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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 28 January 2021

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Orders, 4 June and 30 December 2020).

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

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Covid-19: Safety of Rail Workers

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): What steps he has taken to ensure the safety of rail workers during the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown. [911485]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): Good morning, Mr Speaker. We have worked closely with the rail industry throughout the pandemic to mitigate covid-19 risks to workers. Since the covid outbreak, operators have been cleaning trains in line with existing guidance, increasing cleaning regimes and concentrating on high-touch areas that present a higher risk of contamination.

Tonia Antoniazzi [V]: The Minister will be aware that the rail industry coronavirus forum's figures show that total covid deaths among rail workers have tragically more than doubled since November, from 12 to 26, and that absences have also doubled. The figures could be even higher when subcontractors are included. The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers is concerned that, despite the new variant, some rail companies are acting like it is business as usual. Can the Minister tell the rail companies to do more to protect our rail workers who are so bravely keeping our country moving?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank the hon. Lady for her excellent question. I have been talking to the rail companies and, indeed, the general secretaries of the unions throughout this crisis and we have issued comprehensive guidance to public transport operators, including rail operators. This has been reinforced by officials throughout the pandemic with guidance on how to keep staff safe and trains clean, so that passengers and staff are able to maintain good hygiene.

Railway Stations: Tactile Paving

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): If he will make it his policy to speed up the installation of tactile paving in all railway stations. [911486]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): The Department expects the industry to meet current accessibility requirements whenever it installs, renews or replaces station infrastructure. This includes appropriate tactile paving.

Sarah Olney [V]: Does the Minister acknowledge that travellers will need extra encouragement to get out of their cars and back on to public transport once the coronavirus restrictions have been lifted? Will he prioritise making railway stations safe and accessible as a means of attracting travellers back?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I am fully aware, as is every single person in the industry, that we will need to entice and encourage passengers back when they are allowed to travel on our trains. And yes, the hon. Lady is absolutely right: our stations need to be more friendly, more welcoming, more accessible and spotless—and they will be. To accelerate the programme of tactile paving, we have included it as part of our core scope for accessible routes installed under the Access for All programme, so I hope that she will see some changes when she returns to public transport.

Oxford-Cambridge Expressway

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): What plans his Department has for the paused Oxford-Cambridge expressway project. [911487]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean): The project is paused and no work is being done on it. We are considering how other transport interventions can best support growth and jobs in the Oxford to Cambridge arc.

Layla Moran [V]: Residents in Oxfordshire, who are strongly opposed to the Oxford to Cambridge expressway, are worried that while the expressway is officially paused, it seems that parts of the road project are going ahead, but in smaller chunks. One expressed it as “expressway by stealth”. Can the Minister tell us how many subsections of the expressway project are in their planning stages, and does “pause” mean that “go” is still an option?

Rachel Maclean: I can assure the hon. Lady that the Government have announced plans to develop with local partners a long-term spatial framework, and that it is along the lines of the 25-year environment plan to build beautiful and sustainable places in her community and in the whole region. Consultation with local residents and herself is central to achieving this vision.

Transport for London Budget

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): What assessment he has made of the progress of the Mayor of London in putting the Transport for London budget on a sound footing. [911488]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): The Mayor of London is responsible for Crossrail's costs and completion through Transport for London, although the Government have offered an additional £825 million in borrowing to meet Crossrail's funding shortfall.

Felicity Buchan: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Mayor of London has monumentally mismanaged the Crossrail project, which is over budget and several years delayed, and that it is ordinary Londoners who are having to pick up the bill with a 10% increase in the share of council tax for the Mayor?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is of course correct. We have had the failure to deliver Crossrail on time, £5.2 billion; higher pensions at TfL, £828 million; the fare freeze, with £640 million of fares not collected; and fare dodging, £400 million. I know that that is all just millions and billions to us, but it all adds up.

Mr Speaker: We now welcome to the Dispatch Box shadow Minister Sam Tarry.

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Instead of levelling up the north, where this Government have cut £4 million from Transport for the North, the Minister and his Government clearly intend to level down London's transport network. This is not the first time we have had to come to the House to ask about the Government's support for TfL because it did not go far enough in the first place. At a time when public transport ridership has collapsed and we are still a long way off recovering to pre-pandemic ridership levels, we must think about redistribution. That is clearly the right approach. Vehicle excise duty, which raises £500 million from drivers who live in London, is invested almost exclusively in roads outside the city. Keeping it in the capital would enable TfL to continue to be a world-class transport provider and boost our nation's economy, so will the Transport Secretary commit to looking at this as a way to support TfL?

Grant Shapps: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his position, warmly congratulate him and look forward to many exchanges. He asks about TfL. The Government have provided £3.3 billion and counting to TfL to keep it afloat. I just listed some of the moneys that had not been collected in by the Mayor, and I hear that the hon. Gentleman now wants to give the Mayor responsibility for the collection of vehicle excise duty in addition. Londoners will be interested in this. The Mayor is already planning an over £31 band D increase in council tax this year and now he has this new boundary tax, which might be £3.50 or £5.50—we await to hear—for entering London from certain locations. Where does it end?

Cycling and Walking

Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): What support his Department is providing to local authorities to maintain and increase levels of cycling and walking. [911489]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): The Government are investing £2 billion in active travel over the next five years, much of which will go to local authorities. This is the biggest ever boost for cycling and walking.

Cherilyn Mackrory [V]: In Cornwall, we have benefited from over £600,000 in the second tranche of the Government's active travel fund—that is 100% of our initial indicative allocation. This will allow Cornwall Council to take forward a package of walking and

cycling projects in the two biggest towns in my constituency, Truro and Falmouth. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government's active travel fund is the key to enabling our country to start walking and cycling? Will he confirm that further tranches of this fund will be available to local authorities?

Chris Heaton-Harris: Obviously, we agree that the provision of high-quality infrastructure is vital to getting more people cycling and walking, and that local authorities have a key role to play in delivering that. There will be further funding for local authorities to deliver high-quality cycling and walking schemes in the next financial year, and beyond, as part of the £2 billion announced by the Prime Minister in the gear change plan, and I will be announcing further details of this in due course.

Car-free Environments

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to make an assessment of the effect on the economy of car-free environments. [911490]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean): The Government strongly agree that investment in cycling and walking infrastructure delivers benefits to national and local economies, better public health and cheaper travel. That is why, as Members will have heard my colleague just set out, the Prime Minister has announced the biggest ever funding boost to cycling and walking—a total package of £2 billion.

Rachael Maskell [V]: As our high streets struggle and, ironically, York's Green-Lib Dem council is waving through new car park developments, which will suck even more cars into York, Living Streets' work on "The Pedestrian Pound" is certainly the antidote, showing that pedestrianisation and investment in the public realm will drive up footfall by up to 35% and retail sales by a similar proportion. Will the Minister work with me to realise York's potential as a car-free city, so that my community can reap the environmental, social, health and economic benefits of walking, cycling and active travel?

Rachel Maclean: I very much thank the hon. Lady for the way in which she is championing active travel in the city of York, and the Department strongly shares that ambition. For example, she will know of the electric park and ride service that has been delivered, thanks to funding from the Department. We very much look forward to continuing those conversations with her.

Rail Connections: North of England

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve rail connections in the north of England. [911491]

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve rail connections in the north of England. [911497]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Andrew Stephenson): Last year, we took control of the Northern rail franchise to deliver better and more punctual services. We announced £589 million to kick-start the trans-Pennine route upgrade, and we continue to invest in improving

Leeds station. This month, we have launched a consultation to address the Manchester bottleneck, and on Saturday we announced £34 for the initial work on reopening the Northumberland line.

Alec Shelbrooke [V]: I welcome my hon. Friend's commitment to rail in the north. Will he give me and my constituents an update on step-free access at Garforth station, which I have been campaigning on for many years?

Andrew Stephenson: My right hon. Friend has been a tireless champion for the much-needed improvements at Garforth station, to make it safer for all passengers, especially those with restricted mobility or those with pushchairs. I share his frustration at the length of time it has taken to deliver the improvements that he has secured for his constituents, and we will seek an update on timescales from Network Rail.

Craig Whittaker [V]: It is concerning to see, in the local press at least, incredibly negative and biased reporting that the High Speed 2 eastern leg is to be scrapped. Will my hon. Friend confirm whether those reports are true? If so, how does that fit in with his longer-term ambition to improve rail connections in the north?

Andrew Stephenson: My hon. Friend frequently raises his constituents' concerns, particularly about the Calder Valley line and the need for improvements in local services. He is completely right to raise the importance of major rail infrastructure projects such as the eastern leg of HS2. We are committed to building HS2 phase 2b and to enabling the east midlands, Yorkshire and the north-east to reap the benefits of high-speed rail services. We aim to publish the integrated rail plan early this year, which will set out our plans covering the eastern leg.

Delivery of Transport Infrastructure Projects

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to accelerate the delivery of transport infrastructure projects. [911492]

Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to accelerate the delivery of transport infrastructure projects. [911495]

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to accelerate the delivery of transport infrastructure projects. [911498]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): My Department is at the forefront of delivering plans and detail for the national infrastructure strategy, and we are using Project Speed initiatives and my acceleration unit in the delivery of infrastructure.

Mrs Latham [V]: Duffield railway station in my constituency is expected to become busier during the next few years, as work on improvements to the A38 will make driving from Duffield to Derby very difficult. I am concerned that the platforms are not accessible for mothers with children in pushchairs, the elderly and the disabled, as the steps are steep and narrow and there are no lifts. Will the Secretary of State inform me of what plans there are to improve accessibility at Duffield railway station in the immediate future, because work on the A38 is starting very soon?

Grant Shapps: I am delighted that we are upgrading the A38. I know that my hon. Friend is a regular user of Duffield railway station. She will be pleased to know that there will most likely be further rounds of the Access for All funding, which has done so much to improve access to railway stations throughout the country. I look forward to receiving an application from my hon. Friend.

Dehenna Davison [V]: My right hon. Friend is used to me bending his ear about the Toft Hill bypass, but today I am mixing it up. Last week, I held a call with residents of Whorlton, Wycliffe and the surrounding villages about the full closure of Whorlton bridge. Durham County Council has funding available for the necessary testing of the bridge's components, but there are concerns about funding availability for the full repairs, so will the Secretary of State meet me and council officers to help to find a funding solution for the repairs of this nationally significant bridge?

Grant Shapps: I came armed to the teeth with information about Toft Hill bypass, so I am disappointed. None the less, my hon. Friend's concerns about Whorlton bridge sound like they would be well addressed by the £4 billion levelling-up fund that we recently announced. We look forward to hearing from her when that fund becomes available. Of course, I would be happy either to meet my hon. Friend myself or to arrange for my roads Minister to do the same.

Mark Menzies [V]: I am delighted that the progress on my bid for the restoring your railway fund means that feasibility studies at Ansdell station are soon to begin, bringing the doubling of services on the South Fylde line closer than ever before. With more passengers on the line ending their journeys or transferring at Preston, which is already a busy station, what plans are in place to increase platform capacity at Preston station?

Grant Shapps: I know that my hon. Friend has been campaigning tirelessly on this issue. It is fantastic that these Beeching reversals, with the restoring your railway bids, are helping to improve Ansdell. Increasing platform capacity is part of the proposals for Preston, which include extending platforms 3 and 4 and removing platforms 3c and 4c. I know my hon. Friend already knows that, but it is very exciting and I congratulate him on all the work that he has done to bring the issue forward for his community.

Transport Decarbonisation

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What plans his Department has to facilitate a green recovery from the covid-19 outbreak through transport decarbonisation. [911493]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): Transport decarbonisation through more active travel, electric vehicles, greener aviation and shipping, is at the heart of our green recovery.

Alan Brown [V]: [*Inaudible.*]

Mr Speaker: In that case, we will go to shadow Minister Mike Kane.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): With our borders open and our schools closed and the Prime Minister introducing new quarantine measures, the recent aviation test and release announcement is now in tatters. We want to decarbonise and we want to give the industry confidence, but the Jet Zero Council, much lauded by the Prime Minister, has met only once and has no workstreams and the Government are dithering over financing the airspace modernisation programme. When will the Secretary of State step up?

Grant Shapps: I am disappointed that the hon. Gentleman missed my speech yesterday at Davos where I addressed that subject in detail. In fact, I want to correct the record of the House: the Jet Zero Council has actually met on two occasions and—wait for the punchline—has sub-committees that have met on many occasions, because they are the work horses of the Jet Zero Council and they bring together academia, the sector itself, Government and international partners to deliver zero-carbon flight by 2050. I refer him to my speech of yesterday, which he can get to from my tweet at @grantshapps.¹

Mr Speaker: Let us return to Alan Brown.

Alan Brown [V]: More needs to be done to create jobs in decarbonised transport. I have three asks of the Secretary of State: introduce mandatory e10 fuels; provide funding for sustainable aviation fuel plants; and provide a bus strategy that copies the combined Scottish Government-EU initiative that saw the world's first hydrogen double-decker buses in Aberdeen. The bus strategy needs to include orders for Scottish and UK manufacturers. Will he confirm dates and funding for these initiatives and in writing as well, please?

Grant Shapps: I certainly share the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for all things hydrogen, and I think I am right in saying that the UK Government fund a hydrogen bus project in Glasgow.² He will know that we are also funding a hydrogen train project. In fact, I have ridden on the HydroFLEX train. We have also announced the country's first hydrogen hub, which happens to be in Teesside. Mr Speaker, given the Prime Minister's 10-point decarbonisation plan from last month, you will not find a more pro-decarbonisation Government than this one. I look forward to working with the hon. Gentleman on many more measures, including in Scotland.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP) [V]: I do not know about you, Mr Speaker, but I cannot wait to read the Secretary of State's speech to Davos. As he very well knows, Scotland is more ambitious in this area and is world leading in its pursuit of rail electrification, with the editor of *Rail* magazine saying last week that Scotland has made big progress here, all while the major English electrification projects got cancelled by his Department. Moreover, in our electric vehicle industry alone, domestic charge point funding and e-bike loan schemes have also been deemed world leading. When will the UK Government match their climate emergency rhetoric and decarbonise transport and improve transport sustainability?

Grant Shapps: The audio was not perfect there, but I got the bit where the hon. Gentleman was saying that he is very enthusiastic about zero carbon and getting to the point where the UK Government are the first major

economy in the world to legislate for net zero by 2050. I am pleased that he is so enthusiastic. He will no doubt be backing the UK Government's plan to get to zero carbon cars, starting with the end of the sale of petrol and diesel cars by 2030. I know that he will be welcoming the enormous sums of money that will have gone right the way across the United Kingdom, which have enabled—credit where credit is due—the Scottish Government to roll out an impressive number of charging stations for electric vehicles. Let us work together to get this job done. It seems that we are better when we do these things together.

Covid-19: Support for the Rail Industry

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): What financial support his Department is providing to the rail industry during the covid-19 outbreak. [911494]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): The 2020 spending review provided a total of £10.1 billion of confirmed funding for the Department for Transport to support passenger rail services in England during the covid outbreak.

Sir David Amess [V]: The service on both the Greater Anglia and c2c lines has been significantly cut during the latest lockdowns. Many constituents have contacted me to tell me that social distancing is near impossible on the few trains that are being run. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that enough money is being given to allow train operators to run a safe service?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend from nearly the city of Southend is absolutely right to mention the importance of keeping the right level of trains running. I mentioned that we funded £10.1 billion—an unprecedented amount—to keep these trains running during the covid crisis to make sure that essential workers can get to work. Of course people should not be travelling to work unless they cannot do that work from home. He will be interested to know that there have been discussions with Build UK and the Construction Leadership Council, particularly on that c2c line and concern about those trains coming into Canning Town. We will keep a close eye on this, and I have asked Sir Peter Hendy, the chair of Network Rail, to also work to ensure that we are alerted as soon as there are any signs of congestion and make sure that these lines can operate safely.

Railway Resilience Work: Dawlish

Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con): What recent progress Network Rail has made on railway resilience work at Dawlish. [911496]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): Work is under way on the second phase of the new sea wall following the opening of the first phase, which I was happy to open in person in September—one of the few visits that I have been able to make in the last year.

Sir Gary Streeter [V]: This region is still talking about the Minister's visit to Dawlish. He will know the importance of the rail link from Plymouth to Paddington, and the disruption that we have suffered in the past. The region is very grateful for the work that has been carried out in

1. [Official Report, 1 February 2021, Vol. 688, c. 5MC.]

2. [Official Report, 8 February 2021, Vol. 689, c. 2MC.]

recent years, but can he assure me today that the next phase of work at Dawlish, to secure the cliff face from crumbling on to the track, will not be delayed or compromised, in order to ensure that essential rail services can continue along this iconic part of the journey?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank my hon. Friend; I am sure that the ticker tape and dried rose petals are still being cleared. I am happy to assure him that we remain committed to improving the resilience of this vital transport artery. Network Rail is continuing to develop proposals for further phases of the resilience programme, using £17.2 million of Government funding that has already been given.

Rail Network Capacity

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): What steps he is taking to expand capacity on the rail network. [911499]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Andrew Stephenson): The Government have made record investments in building and modernising our rail network, and providing capacity for rail users. The spending review included over £58 billion of investment for road and rail transport between 2021 and 2025, delivering some of the Government's largest capital projects and helping us to build back better post covid-19.

Theresa Villiers [V]: The Government's programme of rail improvements is the biggest since the Victorian era. Will the Minister confirm that it is going ahead, even if passenger numbers take some time to recover from the covid outbreak? Will he also ensure that it delivers significant improvements to connections between our great northern cities, because that is essential to levelling up economic opportunities in our country?

Andrew Stephenson: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. We are getting on with delivering record amounts of investment in our rail infrastructure, particularly across the north, with the trans-Pennine route upgrade. We announced £589 million for that investment, joining Manchester, Leeds and other great cities across the north of England. That will be the biggest investment in the conventional rail network. Of course, at the same time we are also making progress with major infrastructure projects such as high-speed rail; last week we concluded the parliamentary passage of the High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill, taking the railway line from the west midlands through to Crewe.

Port of Liverpool: New Rail Link

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential merits of a new rail link at the port of Liverpool. [911500]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Andrew Stephenson): The Department is increasing rail freight at the port of Liverpool by enhancing the Bootle branch line. This will double capacity from one to two freight paths per hour each way, and will be completed later this year.

Bill Esterson [V]: Moving freight off the roads and on to rail is crucial if we are to cut carbon emissions. The changes that the Minister announced will be a very small contribution because the Government are planning a new road from the port of Liverpool through the Rimrose valley into my constituency, which will have precisely the opposite effect and increase emissions. Earlier, the Secretary of State told us that transport decarbonisation is at the heart of his plans. Do Ministers want to play their part in meeting Government targets or not? If they do, will they think again, look at the report produced by Arup for Sefton Council on alternatives to road from the port of Liverpool, and invest properly in rail freight?

Andrew Stephenson: Doubling capacity on the Bootle branch line is expected to meet forecast demand for the foreseeable future. Recent forecasts, unconstrained by limits on infrastructure capacity, indicate demand for 40 trains per day in each direction by 2043. Two paths per hour in each direction of course provides capacity for 48 freight trains per day. However, the nature of some freight requirements, particularly for shorter movements and smaller loads, means that road transport can sometimes be more economically efficient.

March 2021 Rail Fares Increase

Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on passenger numbers of increasing rail fares by 2.6 per cent in March 2021. [911502]

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on passenger numbers of increasing rail fares by 2.6 per cent in March 2021. [911513]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): This is the lowest fare rise in four years. Passengers are advised to reduce journeys as much as possible, and hence usage has fallen dramatically during the lockdowns. Passenger behaviours in the future are unbelievably uncertain, but a small fare rise will help to ensure that taxpayers are not unfairly overburdened for keeping vital rail services running.

Kate Osborne [V]: Because millions of commuters are now working from home, the RMT union has produced research on flexible rail ticketing that shows that if the cost of full-time season tickets was pro-rated to two, three or four days a week, these tickets would offer better value for money and encourage passengers back to our railways when it is safe to do so. Will the Minister update us on the Department's plans with industry on flexible ticketing and when these tickets might be introduced?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank the hon. Lady for her very wise question. I welcome the work done by the RMT in this area, and a whole host of others. We are working with industry on what we can do with flexible ticketing going forward. We are wary that sending mixed messages at this time in trying to encourage people to buy tickets for future travel might not be the right thing to do, but I promise her that we are working closely with industry and expect to make announcements when we can.

Kate Osamor [V]: Train commuters using the Greater Anglia service from Edmonton Green to London Liverpool Street are set to pay £1,436 from March 2021—£436 more than in 2010. Labour has long argued that public ownership of the rail network would provide better value for taxpayers and for passengers. Does the Minister agree that the Government must stop bolstering profit for private companies and bring the network in-house?

Chris Heaton-Harris: No. I am absolutely sure that public ownership of the railways, if we nationalised rail, would mean that the increases the hon. Lady outlined would be way more.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): In the midst of a pandemic and facing a deep recession, when people are losing their jobs and seeing wages slashed, this Tory Government are pushing through inflation-busting rail fare increases this March. After a period of record low passenger numbers, we need to encourage people back on to trains to help our economy and our environment, so it makes absolutely no sense to increase ticket prices. Can the Minister explain why his Government continue to pay risk-free guaranteed profits to private train companies? Is it fair that rail passengers across our country will be picking up the tab and paying more—much more—to get to work or see their loved ones?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I always try not to be overtly political in these matters, but under the last Labour Government, in the run-up to 2010, we had rises of 4%, 3.9%, 4.3%, 4.8%, and 6%. We have temporarily frozen fares in January and February so that people can look at what their travel plans might be as lockdown plans are announced. We have introduced all sorts of railcards and a whole host of discounts, and regulated fares will be increasing at the lowest actual rate in four years. But yes, the hon. Gentleman is quite right: we do need eventually to encourage people back on to our railways. If we are going to decarbonise, and if we are going to level up, we want to take people off the roads and entice them back to the railways, and we will have products to do that—but now, I am afraid, we also need to remember that the taxpayer stood by the railways with £10.1 billion in the course of this time, and they do need some money back.

Traffic Management: Kent

Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure the effective management of traffic in (a) Dover and (b) Kent. [911503]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): We are working to support all those in Kent with traffic management, including the Kent Resilience Forum and the local authorities. I also pay tribute to the military and to NHS Test and Trace for the way that they helped to get things going again after the Christmas lorry crisis.

Mrs Elphicke [V]: Having worked so positively with my right hon. Friend and with the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean), over so many months on the Keep Dover Clear strategy, it was extremely disappointing that Dover came to a halt and a standstill and faced gridlock following France's

unreasonable closure of the border. Will my right hon. Friend reaffirm the Government's commitment to keep Dover clear so that whatever happens at the port of Dover or is done by the French, people can get around to work, to school and in their daily lives?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I pay tribute to her for the way that she has campaigned to keep Dover clear. She is right also in saying that before Christmas, President Macron decided to close the French border with no notice, meaning that we ended up with thousands of lorries gridlocking Kent. We had to put in place emergency measures, which have included at this stage providing lateral flow tests to 120,000 hauliers in order for them to cross. I can report to the House that once they have crossed to the other side, the French have also been carrying out some tests. No one has come across with coronavirus as a result of the enormous programme we have put in place, none of which would have been possible without my hon. Friend's tremendous assistance during those few days before Christmas while the military, NHS Test and Trace, the police and, not least, the local MP worked to clear the problem.

Access to Bus Services: Cumbria

Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve access to bus services in rural areas in Cumbria. [911504]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Robert Courts): We are developing a national bus strategy for England. Cumbria is participating in phase 2 of the rural mobility fund.

Dr Hudson [V]: Bus services offer a vital lifeline for people in rural communities such as Penrith and The Border, and the importance of this connectivity has been brought into sharp relief in the pandemic. In 2014, Cumbria County Council opted to stop using central Government funds to subsidise commercial bus services, meaning some routes were not viable for operators, leading to a reduction in provision. Does my hon. Friend agree that now is the time for the council to revisit that decision and use available funds to support rural bus routes to allow people to go about their lives, reconnect and improve their health and welfare?

Robert Courts: We recognise the importance of public transport for the sustainability and the independence of communities, particularly in rural areas like Cumbria, which is why we are providing a £20 million rural mobility fund to support demand-responsive services in rural and suburban areas. I am pleased to say that thanks to my hon. Friend's support, Cumbria County Council was successful in phase 1 and has been invited to participate in phase 2.

Covid-19: Aviation and Airport Transport Workers

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment he has made of the effect of covid-19 on the level of (a) infection, (b) hospitalisation and (c) deaths of transport workers in the (i) aviation, (ii) airports and (iii) airport transfer sectors since January 2020. [911505]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Robert Courts): My Department engages regularly with the Department of Health and Social Care, SAGE and the Joint Biosecurity Centre to ensure we have up-to-date information on the risk of transmission in the aviation sector. We have published safer transport guidance to operators on reducing the risks, and we engage regularly with the sector on the steps they are taking, including the level of absences they are seeing.

Stephen Doughty [V]: This week, we passed the grim milestone of 100,000 people having lost their lives tragically to this terrible disease. Last year I was strongly critical of the Government's policies on the border, including through our airports. Figures released by Government Ministers showed that more than 2,000 UK Visas and Immigration and Border Force officials were off with symptoms of coronavirus in January to April last year, and that is before we even look at others working in, for example, our airports and on planes. Can the Minister explain what exactly he is doing to keep airport workers safe, particularly those at Heathrow and other major hubs and especially those who will be involved in transporting individuals to quarantine hotels?

Robert Courts: The hon. Gentleman is right to pinpoint the critical importance of those who work in the aviation sector for the country, and I join him in mourning the loss of every single life tragically lost during the course of this pandemic. We are working very closely with operators and the Home Office to operationalise the safer transport guidance that I referred to earlier, in addition to the rapid testing pilots, which may also assist.

North Cotswold Line

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential merits of additional improvements to the North Cotswold line. [911506]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Andrew Stephenson): An updated strategic outline business case for improvements to the North Cotswold line is due to be resubmitted by the North Cotswold Line Task Force.

Harriett Baldwin: I think people will be astonished to learn that the great cities of Worcester and Hereford are served by a rail line from London that in many places is single-track. The North Cotswold Line Task Force has done some fantastic work in proposing that we redouble some of that track. Will the Minister look closely at its suggestions and support the local councils that are contributing to the development phase of this project?

Andrew Stephenson: The Department and Network Rail will continue to work with the taskforce on its proposals. I recognise that the line has experienced a renaissance over the past decade, and the taskforce is keen to build on that. I know that my hon. Friend's desire for improvement is shared by many of my colleagues, not least the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts).

Support for Hauliers Transporting to and from the EU

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support hauliers transporting goods to and from the EU; and if he will make a statement. [911507]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean): We have rolled out a large-scale haulier communications campaign, opened 46 information and advice sites around the country and published our haulier handbook in 14 languages—all the languages that hauliers will be speaking when they come to the UK. We are also offering free covid-19 testing for hauliers at many of our information and advice sites.

