | Jim McMahon       |
| Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield)                               | Stuart Andrew     |
| Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green)                         | Mark Tami         |
| Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting)                             | Mark Tami         |
| Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle)                     | Stuart Andrew     |
| Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk)                           | Stuart Andrew     |
| Siobhan Baillie (Stroud)                                   | Stuart Andrew     |
| Hannah Bardell (Livingston)                                | Patrick Grady     |
| Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay)                    | Stuart Andrew     |
| Margaret Beckett (Derby South)                             | Clive Efford      |
| Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley)                           | Stuart Andrew     |
| Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen)                         | Stuart Andrew     |
| Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East)                      | Mark Tami         |
| Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South)              | Patrick Grady     |
| Bob Blackman (Harrow East)                                 | Stuart Andrew     |
| Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North)                           | Patrick Grady     |
| Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough)                             | Stuart Andrew     |
| Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill)         | Patrick Grady     |
| Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire)                 | Stuart Andrew     |
| James Brokenshire (Old Bexley and Sidcup)                  | Stuart Andrew     |
| Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham)                                    | Mark Tami         |
| Richard Burgon (Leeds East)                                | Zarah Sultana     |
| Conor Burns (Bournemouth West)                             | Stuart Andrew     |
| Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) | Patrick Grady     |
| Sir William Cash (Stone)                                   | Leo Docherty      |
| Sarah Champion (Rotherham)                                 | Mark Tami         |
| Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife)                | Patrick Grady     |
| Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham)                    | Stuart Andrew     |
| Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe)                      | Stuart Andrew     |
| Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire)                             | Mark Tami         |
| Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North)                            | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde)                                  | Patrick Grady     |

| Member eligible for proxy vote                  | Nominated proxy |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Mr Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon)       | Alex Burghart   |
| Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark)       | Mark Tami       |
| Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East)       | Patrick Grady   |
| Stella Creasy (Walthamstow)                     | Mark Tami       |
| Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford)           | Caroline Nokes  |
| Janet Daby (Lewisham East)                      | Mark Tami       |
| Geraint Davies (Swansea West)                   | Chris Evans     |
| Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden)         | Stuart Andrew   |
| Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland)               | Stuart Andrew   |
| Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk)        | Patrick Grady   |
| Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West)               | Mark Tami       |
| Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)                   | Rachel Hopkins  |
| Caroline Dinenage (Gosport)                     | Caroline Nokes  |
| Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire)    | Patrick Grady   |
| Dave Doogan (Angus)                             | Patrick Grady   |
| Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock)         | Patrick Grady   |
| Ms Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire)            | Stuart Andrew   |
| Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington)             | Mark Tami       |
| Philip Dunne (Ludlow)                           | Jeremy Hunt     |
| Colum Eastwood (Foyle)                          | Conor McGinn    |
| Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall)                    | Mark Tami       |
| Bill Esterson (Sefton Central)                  | Mark Tami       |
| Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth)                        | Stuart Andrew   |
| Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford)   | Stuart Andrew   |
| Michael Fabricant (Lichfield)                   | Stuart Andrew   |
| Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw)          | Patrick Grady   |
| Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) | Patrick Grady   |
| Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford)             | Mark Tami       |
| George Freeman (Mid Norfolk)                    | Theo Clarke     |
| Marcus Fysh (Yeovil)                            | Stuart Andrew   |
| Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet)                   | Caroline Nokes  |
| Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham)       | Stuart Andrew   |
| Mary Glendon (North Tyneside)                   | Mark Tami       |
| Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald)       | Stuart Andrew   |
| Peter Grant (Glenrothes)                        | Patrick Grady   |
| Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts)                  | Patrick Grady   |
| Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West)                | Mark Tami       |
| Kate Griffiths (Burton)                         | Aaron Bell      |
| Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish)              | Mark Tami       |