Michael Fabricant [V]: My hon. Friend may well know about the Road King truck stop, which is along the A5, not far from Burntwood. I was going to ask her a question about what work she is doing, but she has already answered it, so instead I will ask her this: when we are allowed to do so, will she join me for breakfast at the Road King?

Rachel Maclean: How could I possibly turn down such a wonderful invitation? I can tell my hon. Friend that I have already visited an information and advice site in Hopwood. It is a fantastic service, and there are thousands of hauliers visiting these sites up and down the country, including the Road King at Cannock. I would like to join him there, and hopefully he can tell me what the best breakfast is.

Mr Speaker: He will pay, of course.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab) [V]: I am afraid that my question for the Minister might be slightly tougher to answer. As she knows, the new three-stop limit will be devastating for UK hauliers working with touring musicians or on events that involve multiple stops in EU countries. This is such an important sector for the UK, and it has already been hit so hard by covid. Can the Minister at least acknowledge today that the Government's failure to seek an exemption during the negotiations was a massive own goal? Will the Government get back round the negotiating table and sort this out before the summer, when we all hope that the live music scene will be open once again for business?

Rachel Maclean: We certainly share the hon. Lady's desire to see the live music scene open once again in this country. The trade and co-operation agreement that the Government have negotiated with the EU is an excellent deal for our hauliers that allows 95% of haulier movements to continue as they did before. All hauliers who carry out work for a commercial purpose in the EU will be subject to the provisions of the UK-EU trade and co-operation agreement. It is really important to put on the record that during negotiations with the EU, the Government proposed exemptions for specialist hauliers such as the ones she referred to due to the nature of their businesses, but unfortunately the EU did not agree to those asks. However, because we recognise the important impact that this will have, we continue our discussions.

Covid-19: Support for Coach Operators and Manufacturers

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): What plans the Government have to support coach (a) operators and (b) manufacturers during periods of reduced demand as a result of the covid-19 outbreak. [911511]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Robert Courts): A range of support measures have been made available to UK businesses, including the coach industry, such as the coronavirus job retention scheme. Coach operators and manufacturers can also contact their local authority regarding discretionary funding provided by the Government for companies experiencing a severe impact on their businesses.

Grahame Morris: Notwithstanding that answer, I have a simple question: why have Ministers still not committed to providing targeted support for coach companies, most of which are small, family-run, community-based businesses that provide essential support to other sectors but have been unable to access coronavirus support packages?

Robert Courts: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this matter. I know that he led a very well-attended debate in Westminster Hall just before Christmas. This is a very challenging time for the sector; I entirely recognise that. It is a very diverse sector, and it is difficult to have a one-size-fits-all scheme. A variety of support has been provided by the Government, such as the Department for Education's money to provide additional support for school and college transport, the Department for Transport's money to support Christmas travel and the Treasury's funding for the additional restrictions grant.

Improving Roads in England

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve roads in England. [911510]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean): The Department is committed to providing improvements for all road users. It is providing over £2.7 billion for the maintenance of England's local highway network outside London over 2020-21 and 2021-22, and as part of road investment strategy 2, it is providing £4.1 billion for capital renewals on the strategic road network in England over the next five years.

Joy Morrissey [V]: Too many roads in Beaconsfield, Iver and Denham in my constituency are blighted with potholes. As my hon. Friend is well aware, we want to see our potholes mended. Can the Minister confirm that the Government are still on track and committed to investing £500 million every single year in tackling potholes, and will she undertake to meet me to discuss further how we can tackle potholes together?

Rachel Maclean: I thank my hon. Friend so much for raising this issue. Every single Member in the Chamber is supportive of this question, because we all know how important this is to our constituents' daily lives. I can happily confirm to my hon. Friend that that is absolutely the case: Budget 2020 announced £2.5 billion in total for the pothole fund, providing £500 million this year to

local highway authorities in England for tackling potholes and £500 million each year for the next four years. I am sure that my noble Friend in the other place who deals with this matter, Baroness Vere of Norbiton, would be delighted to meet her to discuss the matters in Beaconsfield.

Topical Questions

[911454] **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): On Saturday, I was delighted to announce £34 million to help to reopen the Northumberland rail line between Newcastle upon Tyne, Blyth and Ashington. Restoring many of the lines closed during the 1960s is an important part of this Government's mission to level up the north when it comes to transport. I can announce today that, since the creation of the northern powerhouse in 2014, this Conservative Government have spent more than £20 billion on the region's transport, delivering roads, rail, and cleaner and better transport, including 168 miles of rail electrification.

Mr Speaker: You should see the railway station at Coppull.

Jeff Smith [V]: The Committee on Climate Change has reported that aviation accounted for 8% of UK emissions in 2019, before the pandemic stopped flights. I am pleased that the Government have finally indicated that they will bring forward a support package for aviation this autumn, but will this be conditional on action to tackle emissions in the climate crisis?

Grant Shapps: Mr Speaker, do not think that I did not hear that plea for a rail station.

I want to address the hon. Gentleman's point about aviation. Again, without sounding like a stuck record, I must refer him to my World Economic Forum discussion and announcements on this just yesterday. Of course, we have COP26 coming up at the end of this year, where the whole world will come together to try to tackle some of these aviation emission problems, and the UK is taking an absolute leading role through the Jet Zero Council. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's interest in this subject, and indeed extend an offer to work with him to progress it.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I welcome the decision to have evidence-based enhancements to control covid at our international borders, as opposed to a blanket approach. Would the Secretary of State agree with me that a blanket approach could see essential goods and services failing to come into this country from countries where the covid risk is perhaps less than our own, because those delivering are currently enjoying a 10-day stay in the Holiday Inn? Can I ask him, in particular, to ensure that he publishes the criteria for countries that will go on to the red list or come off it, so that the aviation industry in particular has the chance to plan ahead?

Grant Shapps: I think my hon. Friend, the Chair of the Transport Committee, is absolutely right. This has required a proportionate and science-based approach

to where people for quarantine in hotels should come from, and that includes a red list of countries. I can tell my hon. Friend and the House that that list is available on gov.uk—it contains 30 countries. South America, South Africa and Portugal are primarily the areas and countries involved. I think it is very important that we do make this science-based, and this adds to the pre-departure testing and, of course, all the other measures we have put in place. We will hear from the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) shortly, and I know he is going to explain why he called for quarantine to be lessened.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): I am very disappointed that the Secretary of State would go so low as to repeat an untruth that was made by the Prime Minister yesterday, and a point of order has been submitted on that matter.

Mr Speaker: Order. Nobody would deliberately say there was an untruth; somebody may not have had the right information, but it certainly would not be a deliberate mistruth.

Jim McMahon: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As we all know, 500 covid cases have been recorded at the DVLA offices in Swansea. There have also been worrying allegations that employees were coerced into turning off their track and trace apps or given warnings for taking time off sick, and those must be fully investigated. The evidence offered by the chief executive of the DVLA to the Transport Committee has, I am afraid, turned a crisis into a political test. Will the Transport Secretary explain why he ignored warnings about that issue, and why he essentially allowed a Government office to become a covid-19 superspreader? Will he confirm whether the chief executive of the DVLA still enjoys his full support?

Grant Shapps: I would like to clear up this confusion, because I do not think that a mis-statement should stand. I will quote from the hon. Gentleman on 3 July:

“Labour, like families and businesses up and down the country, are keen for the Government’s quarantine measures to be lessened”. That was the precise quote.

On the DVLA, I share the hon. Gentleman’s concern about the stories we saw in the newspapers this weekend, and I have investigated fully. Only one third of the staff are currently working at the DVLA. He might ask why any staff are working there, and the simple answer is that there are paper-based forms and submissions that are not being made online, and without them key workers and others would not be getting their licences. There are databases that, for privacy reasons, cannot be connected to from home, and that requires some people to go to the offices. A number of important steps have been taken, including work with Public Health Wales and setting up a new office for people to work in. No requests to turn off test and trace have been made by either the DVLA or the Department for Transport. The DVLA works under strict civil service guidance on sick pay and leave, and it must not diverge from that. I take the matter extremely seriously, and I will provide further written reassurances to the hon. Gentleman.

Jim McMahon: That opportunity for the Transport Secretary to confirm his support for the chief executive was not taken, which is interesting in itself.

Let me turn to smart motorways. This month, a coroner concluded that the lack of a hard shoulder on the M1 in South Yorkshire contributed to the deaths of two men, making a total of nearly 40 lives lost as a result of smart motorways and the absence of a hard shoulder. Even the former roads Minister, the right hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning), who introduced the programme in 2010, admitted that it was a gross public policy failure. Enough is enough. Will the Secretary of State commit, the minute this session finishes, to pick up the phone and issue an instruction to reinstate the hard shoulder on smart motorways? God forbid we will be here again reviewing more deaths if action is not taken.

Grant Shapps: It is tragic that anybody ever dies on our roads, and it is worth recalling that motorways in general are safer than most roads overall. Smart motorways were, and are, an issue that sparked a great deal of interest from me, and as the hon. Gentleman may recall, before he was in post last year I set up a review, a stocktake, which recommended 18 different measures, including spending more than £500 million to put in a whole series of measures to ensure that smart motorways are not just as safe as, but safer than conventional motorways. That stocktake is now one year through, and I will soon return to the House to report on its progress. I know there is a lot of interest in that.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP) [V]: On the very day that the Prime Minister shamefully sets a terrible example by making a completely unnecessary cross-border campaign trip, which by my reckoning is against the law in Scotland, will the Secretary of State say what steps he is taking to ensure that the impact of border disruptions, which have hammered important Scottish industries such as seafood and fresh food, is reduced, and that hauliers are able to take more return loads than the scarce amount they can take at present?

Grant Shapps: The House will know that, through a process called the Brexit operations committee, there were over 180 meetings, which have ensured that, with regard to the routing that those lorries take—typically down to Kent and through the so-called short straits—we have seen no queues at all thanks to that planning. There have been some issues with paperwork. I know that that has impacted Scottish fish. I know that Scottish fishermen are celebrating the fact that they can catch and keep a quarter more—in five and a half years’ time there will be no requirement to give any of it away, subject to the discussions then—and I know that additional money and assistance is going to both the Scottish Government and Scottish fishermen in order to resolve any outstanding problems with paperwork, which I trust will be concluded as quickly as possible.

[911456] **Gareth Johnson** (Dartford) (Con) [V]: What discussions has my hon. Friend had with the Mayor of London about his proposals to charge my constituents in Kent £3.50 to drive into the neighbouring London Borough of Bexley? Does my hon. Friend agree that that would have a catastrophic and disproportionate impact on places such as Dartford that border London?

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): There are always lots of conversations going on between Transport for London, the Mayor

and the Department. Transport in London is devolved to the Mayor of London and TfL, and it is because of decisions that the Mayor has made that TfL has found itself saddled with massive debt and unable to deliver infrastructure projects, leaving it in a weak position even before covid raised its ugly head. The Government—and the UK taxpayer, therefore—have agreed two extraordinary financing packages for TfL worth over £3 billion to ensure the continuation of public transport services in this great city.

[911457] **Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab) [V]: Greenfield station in my constituency is completely inaccessible. Anyone with a mobility impairment or young children in a buggy may be able to get a train from Greenfield to Manchester, but they would not be able to come back, because they would have to get over the footbridge to get to the exit, which is impossible. We have applied for every grant available to us to address this and we have never been successful. If the Government are committed to levelling up—there is a lot to level up in the north—when will the Transport Secretary ensure that my disabled constituents get a fully accessible station?

Chris Heaton-Harris: As I have said at the Dispatch Box a number of times, we have a lot to do in getting all our stations accessible. This is a Victorian network. While 75% of all passenger journeys go through step-free stations, that means there are a huge number of old stations that need major improvements. The trans-Pennine route upgrade is expected to bring major improvements to several stations along that route, and we are committed to making those stations directly impacted by the TRU more accessible.

[911458] **Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con) [V]: Flexible season tickets will help commuters from Havant save money, reflect modern working practices and support our railways when movement restrictions ease. What work is my hon. Friend doing with South Western Railway and Southern in particular to make flexible season tickets a reality in our area?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank my hon. Friend for his wise question. We are actively working with the train operators he mentions and others to develop a solution that offers better value and convenience for those who will be commuting flexibly in the future, and we will provide further details in due course.

[911459] **Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): Taxi drivers in my constituency have gone above and beyond the call of duty during the pandemic to provide safe and reliable transport for essential journeys. However, some have been excluded from the self-employment income support scheme. Will the Minister commit to providing the financial assistance necessary to ensure that all taxi drivers are able to keep their businesses going during these terrible times?

Chris Heaton-Harris: The hon. Lady has raised the issue of self-employed taxi drivers and the grants they have received during the first three rounds of the self-employment income support scheme previously. We have announced several measures that are available to UK businesses, including the taxi and private hire sector, to support them through this challenging time, including

that scheme. Over the first three rounds of the scheme, up to £21,570 has been made available for those eligible, but I will happily speak to her about those who have fallen through the gap that she mentions to see what we can do.

[911460] **Scott Benton** (Blackpool South) (Con) [V]: Once the current pandemic is over, many people are predicting a rise in staycations and domestic tourism, which will be especially beneficial to Blackpool. However, it will be difficult for many of my local businesses to take advantage of these opportunities without the ongoing viability of the coach sector, which brings thousands of people into Blackpool every single year. What assistance is my hon. Friend able to provide to this vital industry going forward?

Chris Heaton-Harris: We all look forward to staycations in Blackpool and maybe the odd party conference again, with those enjoyable days that some of us of a certain age used to have there. Coach companies have access to support measures such as the job retention scheme and bounce back loans, as well as locally administered funding. When it is safe to do so, the Government will explore opportunities to open up business for coach operators.

[911461] **Paula Barker** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab) [V]: The Transport Committee was told yesterday by the chief executive of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency that work is being slowed down and that she holds regular meetings with Ministers to discuss work priorities. Does the Minister really believe that activities such as processing provisional licences and even personalised number plates, which I am told are still being carried out, are priorities for the DVLA during this lockdown? Does he agree with the Public and Commercial Services Union that only the most essential work should be happening there right now?

Grant Shapps: I do agree with the hon. Lady. It is right that only essential work should be taking place at the DVLA, and I will check the reports she mentions. It is absolutely critical. I pay tribute to the people ensuring that essential work for key workers, for example checking databases for the police, has been able to continue. I appeal to the public to please use online facilities wherever possible, because that prevents people from needing to go into the office. I should mention that the UK Government have provided 2,000 lateral flow tests. That is now being expanded to every single DVLA worker, something the Welsh Government were not providing, and is helping to protect people now.

[911463] **Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): The Government's support for active travel is very much welcomed by cyclists, walkers and horse riders in West Worcestershire. Is the Secretary of State speaking to his counterpart in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to find ways in which farmers could be incentivised through their agricultural management plans to contribute to the public good of creating new greenways like the one proposed from Worcester to Leominster?

Chris Heaton-Harris: The Government are committed to providing an unprecedented £2 billion of dedicated funding for cycling and walking over the rest of this Parliament. There are a whole host of ways in which

that can be spent. Conversations are going on across Government about how to support cycling and walking infrastructure in various areas, including potentially on disused railway lines. I have seen the benefits of how they can be used in my own constituency when cycling down the wonderful Brampton Valley Way.

[911462] **Peter Dowd** (Bootle) (Lab) [V]: I appreciate the Minister's response to my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson), my constituency neighbour, but I think he may have missed the substantive point my hon. Friend was making. There is a proposal to rip up Rimrose Valley Park, which is the only substantive green lung in my very small urban constituency, and plough a major road through it. Before he puts his signature to the £300 million-plus cheque to build the road, will he agree to meet me, my hon. Friend, council colleagues and very worried friends of Rimrose Valley Park to listen to our fears about the irreparable and long-term damage to our environment, leisure opportunities, and the health and safety of our community, and hear about alternatives to this road, which does not meet the spirit or aims of the Prime Minister's 10-point decarbonisation plan?

Chris Heaton-Harris: Unbelievably, I have actually campaigned politically for my party in the hon. Gentleman's constituency in the past; I say unbelievably because it is one of the safest Labour seats in the country. I actually think he represents a wonderful part of the world, with wonderful people, and he represents it well. I will sort out the meeting with the appropriate Minister on his behalf.

Mr Speaker: I will now come to the final question, from Greg Smith. I am pretty disappointed—topical questions are meant to be short and punchy. I say to everybody that, in the future, we have to get through them.

[911466] **Greg Smith** (Buckingham) (Con): On 6 January, the Transport Committee heard evidence of the continuing nightmares faced by communities at the hands of HS2 Ltd. What progress has been made on the excellent suggestions made at the Committee, particularly for a new independent role with real teeth to hold HS2 Ltd to account?

Chris Heaton-Harris: My hon. Friend modestly mentions the excellent suggestions that I believe he made at the Select Committee on 6 January. HS2 Ltd is meeting some parish councils on 1 March. I know that my great friend the HS2 Minister—my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson)—is looking forward to ongoing discussions about the ideas that my hon. Friend raised in that Select Committee.

10.35 am

Mr Speaker: I now suspend the House for a few minutes to enable the necessary arrangements for the next business to be made.

10.36 am

Sitting suspended.

Business of the House

10.39 am

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

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): The business for the week commencing 1 February will include:

MONDAY 1 FEBRUARY—Opposition day (16th allocated day). There will be a debate on a motion relating to cladding and building safety, followed by a debate on a motion relating to border security. Both debates will arise on a motion in the name of the official Opposition.

TUESDAY 2 FEBRUARY—Second reading of the Air Traffic Management and Unmanned Aircraft Bill [*Lords*].

WEDNESDAY 3 FEBRUARY—Motion to approve statutory instruments relating to sanctions, followed by a motion to approve the draft Value Added Tax (Miscellaneous Amendments to Acts of Parliament) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 and the Value Added Tax Act 1994 and Revocation) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 (S.I., 2020, No. 1544), followed by a motion relating to the Travellers' Allowances and Miscellaneous Provisions (EU Exit) Regulations 2020, followed by a debate on a petition relating to grooming gangs. The subject for this debate was determined by the Petitions Committee.

THURSDAY 4 FEBRUARY—General debate on the future of the UK space industry, followed by a general debate on the towns fund. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 5 FEBRUARY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 8 February will include:

MONDAY 8 FEBRUARY—Second reading of the Armed Forces Bill, followed by a motion to approve the Armed Forces Act (Continuation) Order 2021.

TUESDAY 9 FEBRUARY—Motion to approve the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2021, followed by a motion to approve the Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 2021, followed by consideration of Lords amendments to the Trade Bill.

WEDNESDAY 10 FEBRUARY—Motions relating to the police grant and local government finance reports.

THURSDAY 11 FEBRUARY—General debate relating to the publication of the integrated review of security, defence, development and foreign policy, followed by a debate on a motion relating to the UK's commitment to reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 12 FEBRUARY—The House will not be sitting.

Hon. and right hon. Members may also wish to know that, subject to the progress of business, the House will rise for the constituency recess at the conclusion of business on Thursday 11 February and return on Monday 22 February.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): We were told that yesterday.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thought hon. and right hon. Members would like confirmation of this information. The motion for the recess is on the Order Paper.

Valerie Vaz: The question is, did the Leader of the House know before the Prime Minister announced it? But I thank him for that. He did not really give clarity on the end of the Session—I wonder whether he could do that.

This week, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) raised the issue of Anoosheh Ashoori in an Adjournment debate, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) wrote an article in *The Telegraph*, which was a timely reminder that Nazanin has less than 40 days before her sentence comes to an end. Both Nazanin and Anoosheh have been punished for visiting their parents in Iran. Now that President Biden has lifted sanctions in Yemen, Luke Symons must not be forgotten either. I do not think the Minister for the Middle East and North Africa gave my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East a very helpful response.

The motion to carry over the Environment Bill was agreed. Talk about flip-flopping—on 13 December 2019, the Prime Minister said that he wanted to make Britain the “cleanest, greenest” country “on Earth”, yet the Government did not accept our Opposition amendment enshrining in the Bill the World Health Organisation air pollution guidelines that needed to be done by 2020. As for lifting the ban on bee-killing pesticides, we have just got our bees back—they are important pollinators. Will the Leader of the House look at whether, when the Bill comes back, the Government will accept this, given that President Biden has said that there is an “existential” climate emergency?

Unless we all tackle the climate emergency—the scientists say that winters are becoming wetter and wetter—we will have more floods. Can we have clarity on what the Prime Minister meant when he said last year that he will “get Bewdley done”? Bewdley did not get done. It got flooded. When Labour was in power, we increased flood defences by 33%, and that was then cut by the Conservative party, but it was never restored to the 33% higher level. Can we have a statement on this, or better still, can the Leader of the House publish the data from the Environment Agency that said that one in 20 of our flood defences are in disrepair and that more than 3,000 of those, which pose risk to life and property, are “almost useless”?

I know that the Leader of the House has announced the Adjournment of a week. He will remember that the bailiff-enforced evictions ban will expire on 21 February, so will he look at having a debate on the affirmative regulations, as they will run out then?

I know that the Government have a difficulty with having women spokespeople, but International Women's Day is coming up, so could we have a debate on that in Government time?

People think of the recess as half-term, but many parents, teachers and teaching assistants will not have one. A headteacher wrote to me to say that

“the way we are working is unsustainable and at some point we will have to put our own health and the welfare of our own families first.”

He asked for clarity before the Prime Minister had made his announcement about 8 March. He wanted to know the conditions for schools to reopen after lockdown;

how a return to schools would operate and whether it would be phased or by rota or bubbles; and what the role of lateral flow testing would be. He also wanted honesty over whether education staff would be prioritised for the vaccine, and to know the timetable for the consultation following cancelled exams. And he pleaded with me—he said, “I beg of you”—to ask the Government to establish the guidelines before they make an announcement. Could the Leader of the House ensure that the Secretary of State for Education comes to the House to make a statement before we run into difficulties with the Budget announcements?

Why did the Conservative party want to know the ethnic background of 10 million voters? Why has it acted illegally? It says that it is the party of law and order, but on Tuesday the Information Commissioner told a Select Committee that the Conservative party had acted illegally. Could we have a statement to say that all the data that was harvested has been destroyed?

On flip-flopping again, apparently businesses have been told that they need to set up in the EU if they want to get anything done. Ministers actually said that they had to go to Ireland so that they could be part of the single market. Could we have clarity on that position and whether or not it is better for them to be in the EU?

In another flip-flop, it has been announced that there is not going to be a bonfire of employment rights. I think that announcement was made to the media, so could we have a statement in the House?

I did not attribute it to him, but it was Clive Myrie’s moving film on our NHS workers that showed how difficult it is. Although the rates are going down, we have lost 100,000 people. People need to realise that they need to abide by all the rules.

Finally, I want to thank you, Mr Speaker, for commemorating Holocaust Memorial Day yesterday, and to thank your staff for setting up the lighting of the candle. There will be an important debate later, but that represented, on the day itself, light over darkness.

Mr Rees-Mogg: May I begin by agreeing so much with the right hon. Lady, and by thanking you, Mr Speaker, for arranging a very sombre and moving ceremony? How right it is that we remember one of the greatest tragedies, if not the greatest tragedy, that the world has ever suffered. The debate later is very important.

The right hon. Lady mentioned the 100,000 deaths. This is, for every family affected, a deep sadness, and we pray for the souls of the departed. We look forward to a brighter future as the vaccine is rolled out and people are protected from this terrible and deadly disease.

I am sorry that the right hon. Lady was not satisfied with the response given to the Adjournment debate in relation to people held illegally, particularly Ms Zaghari-Ratcliffe, whose sentence, as the right hon. Lady said, comes to an end in 14 days. We expect people who are held improperly to be released. We expect states to observe the rule of law, and we hope that she will be released. The right hon. Lady is always right to raise this case, which I take up with the Foreign Office every week on her behalf.

I am glad that the right hon. Lady welcomes the announcement of the forthcoming recess. She asked if I knew about it. Yes, I did know about it, she will be reassured to know, and I think the motion formalising it is in my name, so it is lucky that I knew about it, too.

The Environment Bill is being carried over because, as much as anything, the House of Lords’ legislative programme—the Government’s legislative programme, delivering on our manifesto commitments—is very full. It turns out that when we do things remotely, they sometimes take longer than they did when people were physically present. Some inevitable delays are caused by the covid crisis, but that does not reduce the Government’s commitment to environmental improvement. The Prime Minister has set out the 10-point plan, and COP26 will take place in Glasgow later this year. This Government are a world leader in environmental improvement, and that will carry on being the case.

With regard to flooding, the £5.2 billion of taxpayers’ money announced last year is going ahead and will be implemented to provide more flood defences, protecting hundreds of thousands more homes. That shows the Government’s commitment to protecting people’s homes. The right hon. Lady also asked about repairs. Some £120 million has been set aside for repairs, so again that is taking place.

On the specific request for a debate in Government time on International Women’s Day, the right hon. Lady will remember that last year the Backbench Business Committee had not yet been set up, and therefore the Government provided time for the debate. The Backbench Business Committee knows that, when it was set up, one of the things that it had responsibility for was the International Women’s Day debate, as it has for the debate later today on Holocaust Memorial Day. These very important debates come out of the Backbench Business Committee’s allocation.

I completely understand the right hon. Lady’s frustration in relation to schools, with five children of my own being home schooled—although, I must confess that the burden is falling primarily on my wife, rather than on me. This is something that parents are finding difficult, because it is hard. But to ask for clarity in an uncertain situation is, I think, simply not reasonable. Things are developing all the time, sometimes for the better and sometimes not. We had a new strain that turned out to be more virulent, but now we have progress with the vaccine roll-out, so we have to deal with events as they arise. It is not possible to set out with complete clarity what will happen and be certain that that is what will happen, because of the unknowable nature of the progress of the virus and the responses to it.

With regard to EU businesses, we are much better off being out of the European Union. That is what the country wanted and what we have delivered, and we are seeing the benefits day by day. It is really good news that we are out. The Government have not advised businesses to set up in the European Union—that is a fiction.

Finally, the Government have been great supporters of employment rights in this country, but then the Tories have always been great supporters of employment rights. If I may claim Elizabeth I as the first Tory, as I am tempted to do, an Act of Parliament was passed in her reign—

Mr Speaker: Order. The royal family are not political, and the Leader of the House knows that.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The current members, Mr Speaker; I think I must be allowed to comment on previous members. Otherwise, all my exchanges with my hon. Friend the

[*Mr Rees-Mogg*]

Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger) would be out of order, because Alfred the Great was certainly a member of the royal family. I think I am allowed to refer to Queen Elizabeth I, who introduced an Act to protect people from unfair dismissal. Of course, it was Lord Shaftesbury, that great Tory hero, who was the mainstay of 19th-century improvements in employment rights. The Conservatives have always been committed to that and will continue to be, which is why employment rights in this country are much better than they are in Europe, including maternity leave and holiday time. It is because this nation and the Conservative party have a great commitment to employment rights.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): Mole Valley, like many other constituencies, is frequently plagued by Travellers illegally invading both public and private land, and by abuse of planning legislation. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Home Office are said to be introducing legislation to help deal with the problem, but I am hearing a disparity of approach. It would therefore be helpful if, prior to its presentation, there was a debate to enable Members to express their wishes on this prospective legislation.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend raises an important point. For many years, illegal Traveller encampments have brought crime to local areas, as well as antisocial and threatening behaviour. It remains the Government's intention to bring forward legislation when parliamentary time allows that strengthens police powers to tackle unauthorised encampments. As we set out in our recent "Planning for the future" White Paper, we intend to review and strengthen existing powers and sanctions to ensure that they support the new planning system. We intend to introduce more powers to address intentional unauthorised development, consider higher fines and look at ways of supporting more enforcement activity. We want a fair system for all. The Government's overarching aim is to ensure fair and equal treatment for Travellers, in a way that facilitates their nomadic way of life while respecting the interests of the settled community. I hope that my hon. Friend will make his views known to Ministers in the normal way, but an Adjournment debate might be an excellent means of getting his views further on the record.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP) [V]: First, may I associate myself with the remarks of the shadow Leader of the House and the Leader of the House regarding Holocaust Memorial Day?

I would like to ask for a debate on the role of Government Ministers and the Prime Minister in particular in setting an example by following the rules that they make for others during the lockdown. I know that every time the Prime Minister opens his mouth on the subject, his ill-informed views drive support for Scottish independence upwards, and I know also that his stage-managed visits to selected Scottish supporters make the SNP's case for it. So in normal circumstances, he would be most welcome, but these are not normal circumstances. We are telling millions of people not to leave their homes and only to make essential journeys. The Prime Minister is more than capable of patronising us from his office in Whitehall, so what exactly is so essential about his

1,000-mile round trip to Livingston today? This gallivanting is a blatant piece of electioneering, while most people are focused on fighting covid, but the real tragedy is that his actions will undermine the public health message, which we all need to succeed.

Let me turn to the Government plans to cut universal credit by 20% in April. This would be the most cruel and immoral decision of this Administration, heaping pain and misery on the very poorest in our communities, who have already borne the consequences of covid to a greater extent than most. The decision is extremely unpopular, even in the Tory party, but rather than have a proper debate on the matter, the Government are trying to buy time by delaying it until the Budget at the start of March. That may suit the Government, but to leave this threat hanging over the heads of so many families is unforgivable. The House should debate this measure now, not in March.

In December, the Government laid changes to the immigration rules that fundamentally altered the nature of asylum, leaving many vulnerable people in limbo. Members across the House have supported an SNP motion to oppose those measures. When will we get the chance to debate them? Finally, may I ask again when we will get a third party Opposition day, which is long overdue?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As always, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his questions. We have facilitated a debate, coming up shortly, in response to a prayer from the SNP on a statutory instrument. We are doing our best to facilitate all Opposition parties, but I bear in mind his request for an Opposition day debate, which is important, as set out in Standing Orders.

As regards universal credit, the hon. Gentleman is simply getting the wrong end of the stick or not paying attention. It was debated in the House not long ago in an Opposition day debate, as is the normal way of things being debated in the House. That is why there are Opposition day debates—so that people can discuss things that the Opposition want to talk about. The Government have made it clear that the £20 uplift introduced by this Government to help the least well-off in society during the pandemic is under review, and there will be an announcement in the Budget in the perfectly normal and proper way. It is cheap point scoring that does not score any points to complain about it at this stage, when the decision will be announced in due course.

As regards the Prime Minister's visit to Scotland, I used to think that Mona Lott was a fictional character, but it turns out that it is actually the First Minister of Scotland. All Mrs Sturgeon can ever do is moan a lot. She moans when distinguished royal personages visit Scotland, and she moans when the Prime Minister visits Scotland—people doing their duty and doing their job. The visit to Livingston is something we should be proud of as a nation. The Prime Minister is visiting a vaccine factory that has made enormous strides to develop and produce a vaccine that is awaiting approval to help in the fight against covid. The Prime Minister is doing his job. Mona Lott will have something to moan about in early February, when Mr Salmond gives evidence to a committee of inquiry in the Scottish Parliament and we find out all that is going on up north to the disadvantage of the Scottish people, led by a hopeless Administration.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con) [V]: Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the management of trees by local authorities? While most people recognise the importance of tree-planting programmes, I am receiving a number of complaints in Southend about the damage that trees are doing to pavements and, sadly, to people's property. There needs to be some sort of mechanism to resolve disputes between the local authority and the insurers.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. There are difficulties when roots push up into pavements or tarmac, and there are laws and rules relating to this. The effect of any tree on neighbouring land is for the relevant owners to discuss, and the Government recommend that arboricultural advice is sought from competent contractors and consultants. They or the local authority should be able to inform tree owners of their responsibilities and the options in any particular case. It is important that trees are inspected regularly, with necessary maintenance to ensure that they remain safe and healthy, and that it is safe for buses to pass under them on highways and so on. That responsibility falls primarily on local councils, but my hon. Friend has got his point on the record.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab) [V]: As always, Mr Speaker, I am very grateful to you for calling me.

I understand that the award of the Backbench Business time on Thursday 11 February may have been regarded as provisional by Government business managers; I hope that that is not the case. The Backbench Business Committee was established so that issues could be aired and debated as requested by Back-Bench Members across the House. Sometimes issues and subject matters may arise on which many Members want to contribute and which may, at the same time, be inconvenient for the Government of the day. But this is one of the reasons that the Committee was established—to allow parliamentarians, away from the Executive and the Front Benchers on both sides, to have a measure of input into the parliamentary agenda and the subjects of debate.

On a lighter note—I do hope that this is appreciated—the Backbench Business Committee has received an application for a debate on International Women's Day, which is on Monday 8 March. Of course we would love to facilitate it, but the awarding of time to the Committee is up to the Government, and we are well behind the schedule within Standing Orders for the allocation for this Session.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman's point about the Backbench Business Committee's choice of debates is absolutely right. The Committee is there to choose debates that Back Benchers want to have. That may be inconvenient to both Front Benches, but it is perfectly reasonable and fair. As regards the allocation of time, I remind the hon. Gentleman that Government time was found prior to the set-up of the Backbench Business Committee for what were essentially Back-Bench business debates, so we have done rather better than the bald figures indicate.

Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con) [V]: My constituency, Wakefield, close to the heart of God's own country, is—as you know, Mr Speaker—a wonderful place to visit, work or live in. It generally enjoys a fine

climate, blessed to it by the beneficent creator we are familiar with from the Gospels. On occasion, however, we have witnessed tempests more reminiscent of the Old Testament, and at such times Wakefield suffers severe flooding. Since being elected, I have aided my constituents in battling floods—most recently, just last week during Storm Christoph. With this in mind, will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House find Government time for a debate on the state of Wakefield's flood defences and those of the wider Calder river system?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I did not realise that Wakefield had moved to Somerset and was therefore in God's own county, but I will accept my hon. Friend's suggestion; of course, we remember that Christ was taken to Glastonbury by Joseph of Arimathea, and that is why we have such a claim to being a divine county.

I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this point, because it is vital that we tackle flooding across the country and guard against it in future. As I said earlier, the Government are spending £5.2 billion on flood and coastal defence schemes over the next six years, and we have spent £2.6 billion between 2015 and 2021 to protect 300,000 homes. We are obviously working with communities and local authorities to make sure that this money is spent wherever the risk is highest, and where it will benefit the most people and property, so my hon. Friend will not have to build an ark and go in two by two.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP) [V]: The UK Government's proposed Turing scheme is at every level a pale imitation of Erasmus, not least the funding of £105 million compared with the educational and fraternal powerhouse of Erasmus and its budget of £26.2 billion over seven years. Turing offers no funding to the international partners that we need to allow mobilities; it offers no support at all for adult education or youth work centres; and support for our colleges and schools will be drastically reduced. Can we have a debate in Government time on the incompetence of this Government's damaging educational opportunity in Scotland, with specific reference to the provisions made under the 1707 Acts of Union?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is always a delight to debate the virtues of the Acts of Union and what they did to create such a strong United Kingdom, to the benefit of everybody throughout the whole United Kingdom. I remind the hon. Gentleman of the £8.6 billion that the United Kingdom taxpayer has provided to help Scotland.

The Turing scheme will be backed by £100 million and will look at a broader horizon, rather than a narrow European horizon—we will turn our eyes to the whole of the world and it will provide UK students with the opportunity to study all over the world. It will potentially help 35,000 students in universities, colleges and schools to go on study and work placements overseas, starting in September 2021. The continuation of Erasmus would have cost the taxpayer £2 billion and we would have got less out of it than we put in. That would not have been fair on our taxpayers.

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con) [V]: The eviction ban has been a positive policy overall, but my constituent Andy has experienced the negative side of it. His tenants have used it as an excuse not to pay their rent, even

[David Johnston]

though they have remained in full-time employment and have even abused him for requesting it. They are now in serious arrears and, as it is his main income, he is seriously out of pocket. May we have a debate on supporting our constituents in respect of the unintended consequences of policies designed to support people, not to allow others to take advantage of them?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Government continue, in all our guidance and communications, to urge tenants to pay their rent wherever possible and to speak to their landlord at the earliest opportunity if they have any difficulties in doing so. We have put in place a significant financial package to help tenants to pay their rent, including through support for businesses to pay salaries and the boosting of the welfare safety net. Our package of measures strikes a fair balance. Landlords can now action possession claims through the courts, although currently bailiffs cannot enforce evictions. There are exemptions for the most serious cases, such as antisocial behaviour and arrears equivalent to six months' rent. It is important to strike a balance between the interests of tenants and those of landlords, many of whom, as with my hon. Friend's constituent, own only one property and are dependent on the income from it.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: The Leader of the House will be aware from my previous questions of the concerns of thousands of my residents in Cardiff South and Penarth who are affected by fire and building safety defects, and of the need for UK Government legislative action on the issue. He will know that this concern is shared throughout the House. Will he be clear about when the Lords amendments to the Fire Safety Bill will come back to this House; whether there will be adequate time to discuss the many excellent amendments that have been tabled, including by my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition; and when the draft Building Safety Bill will be brought before the House? My residents want to see action and they do not want leaseholders to have to pay the costs of the terrible defects in their buildings.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I will make announcements about business in the normal way. Of course, there is a natural progression of Bills. I should point out that 100% of Grenfell-style cladding either has been removed or is in the process of being removed from social housing, and the proportion is 90% across all housing. The taxpayer has provided £1.6 billion to facilitate that. What the hon. Gentleman asks about is being taken very seriously and steps are being taken, but Bills will receive their passage in the normal way.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) [V]: My right hon. Friend will be aware that last week the deeply unpopular Streetspace scheme was found by the High Court to be unlawful because of the failure to consult residents, the failure to take into account the impact on taxi drivers and the failure to take into account the disabled and other protected characteristics. The schemes across London have cost millions of pounds, but the verdict has an effect right across the country, where road closures and cycle lanes are being put into place without proper consultation. Sadly, I was unsuccessful in the shuffle for Transport questions, so may we have a

statement from the Secretary of State for Transport to the House on the impact of the verdict on the various schemes throughout the country, and particularly in London?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is very wise in how he uses the House's mechanisms, because the lines I have here come from the Department for Transport, although I would add my own line that the car-hating Mayor of London wanted to do his best to upset motorists, and neither is he very fond of taxi drivers, who Disraeli called the gondoliers of London and who should always be respected and admired for the work they do.

It would be wrong of me to comment on the specific judgment because it may be under appeal from Transport for London and it is not proper to discuss current legal cases. However, the Government have made it clear to local authorities that they must consider the effect on all road users when developing cycling and walking schemes through the active travel fund. Allocations from tranche 2 of the active travel fund were announced last November. These were subject to LAs demonstrating that they have consulted local communities on proposed schemes. The Government's additional network management duty guidance on reallocating road space was updated in November alongside the tranche 2 announcements and strengthens the advice on consulting disabled people. It recommends that authorities carry out quality impact assessments and reminds them of their duties under equalities legislation. But I think the real answer to my hon. Friend is: vote Conservative in the local elections and let us have a Tory Mayor.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab) [V]: It is a bit disappointing that the Leader of the House, my constituency neighbour, does not take more seriously the need to tackle air pollution, but I want to ask about something else today. Two weeks ago, he suggested that fish "are now British fish, and they are better and happier fish for it."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 2021; Vol. 687, c. 510.] Obviously he was being a bit silly, which he likes to do from time to time, but if he does really care about the emotional wellbeing of fish, or any other sentient beings, above and beyond nurturing their sense of national identity, perhaps he might find parliamentary time to bring forward the animal sentience Bill that was promised to this House as long ago as 2017. There is no excuse for the delay and no excuse for breaking that promise to the House, so can he just get on with it?

Mr Rees-Mogg: First, I do not know why the hon. Lady thinks I do not mind about air pollution, which is a matter of great seriousness. It has to be remembered that it was the last socialist Government who encouraged people to have the diesel cars that have done so much damage to our air quality. She ought to remember that when phrasing her questions. On the animal sentience Bill, it was in the manifesto and there is every intention of bringing it forward. The Government are going to meet their manifesto commitments.

Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con) [V]: On 15 February last year, Emily Moore from my constituency died while in a local mental health facility. Emily had committed suicide just days after her eighteenth birthday. Her father David has been campaigning hard for better mental health support for young people. In the context

of covid, there are widespread concerns about the detrimental impact of the pandemic on mental health. Is it possible to have a debate on this in Government time to see whether we in this House can find solutions to help to ensure that no young person has to follow Emily's fate?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am incredibly sorry to hear about the death of my hon. Friend's constituent, Emily. We pray for her soul and for the comfort of her family, and those who are bereaved.

As a society we need to do everything we can to support vulnerable and at-risk people, as well as those in crisis, and give them the help they desperately need. This is particularly true during the pandemic. We recently had Brew Monday with the Samaritans, raised by the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist), and that is something also to bear in mind. The Government are putting more money into and taking more action on mental health than any previous Government. Mental health funding increased to £13.3 billion in 2019-20.

The Government are clear that the best place for children to be is in school for their learning, development and mental health. That is why we have done all we can to keep schools open through this pandemic. For those children who may be struggling with their mental health, schools have the flexibility to offer a place to vulnerable children, who might include those for whom being in school helps them to manage their mental health. Schools will continue to offer pastoral support to pupils working remotely, supported by £8 million of taxpayers' money that the Government have provided for wellbeing training and advice, while Public Health England has provided guidance for parents and carers on supporting children's and young people's mental health and wellbeing. What Emily's family are campaigning for is something that I think we all support.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD) [V]: Last week, the Education Secretary announced that the teaching grant would be removed from high-cost C1 subjects while support for strategic subjects would increase. This would severely impact institutions like Bath Spa University, which the Leader of the House and I share in our constituencies. From product design to computer software engineering to the creative arts, these subjects are vital to our economy and our wellbeing. Can we have a debate in Government time on the enormous value of creative subjects and their role in rebuilding our economy when recovering after the corona crisis?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady mentions Bath Spa University—its main campus is in North East Somerset, at Newton St Loe—which is a very fine establishment. In all decisions of this kind, there are difficult balances to be made when allocating resources. There are not unlimited resources and there are many things that clamour for taxpayers' money, so it is really a question of getting that balance right.

Mr Speaker: Thinking of Alfred the Great, let us go to Ian Liddell-Grainger.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con) [V]: Mr Speaker, thank you. I was worried to hear that some of our colleagues do not realise that Somerset is God's county.

My right hon. Friend will remember that the Vikings were very pleased to get other people's money. They begged it, borrowed it, stole it, buried it. Unfortunately, that is what has been happening in the county council: it has been hoarding the covid grants. It thought it had been given £32 million, as it said publicly. It turns out that the accountants tell it that it has been given £80 million, which is what it should be using for covid. We want to know what has happened to the money, and we want to see the proof.

Unfortunately, this county council wants to become a unitary, which is going to be disastrous for the people of Somerset. We need a full-county solution and we need a debate. King Alfred and I would love such a debate, and I wonder if my right hon. Friend will be so kind as to give it to us both.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend, as always, raises an important point. I am delighted to hear that the council has found more money. It sounds rather like the card in Monopoly that says, "Banking error in your favour", which very rarely seems to happen in real life, but clearly has happened in Somerset.

I have indeed received communications from the county council about what it calls its "One Somerset" proposal. The problem with this is that it does not include the whole of Somerset—it leaves out both North Somerset, and Bath and North East Somerset—and it is always an irritation when people pretend to represent the whole great county of Somerset when they are only representing a part of it.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab) [V]: The North East Joint Transport Committee's "Connected North East" blueprint sets out vital asks of Government to upgrade our regional transport and digital connectivity in order to rebuild and revitalise our economy and communities post covid, including long-overdue upgrades to the congested east coast main line and long-distance high-speed rail services calling at Newcastle airport. Can we therefore find time for a debate on how the Government will support north-east communities to deliver this ambitious package, developed by our region for our region, so that the north-east can forge its prosperous future?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I hope the hon. Lady is pleased that we have managed to find time for a Petitions Committee debate, which I promised I would do when Westminster Hall was temporarily closed.

The Government have a record infrastructure programme, with £600 billion in the next five years to deliver on the promise to upgrade and level up infrastructure. That is for roads and railways, along with gigabit broadband and 5G. On railways, there is £40 billion for rail, including £17.5 billion for renewal and upgrades over the next three years. So there is money available, it is being spent and the hon. Lady is right to petition for it for her part of the country.

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con) [V]: With covid cases in remote rural North Devon at 60 per 100,000, neighbouring Torridge at 50 per 100,000 and our hospital having just seven cases currently, will my right hon. Friend secure Government time to debate the timing of schools being able to fully reopen? With some of the

[Selaine Saxby]

worst broadband in the country, no visitors travelling into the area and the vaccine roll-out going well—and thanks to residents who have consistently kept cases below the national average—is there an opportunity for some Devon schools to have early confirmation that the good work being done in keeping infection rates down will result in schools opening on 8 March, if not earlier?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Government's priority every step of the way has been making sure that no young person would be disadvantaged by the situation we are in and returning to face-to-face learning as soon as we possibly can, while giving a fortnight's notice for schools to reopen. There is support for children who may be falling behind. There is the £650 million catch-up premium, helping schools to support all pupils this academic year—worth £80 per pupil in most schools and £240 per pupil in special schools—in addition to the £350 million national tutoring programme targeted at the most disadvantaged students. The Government will set out plans as soon as we reasonably can, but as I said in response to the right hon. Lady the shadow Leader of the House, the certainty that is asked for cannot necessarily be given with an evolving pandemic.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab) [V]: The Government's kickstart scheme seems to need exactly that. Despite the Chancellor's trumpeting of the scheme, the experience for many businesses, training providers and those bidding for contracts is of frustration, bureaucracy and receiving no feedback on why bids are rejected. The reality is that the scheme has delivered only 2,000 jobs for young people on the ground. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a Government debate or a statement to inform the House of what the Government intend to do to get the scheme back on track?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The kickstart scheme is really important in helping young people get employment. It is rolling out and it will help young people. Of course, if the hon. Gentleman has any specific concerns, or if there are specific areas where he thinks things could be improved, if he would like to send them to me, I will pass them on to the Secretary of State.

Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): As my right hon. Friend will know, Derbyshire Dales again experienced flooding last week due to Storm Christoph. The River Wye in Bakewell burst its banks and homes were flooded, causing serious damage and much anguish. This is now a near-annual event. Will my right hon. Friend allow time for a debate on the effective long-term management of the River Wye and the River Derwent, so that my constituents can sleep easy in their beds when it rains?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is not the first Member to raise this issue this morning; it is clearly a matter of concern across the House and the country. I reiterate the figures on the planned expenditure—the £5.2 billion. There is a worry for people where flood defences are imperfect, and it is important that that money is spent effectively, in addition to the money being spent to repair defences. The shadow Leader of the House raised the state of repair of some flood defences. I know from

my own county, when the Somerset levels flooded—not in my constituency, but nearby—the terrible effect this has on families and businesses. It is something that the Government are working hard to deal with. As regards the specifics on the Derwent and the Wye, I suggest that that is a matter for an Adjournment debate.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind) [V]: Diolch, Mr Speaker. I thank the Leader of the House for addressing my issue with proxy voting. I am grateful to him. News broke last night that a DVLA worker has sadly passed away following a positive covid test. From my conversations with constituents, it appears that the Prime Minister was poorly briefed in his answer yesterday. The testing system he refers to has not been applied uniformly across the DVLA estate. In the main building, workers are cramped on each floor in an environment that appears not to be covid-secure. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Transport to come to the House to make a statement, so that Welsh MPs are able to convey the concerns of our constituents, because his answer earlier today will not have alleviated them?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As I understand it, the DVLA has worked hard to make its Swansea headquarters covid-safe and has carried out, I think, 2,000 tests to detect covid within its workforce. Out of that workforce, the number I am aware of who have tested positive for covid over the course of the pandemic is in line with, if not below, the national average. It is important to remember that the DVLA carries out an absolutely essential service that needs to be done within an office environment. Driving licences and vehicle documentation need to be printed securely—it is not work that can easily be done from home. Dare I say that points need to be deducted from people's licences securely when that unfortunate occurrence may arise? The DVLA needs to have people physically present, but I believe it is working hard to ensure its headquarters is a covid-safe environment.

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con) [V]: May I add my voice to those Members who have highlighted the importance of marking International Women's Day this year? The theme this year is Choose to Challenge, with events across the country and abroad, celebrating women's achievements and raising awareness of the inequality and bias that, sadly, still remain for too many women and girls across the globe. May I ask on behalf of the all-party parliamentary group on women in Parliament, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), whether my right hon. Friend will please agree to a debate in this place in Government time to mark International Women's Day?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I refer my hon. Friend to my earlier answer that this is a matter for the Backbench Business Committee. It is why it was given so much time in the Chamber, so that it could take care of these very important debates, such as the one that we are having later today for the holocaust memorial. I would add that the Government prioritise the rights of women and have done a great deal of work in terms of their international aid budget regarding the education of women and girls to ensure that girls up to the age of 12 receive an education, and therefore it is a governmental priority.

Mr Speaker: May I just add that the House Service will also be recognising International Women's Day?

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): Shopworkers, particularly those in supermarkets and other food stores, have really been on the frontline during this pandemic, keeping us supplied with the essentials of life. They do not have the option of working from home. Yet, too often, retail workers face abuse and poor treatment from a few customers. Just yesterday, one of my staff witnessed a shopworker being spat at for asking someone to wear a mask going into the store. Can we have a debate in Government time on the impact of covid-19 on retail workers?

Mr Rees-Mogg: May I begin by saying that I hope the hon. Lady did not mind my mentioning her earlier, without having given her notice, with regard to the Samaritans, but as I saw that she was in the Chamber, I hoped that she would take it as a compliment?

The issue that the hon. Lady raises is a really serious one. The protection of the vital work done by people in supermarkets is one that we should not forget. We often talk about the vital work done by people in the emergency services, but, actually, during this pandemic, ensuring that people have access to the necessities of life has been courageously done by shop workers across the country. They are protected by the normal law, and if somebody has spat at a worker in a supermarket, that is illegal and the police should be notified and the law should be enforced. Certainly, the Government will do everything they can to encourage the correct enforcement of the law.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con) [V]: If vaccination is, as he believes, the cavalry riding to our rescue, may we confidently expect a statement from the Prime Minister as soon as the vulnerable have had their jabs and absorbed them on how he will lift restrictions in an orderly way and set the people free?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am always a bit nervous about these military analogies, though the distinguished Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee will know a great deal more about this than I do, because some cavalry charges are more successful than others. It depends whether we are talking about Omdurman or—[*Interruption.*] Balaclava, indeed. Thank you for that helpful prompt, Mr Speaker. None the less, my right hon. Friend makes a very important point. The delivery of a safe and effective vaccine is the best way to protect the most vulnerable and save thousands of lives, and great strides are being made in protecting the population. There remains a long and difficult road ahead and there will be a considerable time lag until we can expect these vaccinations to help ease pressure on the NHS, bearing in mind that it takes a fortnight from vaccination for the vaccine to begin to take its effect. If we succeed, we will be protecting huge numbers of people from the virus. Eventually, that will allow us to remove many of the restrictions that we have endured for so long. It is wonderful that the Prime Minister is in Scotland today visiting Valneva. We are rolling out more vaccines potentially and this has had great support from Her Majesty's Government.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP) [V]: The Ministry of Defence recently disclosed to me that Saudi armed forces were trained with £2.4 million

of taxpayers' money from the secretive integrated activity fund. Can we therefore have a debate in Government time on British security support to Gulf countries with abysmal human rights records, such as Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, that continue to wage a disastrous war in Yemen while imprisoning hundreds of peaceful political prisoners, such as Hasan Mushaima, who should be immediately freed?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Government have very strict rules, both on arms sales and on our relationships with countries around the world in terms of military development. These matters are regularly debated in the House. We work with our allies to help them in their military, and it is right and proper that we should do so, but we also maintain the highest standards of human rights.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con) [V]: May we have an update from the Leader of the House on the progress of the restoration and renewal programme for the Palace of Westminster?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is a model of brevity in her questions. I will not be quite so brief in the answer, because this is a key subject. The Sponsor Body is due to publish its strategic review on the restoration and renewal programme soon. That will enable the parties involved to consider options in the light of the economic effect of the coronavirus. As Leader of the House, I want to ensure that the Palace of Westminster remains the home of our democracy for future generations. In the first instance, that means getting on with the works that are immediately possible; restoration and renewal should not be used as a cause for delaying works that everyone knows need to take place—I am thinking of things such as the restoration of the Victoria Tower, which the Commons, at any rate, is keen to proceed with, and, in particular, works relating to fire safety. A great deal has been done on that, but concerns have recently been raised with me about the hammer-beam roof in Westminster Hall, and I would make that an absolute priority in terms of fire safety. It has lasted since the reign of Richard II and I hope it can last another 700-odd years. I hope I will still be here then and you too, Mr Speaker—[*Interruption.*] Well, 700, I am not that ambitious! I am glad that progress has been made on reducing the fire risk already, but more is required, which is why it is good news that the Sponsor Body and the Delivery Authority, which were established in legislation during my time as Leader of the House, are on schedule to prepare options for Parliament to consider in a timely fashion. When we come to consider those options, we need to be anxious to ensure that taxpayers' money is spent on vital works, not on a gold-plated scheme. We have to explain to our constituents when we spend money on ourselves, so the vital works test will be a key one. As we save the Palace, there must be no blank cheque.

Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab) [V]: Last week, the Prime Minister disagreed with me when referring to the conclusions of experts, doctors and others on the role of structural racism in the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. Surely any vaccine hesitancy strategy must include addressing that if it is to maximise its success. Although the Government have not heeded calls to prioritise these communities for

[Apsana Begum]

vaccine roll-out, they have finally begun to see some sense and, as I understand it, will now at least record ethnicity data as part of the roll-out. Will the Leader of the House confirm whether the Government will consider allocating time to debate the evidence on the success of the vaccine roll-out, particularly in relation to the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on BAME communities? Does he agree that it would be helpful for the vaccine ethnicity data to be publicly released regularly, not least to inform this House's debates accordingly?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend the Minister for Equalities has been looking into the effects of the coronavirus on minority communities, and has reported and spoken to the House about it before. Obviously, this is an issue of concern and I am sure it will be brought up in the House in future. As regards the vaccine, I think the hon. Lady is extremely helpful in raising this issue, because she can help get across the message, better than I can, that this vaccine is safe for all communities and all communities should be encouraged to come forward for it. That is certainly what the Government are trying to ensure happens, but her help in doing this, with her constituents and more widely, is extremely welcome, and I am grateful to her.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con) [V]: Due to the excellent progress in rolling out the vaccines, we can start to look ahead with increasing clarity. One sector of business that has faced real hardship is the conference industry, a sector with a long and diverse supply chain, ranging from hospitality to exhibition stand construction. Please may we have a debate about that sector, to consider what can be done to ensure that it bounces back quickly, as it is so important for jobs and it is central to the economy of not only Harrogate and Knaresborough, but, of course, other constituencies around the UK?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Her Majesty's Government recognise that the conferencing and wider events and exhibitions sector has been most severely affected by covid-19. The Government also recognise that in normal times, the sector makes a significant economic contribution to the UK, not just in direct expenditure by business visitors, but through the trade transacted at events, so it is unfortunate that this has not been able to resume. While activity is prohibited, event venues and organisers can make use of the Government's economic support package, including the coronavirus job retention scheme and the various grant schemes. I join my hon. Friend in praising the Harrogate convention centre for becoming a Nightingale hospital and therefore being able to help the community widely.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Now that we have taken back control and parliamentary sovereignty has been restored, how will the Government respond to resolutions made by the House on motions proposed by Opposition parties? In the past two weeks, the House has agreed four propositions, with cross-party support and no dissent, after the Government withdrew their amendments. How or when will the Government respond to those resolutions of the House, as they did during the 2017-19 Parliament?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As a general rule, the Government respond to debates during the debate. The Government's position is set out from the Dispatch Box, at both the opening and closing of the debate, but it is important to remember the structures of the House and that resolutions of this House regarding expenditure have to come on Crown initiative. This is an important constitutional point. The House of Commons is here to challenge the Government over their expenditure, not to tell the Government to make expenditure, so all motions must be considered in the context of understanding the constitutional significance of Crown initiative on expenditure.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend continue to ensure regular updates to the House on Britain's world-leading vaccination roll-out programme? Will he join me in praising Northamptonshire NHS, which has one of the very best records in the whole country for the vaccine? As of yesterday, 86,000 Northamptonshire residents have been vaccinated, which includes 86% of those over 80 and 66% of those over 75.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I congratulate Northamptonshire on its success. I am sure it is down to having my hon. Friend as a Member of Parliament that it has done so well, because he is an absolute champion for his constituency and for his county. The figure I have is that so far, 7,164,387 have been vaccinated. Yes, the House will be kept up to date, though I note that Sky News has a fantastic website that has a number spinning up so that one can see exactly how many vaccinations have taken place. I hope it has not been updated since I have been in the Chamber, but over 7 million is very impressive. More than 80% of over-80s have now been vaccinated, along with more than 75% of elderly care home residents, so great progress is being made, and it is obviously important to ensure that the House is kept informed of that success.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD) [V]: I thank the Leader of the House for writing to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on 20 January, asking the Minister to respond to me on the various questions I have raised on fire safety. I am also grateful that the official Opposition will be using their debate on Monday to discuss fire safety, but we still need the Government to review the programme motion on the Fire Safety Bill to allow more time to properly debate the various amendments tabled by Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs to protect leaseholders from exorbitant costs. Can the Leader of the House update us on any conversations he has had with the Secretary of State in that regard?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I actually wrote to the hon. Lady yesterday with some news on chasing the Department for a response for her. As regards the programme motion for when Lords amendments come back, what she says and asks for has been heard and noted, but that is not a promise of any change; it is merely a recognition that it is not an entirely unreasonable request.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con) [V]: Given the success of the stamp duty holiday in boosting home sales, will the Chancellor of Exchequer come to the House to make a statement on extending the holiday until the end of 2021 to help shore up economic growth and avoid the risk of a slump in the housing industry at a critical time?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think I am not allowed to refer hon. Members to what I wrote on this subject before I joined the Government—which are, of course, not necessarily the views I hold any more. I will undoubtedly make representations on behalf of my hon. Friend to the Chancellor, because it is worth bearing in mind that cutting stamp duty has boosted an industry that employs nearly 750,000 people. However, it is also worth bearing in mind that the Government need some revenue to pay for all that the Government have to do.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Thank you for allowing me to raise a point of order in relation to what I believe was a misleading statement made by the Prime Minister yesterday. He said—

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot use the word “misleading”.

Hon. Members: Inadvertently.

Mr Speaker: Yes, “inadvertently” would be a nicer way of dealing with it.

Jim McMahon: I am more than happy to take that advice, Mr Speaker. Thank you.

The Prime Minister said:

“It was only recently that the shadow Transport Secretary was saying that quarantine measures should be relaxed.”—[*Official Report*, 27 January 2021; Vol. 688, c. 366.]

He went on to repeat a similar comment. This relates to a statement that was made over 200 days ago in July last year and had nothing at all to do with current regulations or our current covid rates. It was in response to the Government themselves lifting quarantine restrictions for a list of countries. We have been critical of the Government for failing to have a proper track and trace system and failing to do pre-screening and testing on arrival, so, far from calling for relaxation, we were criticising the Government for their own failures. I think the record should be put straight.

Mr Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair, but hopefully those on the Treasury Bench will have picked up on it. If nothing else, it is now on the record. I will now suspend the House for three minutes to enable the necessary arrangements for the next business to be made.

11.41 am

Sitting suspended.

Backbench Business

Holocaust Memorial Day 2021

11.44 am

Mr Speaker: We now come to the general debate on Holocaust Memorial Day 2021. It may be helpful to inform the House that the debate is likely to run until 3.45.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Holocaust Memorial Day 2021.

It is a privilege to open this important debate to mark Holocaust Memorial Day, which took place yesterday, 27 January, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, which remains one of the most dark and horrific crime scenes of world history. I would like to thank in particular the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) and the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for co-sponsoring this debate.

Over the past 20 years, Holocaust Memorial Day has become an important part of our national life, with the numbers of events growing every year. That is largely down to the incredible work of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, and the Holocaust Educational Trust, which both work tirelessly to ensure that the collective memory of the holocaust is renewed and strengthened with every passing year. The pandemic has meant that this memorial day has been marked in different ways, but nevertheless thousands of activities have taken place across the country, using resources that the HMDT developed to support online commemorations.

Normally, Members from across the House would have had the opportunity to sign a book of commitment organised by the Holocaust Educational Trust, in which we remember the victims of the holocaust, and pledge to fight against hatred, racism and antisemitism, wherever we see it. Last night we were all able, wherever we were in the UK, to participate in the first fully digital national holocaust commemorative ceremony.

Holocaust Memorial Day is when we remember the millions of people murdered under Nazi persecution, and in the genocides that followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Darfur. The theme this year is “Be the light in the darkness”, and at the close of the ceremony last night we lit candles. Those candles symbolised the lives of those who were murdered in the death camps and subsequent genocides, as well as the lives of the survivors who still live and walk among us, and those who have passed away.

The candles also represented hope—the hope that comes from a collective determination never to allow such atrocities to take place again; the hope that comes from standing together against antisemitism and all forms of prejudice. As the years pass by, the number of men and women who witnessed and survived the holocaust sadly gets smaller, and it is an incredible privilege to meet those survivors and hear their extraordinary testimonies. They are stories of courage, survival, hope, and forgiveness, in the face of unthinkable horror and suffering.

[Stephen Crabb]

A few years ago I had the privilege of meeting Lily Ebert, now aged 97, who survived Auschwitz. Lily is a remarkable woman, a true survivor. Just last week she went for her first walk, having recovered from covid-19. Susan Pollack moved many of us to tears at the Conservative conference in 2018, by recounting her experiences as a young girl in both Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. Many have said this before, and it is so true, that meeting these survivors is an unforgettable experience. I am always left stunned and humbled by their capacity for forgiveness, and the choice to love those who showed them only hate and violence. That is light in darkness.

I pay tribute to the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust, which enables young people to understand the past, and empowers them to stand up against antisemitism and prejudice in all its forms. In March last year, due to the pandemic the trust was forced to suspend its overseas projects and in-person educational programmes, but it has quickly adapted to ensure that its work is continued at an impressive scale online, with survivors using video calls to share their testimonies. The responses shared on social media afterwards show how strikingly powerful those sessions are, especially for young people.

Holocaust Memorial Day is about remembrance, but it should also be a moment that moves us to consider the darkness still around us today. I am talking about the cancer of antisemitism that even now eats away inside some of our institutions, and that spawns and thrives on social media, and casts dark shadows across our own society and those of some of our closest neighbours.

Take, for example, the Halle synagogue attack in Germany in October 2019. The synagogue was targeted in an antisemitic attack, and the armed attacker unsuccessfully tried to enter the synagogue, before fatally shooting two non-Jewish victims and injuring two others. The perpetrator espoused radical far-right views. He was an antisemite and holocaust denier. He livestreamed his actions so that they could be celebrated in dark places online.

Even closer to home, we could look at what is happening in our universities. I am sure that some colleagues will want to raise that this afternoon. How can it be that Jewish students in this country do not feel protected by our institutions, places of openness and learning turned into dark corners where Jewish young people experience fear? The adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance modern definition of antisemitism should merely be the first step in tackling rising levels of antisemitism, yet even that is seen as too much to ask for from some universities, whose academics spuriously claim that the definition would shut down legitimate debate about Israeli Government policies.

We must not shy away from the reality that modern antisemitism invariably morphs into anti-Zionism and the demonisation of Israel itself. The late Rabbi Lord Sacks, a man of extraordinary wisdom and kindness, once said:

“One of the enduring facts of history is that most anti-Semites do not think of themselves as anti-Semites. ‘We don’t hate Jews’, they said in the Middle Ages, ‘just their religion’. ‘We don’t hate Jews’, they said in the 19th century, ‘just their race’. ‘We don’t hate Jews’, they say now, ‘just their nation state’.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 13 September 2018; Vol. 792, c. 2413.]

I have had the privilege of visiting Yad Vashem, Israel’s holocaust memorial, on numerous occasions, and I find each experience deeply moving. On leaving the museum, visitors walk out on to a balcony overlooking a vista of Jerusalem, and it is impossible not to reflect on the place of sanctuary and refuge that the nation state of Israel continues to provide for Jews still fleeing persecution today.

Holocaust Memorial Day is also about remembering the other genocides the world has witnessed. I think about the people I met in 1998 in the Bosnian town of Foča, a town described by Human Rights Watch as a “closed, dark place”, which saw the systematic removal of its Muslim population by Serb forces in a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing. It saw forced detention, rape, expulsions, murder on a horrific scale, and destruction of historic mosques and other cultural sites.

I think too of the victims and the survivors of the Rwandan genocide, which happened right under the noses of the international community in 1994. I, along with numerous colleagues in my party, used to spend part of my summer recess in Rwanda with Project Umubano, which was founded by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell). On each of those visits, we would visit the genocide memorial in Kigali, where we would lay a wreath. We had the opportunity to hear the testimonies of survivors—people such as the wonderful Freddy Mutanguha, who was one of the 95,000 children and teenagers in Rwanda orphaned during those terrible three months between April and July ’94. In Rwanda, the dark places of genocide were the beautiful green hillsides, the churches, the sports grounds.

One of the lessons of those visits is that genocides do not happen by accident. They follow a pattern. They require planning. It requires powerful people to deliberate and take calculated decisions to persecute and, ultimately, visit death upon entire communities. Weapons and implements of torture and murder need to be bought, acquired, constructed. Genocides require ideologies to flourish that focus on differences between people and groups—ideologies that glorify strength and superiority, that systematically dehumanise minorities. Those ideologies infect school rooms, universities, bars and individual homes. They are ideologies that create those dark places where the unthinkable somehow becomes justifiable and even normal.

It requires methods of mass communication and propaganda—radio, television and, in our own age, the unregulated channels of social media—to turn communities against each other. Most of all, genocides require people to turn a blind eye—neighbours, work colleagues, friends, even family members. Genocides require people to turn away. They require good people to do nothing.

I believe that darkness threatens every new generation. Old hatreds resurface time and again. Maybe they never fully go away and are just waiting for vehicles to emerge to legitimise and breathe new life into them at opportune moments. Being light in darkness means staying vigilant against that, it means having the clarity to identify it, and it means having the courage to confront it and push back wherever possible—in our national institutions, in our own political parties, on social media, in our own constituencies. None of those is an easy thing to do, but on Holocaust Memorial Day we take renewed strength from being able to stand

together, reflect on the events of the past and pledge to honour the memory of those whose lives were taken, by doing more—by doing what we can—to stand up against prejudice, antisemitism and hatred in all its forms.

Mr Speaker: We will start with a three-minute limit, in order to accommodate all Members who wish to contribute to this very, very important debate.

11.55 am

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab) [V]: I congratulate the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) on his very good contribution. It seems incomprehensible that so many people were complicit by their action or inaction in the uniquely horrific extermination of 6 million Jews, yet the holocaust is not an isolated genocide. Today, Uyghurs and Rohingyas are living through the nightmare of persecution, segregation, imprisonment and murder. Only by acting together, confronting prejudice and hate and being the light in the darkness can we conquer this evil.

I recently read my grandfather's diaries, written when he escaped to Britain from Austria. Old and ill, he was interned in Huyton because he was deemed an enemy alien. His diaries reveal the trauma, the constant worry about relatives and the challenges faced by refugees. An eternal optimist, his diaries also describe the talent imprisoned with him—musicians, artists and academics—and that made me realise how many brilliant philosophers, musicians and scientists were lost because they were murdered by the Nazis.

As holocaust survivors inevitably die, it falls to us to keep the knowledge of what happened alive. My grandmother's letter, written nine days before she was killed, in which she says twice, "Don't forget me completely", sealed my determination to fight racism and antisemitism wherever and whenever I meet it.

When I was first an MP, I was a Labour MP who happened to be Jewish, but when antisemitism moved to the mainstream of my party, I became a Jewish Labour MP—my identity interwoven with my work. The last five years have been difficult, long and lonely. I did enjoy support from the brave activists in the Jewish Labour Movement and from those colleagues who did call out antisemitism, and I will never forget the friendship and support between the four Jewish Labour women: Louise Ellman, Ruth Smeeth, Luciana Berger and myself. It was the women who stood together, worked together and simply would not give up. The tragedy is that they are no longer MPs. I salute their brave contribution, and I miss them.

A year has made a huge difference. By his actions, our party's new leader is demonstrating zero tolerance of Jew hate, not just suspending and expelling individuals but transforming our culture and re-establishing trust with the Jewish community, who were hurt and genuinely frightened. As a party, we are finally focused on eliminating antisemitism, responding to the shameful findings of the Equality and Human Rights Commission report and restoring our core values.

The history of the Jews and our knowledge of present-day genocides tells us that if we ignore prejudice and hate, it can deepen and destroy. I came into politics to fight racism, so I will always do all I can to nurture the light and conquer the darkness.

11.58 am

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I bow in respect to the first two speeches, and I expect they will be matched by those that follow.

"We remember those who were murdered for who they were. We stand against prejudice, hostility and division in the world today. We learn from the tragedies and horrors of the past. We work towards a better future."

Those were the words put out with the photograph of the candle we lit last night. Had I been born in the Dutch Jewish line of my family, I could have died at Bergen-Belsen with many of the other 113 members of my grandfather's extended family.

The purpose of the holocaust memorial and education centre is for us to know, to care and to act, whatever our heritage. It may be that the Secretary of State will announce that if the proposed national heritage memorial and learning centre is built—whether it is built in Victoria Tower Gardens or not—then entry will be free. We have always assumed it would be free, but the Government were not able to say that. What the Government did say through its agency is that the bulk of the money should be spent on education, not on construction.

The proposal in September 2015 was that the centre should be completed by 2020, a year ago, that it should have the support of the local authority wherever it was to be built, and that it could be built anywhere within 3 miles of London on a suitable site. Page 10 of the publication showed that and included: west of Regent's park; Spitalfields; most of Southwark, including the Imperial War Museum—

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick) *indicated dissent.*

Sir Peter Bottomley: The Secretary of State may shake his head. He will have his chance to speak. I ask him at the moment to listen, if I may. I respect him and I respect what he tries to do, but I ask him to publish the analysis done before 2016 of the sites at the Imperial War Museum and Victoria Tower Gardens. I will publish what I know. He will need to consider what he is putting forward and his deputy needs to say whether he can seriously make a decision on the Secretary of State's behalf when the Government are so implicated in an inappropriate scheme in an inappropriate place, with a design not accepted in Ottawa.

12.1 pm

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab) [V]: I would like to pay tribute to all the Members who secured this debate. We really should have an annual debate to mark Holocaust Memorial Day.

The indications are, and the figures back this up, that antisemitism is on the rise not just in Britain but across Europe and perhaps elsewhere. For many of us, our own personal experiences, for example those just recounted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), back that up. Our personal experiences support the notion that antisemitism is on the rise in this country and elsewhere. The question is why is that?

I suspect that the reason is at least partly because the events of the holocaust of the 1930s and 1940s, and of world war two, are slipping from memory and into history. I am thinking of all the holocaust survivors who spent their lives touring schools and colleges, writing

[John Cryer]

and speaking, such as Leon Greenman, who lived most of his life in Ilford, close to my constituency. After world war two, Leon spent his life writing and talking about the holocaust. That generation is passing into history.

We know that historically racism often starts with the Jewish community and then spreads to other communities. Even in the middle ages, the crusaders started by massacring Jewish communities across Europe before they started their genocidal mayhem against Muslims in the Holy Land. We also know that holocaust denial, or perhaps not so much holocaust denial as a tendency to say, “Well, there are a number of interpretations you can make of the holocaust,” is a sort of academic approach to moral relativism. There is a tendency, which is more widespread now than it was a few years ago, to put forward that pseudo-academic view. The question is: is that acceptable? The answer is no, it is not acceptable. The fact is that the holocaust was about one thing: the attempt to wipe an entire race off the face of the planet. It was not about anything else. It was simply that: genocide on a scale that has not been seen before or since. The crucial thing is that every time someone takes a moral relativist approach to the holocaust and its memory, it chips away at its historical integrity and undermines the beliefs of people such as those speaking today who want to remember how it really was.

I pay tribute to the Holocaust Educational Trust and its work in widening and deepening the knowledge of the holocaust. We all have a duty to widen that knowledge and to make sure that in the hearts and minds of future generations that collective memory is carried forward.

12.4 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con) [V]: Like the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), I am a trustee of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, which, as we have heard, is responsible for putting together Holocaust Memorial Day. I hope that Members logged on for last night’s ceremony and the national moment. If they did not, they are in a minority, because people logged on in their tens of thousands. I hope that, like me, they found it a very moving and emotional experience.

Last year, which marked 75 years since the liberation of Auschwitz, I was asked to remember one person in particular who was a victim of Nazi persecution. I decided not to do that. Putting on a yarmulke, I decided to remember all 6 million victims of Nazi persecution, and I remember them all today.

The horror of this genocide has been repeated subsequently. What brought it home to me was when I visited the concentration camp just outside the Polish town of Lublin, and saw an enormous number of plants and flowers growing. They grow so magnificently there because they are all growing on the ashes of human burials. Just think about that: all that beauty coming out of such a tragic and momentarily horrific situation.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn and I wrote an article for the *Daily Mirror* online yesterday, in which we said:

“Speaking as a Christian and a Muslim, respectively, we both know that marking Holocaust Memorial Day is more important than ever. Commemorating the millions of people who were murdered in the Holocaust, under Nazi persecution and in the

genocides that followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur is vital for us to learn where persecution based on faith and identity can lead.”

As the Chief Rabbi said last night:

“If we are all the light in the darkness, think of what a wonderful world we can achieve.”

Let us, in participating in this debate, aim to be that light in the darkness.

12.7 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP) [V]: I begin by thanking my honourable colleagues and co-sponsors of this vital debate, all honourable colleagues who are speaking today, those who have been marking Holocaust Memorial Day, and of course the Backbench Business Committee. Thanks must also go to the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust for its inspirational work; to the Holocaust Educational Trust, led by Karen Pollock, for teaching future generations; to the Community Security Trust; and to Danny Stone and the Antisemitism Policy Trust.

It is crucial that, in remembrance, we do not picture atrocities of genocide perpetrated during the Holocaust as historical events. It is important to reflect on the reality that the seeds of antisemitic distrust, prejudice and hatred were spread years prior to armbands being worn, ghettos being built, trains being loaded and gas chambers being filled.

A recent briefing from the Antisemitism Policy Trust found that throughout history Jewish people have been blamed for diseases and pandemics. Indeed, since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, these age-old tropes have re-emerged in updated forms, on our social media channels and popular antisemitic online forums, such as 4chan and Gab. It did not take long for the virus to be named “the Jew flu”—part of a Zionist agenda to start world war three—or for antisemites online to encourage people deliberately to try to infect Jewish people, as part of the “holocough”.

In its latest report, the Community Security Trust recorded 789 antisemitic incidents that took place across the UK in the first six months of 2020. It would be easy to dismiss the instances outlined as the actions of a deluded fringe, but that would also be foolish and could be deadly. An article published in *The Guardian* last April found that referrals to prevent online radicalisation had fallen by 50% since the start of lockdown, which has created ideal conditions for online predators and trolls to spread hate and lies.

We must do more to stamp out antisemitism on online platforms, call on the social media giants to do more to police such content, and introduce more stringent barriers in the forthcoming online safety Bill. We disrespect the memory of millions who died in the holocaust if we fail to take action to stamp out the recurring lies that culminated in such widespread destruction of life 80 years ago. We are, indeed, arrogant to presume that stereotypes of the past can find no audience in the future. We would therefore do well to live out the theme of this year’s Holocaust Memorial Day—light in the darkness—in our approach to antisemitism going forward.

12.10 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): Three years ago, I stood with the wonderful Susan Pollack, the Auschwitz survivor, at the Kigali memorial site in

Rwanda, the largest burial ground in the world. We were mourning the million who were slaughtered in a 90-day frenzy of killing and brutality in Rwanda. Most of those who took part have been brought to justice, through either the Arusha international tribunal or the Gacaca courts, which have processed hundreds of thousands who have returned to Rwanda from the hills of the Kivus because they see that the process is decent and fair.

The death penalty in Rwanda has been abolished and most countries—including the United States, Canada, Belgium, Sweden and others—have extradited people back to Rwanda. As John Adams said, “Facts are stubborn things”. Living free in Britain today are five alleged Rwandan genocide perpetrators: three were senior Government officials in the 1994 genocidal regime and one of those was allegedly heavily involved in the notorious massacre of 45,000 Tutsis at Murambi—the worst massacre since the second world war.

On 14 September 2006, the British and Rwandan Governments agreed a memorandum of understanding; I first raised this matter in the House on 5 December 2006. Extradition warrants were signed the same month. In 2015, a British district judge ruled that even though there was a *prima facie* case of genocide made out against the five individuals, it could breach their human rights to send them back to Rwanda, and that ruling was upheld on appeal. The Rwandan judicial authorities have given up on British justice and extradition and requested that Britain undertake prosecution here. The authorities indicated that the collection of evidence already laid out in the court papers and filed in the UK via the war crimes unit would take up to 10 years to process.

These are the facts. Living in this country today, free and at large for more than 14 years now, are five people accused of the most heinous of crimes: genocide participation—crimes against humanity. Four out of five are living at the taxpayer’s expense and more than £3 million of taxpayers’ money has been spent on meeting their legal fees. Is it any wonder that in Africa, and in the UK, too, people accuse the British establishment of hypocrisy? To them, it looks suspiciously as if crimes against white Europeans are taken more seriously than those perpetrated against black Africans.

I call upon all those who care about the holocaust, genocide and justice to take up this cause. The souls of the slaughtered Tutsis cry out for justice, but Britain has turned a deaf ear. We should all be ashamed.

12.13 pm

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): It is nearly 76 years since the end of the second world war in Europe, but the lessons that the world needs to learn from the events that culminated in the holocaust remain as relevant today as they were then. The holocaust did not begin and end with Auschwitz and the other extermination camps; its roots lay in the falsehoods and hatred that festered for centuries before and continue to exist today.

In the 1920s and 1930s, that hate and antisemitism was whipped up at rallies, and pamphlets were published that transformed Germany from an advanced liberal democracy into a vicious dictatorship. Today, that poison and those lies have not gone away. We rarely see the mass rallies and events, but the battle has moved online,

where hate speech and holocaust denial can be found at a disturbing level. There are those who hide behind the idea that somehow this should be allowed, under some perverse idea that it is free speech.

The other night, I re-watched the excellent David Baddiel documentary in which he made contact with holocaust deniers. I was particularly struck by his concerns about what he termed to be “soft” holocaust denial—the idea that, yes, something may have gone on, but that it has been exaggerated and somehow blame lies on all sides. This is extremely dangerous. We see today populist Governments in Poland and Hungary seeking to rewrite history, to airbrush out the involvement of their countrymen and women in terrible crimes.

I believe that the holocaust is not just a terrible one-off event that happened in our history, carried out by a madman and his thugs. The truth is very different. Before the establishment of mechanised extermination in death camps, Einsatzgruppen squads followed the German advance into eastern Europe and Russia, shooting over 2 million men, women and children. These groups were led not by so-called thugs but by a university lecturer, a theologian, a doctor. These should be warnings to us about how this can take over.

History teaches us the events of the past, but it is also a warning for our future. The holocaust is a fact. There are no alternative facts, and we should never allow that to be said.

12.16 pm

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con) [V]: I thank the Backbench Business Committee for selecting this timely debate. It is important that we as politicians learn as much as we can about what happens when politics goes wrong, as they did in Germany in the late 1930s and early ’40s under Adolf Hitler’s Nazi party.

I have joined students from my South East Cornwall constituency on a visit to the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland, organised by the Holocaust Educational Trust. There cannot be a starker reminder of the terrible atrocities man can visit upon man. The new museum displays prisoners’ mugshots and substantial amounts of hair, suitcases and shoes taken from murdered prisoners. It is an educational journey I will never forget, and I know the impact it had on the visiting students.

I have also visited Israel with the Conservative Friends of Israel, as declared in my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. Along with colleagues, I visited Yad Vashem, Israel’s holocaust memorial. It was an incredibly moving visit. I found the hall of names particularly poignant. The ceiling of the hall displays 600 photographs and fragments of pages of testimony. Over 2 million of these pages are stored around the hall, a room for the 6 million men, women and children from the diverse Jewish world who were murdered by the Nazis. On the same visit, I attended the national ceremony of Yom HaShoah—Holocaust Remembrance Day.