| Member eligible for proxy vote                         | Nominated proxy     |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Robert Halfon (Harlow)                                 | Lucy Allan          |
| Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East)                     | Mark Tami           |
| Claire Hanna (Belfast South)                           | Liz Saville Roberts |
| Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath)               | Patrick Grady       |
| Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham)             | Mark Tami           |
| Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston)                            | Mark Tami           |
| Mike Hill (Hartlepool)                                 | Mark Tami           |
| Simon Hoare (North Dorset)                             | Fay Jones           |
| Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking)                          | Wes Streeting       |
| Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West)    | Mark Tami           |
| Adam Holloway (Gravesham)                              | Maria Caulfield     |
| Sir George Howarth (Knowsley)                          | Mark Tami           |
| Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border)                | Stuart Andrew       |
| Imran Hussain (Bradford East)                          | Judith Cummins      |
| Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire)            | Stuart Andrew       |
| Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood)                    | Stuart Andrew       |
| Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham)       | Stuart Andrew       |
| Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North)          | Mark Tami           |
| Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton)                     | Ruth Edwards        |
| Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South)              | Mark Tami           |
| Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton)                        | Mark Tami           |
| Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire)                       | Stuart Andrew       |
| Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire)                    | Mr William Wragg    |
| Ian Lavery (Wansbeck)                                  | Mary Kelly Foy      |
| Chris Law (Dundee West)                                | Patrick Grady       |
| Clive Lewis (Norwich South)                            | Mark Tami           |
| Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) | Stuart Andrew       |
| Tony Lloyd (Rochdale)                                  | Mark Tami           |
| Mark Logan (Bolton North East)                         | Stuart Andrew       |
| Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles)               | Cat Smith           |
| Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster)                 | Lee Rowley          |
| Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking)                              | Stuart Andrew       |
| Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian)                         | Patrick Grady       |
| Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood)                 | Mark Tami           |
| Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford)                  | Stuart Andrew       |
| Rachael Maskell (York Central)                         | Mark Tami           |

| Member eligible for proxy vote                                   | Nominated proxy |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough)                                    | Mark Tami       |
| Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) | Patrick Grady   |
| John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington)                            | Cat Smith       |
| Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East)                             | Patrick Grady   |
| John Mc Nally (Falkirk)                                          | Patrick Grady   |
| Stephen McPartland (Stevenage)                                   | Stuart Andrew   |
| Ian Mearns (Gateshead)                                           | Mark Tami       |
| Mark Menzies (Fylde)                                             | Sir David Amess |
| Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View)                              | Stuart Andrew   |
| Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock)              | Stuart Andrew   |
| Edward Miliband (Doncaster North)                                | Mark Tami       |
| Nigel Mills (Amber Valley)                                       | Stuart Andrew   |
| Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West)                              | Patrick Grady   |
| Jessica Morden (Newport East)                                    | Mark Tami       |
| Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot)                                 | Stuart Andrew   |
| David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale)                           | Stuart Andrew   |
| Grahame Morris (Easington)                                       | Mark Tami       |
| Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield)                                     | Stuart Andrew   |
| James Murray (Ealing North)                                      | Mark Tami       |
| John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire)                       | Patrick Grady   |
| Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon)                                       | Rebecca Harris  |
| Guy Opperman (Hexham)                                            | Stuart Andrew   |
| Kate Osamor (Edmonton)                                           | Nadia Whittome  |
| Sarah Owen (Luton North)                                         | Alex Norris     |
| Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley)                              | Mark Tami       |
| Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich)               | Peter Aldous    |
| Lucy Powell (Manchester Central)                                 | Mark Tami       |
| Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East)                               | Mark Tami       |
| Christina Rees (Neath)                                           | Mark Tami       |
| Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge)                           | Mark Tami       |
| Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston)                    | Mark Tami       |
| Naz Shah (Bradford West)                                         | Mark Tami       |
| Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall)                            | Mark Tami       |
| Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield)                                 | Mark Tami       |
| Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell)                             | Stuart Andrew   |
| Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East)                                  | Patrick Grady   |
| Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen)                              | Robert Courts   |
| Jo Stevens (Cardiff Glasgow Central)                             | Mark Tami       |



| Member eligible for proxy vote       | Nominated proxy |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) | Stuart Andrew   |
| Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central)    | Patrick Grady   |
| Gareth Thomas (Harrow West)          | Mark Tami       |
| Jon Trickett (Hemsworth)             | Olivia Blake    |

| Member eligible for proxy vote          | Nominated proxy |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East)   | Mark Tami       |
| David Warburton (Somerton and Frome)    | Stuart Andrew   |
| Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) | Patrick Grady   |
| Hywel Williams (Arfon)                  | Ben Lake        |
| Mohammad Yasin (Bedford)                | Mark Tami       |

# Written Statements

*Wednesday 15 July 2020*

## EDUCATION

### College Financial Oversight: Independent Review

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Gillian Keegan):** I am publishing today the report of the Independent Review of College Financial Oversight, conducted by Dame Mary Ney DBE.

At the heart of the report is recognition of the contribution of colleges to their local communities and economies—essential to meeting both the skills needs of business and enabling young people and adults to succeed and adapt to the changing economy. Colleges must be recognised as an integral part of each region's growth strategy with a long-term role in raising productivity and living standards. They are vital to building skills to power our national economic recovery at this time.

The principal conclusion of the report, which I endorse, is that Government must have a strategic relationship with FE colleges. This means not just acting as a regulator, or intervening in the event of failure, but ensuring that every college is part of a coherent plan to meet local and regional need. There are many outstanding colleges, and exceptional college leaders, who are well placed to drive not just the success of their institutions, but wider prosperity working with local authorities, businesses, universities and schools.

The report supports a collaborative FE system. Colleges are critical infrastructure backed over time by substantial Government capital investment. There is a place for competition, but it is also important that colleges work together to meet need and learn from the exceptional practice that exists in the sector. Dame Mary's report highlights how this collaborative approach has driven improvement through the Strategic College Improvement Fund, and National Leaders of FE—work that is now being taken forward through the new College Collaboration Fund and the expansion of the National Leader programmes. I endorse this approach.

The FE Commissioner has played a critical role in bringing FE practitioner expertise into Government and successfully working to strengthen the leadership and governance of colleges. I intend to maintain the role, reporting directly to Ministers as a public appointment, but strengthening alignment with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), and placing its civil service support team there. This change will further empower and develop the ESFA's territorial teams and enable them to draw upon practitioner expertise. There will be a regular strategic dialogue with each college board around priorities. This will reduce the perception that support is only available to colleges in trouble, and focus not just on prevention but on building success and outstanding practice.

The review also recommends further action to improve the effectiveness of the financial data collected from colleges. In February, the ESFA took the first step towards adopting a new integrated single data return, working closely with the Association of Colleges. We

have also commissioned a July financial collection to assess the financial impact of covid-19 on the sector and individual colleges. This will enable us to continue to work with governing bodies to mitigate financial risks arising from covid-19, avoid failure and help reduce intervention, while remaining ready to act decisively when necessary. This will be supported through additional requirements for colleges to be transparent—including protection for whistleblowers—through our audit code of practice and grant conditions. Starting from 2020-21, they will require all colleges to publish their whistleblowing policy externally. We are also considering the link between the ESFA's financial assessments and OFSTED judgements—in light of OFSTED's plans to consider piloting of changes in schools. The report is also right to highlight the importance of funding simplification.

Inspirational leadership, overseen by strong governance, is the ultimate driving force in all our outstanding colleges—providing the structure and culture that supports outstanding teaching and develops exceptional teachers. We are investing in learning and development programmes for those in key governance and leadership roles in colleges through the Education and Training Foundation and Oxford SAID business school. We have allocated up to £4.5 million for the current financial year, which will include a new programme of learning and development for governance professionals. Dame Mary was right to highlight the importance of this role. We will also strengthen the governance guide for college corporations.

Fundamentally, Dame Mary Ney's report demonstrates that Government must set out a long-term radical vision which places colleges where they belong—driving the success of regional economies and communities. This could not be more opportune. As we renew our economy and society following the historic challenge of covid-19, our young people and adults must have the skills to succeed. The steps we are already taking, particularly with the launch of the first wave of our new, high status T-levels this autumn, are a vital step. We must build on this to create a broad and bold strategy to elevate the role of further education and support our colleges in their vital and transformative mission. Our forthcoming White Paper will set out how we plan to do that.

[HCWS370]

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### British Overseas Territories: Registers of Company Beneficial Ownership

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Wendy Morton):** My hon. Friend, the Minister for the Overseas Territories and Sustainable Development (Baroness Sugg), has made the following written ministerial statement:

The Government welcome the statements made by eight overseas territories in which they have committed to greater transparency by announcing they will establish publicly accessible registers of company beneficial ownership.

The eight territories—Anguilla, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, the Falkland Islands, Montserrat, the Pitcairn Islands and St Helena, Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha, and the Turks and Caicos Islands—have all demonstrated good progress and political leadership as part of the global effort to increase transparency in financial services and tackle illicit finance.

This follows an earlier announcement made by the Crown Dependencies to implement publicly accessible registers of company beneficial ownership within the next few years, and the establishment of a publicly accessible register by Gibraltar, in line with the EU's Fifth Anti-Money Laundering Directive.