I have also visited the holocaust exhibition in our own Imperial War Museum, with my husband Bob. The photograph displays and artefacts show dramatically the mass executions carried out as part of the Nazi final solution policy.

At this time of the pandemic, when we cannot travel and should stay at home, it is important that we continue to remember and that we ensure that people can still learn about this terrible time, so that it does not happen

[Mrs Sheryll Murray]

again. The Holocaust Educational Trust has a lot of resources on its website—het.org.uk—and I recommend this important resource.

12.19 pm

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: The theme for this year's Holocaust Memorial Day is:

"Be the light in the darkness".

It challenges this generation to shine a light whenever we encounter darkness, whether we encounter it internationally in Xinjiang or when we hear the chants of antisemitism in the street, community or workplace. In the fullness of time—[*Inaudible.*]—it is easy to assume that we would never see the horror of a country actively seeking to destroy and wipe out any trace of the Jewish community ever again. "Never again", we were told, but each time we have conspiracy theories on the internet around Jews, we take a step back towards the hatred that brought the Nazis to power in the 1930s. Therefore, it is vital that we continue to tell the stories of those who survived the unimaginable cruelty and horror of the holocaust.

Today, I want to tell the House the story of one of the amazing individuals who showed courage and acted as a light in the darkness, and who I hope will be an example to this generation. It is the story of Manfred Goldberg and his teacher Herr Bacher. Manfred and his family were transported to the Riga ghetto. When they arrived, Manfred found that his primary school teacher Herr Bacher was also there. As Manfred's father had escaped to England, Herr Bacher prepared Manfred for his bar mitzvah. Miraculously, a scroll was found. Manfred said:

"On the Saturday of which I speak a prayer service was held in a private room. I was not aware of any prayer services before that week, nor did I experience any subsequently during my three and a half years in various camps. My teacher had somehow organised the required quorum of ten men, and I read the portion he had so kindly taught me. Organising the quorum was a major achievement, as practically everyone had to do slave labour daily, seven days a week."

For Herr Bacher to ensure Manfred had his bar mitzvah, even during all the chaos and upheaval in their lives, is a simple but hugely powerful form of resistance.

The story of Manfred is a story of resistance to the efforts of the Nazi party to eradicate Jewish presence, culture, and communities. People strove to celebrate their faith, observe their culture, continue to educate their children and form communities. Each of these acts was a way of claiming agency over the way they lived their lives in the face of the darkest of situations. The holocaust reshaped our understanding of global responsibility and the meaning of human rights, and fundamentally altered our view of democracy. Holocaust Memorial Day gives us all an opportunity to remember our responsibility to work for a better and safer future for everyone, regardless of geography, race, religion, or sexuality.

I want to highlight the words of the Holocaust survivor, Dorit Oliver-Wolff, as she implores us to "put politics aside" and recognise the atrocities that are ongoing in Xinjiang. In her words, "this is a genocide" and:

"It is inhuman and it was equally inhuman"—

when—

"all my family was killed".

Holocaust Memorial Day reminds us to do all we can to prevent human rights abuses such as the forced labour, the religious persecution and the forced sterilisation that the Uyghur population in China are being subjected to. It is imperative that we act as quickly—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I call, by video link, Dr Matthew Offord.

12.22 pm

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con) [V]: In last year's debate, I spoke about the only concentration camp on British soil, on the island of Alderney. Lager Sylt and Lager Norderney contained Russian and Polish prisoners-of-war, as well as Jewish slave labourers. I raised the issue of undisclosed and unrecorded burial sites of murdered inmates and told the House:

"Rabbinic law dictates that the grave sites of Jewish people should not be disturbed."

However, I expressed my personal view that

"unmarked graves, mass graves and locations of bodies hidden by their murderers are not proper graves in themselves, and I believe that it is appropriate for the identification of bodies to be undertaken"—[*Official Report*, 23 January 2020; Vol. 670, c. 492.]

Some people took my words as advocating a full exhumation of the Channel Islands, but that is not necessary or even desirable. The burial site on Alderney was designated and formally marked by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission as an official war grave, but it was deaccessioned by the CWGC in 1961.

Back in July 2019, my right hon. Friend Lord Pickles, head of the UK delegation of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, along with the deputy head, Sally Sealey, and Dr Gilly Carr, a member of the UK delegation, visited Alderney. The purpose of the trip was to make an assessment of the island's holocaust-related heritage sites after the revelation of new geophysical evidence and the potential presence of further bodies in a mass grave on Longis Common on Alderney.

Putting aside the religious issues, it has been stressed to me that opening mass graves is not as revealing as one might imagine and that gains in knowledge are slight compared with the moral and spiritual costs of disturbance. Knowledge already exists about the sites, and the combination of non-intrusive means of investigation, world war two aerial imagery and research of the records should be sufficient to tell us, with some certitude, what lies beneath Longis Common. I have been advised that a considerable amount is already known about what lies beneath that ground. That is because the British Government are still sitting on embargoed files that detail what they found at the cemetery after the war and their own excavations at the cemetery. Today, I am calling on the Government to find the missing records of the 1961 exhumation, and the detailed records that the UK made of each set of remains by the British excavation in Alderney. We have a duty to ensure that no one is left behind. I ask the Government to play their part and do the right thing by releasing all information and documents in their possession.

12.25 pm

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): Yesterday, my friend Paula Sherriff—a much missed former Member of this House—tweeted a quote that read:

“If we held a moment of silence for every victim of the Holocaust we would be silent for eleven and a half years.”

It is often easy to feel disconnected from the figures and statistics that are read out in this place. Six million people. Six million Jews were murdered by the Nazis. Most of us will struggle to imagine a number too huge to picture in our minds. It is easier, then, for us to imagine what it might feel like in our own lives if overnight the family living next door to us were to disappear, if several of our classmates and teachers did not turn up for school one day, and if there were noticeably fewer people around—emptier shops, cafés, gyms and school playgrounds—just as there have been during lockdown.

But 6 million people did not catch an infectious respiratory virus; they were forced out of their homes, rounded up, robbed, starved, humiliated, branded, tortured, experimented on and killed because of their race and religion. One deranged bully devised and built a murderous plan to wipe out an entire race of people. Of course he could not do this alone, so he tapped into some of our most complicated human flaws—weakness, fear, vulnerability, ignorance—and harnessed them to produce mass inhumanity. Despotism disarms us by yelling their hatred and spite. We all fear becoming their next target. The safest option is to run and hide, to be compliant and complicit. Our instinct is to protect ourselves and those closest to us. But some chose not to.

The people in this place are all here because we chose, one way or another, not to be bystanders. The political arena is not for the faint-hearted, and, sadly, despite what we all now know about the atrocities enacted by the leaders of the Nazi regime, the world has not learnt to stop electing bullies who use their positions of power to make the lives of some intolerable, and they do so in plain sight. Some shout about building walls, inciting hatred, fuelling division, legitimising racism and even encouraging violence. Others arrange to have their political opponents or critics assassinated and poisoned, try to rig elections, and refuse to relinquish power or recognise democracy.

Right now, we know that there are groups of people being persecuted, imprisoned, rounded up, robbed, tortured and branded because of their race and religion. And what are we doing to stop it? We have to find ways to make sure that we are not being mere bystanders. Let us all be braver, like those who resisted. As Edmund Burke said:

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

12.28 pm

Mary Robison (Cheadle) (Con) [V]: Every year we mark Holocaust Memorial Day here in this House and around the world, and remember the unprecedented and unmatched evil of the holocaust. Yesterday marked the 76th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Every year, the number of living holocaust survivors and those living righteous among the nations dwindles further, and as the holocaust slips out of living memory, the task of educating people about it and combating holocaust denial becomes more and more pressing. It is our duty as a society to educate the next generation. I pay tribute to the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, which keep that memory alive.

When we see antisemitism in our own country, we have a duty to call it out. When we see antisemitism in other countries, and being tolerated or adopted by their regimes, again, we have a duty to call that out. Our commitment to human rights in our foreign policy and trade policy must reflect that. Seventy-six years ago, the world said, “Never again.” Every year on this day, we say, “Never again.” But the truth is that it has happened again and is happening again. It happened again in Rwanda, and in Cambodia, and Bosnia. It happened more recently to the Yazidis and the Rohingya. It is happening to the Christian minority in northern Nigeria, too: Open Doors’ “World Watch List 2021” report highlighted the escalating violence against that community, with more than 3,000 Christians killed last year.

Right now, it is happening to the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. We have all seen it happening there. We have seen the videos of people loaded on to trains bound for camps. According to Human Rights Watch, 1.3 million Uyghurs and other Turkic-speaking Muslims have suffered under the Chinese regime’s actions. We have heard the chilling reports of what goes on in those camps, where many people have been sent for expressing their ethnic identity or practising their religion. We have testimonies from survivors. Our Government’s actions to prevent imports associated with the camps from entering this country, by strengthening the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to allow fines for companies that do not comply with transparency obligations, are welcome, but we should always consider ways to exert more pressure on these regimes, such as Magnitsky-style sanctions against listed persons who are complicit in human rights abuses.

Nothing past or present compares to the holocaust for its inhumanity, but we live in a world where there is still antisemitism and genocide. It is now more important than ever that we are able to keep that flame alight and say “Never again”.

12.31 pm

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab) [V]: I thank everyone who made this debate possible. Holocaust Memorial Day stands as a reminder of where racism and the dehumanisation of others can lead. Many years ago, I travelled to Auschwitz-Birkenau with children from my constituency, on a visit organised by the Holocaust Educational Trust. No one who has made that visit will ever forget the experience. The industrial mass killing, the meticulous gathering of clothing and goods—not random acts of chaotic violence but the most organised programme of killing in history.

We recoil and say “Never again”, but since the holocaust there have been further atrocities in the world fuelled by racial hatred and the desire to demonise people because of their faith or because they are a minority of one kind or another. The lessons for today still matter. We should never engage in the conferring of collective guilt, we should openly reject conspiracy theories about dual loyalties or international cabals influencing world events, and we should reject the world view that results in a hierarchy of victimhood where some cannot accept that Jewish people could really be the victims of racism.

It is sadly the case that antisemitism still exists in our society, and indeed became more prominent in recent years, including in my own party. It never represented

[Mr Pat McFadden]

the Labour tradition, which at its best is a politics open to people of all faiths and none and which seeks to break down barriers, not reinforce them, yet still antisemitic views found a home in some of the darker corners of the left, as well as the far right. I am glad and relieved that, under new leadership, we have firmly turned a page on that era. To do so fully and completely, we must not only reject antisemitism but the worldview that gives rise to it, the conspiracy theories that go along with it and the hierarchy of victimhood that is blind to it.

The experience of remembering the holocaust should also inform the ways that we think about refugees today. The UK can be proud of the role we played not only during the war, in liberating the world from tyranny, but before the war, in making a new home for around 10,000 children through the Kindertransport programme. Each one of those children was given a new life and a new chance. Today, when child refugees are still trying to reach our shores, we should remember how precious that chance of a new life can be, and what an amazing contribution to our country can be made by those who are given a chance.

The lessons of Holocaust Memorial Day are not only those from history; they live with us every day. The greatest of all is that we share much more through our common humanity than anything that could drive us apart.

12.34 pm

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con) [V]: It is an honour to take part in this debate today. It was disappointing early on in this debate, however, to hear a Member once again using it for their own personal campaign against the location of the UK holocaust memorial. It was, in my opinion, inappropriate and offensive.

I want to begin with the name of Hilel Gruzin. His name was provided to me with the Yellow Candle I received for Yom HaShoah earlier this year. Hilel was one of the victims of the holocaust, dying at the age of just 21 in 1944 in Latvia, and I hope we can remember his name today. His memory is a blessing.

I want to thank Brigg Town Council for the memorial day ceremony we undertook on Sunday. We were unable, of course, to meet in person this year, but I thank the town council for organising what was anyway a very moving memorial day. I also pay particular tribute to Rabbi Thomas Salamon from my synagogue, who provided some words to us on that day, particularly recounting his story—of his family and of growing up as the son of a mother who was interned in one of the camps.

I want briefly to talk about the work of the APPG against antisemitism, of which I am proud to be co-chair. The work we have been doing this year has largely focused on online antisemitism, which we know is a growing problem in this country. It is something we have to get a grip on, and get a grip on quickly, given the prevalence of social media and the growth of it.

We hear a lot about Facebook, and a lot about Twitter and TikTok, but one platform we have heard less about is Amazon, a company that many of us would herald for helping get us through these past few months—it has many strings to its bow—but, sadly, one that has taken a very long time to remove antisemitic

content. Only recently, 92 books were removed from its platform because of holocaust denial material. At the end of last year, my co-chair and I had to write to Amazon about antisemitic responses that came in the form of Alexa—quite appalling responses—and we have had to write to it again regarding the content it has on its site from the notorious conspiracy theorist and antisemite David Icke, which although provided by a third party, is accessed via Amazon.

In the final seconds I have, my plea to all these platforms is to act responsibly. They cannot contract out their responsibility in regard to antisemitism. This is an area that, sadly, is growing, and they have to do more. I hope that the online harms Bill will provide an opportunity for us to ensure they do more.

12.37 pm

Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab) [V]: It is an honour to have the opportunity to speak in this important debate. I was privileged to join the online commemorative ceremony to mark Holocaust Memorial Day yesterday to honour those who were murdered for who they were and am privileged to stand against prejudice and hatred today.

Holocaust Memorial Day reminds us that there are fewer people around the world with direct lived experience of that hellish extermination. It is crucial to hear the deeply moving testimonies of the remaining survivors, because the message of suffering, pain, trauma and human cruelty must never ever be forgotten. Those testimonies remind us of the impact of the holocaust: the lives cut short, the families ripped apart, and the courage and bravery of those who survived and who seek to ensure that their suffering informs a better future for every one of us. The theme of the Holocaust Memorial Day this year is “Be the light in the darkness”. It encourages everyone to reflect on the depths that humanity can sink to, but also the ways in which individuals and communities resisted that darkness to be the light before, during and after the genocide.

Holocaust Memorial Day is also a day for us to recognise and remember other atrocities that have taken place since that time, including in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Cambodia and, most recently, the genocide of Yazidis by the evil that is known as ISIS. In the summer of 2014, as ISIS rampaged and rolled into Sinjar, the international community was still asleep and the Yazidis defenceless. ISIS perpetrated the unthinkable. Thousands of boys and men were slaughtered, while women and girls were enslaved and raped, with hundreds of thousands put on display, all because they believed in something different. Another genocide happened on our watch.

Thousands of Yazidis still languish in camps with the hope of returning home one day. Six years later, with ISIS defeated militarily and global recognition of ISIS's atrocities accepted, efforts have failed to see Yazidis return in large numbers. Recognition of the genocide of Yazidis has not ended their pain and suffering. Thousands are still unable to return home and feel safer in the camps in which they live. They live in fear of ISIS resurging and constant Turkish airstrikes. What Yazidis want is accountability, justice and the reunification of families. Thousands of children and women are still missing, either enslaved or murdered.

Justice and peace go hand in hand, but bringing to justice those who committed these evil acts will dissuade future perpetrators while also breaking the cycle of violence by demonstrating that justice systems can work. The crisis for Yazidis is not over. Justice means more than perpetrators being tried for terrorism against the Iraqi state; it means, where possible, convicting ISIS members for crimes committed against Yazidis, for torture, kidnapping, enslavement, rape and murder. The crisis is not over if human rights of the Yazidis in Iraq are not respected in law and policy and by all members of society. Yazidis need more than remembrance—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Thank you. I call Dr Liam Fox.

12.41 pm

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): For many of us, as we contemplate the inhumanity, brutality and sheer scale of the holocaust, one uncomfortable question sits in our minds: how could ordinary people like ourselves collude with, acquiesce in, or support a regime that behaved in such a barbaric way and, perhaps even more uncomfortably, do the factors exist in our contemporary world that could allow it to happen again?

In national socialism, nationalism was the dominant partner in the marriage. National socialism regarded itself as a seismic political shift, which recognised a new and glorious image of humanity. Yet this world view was accompanied and counterbalanced by a systematic, ideological dehumanisation of other groups of people: those who opposed the regime, political activists, Gypsies, the disabled, homosexuals, Christians, religious objectors and, of course, the Jews.

Incrementally, but steadily over time, national socialist propaganda dripped poison into German society. The distortion and then the strangulation of democracy, the suppression of the press and the Church brought about this position inch by inch and step by step. Yet from Cambodia to Srebrenica to Syria, the horrors of extreme nationalism continue to ricochet through our recent history. Today's attempts at ethnic cleansing, including China's treatment of the Uyghurs, are part of this terrible continuum.

The basic template of extreme nationalism, a deeply distorted sense of identity and self-worth combined with the exaggeration of perceived slights and the identification of a suitable scapegoat, is still in play. Across the world, many of these stereotypical ideas are being played out again with varying degrees of sophistication and brutality. The dehumanising of opponents, internally and externally, is a timeless theme in the book of extreme nationalism. It is the beast that stalks its prey of plurality, decency and civility. Decades separate us now from the holocaust, but human behaviour still holds flaws and dangers. We must confront dangerous ideologies whenever and wherever they take root. Today of all days, we remember that we have been warned.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. May I just gently remind those who are participating virtually to keep a close eye on the clock? I do not want to have to cut people off, but we have a large number of colleagues who want to contribute to this debate.

12.44 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab) [V]: Let me add my thanks to everybody who has helped to sponsor and organise this debate. I, too, pay tribute to the Holocaust Educational Trust and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust for helping to ensure that the debate is so well organised and so well informed. Seventy-six years on, we still do not look out on a world where we have banished genocide. We cannot yet look out on a world where we have banished antisemitism. Until that moment comes, we need debates like this to remember with contrition and humility, as well as determination, how much further we still have to go.

I want to offer two lessons today that I have reflected on in the run-up to this important day. One is a lesson not from Britain but from Denmark: it is the story of the Danish resistance. Those of us have been to Yad Vashem will know that in the Avenue of the Righteous there is only one memorial to an entire national movement, and that is the memorial to the Danish resistance. This movement came together in 1940 after Hitler invaded Denmark. Together, it organised the extraordinary evacuation of 7,200 Jews, along with 700 of their relatives, in October 1943 after Hitler had given the order to arrest the Jews, with extermination in mind.

This was an exercise in good people coming together—people like Sven Teisen, a member of the Danish resistance, who lost his life in the course of 1943, and Oliver Sandberg, who gave over their house next to the Øresund, across which Jews were ferried to safety in Sweden. Sven Teisen was the uncle that I never knew. Oliver Sandberg was his cousin. They were among thousands of ordinary Danes who came together inspired by one simple idea: that ordinary people can make a difference in standing up to hate.

I am so grateful that our schools are now teaching this lesson to our children—schools like Rockwood Academy in Alum Rock in my constituency. This is a gold standard Holocaust Educational Trust school that has brought alive the testimony of Mady Gerrard. It has named its new building after Mady, and its lights now shine out like a light in the darkness to help light up the January skies here in Birmingham. I want our region to become a region of sanctuary for refugees in the years to come.

I want us to listen to the lessons of Sofia Darr, the headteacher, who I heard from this morning. She said that she has just seen the most extraordinary emotional journey of her children. She wants us to reflect on how we help them to connect at a human level, and on how we recognise their pledges by bringing them together and putting them on a national stage, giving our young people, through their leadership, the chance to genuinely spark a movement for change against hate.

12.47 pm

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con) [V]: It is an honour to contribute to such a powerful debate with heartfelt contributions from colleagues across the House.

Today, as we reflect on Holocaust Memorial Day, I want to share the powerful words of the holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel:

“I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we

[Ms Nusrat Ghani]

must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must—at that moment—become the centre of the universe.”

Elie’s words keep me focused on ensuring that I do all I can, as an MP, both to share the horrors of the holocaust and to ensure that history does not repeat itself.

The theme for Holocaust Memorial Day is “Be the light in the darkness”, encouraging everyone to reflect on the depths that humanity can sink to, but also reminding us that we can all resist that darkness to be the light before, during and after genocide. I do not think there has been a call to action so powerful from the Holocaust Memorial Trust or the Board of Deputies of British Jews. So much focus this year has been on the plight of the Uyghurs, especially last night as they honoured as their guest speaker Rahima Mahmut, who has truly been the light in the darkness for the Uyghurs.

Most recently, the president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, Marie van der Zyl, wrote to the Prime Minister. I believe her words should be shared with all MPs:

“I know you understand that, as a community, we are always extremely hesitant to consider comparisons with the Holocaust...In my letter, I noted the similarities between what is ‘alleged to be happening in the People’s Republic of China today and what happened in Nazi Germany 75 years ago... Today we stand at another of these crucial junctures, and it is time to act to protect the Uyghurs.”

I hope that colleagues will join the Board of Deputies and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust in supporting the genocide amendment. Let us put our words, “Never again”, into action.

12.50 pm

Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab) [V]: Before entering this place, I was fortunate enough to visit the death camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau on a number of occasions—fortunate in the sense that I was able to see at first hand a place that had once, in our recent history, inflicted so much suffering, destruction and, ultimately, death; a place where human beings routinely slaughtered fellow human beings on account of nothing more than their ethnicity, religious beliefs, disabilities, sexual orientation and political activity; a place that is in every sense a living, breathing monument to all who were killed during the holocaust, a fixed reminder of the horrors of genocide and a warning to any society that wishes to dangerously flirt with intolerance and prejudice.

I am proud to represent such a diverse constituency in Liverpool, Wavertree. I know that many of my Jewish constituents will have been lighting a candle yesterday, paying tribute, remembering and reflecting on the lived experiences of the 6 million Jews and those who survived, as well as the other persecuted peoples who perished in those camps at the hands of the Nazis. It is on candles that I want to briefly focus. How poignant and moving was the “Thought for the Day” from the Chief Rabbi yesterday, in which he said:

“Even a tiny flame can conquer darkness.”

The symbol of Holocaust Memorial Day is, of course, that candle. No matter how small the flame—no matter how inconsequential our behaviours may seem at times—we

can be that light in the darkness. It is undoubtedly a powerful call to responsibility in which we all must play a small part as citizens.

I saw that at first hand and was able to capture it in the freezing eastern European snow, as we placed a small row of candles on the remnants and decaying walls of Crematorium IV at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp during my visits. It was not the freezing cold temperatures that gave me chills as I stood there. It was, in fact, learning the story of 7 October 1944. For months, young Jewish women were smuggling small amounts of gunpowder from the munitions factory within the Auschwitz complex to the men and women of the camp’s resistance movement. A young Jewish woman, Roza Robota, passed it to her co-conspirators in the Sonderkommando, the special squad of prisoners forced to work in the camp’s crematoria.

While the uprising was ultimately unsuccessful and a brutal crackdown ensued, Crematorium IV was destroyed and never used again. Roza was hanged in January 1945 alongside three other women comrades. Defiant until the last, their heroic stand is remembered as one of the most courageous acts of Jewish women prisoners in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Their resilience and unrelenting insubordination in the face of adversity and death is a beacon of hope to us all. In that place, in that moment, they were that flame—that candle—and it is our duty, many decades later, to continue telling their stories.

12.53 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I was born four years after the genocide of the holocaust ended, but I have been a witness to genocide. In 1992-93, I was the British UN commander in Bosnia, and the whole country was an example of genocide. I do not have much time, so let me concentrate on one incident on one day: the Ahmic house in Ahmići, on 22 April 1993.

I approached the house to discover that a man and a boy had been shot down in their doorway and their bodies burnt. The boy’s naked body had his fist up in the air. It was horrific. My soldiers told me to look round the back. I went into the cellar, and I could not believe what I saw. The first thing I got was, frankly, the smell; it was awful. Then my eyes focused on a mass of red and black, and I realised it was bodies. One body—I think it was an adult—was arched so far backwards, probably in agony, that it must have broken the back. There were four children there, too, but here is the point: as I looked at the head of what I thought was a woman, her eyes were still there. I was horrified. We went outside. We leant against the wall. My soldiers and I could say nothing. Later, as he was shovelling up the remains of people, a soldier turned to me and said, “Sir, this is Europe in 1993, not Europe in 1943.” We buried over 104 people—I think it was 104 people—in a mass grave nearby. It has affected me deeply. I may not look it, but deep down, I am deeply affected by the genocide I witnessed.

My mother went to Belsen at the end of the war. She was an officer of the Special Operations Executive. She never told me about it until I was stationed nearby. I said to her then, “Why, mum, have you not told me about this?” She said, “Robert, I was ashamed.” I said, “Mum, why were you ashamed? You were in uniform. You were fighting the Nazis. You had learned

to parachute. You had learned to fight them.” She said, “I was ashamed, Robert, because this genocide occurred in my generation.”

Genocides have occurred since 1945. As I have said, I was a witness to one; it is burned into me. The purpose of this debate is to make sure that we try to stop it happening again.

12.56 pm

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD) [V]: I pay tribute to everyone who has spoken in this debate so far, not least the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) for that last very moving speech. I would like to start my contribution by reading a couple of lines from the memoir of Gerda Weissmann Klein, who was 18 when she was sent to the first of several concentration camps, Bolkenhain. She wrote:

“Ilse, a childhood friend of mine, once found a raspberry in the concentration camp and carried it in her pocket all day to present to me that night on a leaf. Imagine a world in which your entire possession is one raspberry and you give it to your friend.”

For me, those words simultaneously drive home the holocaust horrors, while exemplifying the compassion and generosity that existed even in those most awful conditions. It shows us that Ilse Kleinzahler, a young woman in a concentration camp with nothing in the world but a raspberry, could be the light in that unimaginable darkness.

Years later, Gerda said:

“I like to remember some of the things in camp, how people helped each other. I want to tell young people about that—that there was friendship and love and caring.”

Like so many accounts from holocaust survivors, the story has a heartbreaking coda. Ilse died on a death march a week before Gerda was liberated. They were holding each other’s hand. We must never forget the atrocities of the holocaust—never—how Ilse and 6 million Jews were murdered by the Nazis and the inhumanity inflicted on humans by humans. We must remember, so that we try harder to stop it happening again, as it has, tragically, in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and elsewhere, as other colleagues have said. We must be vigilant in our opposition to hatred, discrimination and oppression and vigilant in defence of peace, respect and human rights.

Let us also remember, as Mrs Klein does, the friendship, the love and the caring that existed even amidst all that horror. If those qualities can exist in a Nazi concentration camp in the middle of the holocaust, they can certainly exist now. No matter how difficult things are, how big our challenges may be or how dark the days might seem, we can still find those most human of qualities. We can still care for each other, we can still love each other and we can still be the light in the darkness.

12.59 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) [V]: We come together today to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day, which is held on the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. I visited Auschwitz-Birkenau more than 10 years ago, but it is forever seared on my memory. Six million men, women and children were murdered for no reason other than their faith. This was murder on an industrial scale, with thousands of people responsible for the holocaust. We can never

forget what happened, but those who have long memories can forgive those people who perpetrated this crime against humanity.