In line with the Sanctions and Money Laundering Act 2018 the Government will prepare a draft Order in Council before the end of 2020, which will be published. We hope that the British Virgin Islands will also commit to publicly accessible registers of company beneficial ownership without delay.

The Government consider that the end of 2023 is a reasonable deadline for the introduction of such registers. Meeting this date will be a considerable ask for many overseas territories, given their limited resources; especially those overseas territories that do not currently have a company beneficial ownership register. It will involve significant legislative and operational changes. To provide the overseas territories with assistance on registers the Government ran a technical workshop last July, hosted webinars in November and will be providing further assistance.

It took the UK over three years to introduce its own public register. The 2023 deadline also aligns with the Government's international campaign to advance publicly accessible company beneficial ownership registers as a global norm. We believe that action on beneficial ownership information in the overseas territories should be complemented by improved public access to beneficial ownership information internationally. This maximises the protection of our national security.

The statements issued underscore the overseas territories' continued contribution to the global fight to tackle illicit finance. However, it is not the only action they have taken.

All overseas territories with financial centres participate in the Exchange of Notes arrangements. These are bilateral arrangements under which they share beneficial ownership information with UK law enforcement and other agencies within 24 hours, or one hour in urgent cases. They are an invaluable capability for our law enforcement, particularly for the National Crime Agency on money laundering and asset denial activity. Last year's statutory review found that these arrangements are working well and are providing UK law enforcement with rapid access to information used to support ongoing criminal investigations.

Many overseas territories have committed to global tax transparency standards, including the OECD's Common Reporting Standard; under which taxpayer financial account information is automatically exchanged for tax purposes. This reciprocal, automatic exchange of financial information addresses the secrecy that facilitates offshore tax evasion and provides evidence of tax non-compliance.

The Government therefore welcome the statements on making company beneficial ownership information publicly accessible and all the constructive action the overseas territories are taking as responsible jurisdictions.

[HCWS369]

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### Immigration Health Surcharge Exemption: Update

**The Minister for Health (Edward Argar):** Following announcements by the Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel), and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock), earlier this week, I would like to further update the House on progress made by the Department of Health and Social Care towards implementing the immigration health surcharge exemption for health and social care staff, as announced by the Prime Minister on 21 May 2020.

The Prime Minister's announcement demonstrated our continued commitment to supporting our health and social care workforce and their families, not least because of the support they have provided to all of us throughout the covid-19 pandemic.

Our election manifesto included the commitment to introduce an NHS visa. As set out by the Home Secretary, next month, we will launch a health and care visa, following the fees regulations that were laid yesterday. This will make it cheaper, quicker and easier for the best health and care professionals to come and work in the UK. The launch of this new visa will also mean that for the very first time, overseas health and care staff on this visa will not need to pay the immigration health surcharge upfront, either for themselves or their dependents.

I am, however, conscious that this visa does not exempt everyone in the health and care sector who has paid the immigration health surcharge, such as the thousands of overseas staff working as direct care workers in social care, or as cleaners, porters or healthcare assistants throughout the NHS. I am pleased, therefore, to be able to reiterate what the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care confirmed in the House yesterday: that all employees working in the health and care sector that have paid the immigration health surcharge on or after the 31 March 2020 will be eligible for a reimbursement of what they have paid since that date, including those vital staff outlined above.

This reimbursement will be paid in arrears of six-month increments. This ensures we only reimburse those workers and their families who have worked in the sector for an appropriate period of time. This will also provide an incentive to continue working in the health and care sector. I can confirm that this scheme will be launched by 1 October 2020. This is the earliest date that eligible workers and their families would be able to claim a reimbursement. My officials continue to work with colleagues across Government, the devolved Administrations, representative bodies and the health and care sector to ensure those who are eligible for reimbursement are accounted for within the scheme, and my Department will publish further details of the scheme in due course.

These are significant steps in ensuring that our health and social care workforce and their families are themselves cared for, after they have cared for and supported so many of us in incredible circumstances.

My Department will make further announcements to update the House on the progress of the immigration health surcharge exemption and the reimbursement scheme, and relevant documents will be published on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) in advance of the reimbursement scheme launching in October.

[HCWS372]

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### National Security Arrangements in Northern Ireland: 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2019

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis):** This is a summary of the main findings from the report by His Honour Brian Barker QC, the Independent



Reviewer of National Security Arrangements in Northern Ireland, covering the period from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2019. His Honour Brian Barker concludes:

The overview is a 12-month period of almost constant change and unpredictability. At the core was another year without a functioning Executive or Assembly and no representative capacity for vital decisions on development to be taken.