I pay tribute to the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and to the Holocaust Educational Trust, so ably led by Karen Pollock, which do so much good work to educate not only us but children and young people about the horrors of the holocaust. Sadly, the number of holocaust survivors is dwindling each year, but I pay tribute to those who go into schools, colleges and other meetings around the United Kingdom to bear personal testimony to what happened to them when they were growing up. The reality is that, without their personal testimony, it is hard to contemplate how 6 million people could have been murdered in such a way. Auschwitz-Birkenau was not the only camp. It was responsible for 1.4 million people being murdered, but we have to remember that the other death camps were equally responsible.

We must have the Holocaust memorial and education centre built alongside Parliament in Victoria Tower gardens as a permanent reminder of the horrors that can be inflicted by evil people, so that when people visit the cradle of democracy that is Parliament, they can also visit the memorial centre on a free-of-charge basis, and young people can be suitably educated. I am the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for the holocaust memorial, and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government will be able to update the House on any further news and progress when he sums up the debate. Equally, we must always remember that this happened in our names, and we must ensure that we as Members who cannot sign the book of remembrance this year can sign the early-day motion that I have been privileged to sponsor. Early-day motion 1305 has attracted 91 signatures so far from hon. and right hon. Members from across the House, and I urge other colleagues to do the same. Let us all come together and be the light in the darkness.

1.2 pm

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: Today’s Holocaust Memorial Day theme of “Be the light in the darkness” is really important. We are going through a form of darkness ourselves with the coronavirus epidemic, and 1,500 out of every 100,000 people in this country have died due to coronavirus. For European Jews, the death rate was two thirds of our whole community in the second world war. The fear that Jews had every day in the period from when Hitler took power was unbelievable, and we need to reflect on that today. It did not start with extermination. It started with acts of antisemitism, the forced shaving of beards, the forced labour camps, the removal of religious rights and the detention of children.

I can also say all those things that I have just said about the Uyghur Muslims in China. They are going through a form of persecution, which we need to stand up to today on Holocaust Memorial Day. I praise the Board of Deputies of British Jews for its work on this. We also have other genocides in the world. I am the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on West Papua, where more than half a million people have been killed. The universities of Sydney and Yale have classified this as genocide, and it is important not just to reflect on history but to remember those people who are

[Alex Sobel]

being oppressed and having genocidal action taken against them today. We have a duty to speak out about what is happening now, as well as reflecting on what happened to my own ancestors—people I will never get to meet and whose children were never born. That is something that has fallen not just on the Jewish community, but on other communities around the world. It is not just about communities of race or religion. We need to remember other minority communities, such as the trans community, who are going through terrible forms of persecution and oppression around the world, and who are grossly misunderstood in many places. We also need to send our solidarity to communities of identity and others today on Holocaust Memorial Day. This is not a day just about Jews and the holocaust; this is a day about all those facing oppression, genocide and persecution. As a Jewish person, I send my solidarity and my support to all those facing persecution. We need to be able to shine a light in the darkness. It is said that light is the best disinfectant. Today, we can shine that light and start to disinfect the problems and issues of the world.

1.5 pm

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con) [V]: It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel), and a privilege to be able to speak today to recognise and commemorate all those who were lost in the holocaust. Across the country, there have been national commemorations. I am sure that every Member of Parliament has at least attended private commemoration services online, too. Yesterday, I attended the Solihull Mayor's Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration and watched the livestream of the very moving UK commemorative ceremony for Holocaust Memorial Day. Even during a pandemic, the determination of the British people to hold virtual commemorations online across the country is heartening and demonstrates our resolve to remember the horrors of the holocaust.

I am part of a generation fortunate enough to learn from the lived experiences of many people. However, I agree with the Prince of Wales, who said that the important truth is that we are increasingly losing living voices to educate us. As well as bearing witness to what happened, by listening to these stories and by sharing them we ensure that our future generations will have the courage to speak up in the face of evil. That is why I am a big believer in the importance of programmes such as the Lessons from Auschwitz project, the Ambassador programme and the Outreach programme. Those programmes are important not just because they teach us about the false doctrines of the past; they warn us against malevolent ideologies in the present and the future.

The relevance of that in today's United Kingdom cannot be understated. The Communities Security Trust recorded over 1,800 antisemitic incidents in 2019, a 7% rise on the record of 2018. In 2018, cases of antisemitic incidents rose by 16% from 2017, the highest yearly total since records began in 1984. Clearly, there is more we must do to tackle the ideology of blind hate. We cannot allow ourselves to forget the tragic horror and torment that the Jewish people faced during the holocaust. We must not let ourselves forget the repulsive hatred that led to their suffering. It is a sad fact that the

holocaust was not the final genocide that our world has seen. Rwanda, Cambodia, Darfur and Srebrenica, to name a few, are scars on human history. They remind us that we have no room for complacency.

Debates like this cannot just be empty words. When we speak in the House on these issues, it serves two purposes. First, it is a warning to those who commit or intend to commit atrocities, that we and the rest of the international community will stand in their way. Secondly, it is to inspire. As we remember the courage of those who came before, we seek to inspire those listening today to have the courage to stand up for the oppressed and persecuted. We will never forget the horrors of the holocaust and we will continue to call out antisemitism wherever we find it. This is a duty on all of us. We must be the light in the darkness.

1.8 pm

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): It is a privilege to be able to speak in such an important debate and I would like to echo the contributions of other hon. Members today. I think we can all agree that this is an issue that unites us across the House.

Holocaust Memorial Day allows us a moment to remember the 6 million Jewish victims of Nazi holocaust and the other victims of Hitler's murderous regime. It also reminds us that genocide did not end in 1945. It allows us to reflect on our human experience and the choices we make. We know that darkness exists within all of us, but we can choose to be the light. We can choose not to be drawn down into a dark place of hatred and discrimination that only leads to one place.

Three weeks after I was elected as the MP for Vauxhall, anti-Islamic slogans were painted on the walls of a mosque in my constituency. That hideous hate crime was rightly, and immediately, condemned by everybody in a position of local authority. It came three days after antisemitic graffiti was sprayed across a synagogue and shops in north London, during the Jewish festival of Hanukkah.

Genocide does not just happen. People do not wake up one day and decide that they hate each other. It is a slow process that builds over time. We know from history that latent hatred can lead to genocide when it is left to fester and then exploited by those in positions of power. We cannot pick and choose which forms of racism or hatred we do not like. We must all be united in condemning all forms of racism and hatred, whenever and wherever it happens.

It is our duty as public servants to ensure that those in power never knowingly sow division through the language they use or the actions they take, or choose not to take. We must always be vigilant to see the warning signs, and we must call out racism, discrimination and hatred whenever we see it. The power of Holocaust Memorial Day is that it reminds us never to forget.

1.12 pm

Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con) [V]: It has been 76 years since the world understood the full scale and horror of what happened, as the Nazis and their collaborators tried to eliminate the Jews of Europe. Every time I have returned from Auschwitz-Birkenau, I have struggled to comprehend the enormity and sheer scale of the holocaust. That is why that genocide stands

out in history, and why we can, and should, never forget it happened. Each time I visited, a different element of the camps affected me. Seeing the mass of hair behind the glass cabinets hits particularly hard; seeing children's clothes is simply incomprehensible.

When we really understand that this was a mass, industrialised killing across borders, and across Europe, to wipe out an entire race, the holocaust takes on an even more sinister meaning. It was organised. It involved complex logistics to move people around, and to murder as many Jews as possible after the Nazis had taken from them everything they could. Some—those who counted themselves lucky—were given jobs, but others did not even get that chance.

In many ways the easiest way to understand what happened in the holocaust is by hearing the testimony of those who witnessed it. Otherwise, the scale is too difficult to comprehend. The number of victims is too large, and the number of perpetrators that it took to get there is simply terrifying. I watched Tuesday's Survivor webcast with Eve Kugler BEM, which was superbly organised by the Holocaust Educational Trust. It was fantastic to see Q3 Academy in West Bromwich East taking part. Harpej, a year-nine pupil at Q3 Academy, said it was important to hear Eve speak "because for them it is so personal, and they can tell their story with emotion and we can see how bad it truly was."

Having spent time with survivors, I never cease to be amazed by their lust for life, and this past year they have been even more inspiring. We all know that the future of holocaust education will be challenging, as those first-hand witnesses sadly become fewer. While this year has been testing, covid-19 has not stopped survivors in their mission to educate. I pay a special tribute to the incredible survivors who have taken to Zoom to continue their incredible work over the past year, and to the work of Karen Pollock and the Holocaust Educational Trust.

Holocaust survivor Lily Ebert has managed to reach millions of people, and she continues to share her testimony, thanks to the help of her great-grandson, Dov, who has taken it upon himself to share his great-grandmother's story through social media. The reach has been enormous, and Dov is part of an important generation of people who are all witness to the truth, as a result of hearing the testimony from survivors themselves. I have never been in any doubt that the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust and of the survivors is invaluable, as, sadly, antisemitism still exists and we find it all too often. This year survivors have really been the light in the darkness. They are a community of people who have been through the most unimaginable suffering, but their positivity and relentless resolve to make sure that this never happens again is something to behold. We all have a duty to be the light in the darkness.

1.15 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab) [V]: Every year across the country, we come together to mark Holocaust Memorial Day: to remember those who have been lost; to hear the retelling of stories from those who have survived; and to reflect on what we can do to stop such atrocities taking place again. I thank the Holocaust Educational Trust and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust for the fantastic resources and ceremonies they have provided to ensure that the memorial is still happening safely in 2021.

Thinking of this year's theme—"Be the light in the darkness"—I think of those glimmers and moments of hope brought about through unimaginable bravery and courage. I came across Madeline Deutsch's story in the US Holocaust Memorial Museum collection, where she shared the sacrifices that her mother made to keep her safe during their time in the camps in the second world war. Madeline spoke of how her mother would give up her scraps of bread in order to keep her child safe and fed through the hardest and most trying of circumstances. Although we are aware of how the Nazi regime targeted their evil at all Jews, along with those who did not fit the idea of Aryan, today I want to talk about the treatment and experience of women in camps.

Ravensbrück was the largest Nazi concentration camp established for women. Over 120,000 women had been imprisoned in Ravensbrück by the time it was liberated in 1945. Those women faced not just the harsh reality of the camps; they could also face forced medical experiments and sterilisations, or be made to work in makeshift brothels, or were murdered. In what must have been the very darkest of times, we still hear stories such as the sacrifices that Madeline Deutsch's mother made to keep her child fed and safe.

Although we know that identity-based persecution often affects all those who fall into the targeted groups, women's experiences during genocide can be unique. Today we remember those women who lost their lives or experienced persecution not only in the holocaust, but in the genocides that have sadly followed since. Let us remember the light and hope shown by men and women; let us remember the sacrifices made by fathers and mothers; and let these stories show us that in the very darkest of times, there can always be light.

1.18 pm

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con) [V]: [*Inaudible.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am afraid—

Lee Anderson: As I sat in his kitchen, I noticed a picture of a young man in a British Army uniform. I asked him who it was and he said, "That's me, aged 18, during world war two." I asked him what he did during the war, and he told me that he was with the British Army and helped to liberate Bergen-Belsen. He told me that he could not believe the horrors that he saw, the smell, and what human beings could do to their fellow man. He said that he cried and he cried and he cried, and since that day he had never cried again, and he finished by saying, "I left all my tears at the gates of Belsen." I will never forget those words.

1.19 pm

Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab) [V]: I want to start by paying tribute to Olivia Marks-Woldman and the staff at the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, and Karen Pollock and the good people at the Holocaust Educational Trust, for their tireless work to educate us all. "Be the light in the darkness"—what an amazingly powerful theme. It is a reminder that the anti-fascist values of those who stood against the Nazis are so important today.

I have always been awed by the Warsaw ghetto uprising—a few streets that held out against overwhelming Nazi force for 28 days—and today I am remembering Tosia Altman. She was just 20 years old when she joined

[Ms Lyn Brown]

comrades in Lithuania, but she was the first to go back into Nazi occupied areas—such courage at such a young age. She spent the next few years, at enormous risk, travelling in and out of Jewish ghettos in occupied Europe. She spread information about the horrors that were being perpetrated. She also spread hope. She organised the resistance.

Tosia's incredible resilience in the darkest of times helped to bring about the Warsaw ghetto uprising. She helped people to know that state-enforced hatred could be challenged. She smuggled weapons into the ghetto. She strategised. Over and over again, she went into burning buildings to rescue others. She saved lives and, tragically, burns finally killed her. After being handed over to the Germans by collaborators in the Polish police, she died on 26 May 1943 after two days of untreated, unmitigated agony. She was the first from her movement to return to the greater danger in Poland, and she was the last of them to fall. Tosia Altman, a light in the darkness—remember her name.

We know in this place that racial hatred and genocidal violence are still with us in this world. That is why I was so disappointed that last week, despite the pleas of holocaust survivors, the Government refused to change the law to prevent trade deals with countries committing genocide. We must have clear pathways to identify and prevent another genocide. "Never again" must not be a platitude. It is an instruction. We must be the light in the darkness.

1.21 pm

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con) [V]: It is humbling to join colleagues on both sides of the House and my constituents to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day. For Jews around the world, including here in the UK, the holocaust is not just a terrible memory; it is something they live with on a permanent basis—the photographs of family members they never got to meet, and the knowledge that the thriving Jewish communities across Europe were all but annihilated. Today, 76 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, the world's Jewish population still has not returned to what it was prior to the second world war.

One memory was brought into sharp focus this year, in a time of pandemic: the numbers tattooed on the arms of parents and grandparents. I am sure we have all seen the powerful images of holocaust survivors receiving the coronavirus vaccine with those tattoos still on their arms today. This year's theme is "Be the light in the darkness", encouraging us all to reflect on the depths that humanity can sink to and the ways that we can resist darkness and be the light for others. We are fortunate still to have holocaust survivors with us today, and I urge everybody to interact with the Holocaust Educational Trust and Holocaust Memorial Day Trust to hear from these inspiring individuals.

We have heard a lot about the words "Never again", which first appeared on handmade signs hung up by prisoners at the Buchenwald concentration camp following their liberation in 1945. Those words have become a symbol of the world's resolve to prevent such crimes against humanity from ever reoccurring. Tragically, however, genocides and mass killings were not relegated to history in 1945 but have claimed the lives of an estimated

80 million people since, in places such as Bosnia, Cambodia, Darfur and Rwanda, to name but a few, and today we hear of the persecution of Christians, Yazidis, Rohingyas and Uyghurs. That is why we must continue to be a voice for the persecuted around the world today and to learn from the horrors of the past so that we can be the light.

I would like to finish with these words of Elie Wiesel, the holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate:

"Let us remember those who suffered and perished then, those who fell with weapons in their hands and those who died with prayers on their lips, all those who have no tombs: our heart remains their cemetery."

1.23 pm

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab) [V]: I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in today's debate, as we join across the House and with the Holocaust Educational Trust to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day. Today is an opportunity for us to pause and remember the millions of people who were murdered or whose lives were changed beyond recognition during the holocaust and in more recent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. It is simply staggering to think that the horrors of genocide have occurred across the world during the past two decades, including on the edge of Europe, and even today we see the persecution of Rohingyas, Uyghurs and others across the planet.

As many will know, the date of Holocaust Memorial Day, 27 January, marks the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp. Since Holocaust Memorial Day began in the UK in 2001, it has been marked on the same date each year with a different theme. The 2021 theme is: "Be the light in the darkness." As the trust has said, we can all be the light in the darkness, shining light where people are persecuted and holding those responsible to account. Indeed, it is our common responsibility to be the light and to recognise that our lights are more powerful when we work together.

Words are important too. All of us, through our words, have the power to help set the tone in our family, our workplace and our community. Words can really make a difference. The words that we see and hear all around us today, in newspapers, on social media, online and in conversations, and the words that we all choose to use, have an impact on us and those around us.

On Holocaust Memorial Day, we can honour the survivors of these regimes, but we must also continually challenge ourselves to use the lessons of their experience to inform our lives today. We seek to learn the lessons of the past, but we must also recognise that genocide does not just take place on its own; it is a process that can begin if discrimination, racism and hatred are not checked, challenged and prevented.

We are fortunate here in the UK not to be at risk of genocide. However, discrimination has not ended, and neither has the use of the language of hatred or exclusion. There is still much to do to create a safer future. It might be easier for some to ignore massacres that are happening halfway around the planet, but perhaps it is not so easy to turn a blind eye to events happening in our own backyard. In 2014, antisemitic incidents in the UK reached their highest ever level, double the number of the year before. This continues to be a stain on our society today. Anti-Muslim hate tripled in London after the Paris attacks. Following the EU referendum, hate crime aimed at EU nationals spiked across the UK.

Holocaust Memorial Day is still hugely relevant and important. The mistakes and crimes of the past can never be repeated. Commemorating as we are today is a real demonstration of how the lessons of the past can inform our lives today, and ensure that everyone works together to create a safer, better future.

1.26 pm

Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con): Holocaust Memorial Day demands all to reflect on the hellish events of the genocide perpetrated by Nazi Germany and its collaborators. This year's memorial focuses on being the light in the darkness, encouraging everyone to fight persecution, oppression and injustice everywhere. Despite the difficulties of the past year, it was reassuring yesterday to see people and communities come together in a new way for Holocaust Memorial Day and to reflect.

In the years since the holocaust, we have come to acknowledge that it must never again be allowed to happen. But words alone are hollow; action is required to give them effect. Since the holocaust, we continue to witness genocide, including the Anfal, Rwandan, Bosnian, Rohingya and Yazidi genocides, and currently the genocide of the Uyghurs by the Chinese Communist party.

Tragically, antisemitism continues to rear its monstrous head. In December 2018, a survey found that 89% of Jews living in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK felt that antisemitism had increased in their country over the previous decade.

The United Kingdom must be the light in the darkness now, and provide an example by standing up to those currently committing genocide. Limiting trade and commerce unilaterally with genocidal regimes is one step that the UK must take in leading the world against genocide. On this day, and every day, let us remember the words of holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, who said:

"I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men and women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must—at that moment—become the center of the universe."

Our world's shameful past, and its present, makes it clear that human decency is fragile, and admonishes us that if we treasure humanity, we cannot take our values for granted. To safeguard humanity, we must never forget the evils deliberately inflicted upon the Jewish people throughout the holocaust, and we must appreciate that, as I speak today, similar filthy crimes are being perpetrated by a totalitarian state. We cannot be complicit or deliberately turn a blind eye to genocide out of convenience or lust for bloodstained trade.

Heartbreakingly, this House is called on not only to do everything we can to prevent genocide in the future, but to stop the evil practice that continues today.

1.29 pm

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab): It is an honour not only to speak in such an important debate, but to have joined the very moving Holocaust Memorial Day Trust event yesterday evening.

We should never underestimate how important it is that we take this time every year to remember the horrific events that have occurred in the past; to remember the 6 million Jews murdered during the holocaust, as well as the other millions who were murdered under Nazi rule, and to remember those who were killed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur and in other horrific genocides. Many would have heard the quote:

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

This year's theme for Holocaust Memorial Day, "Be the light in the darkness" could not be more fitting, because we see not only a sustained rise in far right fascism across the world, but the pending economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic. We all know too well the foundations of fascist movements and how they exploit issues in society to perpetuate these ideals. In these dark times, we talk a lot about going back to normal, but we must remember that our normal was not good enough. Our normal saw a rise in antisemitism and all forms of racism over the past few years.

Today, I want to echo the words of 94-year-old holocaust survivor, Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, who recently said that she hopes the coronavirus pandemic will wake people up to have better attitudes towards each other. The atrocities of the holocaust and other past events teach us that we must challenge the prejudice and the language of hatred that we see on a daily basis. We must condemn it when it marches across our streets. We must expose it when it tries to rear its head on all platforms—online platforms in particular at the moment. We must stamp it out when it seeks political legitimacy.

We have all seen recently in the US just what happens when hatred and discrimination are left unchecked and when prejudice is reinforced, empowered and given power. It threatens the very fabric of democracy, so it is not enough for us just not to be racist ourselves. To challenge the scourge of racism across our societies, we must all make the decision to be anti-racist, make conscious efforts to do better and to stand up for others more. The responsibility is with us to be the light in the darkness and to learn from the atrocities of the past to ensure that these horrors never happen again.

1.32 pm

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con) [V]: This debate is an important opportunity to reflect on and remember the murder of millions of Jews, Roma and Sinti, political prisoners, the disabled, those with mental illness, and those who were gay who were persecuted by the barbaric Nazi regime. Today, we also remember the victims of genocide in Bosnia, Rwanda, Cambodia and Darfur and those who, sadly, are still persecuted in parts of the world simply because of who they are.

I have had the privilege of attending events this week to commemorate 76 years since the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau and 20 years since the first Holocaust Memorial Day. On Tuesday, I attended a virtual memorial service hosted by the embassy of Israel and the Foreign Office, and I would like to place on the record my thanks to the Foreign Secretary, the ambassador and Lord Pickles for their moving contributions. In the exceptional circumstances that we face this year, I was grateful to have the chance to listen, learn and reflect on how we must continue to shine a bright light in the darkness.

[Peter Gibson]

In 2019, thanks to the Conservative Friends of Israel, I had the privilege of visiting Israel, as recorded in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, along with other Members of this House. For me, the most moving part of the trip was the visit to the Holocaust History Museum in Yad Vashem where we laid a wreath in memory of the victims of the holocaust. Seeing the personal stories of murder and destruction that forever changed human history moved us all, reinforcing for me the importance of rejecting hatred and working to root out antisemitism. However, the sad truth is that antisemitism persists in the UK and across the world. Indeed, the Community Security Trust has reported that online antisemitism in the UK is at its highest level ever, with more than 780 incidents recorded in the first six months of 2020 alone.

Antisemitism is simply racism, and like all racism it has no place in our society. Racism is born out of ignorance, and ignorance can be overcome with education and understanding. The planned education centre and dedicated holocaust memorial in Victoria Tower gardens will serve as a beacon to future generations to reject hatred, prejudice and denial. Today, we remember all those who have been murdered as a result of religious and political intolerance, and those who have been persecuted in the hope of a kinder, more tolerant society. It is by coming together as a nation—as a community—that we can combat hatred and prejudice globally. We must be the light in the darkness.

1.35 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD) [V]: When I was growing up—when I was first married—one of my most fun relations was my father's first cousin, Joan Priday. Joan was an intelligent woman with a wonderful laugh that I remember today. She was bright, full of fun and had such a sense of humour, and I think I would describe her as being a feminist before her time. She has been dead a long time.

One thing that I did not know about Joan until I was slightly older was that, like the friend of the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson), she had been one of the first people to go into Belsen when it was liberated in early 1945. Like so many people who had that dreadful experience, she did not like to talk about it, but she did tell me that they could not feed the freed prisoners too much to start with because the shock of a full meal could kill them. She talked about the smell which, as the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) mentioned, is something that people who have experienced it never forget. She caught a disease at the camp that made her very sick indeed.

Talking today to her son, John Priday, I discovered that she was troubled by the most awful nightmares for much of the rest of her life. She was awarded the MBE for what she did—she was with the Red Cross, and when the liberating soldiers moved on, of course, the Red Cross had to stay at Belsen. She is dead and gone, and I mourn her, yet by a very strange coincidence, she died on 27 January—Holocaust Memorial Day.

As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, I live in the highlands—I live on the shores of the Dornoch firth in a gentle little town called Tain. That would have seemed then, and indeed seems today, very far from the horrors

that were going on in Europe during the second world war, yet what my cousin Joan Priday said to me has been a useful reminder to me as an individual of how, to echo every other Member speaking today, we must never let this dark heart of evil ever walk the world again. We must do everything in our human power to prevent it.

1.38 pm

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con) [V]: I gave my maiden speech in the House in the corresponding debate last year, and I speak from a constituency where my predecessor has worked tirelessly on this issue and is now our antisemitism tsar. I am truly humbled to be able to speak in this debate on Holocaust Memorial Day—a day that is rightfully being marked not just here in Parliament but throughout the country and beyond.

We should never forget the atrocities perpetrated against the Jewish people and the many other groups that were the target of Nazi racism. That is why I am proud to represent the county where the National Holocaust Centre is located. The memorial centre is dedicated to the teaching of humanity and remembrance so that we as a society can work together for a better world in which tolerance of people's ideas, culture and beliefs is the foundation for a modern society.

Holocaust Memorial Day offers an opportunity to reflect on the tragic events of the genocide perpetrated by Nazi Germany on the Jewish community. It is often said that we shall never again allow this, the most grievous crime against humanity, to be carried out again. Holocaust Memorial Day offers the opportunity to reaffirm this pledge to defend human rights. One such way we can help tackle antisemitism is by adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism. In December 2016, the UK became the first country in Europe to adopt formally this definition, which, while not legally binding, is regarded as a valuable tool, enabling criminal justice agencies to understand how this form of bigotry manifests itself in the 21st century. In 2019, the Communities Secretary wrote to all councils and universities encouraging them to adopt the IHRA working definition of antisemitism, and I would encourage others that have not yet taken this pledge to do so.

We must remember acts of genocide from all over the world. The cases from Rwanda and what happened at Srebrenica, along with the current disturbing world events, are things many of us can immediately relate to and remember, indeed, from our own lifetimes. Today is a day not just for remembrance, but to remind us that action also needs to be taken and we must stand together.

1.41 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab) [V]: It is a privilege to take part in such an important debate. I want to begin by particularly congratulating the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust on the brilliant job it has done in marking Holocaust Memorial Day in these most extraordinary circumstances, as well as communities up and down the country that, like mine in the London Borough of Redbridge, have organised digital events—virtual events—so that people could still come together, albeit in a way that was different from usual.

The last time I went to Auschwitz-Birkenau was just prior to the 2019 general election, with the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and it was, as visits to Auschwitz

always are, deeply moving and deeply unnerving. Going with groups of children from my own constituency, through the Holocaust Educational Trust, was a particularly powerful experience because of the responsibility that we bear, as current and future generations, to bear witness to the testimony of holocaust survivors, who are, sadly, fewer in number with every passing year.

One of the things that I find most troubling about the lessons of the holocaust—the lessons from Auschwitz and, in particular, from visiting Auschwitz just before the 2019 general election—is that it is very easy to look at the holocaust and the Nazi persecution and to ask, with confusion, bewilderment and a total lack of understanding in many respects, how it was that these uniquely evil people, the Nazis, could perpetrate such appalling acts of genocide, but the uncomfortable truth is that the Nazis were not extraordinary people. They were ordinary people capable of acts of extraordinary evil. That is the fundamental truth of the holocaust, and why we must always guard against antisemitism in our society.

It is very easy to condemn the antisemites of the world where they bear the swastika or march through the streets of Charlottesville, but it is much less comfortable confronting antisemitism among the people we know in our communities, perhaps even in our families or, indeed, in our political parties. So if the words “Never again” are really truly to mean something, being the light in the darkness is not just about our country’s responsibility on the global stage to tackle ongoing acts of genocide and atrocities such as those being perpetrated by China; it is also our everyday responsibility as citizens and Members of Parliament to tackle antisemitism under our very noses.