Throughout the reporting period I have taken the opportunity to arrange meetings with appropriate senior members of the Service and PSNI, and to be briefed on significant events. My visits to both MI5 and various PSNI establishments confirm my view that there is a deep sense of commitment and high level of professionalism in the continuing and unpredictable battle against indiscriminate and violent lawlessness. Relations with An Garda Síochána continue to strengthen aided by the appointment of PSNI's Deputy Chief Constable Drew Harris as Garda Commissioner in September 2018.

Following the pattern in recent years there have been successes in the containment of dissident groups, but the context in which national security activities are performed remain 'challenging' and constant care and vigilance by members of the PSNI and the Prison Service both in relation to personal safety remain absolutely necessary.

Arriving from Cheshire Constabulary, Chief Constable Simon Byrne took over on 1 July and was given little time to settle in before a marching season that was disappointingly violent. I was grateful for an introductory meeting in August, and a fuller exchange took place in November covering many of the difficulties, not least the step change in dissident attacks. An examination of CHIS procedures and control had been satisfactory.

The frustrations of the Policing Board were partially addressed by legislation in November 2018 allowing new membership, followed by effective reconstitution in December. I was able to assess progress at a meeting in May and attended what was a very useful exchange. The Board was now able to discharge their wide range of overseeing constitutional duties and follow the seven principles set out in the 2017-2020 plan to continue oversight of the work of the police and to encourage engagement at all levels. In a meeting with Professor Duncan Morrow and Dr Jonny Byrne of the University of Ulster a valuable perspective was provided by their reflections on the

'state of the union' based on years of research and teaching.

The annual statistics issued to mid 2019 show that the powers of stop and search under section 47a of the Terrorism Act 2000 were not exercised. There were 169 premises searched under warrant under section 37 Schedule 5 of the same Act. There were 146 persons detained under section 41 of the Terrorism Act and 143 (98%) were held for 48 hours or less. Sixteen persons were charged with a total of 39 offences including four charges of attempted murder, eight charges of firearms offences, six charges of GBH with intent and four charges of possession of offensive weapon. A total of 34 persons were disposed of by non-jury trial, 29 of whom were found guilty of at least one charge. A total of 17 non-jury trial certificates were issued by the DPP, four down on the previous year. There as a total of six persons convicted in the Crown Court under the Terrorism Act 2000, the Terrorism Act 2006 or the Counter-Terrorism Act 2008, one less than the previous year. There were 1515 examinations carried out by police officers under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000, 656 of which were examinations of persons, eight of which resulted in a detention. Paramilitary style shootings resulted in 17 casualties, down four compared with 2017, all being aged 18 or above. Paramilitary assaults resulted in 60 casualties, up by six. No compensation or agency payments were made

under section 38 schedule 4 of the Justice and Security (NI) Act 2007 where property was broken, destroyed or damaged or other private property rights interfered with.

I wish to note the full co-operation extended to me by both MI5 and the PSNI where standards and commitment, in the face of unpredictable difficulties, continue to be of high order.

Determined attacks from extremists have continued and police and prison officers face unacceptable risk in pursuing their duties as they continue to be regarded as legitimate targets.

The tragic killing of Lyra McKee has robbed Northern Ireland of a 'rising star'—someone who also believed passionately in social and religious tolerance; but her death generated widespread anger and condemnation of the activities of terrorists. One of her legacies hopefully will be an acceleration along the slow road to normalization.

I have measured performance in this reporting period against the five key principles identified in relation to national security in Annex E to the St Andrews Agreement of October 2006. My conclusions can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2020-07-15/HCWS373/>.

[HCWS373]

## **Northern Ireland Assembly Petition of Concern Mechanism: First Report**

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis):** I am today laying before both Houses of Parliament the first report by Her Majesty's Government on the use of the Petition of Concern mechanism in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

As part of the New Decade, New Approach deal upon which the devolved Executive and Assembly was restored in Northern Ireland on 11 January 2020, the UK Government committed to undertaking such a report every six months.

This report covers the period from 11 January 2020 to 10 July 2020, during which no Petition of Concern has been lodged against any motion in the Assembly. During much of that period the normal business of the Assembly has been disrupted due to covid-19. The Assembly has adapted to deal with this by moving to meet frequently as a committee of the whole Assembly.