1.43 pm

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con) [V]: With the sheer scale of the tragedy, the unimaginable horror and the fact that it happened in Europe—on our doorstep—in the mid-20th century, the holocaust is almost impossible to comprehend. Over the 76 years since the liberation of the concentration camps and the end of the second world war, the destruction of Nazi tyranny and the genocide, we have become numb to the numbers and the facts, but we must remind ourselves over and over again. As the numbers of those who survived sadly diminish each year, it is up to us, a new generation who have heard at first hand from those survivors what happened, to remember and to pass on.

In 1933, when the Nazis first came to power in Germany, there were 9 million Jews living in Europe. By 1945, 6 million had been killed—two out of every three—not through disease or natural causes or war but through a programme of extermination, a cold, calculated effort to wipe an entire people from the face of the continent. While we remember all of that faith who, for their faith alone, were tortured and killed, we cannot on this day forget the 5 million others who did not fit into the vision of a perfect race, or who would not submit to the vicious ideology of Nazism: more than half a million Roma Gypsies; thousands of Christian priests and Ministers who refused to submit to the Nazis; political opponents; resistance fighters; the 15,000 members of the LGBT community who died having first been forced into the ignominy of wearing pink triangles so that they could be easily recognised and even further humiliated; the

disabled put to death under Hitler’s cleansing programme; the black children who were forcibly sterilised. For all who suffered and died because of their faith, who they were, who they loved or what they looked like, we must remember and say “Never again.”

It is often asked why we did not do more in the 1930s in the run-up to world war two. Surely we knew what was happening, if not the scale. Maybe we did, but it was harder to know exactly what was happening on foreign shores back then—not so any more. In this interconnected world, a world that seems closer and smaller than ever before, that argument no longer stands, so I wonder, however well meant, how hollow our words feel to the people of Rwanda, Darfur and Bosnia. I wonder, when they hear politicians in the west say “Never again” what they actually think. We knew what was happening in those countries and still we did nothing. We saw on our TV screens the death and destruction, the genocides taking place in our world and in our lifetime. We saw Bashar al-Assad use chemical weapons against children, and this House voted not to intervene. We see forced sterilisation, forced labour and prison camps in Xinjiang for the Uyghur Muslims, and the suffering of the Rohingya in Myanmar. Today, when we say “Never again” let us mean it.

1.46 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con) [V]: While comparisons with the holocaust should never be made lightly, the suffering of at least 200,000 North Koreans in Kim Jong-un’s prison camps, many of them prisoners of conscience, is not dissimilar from that in Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen or Stalin’s gulag. The only difference with North Korea is that the incarceration, atrocities and absolute totalitarian repression have continued there for longer—for decades.

More than 10 years ago, the UN’s first special rapporteur for human rights in North Korea described the human rights crisis there as *sui generis*—in a category of its own. A 2014 UN commission of inquiry chaired by the distinguished Australian judge Michael Kirby concluded that the gravity, scale and nature of human rights violations in North Korea reveal a state that does not have any parallel in the contemporary world, and designated those violations crimes against humanity. The reality is that, in North Korea, there is no freedom whatsoever. Every single article of the universal declaration of human rights is violated every single day.

That 2014 UN report recommended that those responsible be brought to account, but those steps have not been taken, and subsequent years have seen only further crimes. In the light of that, the all-party parliamentary group on North Korea, of which I am a co-chair, launched an inquiry into human rights in that country since the UN report of 2014. Our aim is to shine a parliamentary light. We also wish to spotlight the urgent need for the UK and other states to challenge and suppress these ongoing violations in North Korea, and to work towards bringing those responsible to justice. It is welcome that Lord Ahmad, our Minister for human rights, attended the APPG recently and make clear his support for, and the active engagement of the FCDO with, our inquiry.

The voice that matters in this debate is that of the victims and survivors, to whom I pay tribute. One such is the North Korean escapee Timothy Cho, who not

[Fiona Bruce]

long ago worked as an intern in my office for a year. His hope and enthusiasm for democracy, freedom and the rule of law to be present in his home country is inspirational. We owe it to him and to the victims and remaining survivors of the holocaust and other genocides, however difficult the challenge, not to ignore human rights violations across the globe, including those in North Korea today.

1.49 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind) [V]: It is an honour to have the opportunity to address the House today as we commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day 2021. The theme this year is “Be the light in the darkness”. In the world of today, where injustice and persecution are par for the course in so many lands, this is a powerful, pertinent message. The animus of hatred that drove the Nazi persecution of the Jews and many other marginalised groups such as the Roma, LGBTQ and disabled people remains manifest in the world today, and all of us must be a light in the darkness that will confront that hatred and stop it in its tracks.

Even today, 76 years after the liberation of the inmates of Auschwitz-Birkenau, there are vulnerable minorities around the world who suffer identity-based persecution, discrimination and violence. From the Rohingya in Myanmar to the Uyghurs in China, millions of people across our planet are subjected to deliberate, ongoing oppression and attempts at extermination of their culture, way of life and personhood. How we respond to these horrors is a living, every-day test of whether we are the light in the darkness that the memory of the estimated 6 million Jewish people and millions of others murdered by the Nazis calls on us to be.

Across Europe, too, discrimination against and persecution of many marginalised groups continues today. We cannot be complacent about the antisemitic, anti-Muslim, anti-Traveller, homophobic and transphobic attitudes that prevail in our societies. I pay tribute to organisations such as Human Rights Watch, HOPE not hate, and Tell MAMA, which continue to document rising hatred and persecution domestically in the UK and around the world. I pay tribute to the Holocaust Educational Trust, which does excellent work in schools across the UK, including in my constituency, educating our young people about the horrors of the holocaust and other genocides. I have had the privilege of listening to the deeply moving testimony of Mala Tribich, a survivor of the holocaust who, alone with her brother Ben, was the last member of her family to have survived Nazi persecution.

In conclusion, it is impossible to overstate the importance of these personal accounts. It is paramount that we remember those dark times when the darkness was everywhere and lights were few. It is vital that those accounts are passed on to the next generation, so that the light of memory inspires other lights, other acts of resistance to even the darkest evil. Let us all be such lights.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. For the convenience of the House, I inform everybody that the winding-up speeches will start at 19 minutes past 3, with eight minutes for each of the three Front Benchers and two minutes for Stephen to wind up further.

1.53 pm

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): It is an honour to be called to speak in this timely and poignant debate to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day and the 76th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp. I put on record my thanks to the Backbench Business Committee and my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) for securing this timely debate.

I wish to start by discussing the most abhorrent example of antisemitism: holocaust denial. The Community Security Trust recently undertook a study of holocaust denial in relation to an alternative social media site, BitChute, which unfortunately still operates, providing a safe space for antisemitic, racist, misogynistic and conspiracy-fuelled content from the far right. The CST conducted searches on BitChute in the 24 hours running up to Holocaust Memorial Day this year. The searches related to five non-offensive terms related to the holocaust: “holocaust”, “Auschwitz”, “Hitler”, “gas chambers”, and “Anne Frank”.

What was found were easily accessible videos in vast quantities that both denied and glorified the holocaust. In every single case, the vast majority of the search results were overtly antisemitic. The CST limited its search to the first 20 videos per search item, and 94 of them were considered overtly antisemitic. These 94 videos had a combined viewing figure of over 1.5 million. Some of the videos are inaccessible in the UK, and rightly so, but this is easily circumvented by using a virtual private network. These 94 videos were only a fraction of thousands more that were glorifying the holocaust, and we do need to be doing more to remove this content. Holocaust denial is only one part of the problem on BitChute, which still hosts large quantities of other antisemitic, racist and conspiracy-fuelled material. I look forward to being able to address this further when the online harms Bill comes forward.

I pay tribute to the fantastic work that the Community Security Trust does to keep the Jewish community safe every single day. I also pay tribute to the work of the Antisemitism Policy Trust, and Danny Stone in particular. My constituent Noemie Lopian recently shared the story of her family’s experience during the “long night” and the book telling the story of her father, Ernst Israel Bornstein. The Fed Jewish care home in my constituency runs the My Voice project to make sure that these holocaust survivors will never be forgotten and their stories will live on. The work of the Holocaust Educational Trust, which many hon. and right hon. Members have mentioned, and of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, certainly needs to be remembered. This year’s theme is “Be the light in the darkness”. We really must be that light and say firmly, as a House, “Never again”.

1.56 pm

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): It is a privilege to speak in this important debate as a proudly Jewish parliamentarian.

This year, Holocaust Memorial Day and today’s debate coincide with the Jewish festival of Tu Bishvat. It is one of four “new years” within the Jewish calendar, marking the birthday of trees for the purposes of the mitzvot relating to farming practices and the permissibility of the fruits of those trees for eating or bringing to Jerusalem as a tithe. In contemporary Judaism, and in the context

of increased awareness around ecological issues and the climate emergency, the festival is having something of a renaissance, with millions of trees planted every year and lively debates within our community about what we can learn from our traditions of sustainable farming practices and respect for the divinity of the natural world. In the context of Holocaust Memorial Day, there are some deeper lessons we can take from Tu Bishvat into our reflection, as we honour the lives of those murdered in the holocaust and subsequent genocides in Rwanda, Cambodia, Bosnia and Darfur, and into action as we resolve to make “never again” about more than just platitudes.

I spoke in my speech last year of the incredible story of the Sarajevo Haggadah and Dervis Korkut, a Muslim man who is recognised by the Yad Vashem world holocaust memorial centre as a righteous gentile to whom the Jewish people owe a huge debt. We are not short of these stories of heroism and resistance, and in this place we are enormously privileged in our position of being able to bring about the kinds of large-scale changes that these heroes could only dream of. We need not risk our lives smuggling Swedish passports into Nazi-occupied Hungary, like Raoul Wallenberg, or smuggling Jewish children out of the Warsaw ghetto, like Irena Sendler, or hiding Jews in the Albanian mountains, like Vesel and Fatima Veseli, because we can bring about a fair and just immigration system that protects the lives of refugees, we can work to halt the proliferation of fascist propaganda online, and we can use our international standing, our influence and our trade policy to hold other nations accountable. We need not look the other way as people are persecuted around the world when we have both the moral obligation and the means as a nation to “be the light”. It brings me great sadness to say that, as a House, we are failing in this duty. Solidarity is our most powerful weapon against genocide, and our communities must not allow us to be divided or to see others scapegoated or disasters exploited by the far right.

One of the stories often told from the Talmud at this time of year is of Honi the circle maker. One day, Honi the circle maker was walking on the road and saw a man planting a carob tree. Honi asked the man, “How long will it take for this tree to bear fruit?” The man replied, “Seventy years.” Honi then asked the man, “And do you think you will live another 70 years to eat the fruit of this tree?” The man answered, “Perhaps not. In the same way as my fathers planted for me, I will also plant for my children.”

We know about the long-reaching shadow of inherited pasts and post-memory—the relationship that the generation after bears to the personal, collective and cultural trauma of those that came before—but Tu Bishvat marks the time when the sap starts flowing in the trees again, the welcome reminder of nature’s rhythm and light returning after the darkness, with trees growing, blooming and fruiting. As we preserve the memory of those who can no longer share their own stories, all of us have a duty to sow the seeds of solidarity and friendship for our children, even if we may never live to see the fruits ourselves.

1.59 pm

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): When other countries were rounding up their Jewish communities and herding them on to the trains to the gas chambers, Britain provided a haven for thousands of refugee children.

In November 1938, the then Government announced the Kindertransport scheme, and the Dudley refugee committee was in one of the very first waves of local committees formed the following month. One of its founders, a Mr Honigmann, was a refugee himself, having escaped antisemitic laws in Germany. It was in Dudley that he found safety, and he became a scientific adviser to the newly opened Dudley zoo. Teachers from local schools in Dudley joined him in his efforts, and an excellent education was provided for the Jewish refugee children.

One young man, Georg Kreisel, before reaching the safety of British shores, had been arrested at a school in Vienna, and witnessed horrific beatings and slayings. Out of the 3,000 men and boys who had been detained, Georg was among just three who were released. The rest were sent to concentration camps. He observed:

“Behind me the gates of a hell closed, and horror-stricken, I sought my way home.”

Georg excelled academically, and towards the end of world war two, he made an important contribution to the success of D-day by calculating the effect of waves on the floating harbours being designed for the Normandy landings.

My predecessor in Dudley North, Lord Austin, the son of a holocaust refugee, did a great deal of work to root out antisemitism, and I pay tribute to him for his efforts. To echo the sentiments he expressed in this House, it is the contribution we make in the belief in the values that British people have fought and died for—values of democracy, equality and freedom, fairness and tolerance—that make us British.

We must all take responsibility not just for our actions, but for our language as well. There is no place for identity-based prejudice and hostility, wherever this manifests itself. All of us have a duty to be vigilant, alert to the insidious traps set by those who seek to divide us. I welcome the Government’s introduction of the online harms Bill, but I would ask Ministers to look again at the categorisation and assess whether more could be done to tackle smaller platforms such as BitChute—my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Christian Wakeford) has just referred to it—which is a video platform for neo-Nazis. We must not allow any cesspit of hateful, antisemitic, racist abuse to grow and take hold. We all know what happened when it did.

2.2 pm

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): Many schools across Hartlepool have held online events this week to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day. In following their example, each and every one of us in this House has an obligation to stand up to hatred wherever and whenever we see it. We must use every opportunity to educate people about the horrors of the past to avoid further atrocities in the future.

The holocaust was not the last genocide to take place. Genocides have taken place while the international community has watched with horror on several occasions since the end of the second world war. We owe it to the survivors of the holocaust and of subsequent genocides in Europe, Africa, the middle east, and southern and central Asia to redouble our efforts to stop the slaughter. In our roles, we must set an example and a standard in public life. We must oppose those who seek to cause division and spread false information at every turn.

[Mike Hill]

Prior to the rise of the Nazis, Germany was awash with antisemitism and antisemitic conspiracies, and we must learn from that experience. What begins as a wild myth can soon be accepted as fact across a broad section of society. With the acceptance of lies as truth comes the danger of violence. We know what that can lead to and we know what that did.

Antisemitism and every other form of hatred have not gone away since 1945. They are still here, still wreaking havoc and devastation across our communities, and still causing fear. Even now, Jewish people have told me that they do not dare to be open about their religion or culture in some situations for fear of the reaction they might get. The same is true for other minority groups.

With the rapid rise of antisemitic conspiracies such as QAnon spread by the uneducated and hate-filled platforms like Twitter and endorsed by some of the most prominent political figures in America, it is clear that our fight is not yet over—not even close. The sickening image of a man standing inside the US Capitol building, the seat of American democracy, wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with the words “Camp Auschwitz” shows the extent of what we are still facing as a society 70 years on. That must be our duty and our pledge to those who lost their lives, to the survivors and to future generations the world over. We should never forget and when we say never again, we must mean never again.

2.5 pm

Antony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con): It is a real privilege to take part in today’s debate. It might be 76 years since the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp, but it remains as important as ever that we remember what happened.

This year, the theme for Holocaust Memorial Day is to be the light in the darkness. Light is an incredible thing: it brings hope, it brings knowledge and it exposes. It is this light which showed us the scale of horror and devastation inflicted by the Nazi regime: 6 million Jewish people and millions more—Soviet citizens, Polish people, gay people, Gypsies and many, many more. The number of victims is almost incomprehensible to us and it is an evil brought about by our fellow man, showing us what can happen if we look the other way. It is a sobering reminder to all of us who sit in this place of the deep and humbling responsibility we have, and it is why I support a permanent holocaust memorial next to Parliament.

Earlier this week I spoke to the Jewish Leadership Council, the Antisemitism Policy Trust and the Community Security Trust, three organisations which do incredible work to protect Jewish people in this country and ensure we never lose sight of the work we still must do to end antisemitism. It is a sad reality that far from being eradicated antisemitism appears to be on the rise. We know there are places on the internet where it thrives alongside other hate and extremism. Those are not dark, unknown corners of the internet, but the platforms many of us use: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, as well as the more obscure ones, including the ones explained in such great detail by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Christian Wakeford).

Antisemitism is not just confined to the internet. Burnley does not have a large Jewish population, but last year one of my constituents, Ashley, who is just 18 years old, was attacked for no other reason than his Jewish faith. I want to recognise Ashley’s bravery in coming forward, and thank the CST for the support and help it provided to him. Ashley is a light in the darkness, showing the problems that still exist.

We have heard so many powerful speeches in this debate, including the one from my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). They show us why we should stand vigilantly. We must stand ready to protect those who need it; not to stand by, but to stand up.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Patricia, I understand that you are having difficulties seeing a timer, so I will gently ask you to finish after three minutes if you have not already done so.

2.8 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP) [V]: As we reflect today on the murder of 6 million Jews in the holocaust, we have heard today, shamefully, how antisemitism is still increasing. It is shameful that armed guards are often felt necessary to guard synagogues in London. That is something that should be part of our reflections today.

Currently, we see another genocide being carried out against the Uyghur population. It is unfolding before our very eyes, showing that great evil is still very much a feature of our world. The theme of this year’s commemorations, “Be the light in the darkness”, is not just the light of goodness and hope, but the light that we must shine into the darkest corners of the world whether they be in Europe, Asia, Africa or anywhere else where hatred lurks and seeks to destroy others. Sadly, genocide is not something that is part of our history—it is with us today. The world rightly condemns the atrocities against the Uyghur population, which have chilling parallels to what happened in Europe in the 1940s. It is our moral duty to do everything in our power to stand up to those who violate basic human rights, however powerful they may be. In the world today, nation states that perpetrate such evil must not be glad-handed. They must not be gently coaxed as we seek to sign trade deals. States that perpetrate such evil must not be flattered because we believe them to be powerful and important. We must not tiptoe around leaders or regimes that preside over brutality.

There must be no doubt that we will not tolerate genocide, flagrant abuses of human rights, or hatred in any form. If we are truly serious about condemning such persecution, that must be reflected in this House’s supporting the amendment to the Trade Bill that seeks to terminate any trade deal with any country committing genocide. There can be no equivocation when it comes to dealing with evil.

The holocaust has taught us that hatred in all its forms does not appear overnight; it is the result of creeping, insidious, manipulative, predatory and strategic campaigning to turn one group against another. That is what happened in Germany in the 1940s to the Jewish people, and it is the pattern of all such campaigns of hatred, so we must always be aware. Let our light in the darkness be not just a light of hope but a beacon shining on evil, so that it can be fully exposed and challenged wherever it lurks.

2.11 pm

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): Having been born and raised in Germany, where people do not shy away from their past lest the lessons be forgotten, I thought I was reasonably well versed in this subject. Then, last January, I had the opportunity to visit Yad Vashem. I would urge any Member here to visit that memorial, Auschwitz-Birkenau, or any of the other testaments to the unspeakable evil we are debating today. I have no shame in saying that that experience broke me.

There is a passage in the Talmud that states:

“Once a person has sinned and repeated the sin, [he treats it] as if it has become permitted.”

That verse warns of the mesmeric ease with which the worst of human behaviour can be repeated and then normalised—what political theorist Hannah Arendt called the “banality of evil”. We have a duty, as a people who have enjoyed nearly 1,000 years of relative wealth, prosperity and freedom, to stand against that banality of evil wherever we perceive it. We have not always been equal to that task.

One of the darkest stains on the soul of this nation and, indeed, this place began with the phrase

“a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing”.

The catastrophe that followed allowed us to know those people a lot better, yet we still abandoned them to over 40 years of communist oppression after world war two as we turned inward to look after ourselves. “Enlightened self-interest” is often anything but. As Martin Niemöller once put it:

“Als sie mich holten, gab es keinen mehr, der protestierte.”

“When they came for me, there was no one left to speak for me.”

In commemorating the shoah, we must not satisfy ourselves that we are remembering an historical event that happened many years ago; in a very real sense, it is ongoing. The places—Darfur, Srebrenica, Rwanda—and the names—Yazidi, Rohingya, Uyghur—have changed, but the evil has not.

By our simple luck of birth, we cannot justify turning a blind eye. Nor can modern geopolitical realpolitik give a free pass to the perpetrators, whom we meet on a regular basis, whom we talk to, and one of whom we invited here to give a speech in Westminster Hall. When Andrew Marr can show the Chinese ambassador footage of Uyghurs being rounded up and put on trains and his response is to talk about tourism in Xinjiang, and when official Chinese social media accounts can boast of liberating Uyghur women by sterilising them, we are staring into the void. We must decide whether we want the void to stare back at us.

As we remember the 6 million stolen lives of the shoah—HaShem yikom damam—I hope that Members across the Chamber will also remember those still fighting to live just because of who they are.

2.13 pm

Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab) [V]: It is a privilege to take part in this debate, and to take the opportunity today to remember and pay my respects to all those who have been lost and who have suffered as a result of division and hate.

Holocaust Memorial Day is a day to remember the 6 million Jews murdered during the holocaust, and those who experienced those atrocities as they inevitably reduce in number. It is more important than ever that we continue to observe this day so that generations to come never forget the horrors that were carried out during the holocaust, alongside the victims of genocide in Rwanda, Darfur, Cambodia and Bosnia. I thank one of my local authorities, South Tyneside, which organised its own online event, of which I was very happy to be a part.

The world has a duty to remember that the holocaust was an evil attempt to eliminate 6 million innocent Jewish people and so many others, including LGBT, Roma, Sinti and disabled people, as well as trade unionists and the elderly, all of whom were victims of such horrific Nazi brutality. They were heartlessly killed for no reason other than that they were shockingly identified as being inferior by virtue of their ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or political affiliation.

That humans are capable of such appalling brutality, based on an adherence to a doctrine of hate, is incomprehensible, but to fail to retell one of the darkest periods of human history would be an injustice to those who perished. I am sure the holocaust will carry emotional memories for many of us. For me, I remember my great uncle Frederick, who was one of the first British soldiers to liberate the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp on 15 April 1945, and my youngest son is proudly named after him. It is essential that we continue to educate the next and future generations, so that they are aware of what happened under the Nazi regime and can develop a more tolerant society, free from racism, prejudice and bigotry.

Hatred and intolerance continue to exist 76 years later, and hate speech and hate crimes are on the rise. Our communities are becoming increasingly divided. All too often, acts of horrific cruelty are still being carried out around the world against people because of their religion, their race and their beliefs. In memory of the millions who perished, let us recommit ourselves to tolerance and respect and to standing together, so that their legacy will be a society of co-operation and compassion. We can and we must be the light in the darkness.

2.16 pm

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab) [V]: Yesterday, I was proud to see Durham cathedral and castle lit up to mark Holocaust Memorial Day. They joined scores of other landmarks illuminated to mark the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1945 and to remember the victims of the holocaust.

Some may question the value of these memorials and events, with our focus being on the pandemic and the crisis we are currently living through, but to me it makes them even more important. In hard times, where events are moving so quickly, it is good for us to pause for a minute and reflect.

The theme of this year’s Holocaust Memorial Day, “light in the darkness”, is very appropriate, because these have been dark times, too. The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust urges us to remember those who were murdered for who they were and to stand against prejudice and hatred in the present day. Both are equally important. Understanding our history is vital to learning the lessons of the past, so that we have hope of a better future.

[Mary Kelly Foy]

As many have pointed out over the past few days, the persecution of Jewish people in Germany did not start with the concentration camps, but with stereotyping and prejudiced language, then hatred and scapegoating. We know where it ends. A few years ago, I visited Natzweiler-Struthof camp on the Alsace border, and that will be forever etched in my mind. Natzweiler-Struthof was well known for being used for medical experiments by SS guards.

No two historical periods are the same, but we live in fragile times. Frustration and anger are everywhere and, once again, the instinct for many is to look for scapegoats. As the Jewish writer and poet Michael Rosen wrote a few years ago:

“Fascism arrives as your friend.

It will restore your honour,

make you feel proud,

protect your house,

give you a job,

clean up the neighbourhood,

remind you of how great you once were,

clear out the venal and the corrupt,

remove anything you feel is unlike you...”

Sadly, I see some of that in the way we talk about the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in this country, and sometimes even in this House. Romany Gypsies were victims of the holocaust, too. Hundreds of thousands perished in Nazi Germany, yet many see anti-Traveller sentiment as an acceptable form of racism in 2021. It is not, and as we remember the holocaust, we should learn the lessons of that terrible period.

2.19 pm

Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con) [V]: The Holocaust is not the only example of man’s inhumanity to man. It is not the only genocide, and while it touched every corner of Europe, the United Kingdom was, relatively speaking at least, barely affected. So why remember? It is surely because, as we have already heard so vividly today, it still has the power to shock. The scale is difficult to comprehend. This was not a rampage or a single, impulsive act. Winston Churchill warned in 1940 of

“a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science”.

In the “final solution”, that was made real by educated men, calm deliberation and technical precision. The holocaust was made possible by attitudes that were prevalent in early 20th-century society.

The reason we should continue to remember is encapsulated in the post-war experiences of Toivi Blatt, a Polish Jew who escaped from the Sobibor extermination camp and later found a new life in Israel and then in the United States. Laurence Rees’s book, “Auschwitz: the Nazis and the ‘Final Solution’”, tells how in the early 1990s Toivi returned to visit his home village of Izbica in eastern Poland. He visited his old family home, from before they were taken to the camps, and asked the new owner if he could look around the house where he grew up. The new owner was reluctant, but the offer of US\$3 convinced him. In the living room, Toivi noticed a chair that had belonged to his father. The homeowner said that that was impossible, but Toivi turned over the chair to reveal the family name written on the base. “Mr Blatt,

why the comedy with the chair?” the homeowner asked. “I know why you’re here. You have come for the hidden money. We could divide it 50/50.” Toivi was furious, and left immediately. There is some poetic justice in the story. When Toivi next returned to Izbica, he found his old house in ruins. A neighbour told him: “When you left, we were unable to sleep because day and night he was looking for the treasure you were supposed to have hidden. He took the floor apart, the walls apart, everything. And later he found himself in the situation that he couldn’t fix it—it would cost too much money. And so now it’s a ruin.” Poetic justice, perhaps, but a reminder that while the attitudes that triggered the Holocaust are less prevalent today, they have not been extinguished. We must remember.

2.22 pm

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab) [V]: It is a huge privilege to be able to speak today in this important debate. I am mindful of the time pressure and I will be brief. Holocaust Memorial Day is so important and so necessary. It is an opportunity to remember all those murdered by the Nazis, the 6 million Jews, the thousands of Roma and Sinti, the political prisoners, those with disabilities and mental illness and those persecuted for their sexuality. It is also the day when we remember the 2 million victims of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and the almost 1 million victims of the Rwandan genocide of the 1990s. It is also the day when we remember the 8,000 Muslim men and boys murdered in Srebrenica more than 25 years ago. On Holocaust Memorial Day, we come together to remember them all, to mourn their loss and to commit ourselves to never letting this hate blight our world again.

Like so many people across Newport West, I welcome the theme for this year’s Holocaust Memorial Day, “Be the light in the darkness”. It is a call to action against identity-based persecution, misinformation and the denial of justice. I was glad to be able to join so many people across the UK for the online memorial service last night, organised by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, and I pay tribute to the trust’s amazing effort to produce such a poignant service incorporating input from victims and leaders across the UK. This is a timely focus for the fight for a better world, and we need to remember that the generation who lived this horrific experience are now passing on. Soon, all of those who faced the sheer horror and brutality of the holocaust and survived will no longer be with us, so we owe it to them, and to all those who died at the hands of the Nazis, to never forget and to always remain vigilant.