The fact that there have been no Petitions of Concern since the Assembly was reconvened is a positive reflection on the operation of the Assembly and of the Executive. I know that political leaders in Northern Ireland will share my view that the Assembly should aim to proceed on this basis for the remainder of the current Assembly.

The next UK Government report on the use of the Petition of Concern will cover the period from 11 July 2020 to 10 January 2021.

The report notes that full implementation of the Petition of Concern reforms in NDNA will require Westminster legislation. The Government will bring forward such legislation when parliamentary time allows, after which the Assembly will be able to reflect the detail of the reforms in its standing orders.

[HCWS371]



# Petition

*Wednesday 15 July 2020*

## OBSERVATIONS

### TRANSPORT

#### Protection of workers in the airline industry

*The Petition of the residents of the constituency of Paisley and Renfrewshire North,*

Declares that many workers in the airline industry are currently under threat of being dismissed from their posts and then being rehired on lesser terms and conditions and salary; notes that most other European countries have legislation in place to prevent such mistreatment and to protect workers from management abuse and threats, benefitting both employees and the wider economy; notes the volume of correspondence being received by Members' offices regarding reports of this practice at British Airways; and notes that the Employment (Dismissal and Re-Employment) Bill, which aims to protect workers from management abuse, has already been presented in the House.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to bring forward legislation to prevent firing and re-hiring practices and protect workers from management abuse.

And the petitioners remain etc.—[Presented by Gavin Newlands, *Official Report*, 16 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 773.]

[P002578]

*Observations from The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Kelly Tolhurst):*

The Government recognise the challenging times facing the aviation sector as a result of covid-19. Aviation plays a critical role in our future as a global trading nation and for local economies such as that in the constituency of Paisley and Renfrewshire North.

Additionally, we recognise that this will be a very distressing time for employees of British Airways, Rolls-Royce and across the aviation and aerospace industry, as well as for their families and for local communities that are supported by the industry.

The aviation sector is able to draw upon the unprecedented package of measures announced by the Chancellor, including a Bank of England scheme for firms to raise capital, Time to pay flexibilities with tax bills, financial support for employees and VAT deferrals. These measures have been designed to ensure that companies of any size receive the help they need to get through this difficult time airports, airlines and the wider supply chain.

Our absolute focus in Government has been combating coronavirus, with a view to the safe return to aviation, when the science allows. We have kept an open dialogue with the aviation and aerospace sectors with regular structured engagement from the start of the pandemic with unions and industry bodies such as ADS, AOA and Airlines UK as well as with individual airlines, airports, ground handlers and manufactures. I am also acutely aware of the impact on the aviation workforce and I can assure you that we are actively working with unions and industry to make sure we identify opportunities to retain key skills within the industry, or ensure they are able to find new employment or retrain and upskill as necessary.

More recently, the Department for Transport has established a restart and recovery unit to work directly with the sector, focusing on the immediate practicalities of restarting the sector and to set a clear vision and objectives looking forward to the longer-term recovery phase. This work has already started in earnest with the international aviation taskforce's industry expert steering group, a collaborative working group with representation from across industry and Government, including the devolved Administrations. Through this group we have recently developed safer travel guidance for operators and passengers, published on the 11 June 2020. This group will also consider how the industry can restart flying and ensure that it can grow sustainably in the future.





# Ministerial Correction

*Wednesday 15 July 2020*

## EDUCATION

### Support for Left-Behind Children

*The following is an extract from the response to the Estimates Day debate on Support for Left-Behind Children by the Minister for School Standards on 7 July 2020.*

**Nick Gibb:** As we announced last year, we are increasing core schools funding by £2.6 billion this **academic** year and by £4.8 billion and £7.1 billion by 2021-22 and

2022-23 respectively, compared to 2019-20, including additional funding for children with special needs and disabilities.

*[Official Report, 7 July 2020, Vol. 678, c. 894.]*

*Letter of correction from the Minister for School Standards:*

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the debate on Support for Left-Behind Children.

The correct response should have been:

**Nick Gibb:** As we announced last year, we are increasing core schools funding by £2.6 billion this **financial** year and by £4.8 billion and £7.1 billion by 2021-22 and 2022-23 respectively, compared to 2019-20, including additional funding for children with special needs and disabilities.





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Wednesday 22 July 2020**

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