People across Newport West reflected yesterday on the vicious murders, on the hopes and dreams robbed by the Nazis and on what we can do to stop hatred taking hold again. I was pleased that the leader of Newport City Council—Councillor Jane Mudd—and her colleagues across the political parties came together yesterday to light the Civic Centre purple as our city marked Holocaust Memorial Day.

This year, we were not able to remember together, nor to reaffirm anew our commitment to a better world, but we will meet again next year. The millions of victims of genocide across the world will not have this opportunity, so let us seize the ability to meet again that we have been blessed with, let us protect it always, and let us commit ourselves to eradicating hate wherever we find it. I am

honoured to speak for the people of Newport West in this debate, and I pledge on behalf of us all to never walk by on the other side.

2.25 pm

Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con) [V]: I am truly humbled to be called to take part in today's debate. As I lit a candle last night to mark the 76th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, I reflected on my visit there some years ago. I was attending a conference in nearby Krakow and felt compelled to take time out to make the journey. I travelled there by train, and was unable to imagine what that journey would have been like for the millions of Jews who knew what the final destination meant.

We all have moments in our lives that remain embedded in our memories long after others fade. I remember vividly the eerie silence and the absence of birdsong as I entered the site. The sign "Arbeit Macht Frei" was a grim reminder that I was stepping back into the setting of the most abhorrent atrocity in the last 100 years. Before visiting the Auschwitz living museum, I had not fully understood the extent to which the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis reached beyond the Jewish population, to include a wide range of political opponents, other ethnic groups such as the Roma community, gay men and people with disabilities. But in remembering the lives of these victims, so brutally murdered by the Nazis, who felt empowered to commit these atrocities, we must recommit ourselves as a society to tackling that hatred, intolerance and prejudice in whatever modern-day shape it may take.

That is why, as so few survivors of the holocaust remain to talk of their lived experience, it has never been more important that their stories are captured or retold by future generations—lest we forget. Yet as the London Eye lit up purple and candles were lit in windows yesterday evening to commemorate and remember the dead, denial, division and misinformation continues. I welcome the work of organisations such as the Holocaust Educational Trust that play an important role in providing educational events for students across the country on Holocaust Memorial Day and throughout the year. I also absolutely support the Government's commitment to building a permanent statue and Holocaust Memorial education centre next to Parliament.

Lessons were meant to be learnt from the horrors of the holocaust. The world was to change for the better forever. How, then, do we explain Bosnia, Cambodia, Darfur, Rwanda, the Rohingya people and the plight of Uyghurs in China? As I know many colleagues wish to speak in this debate, I will end my speech now, with the poignant words of holocaust survivor Gena Turgel:

"We will continue to do our bit for as long as we can, secure in the knowledge that others will continue to light a candle long after us."

2.28 pm

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab) [V]: The theme of this year's Holocaust Memorial Day is "Be the light in the darkness", encouraging us to focus on those who, over the years, have found the courage and the conviction to take a stand against hatred and division, and to remind us of our duty to confront racism, division and misinformation wherever

we see it. We should not underestimate the great courage that it can take to do so, or see it as a challenge confined to the history books.

Just three weeks ago, a group of thugs stormed the heart of US democracy. Among their number was a man wearing a "Camp Auschwitz" T-shirt, and others wearing shirts emblazoned with deeply offensive and disturbing messages. This did not come out of nowhere. Too many politicians have failed to take a stand for freedom, tolerance and the rule of law over the last few years. When President Trump refused to accept electoral defeat in November, one Republican party official was quoted as saying:

"What is the downside for humoring him for this little bit of time?"

History has repeatedly confirmed that appeasement in the face of prejudice and hatred only emboldens those who perpetrate it.

One of the reasons why the rise of the Nazis is so difficult for us to come to terms with is that it is not something that happened centuries ago or in a failed state on the other side of the world; it happened in western Europe in the mid-20th century. It stands as a grave warning of where hatred and misinformation can lead, if we allow it to, even in the wealthiest and best-educated societies.

Today, the worrying reality is that many British Jews see antisemitism creeping back into everyday life. So what do we do? First, we educate. I pay tribute to the work of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and the Holocaust Educational Trust, which have helped me to understand the true horror of the holocaust, and my duty to ensure that we teach future generations what is right and how to build a better future.

Secondly, we legislate, through the online safety Bill, and by adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism. We work, on a cross-party basis, through the all-party parliamentary group against antisemitism, which I co-chair, and which I invite all Members to join. Most of all, we set the tone in public discourse, with no pandering to racist, divisive narratives, and no standing by when we see antisemitism in or outside politics. Sadly, we still have work to do in my party to repair the damage of the past five years.

Through active remembrance, which we continue to do through this annual debate and events, I hope that Holocaust Memorial Day will serve as a marker for future generations that we have listened, we have learnt, we have acted, and never again.

2.31 pm

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con) [V]: North Norfolk is a peaceful constituency of farming, beautiful coastline and, of course, the Norfolk broads. Life generally moves slowly, with a broads ranger quietly reminding a speeding boat that 5 mph is well over the 4 mph limit, and to be more careful in future.

Had I been the MP for North Norfolk in the 1930s, I wonder how I would have reacted to the growing stories of antisemitism in Europe. I wonder how Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Thomas Russell Albert Mason Cook, my predecessor from 1931 to 1945, would have reacted. According to *Hansard*, in the years between his election and the outbreak of war, he did not once mention the subject. It is not surprising, really, and I do not blame him, because in the same period from Hitler's power

[Duncan Baker]

grab, antisemitism gets only 43 mentions in *Hansard*, and those are largely in passing. In Hitler's early days in power, that is perhaps excusable, but our records show not only a lack of interest in the rise of evil elsewhere, but a positive wish to keep it there. There are quite a few examples to choose from, but perhaps this one from a debate in 1938 is as good as any to prove the point:

"We must remember that if these people come in here, we risk the rousing of anti-Semitism in this country." —[*Official Report*, 24 November 1938; Vol. 341, c. 2053.]

Thankfully, times have changed and continue to change.

As an island nation, we could be accused of being inward-looking. We must not be. Too often it is easier to turn a blind eye or to make the excuse that we must fix our own problems first. Too often, especially these days, people are afraid of calling out wrongdoing or evil for fear of being branded a troublemaker or disrupter, of going against the tide, of challenging authority, of raising their voice when others say they must not, because it means putting their career and reputation at risk. So have I any right to call out Sir Thomas for worrying more about the British sugar subsidy in 1935 than the persecution of Jews in Germany? No. We live in very different times; but it is an important reflection of how far we have come, and must continue to move, so that this period of history is never forgotten yet always learnt from.

That is why today we should be standing up for the Rohingya in Myanmar, and against the Dinka ethnic group in South Sudan for their persecution of the Nuer people. We should be calling out the persecution of the Yazidis in Iraq. Perhaps most seriously, there is the persecution of the Uyghurs by the Chinese state. We put our economic comfort against the untold distress of an entire people. These atrocities are happening today. Are we a light in their darkness? We should be. Let us all be a light in their darkness.

2.34 pm

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): It is a privilege to speak in today's debate. No words can really describe the evil perpetrated by man upon their fellow man in a deliberate act of extermination of an entire race. As the survivors—the living testament to this evil pass—it is vital that we redouble our efforts to ensure that a light continues to be shone upon this evil. That is why I am glad to add my support to those seeking a permanent memorial here in our nation's capital—a city that shone a light in the darkness during the dark days of the second world war. I cannot think of a more poignant or apt tribute to those people.

2.35 pm

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab) [V]: It is an honour and a privilege to speak in today's debate. A staggering and heartbreaking 6 million Jews—women, men and children—were murdered during the holocaust. Today we collectively commemorate and remember them. Today we collectively grieve and say, "Never again."

The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust's theme for this year could not be more fitting: "Be the light in the darkness." This theme invites us to reflect on the murky depths to which humanity can sink. We saw it in the holocaust and in the genocides that followed, from

Cambodia to Darfur, Bosnia and Rwanda—dark stains on all of humanity. The light derives from communities who defied evil and those who rose to save lives—those who put their own lives on the line to stand up to and against hate. We salute those people, we commemorate them and we remember them.

The holocaust was not something that happened long ago. It is our recent history, and it should always remain engraved in our consciousness. Millions of Jews and non-Jews were murdered through forced labour, starvation, bullets and gas chambers. We should rightly be proud of the role that British forces played in liberating those who were sent to die in concentration and extermination camps such as Bergen-Belsen.

In the aftermath of the war, more than 3,000 holocaust survivors settled in Britain. In putting together my remarks for this speech, I was inspired by the story of Martin Kapel, who grew up in Coventry. Martin was born of Polish parents in Germany, and I willed up as I read about the horrors he witnessed as a young boy. Fortunately, he was selected to be transported to Britain through the Kindertransport programme. He was one of the thousands of Jewish children who survived by escaping to Britain while the communities they came from were destroyed. I am proud that he chose to make Coventry his home.

I am proud that, today, Coventry still holds its status as a sanctuary city, home to refugees fleeing violence. I join the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust in calling on us all to be the light in the darkness. In doing so, we make a commitment to continue to stand against hate. We make a commitment to not be complacent in the face of intolerance and not to look the other way. We must do right by those who are fleeing persecution. Never again should we stand by and watch genocide take place or forget our most important humanitarian principles.

2.38 pm

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): It is a great privilege to speak on this most important occasion. Between 1935 and 1945, an estimated 16 million people were killed by the Nazi regime. That included 6 million Jews, 7 million Soviet citizens, 3 million Soviet prisoners of war, 1.8 million non-Jewish Polish civilians, 312,000 Serbian civilians, 250,000 people with disabilities and 250,000 Roma Gypsies. The breadth of depravity was breathtaking. It included legalised social discrimination, involuntary hospitalisation, euthanasia, forced sterilisation, forced labour, sexual slavery, human experimentation and downright murder. I say to those holocaust deniers who may be watching: "You do not speak for me or anybody in this place, and you need to take a look in the mirror."

Sadly, so few of those who witnessed these appalling events are still with us today, but we must record their testimony while we still can and capture the evidence of that time. My own testimony is limited. When I was based in Germany, we visited Bergen-Belsen and travelled further afield to Auschwitz—dark, scary and eerie places. I heard a number of questions, including, "Daddy, is it true that the birds don't sing?" to which I replied, "Yes, I think so." Of course, there is a reason why the birds do not sing.

In 2016, the regiment I was commanding in Germany was tasked to set up a convoy support centre in Altengrabow, just west of Berlin. We discovered very

quickly that it was the location for Stalag 11 A, and had also been home to German and Soviet forces throughout recent history. It became obvious that in the woods behind the big, barbed wire fence, there were some strange buildings. I have no idea what those buildings were, but history must be recorded there, too.

I have seen with my own two eyes atrocities in Sierra Leone and in Bosnia—atrocities of Governments, of Serbs, of Croats, Christians against Muslims and vice versa, the Revolutionary United Front against the people in Sierra Leone, and Makeni, Ahmići, Goražde and Srebrenica. More recently, we have seen Rwanda and Yemen, the Uyghurs in China, and Cambodia. This is happening right now—it is happening in our world, today, on our doorstep—and it must be stopped with the full power of the United Nations, NATO, military force, peacekeeping, peace enforcement and sanctions. Most importantly, for now, the evidence and the testimony from these current events must be captured, so that lessons are learned for the future and that those who perpetrate these dreadful crimes are brought to justice.

2.41 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab) [V]: Like others who have spoken, I remember my visit to Auschwitz with a group of sixth formers, organised by the Holocaust Educational Trust, to which I pay tribute. It was around this time of year. It was freezing. There was no snow on the ground. I will never forget how I felt as I thought of human beings being forced to march across that frozen ground, barefoot, near naked, on their way to extermination.

We must never forget that we allowed it to happen. That is why we cannot quietly ignore or excuse antisemitism. That is why we must challenge phoney equivalence arguments and free-speech excuses, no matter where they come from or who makes them. Excuses mean complicity.

When we think of Israel, it is right to question the motives of those who constantly single out that state for special treatment. That does not mean that I do not support a just settlement, a democratic and viable Palestinian state, and a secure and recognised Israel—I do support those things. It does mean, however, that when I hear the frank views of As'ad AbuKhalil, who has said:

“The real aim of BDS is to bring down the state of Israel... That should be stated as an unambiguous goal”,

or those of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, who has said:

“It is the mission of the Islamic Republic...to erase Israel from the map of the region”,

I question the intentions and the motives of those who support such people and such movements.

It was exactly those kinds of views that paved the way to Auschwitz. We should never forget what indifference and turning a blind eye can lead to. Let us be a light in the darkness.

2.43 pm

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con) [V]: My constituency is home to a long-standing Jewish community, and I regularly meet constituents whose lives have been personally deeply affected by the events that we remember today, including many who fled persecution and found sanctuary here in the UK.

We have heard many examples during this debate of where our country has been, or has tried to be, the light against genocide and oppression, wherever it has occurred in the world. I pay particular tribute to members of our armed forces, who have often been the last defence of those at risk, and all too often the first on the scene to provide succour when atrocities occurred, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart).

My constituents would be the first to remind me that this debate is about future action as well as remembrance. The UK is the leading country in Europe for the resettlement of child refugees and continues to play an honourable role in efforts to bring peace and stability to the wider world. As we remember the victims of the holocaust and of genocide throughout history, it is also an opportunity to consider that, as well as seeking to bring the light of freedom to places where there is none, our country remains a beacon of light to those who are fleeing oppression.

The new global resettlement scheme is an opportunity to restate our commitment to the United Kingdom being a place of refuge. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Duncan Baker) mentioned, *Hansard* records little consideration of issues of oppression and the risk of genocide in the run-up to the holocaust. At a time when we know that, across the world, there is great instability and great risk to life and peace, let us all ensure, following this debate today, that we have a genuinely humanitarian approach as we consider the policies that we will need in the future at a time when we are saying collectively, “Never again”.

2.46 pm

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab) [V]: It is a privilege to be called to speak in this debate. In 2013, I visited Auschwitz-Birkenau. What affected me more than anything else, more than the watchtowers and the crematoriums, were the signs of life—the human hair, the family suitcases, the stacks of shoes. Today in Parliament we remember the 6 million Jewish people and the millions of Roma, Sinti, LGBT and disabled people who were murdered by the Nazis. We also remember the resistance to the Nazis, the resistance seen when Hanukkah arrived and a menorah was lit on a Berlin windowsill even as swastikas flew outside, when the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto rose up in one of the most inspiring acts of human history and when prisoners in Treblinka and Sobibor rebelled in the shadow of the gas chamber and killed Nazi oppressors. Alongside the horrors of the holocaust are these accounts of the human spirit—of people standing up to the most brutal of evils. Today, we must treasure and defend the daily reminders of the Nazis' defeat—from every synagogue service and every Jewish family who pass on their traditions to the next generation to our rejection of racial hierarchy and our celebration of multiculturalism.

History is not over. Antisemitism and the far right are on the rise. Earlier this month, we saw fascists wearing Nazi iconography storming Capitol Hill. A man who called white supremacist protesters “very fine people” held the world's most powerful office. In Hungary, the Prime Minister spreads Soros conspiracies and lauds generals who sent tens of thousands of Jewish people to Nazi concentration camps. In Brazil, the far-right president attacks the rights of LGBT people, indigenous people and trade unionists. Here in Britain, antisemites still spread conspiracies about the Rothschilds and George Soros.

[Zarah Sultana]

Antisemitic violence remains a growing threat to Jewish people. Our communities are still divided by racism. Frantz Fanon, an intellectual of the anti-colonial struggle, said that whenever he saw an antisemite, he knew that he, too, was threatened. That was not only because plenty of antisemites are white supremacists, but for a deeper reason. It is because that kind of thinking that produces antisemitism blames social ills on minority groups. It is a thinking that encourages us to turn on each other and to treat our neighbours as our enemies. So long as that thinking exists, Fanon said that none of us are safe from denigration and attack. That is why we all have a stake in fighting for each other, in combating antisemitism and racism in all of its forms. When we come together and link our struggles, we are all made stronger. There is safety and solidarity, and today and every day, I extend my solidarity to Jewish people and everyone facing—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I call Dean Russell.

2.49 pm

Dean Russell (Watford) (Con) [V]: It is painful to imagine, as a parent, the possibility of saying goodnight to one's child and not knowing whether a knock at the door could mean never saying goodnight to them again. That is the reality of the holocaust. Six million lives were lost—due not to famine or pandemic, but to hate. In this debate, we have heard powerful statements and numbers beyond comprehension of victims of genocide around the world—lives lost, contributions to society that we will never know, and stories wickedly ended before their time.

We often say that time heals, but it can leave a scar. The holocaust is a scar on humanity that we must face up to, even today. As we mark Holocaust Memorial Day, we reflect on a simple yet powerful statement: be the light in the darkness. In doing so we must remember that, just as the night descends each evening, darkness can also fall slowly on us all. Darkness can exist only if there is an absence of light. It is only by choosing to look the other way that we diminish the light of humanity.

The trouble with the darkness is that it allows otherwise good people to believe that they cannot see what is happening around them. No baby is born with hatred in their heart, yet there are those who will twist the human condition to nurture hate and to plant the seeds of hate with words of envy and of “us versus them” and, ultimately, at the worst extreme, to generate acts of evil while others pretend they do not see them.

We cannot bring back those whose lives were ended too soon, but we can ensure that others do not have to fear that knock at the door. We cannot bring back to life the millions whose lives were tragically ended, but with every candle we light, every child we educate, every time we choose not to like or share statements of intolerance and every time we challenge acts of hate around the world, we shine a light on those who would prefer to hide in the darkness.

The holocaust and the genocides ever since have taught us that we must never be complacent. We must continue to look around the world, today and in all our

tomorrows, to ensure that we are not ignoring the plight of others. As we mark Holocaust Memorial Day, let us all be in the light in the darkness.

2.52 pm

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab) [V]: I pay tribute to Liverpool's long-established Jewish community, and to two former residents: Maurice Eschwege and his daughter Vera Goltschmitt. As a young child, Maurice moved from Germany to Liverpool, where he grew up. He married Isabella Annoni, an Italian Catholic, and they had three children: Vera, Alexander and Muriel. Maurice ran a jewellers and pawnbrokers business on Lime Street. He was a pillar of the community and served as a justice of the peace. He was twice elected as a Labour councillor for the St Anne's ward of the city in the 1920s.

When his wife Isabella died, Maurice moved to Paris to live with his daughter Vera and her husband. After the war broke out, Maurice was transported to a German camp—he never returned. Vera, her husband and their youngest son Alain were all transported to Auschwitz, where they were murdered alongside millions of others—Jews, Slavic peoples, Roma and Sinti communities, black, disabled and LGBT people and political opponents, who all perished at the hands of the Nazis. Today, we remember them, and in their stories we seek to learn the lessons of the past.

We recognise that the forces that drove this evil were pervasive and widespread: Governments and politicians throughout Europe—even in the UK—made antisemitism acceptable through their statements and actions, especially when denying safety to refugees. Today, as our Government lock asylum seekers in inhumane conditions in military bases and close the door on unaccompanied child refugees, it is clear that we still have much to learn.

Today, we must recognise that genocide does not begin with the death camp, but is what happens when we allow discrimination, racism and hatred to go unchecked—when we allow politicians and the media to divide us and govern through hatred. We must make a collective promise to reinforce our commitment to fighting the rise of racism and those political forces who would take us back to some of the darkest times of European history; and to take a stand against the normalisation and institutionalisation of discrimination and hatred in our own country and across the world.

As we take this opportunity to remember the millions who lost their lives in the holocaust, we remember prior genocides in the Congo, Kenya and South Africa, and we remember subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. But we have to redouble our fight against ongoing atrocities against the Rohingya, the Uyghur and the Kashmiris. Today, in memory of all those whose lives were unjustly taken, we pledge our solidarity with oppressed peoples across the world and promise to carry forward the flame of resistance against hatred, racism and bigotry. In remembering the true horrors of fascism and the victims of all acts of genocide across the globe, we stand together, united—a light in the darkness—to say, “Never again.”

2.55 pm

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): Yesterday, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, marked 76 years since the liberation of Auschwitz. It is hard for any of us to

comprehend the devastation and complete horror that occurred during the holocaust. By the end of the second world war, 6 million Jewish people—6 million men, women and children—had been murdered by the Nazis. I was particularly struck recently by the words of the chairman of Bradford synagogue, Rudi Leavor, who came to Britain in 1937 aged just 11, after escaping Nazi Germany with his parents and sister. He said:

“The process of their murder was inflicted with insane cruelty. Children were separated from their parents, couples were separated, they were deceived into entering what were described as showers but were in fact gas chambers, made to stand on the edge of wide trenches in which there were already corpses, then shot so that they conveniently fell into those trenches.”

I think we can all agree that those words set out in stark and plain detail the true horror that was the holocaust.

Holocaust Memorial Day provides an opportunity for us all to reflect on our own actions and our collective actions and to consider what more can be done to prevent these horrific events. But, of course, actions speak louder than words. The truth is that we have seen a worrying, creeping rise of the virus of antisemitism across our country in recent years, and we cannot be complacent. A recent report by the Community Security Trust suggested that for the fourth year in a row, the number of antisemitic incidents in Britain has increased.

It is incumbent on every single one of us in this House, no matter what political party we are in or how long we have been here, to do everything it takes to ensure that nothing like this can ever happen again. As we speak in this debate today, we have in the forefront of our minds the terrible reports that are coming out of western China, where the Uyghur population is being persecuted—reports of forced sterilisation of Uyghur women, high levels of surveillance and forced labour—and what is happening in Kashmir. We must use debates such as this to remember, but also to talk about current issues.

Fundamentally, I believe that this comes down to education. Our schools can play an important role, and I am pleased that many of our young people across the country are learning about these horrific events, so that we can ensure that appropriate actions are taken as we go forth. I am sure that the permanent holocaust memorial and education centre right next to Parliament will play a crucial role in ensuring that we all consistently remember as we come into this place.

2.58 pm

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD) [V]: It is an honour to take part in this Holocaust Memorial Day debate and to hear the many moving and memorable contributions. Like many Members, I have heard, read about and known about the holocaust for a lifetime—a lifetime denied to many millions. I only now recognise that reading Anne Frank’s diary as a child was perhaps instrumental in awakening that part of my political motivation that is about fighting discrimination, racism and injustice. It prompted me to ask questions, and I am proud to say that the answers my parents offered left no doubt about the wrong that they believed had been done and how easily it could have been them. Those questions meant that I read everything I could, watched every documentary and listened to every survivor account in a search not for information about what had happened but for some understanding of how that evil had been nurtured and allowed to grow.

As an adult, I visited Anne Frank’s house in Amsterdam with my own daughter, and was shocked afresh at the conditions in which her family had been forced to exist in order to avoid being murdered simply for who they were. I have also visited Yad Vashem in Israel and listened to the heartbreaking tales of those who survived, but I have never yet been able to face visiting any of the concentration camps. But I will—because of what I am thinking about today, because of what we in this place must do, and because I remember a photograph on the wall in Anne Frank’s house that has stuck with me. It was a picture of, of all things, the young Princess Elizabeth. I remember looking at it and wondering why—thinking, “What was its significance?” Perhaps its significance was that the knowledge that there were good people in other parts of the world fighting a war that might end the horror that they were enduring gave them hope and provided a light in their unimaginable darkness.

We all continue to share a responsibility, not only for those whose lives and loved ones were stolen in the holocaust, but for those who suffer now—today. They suffer the indignity and cruelty of being forced to kneel on railway platforms in China before being boarded on to trains and transported to camps. The echoes of the holocaust in those pictures were evident to us all. I pay tribute to the Board of Deputies of British Jews for leading the calls for action to protect the Uyghur Muslims. We must all listen to them. We must act and ensure that the lessons of the holocaust are never forgotten, its horrors not repeated again in our lifetimes, and the light of remembrance never ever allowed to dim.

3.1 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con) [V]: Although I myself am not a Jew but a Catholic, there is Jewish blood in each and every one of us. I would certainly have been proud to have been born a Jew, and I stand shoulder to shoulder with our local Jewish community at the Southend and Westcliff Hebrew Congregation, the Southend and District Reform synagogue and the recently arrived Hassidic Jews. Over the past two years, these people, who are my friends, have felt very vulnerable. I would like the Government to continue to support the work of the Community Security Trust, which does vital work to keep the Jewish community safe through the protective security grant.

I simply do not understand and have never understood antisemitism. The most important lesson from the holocaust is that although we cannot police the world, it is simply not acceptable to stand by and do and say nothing when genocide happens. For evil to prevail, all it needs is for good people to remain silent. I therefore support the genocide amendment to the Trade Bill. We should not be supporting genocide in any form—whether against the Jewish community, the Uyghurs or anyone else—and should instead be encouraging countries to improve their human rights records.

Each year, a tree-planting event is planned in Southend to commemorate the lives of those who died in the holocaust and more recent genocides. I am very much involved in that event, and have also had the great honour to lay a wreath and plant a tree at Yad Vashem. For two years I campaigned to have a statue of Raoul Wallenberg placed outside the Western Marble Arch synagogue, and Sigmund Sternberg led the fundraising campaign. Through the Schutz-Pass, Raoul Wallenberg

[*Sir David Amess*]

saved the lives of 100,000 Jews in Hungary. It was one of the proudest moments of my life when in 1997 Her Majesty the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh and the President of Israel unveiled that statue. Although most of us mere mortals would not be able to replicate such valour, if Holocaust Memorial Day is anything, it is a time to honour such bravery and for each and every one of us, particularly in Parliament, to condemn antisemitism and genocide.

3.4 pm

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab) [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) and the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for securing today's debate. As co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on prevention of genocide and crimes against humanity, I join colleagues on both sides of the House in taking a moment to pause, despite all that is happening around us right now, and reflect on and remember the greatest crime in history.

I pay tribute to the work of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and the Aegis Trust for their action on education and prevention in my constituency, across the country and around the world. We must never forget that we must use our power and responsibility as parliamentarians to ensure this never happens again. Unfortunately, and to our great shame, "never again" has become time and time again in the 76 years since the liberation of Auschwitz. At this very moment, as we have this debate, genocide and crimes against humanity are taking place all over the world, against the Uyghurs, the Rohingya, the Yazidis and more recently, the Tigrayan people in western Ethiopia. Genocide Watch now considers Ethiopia to be at genocide stage 9 out of 10: extermination.

Well-meaning words and statements will only get us so far, but as parliamentarians we must go further. What can we do? We can be assertive—braver at calling out genocides and crimes against humanity. Our second tool is accountability. We have to hold the Government to account on how they monitor, respond to and prevent atrocities. We can call for more training for our civil servants around the world to spot signs early and report them before atrocities take place.

We can also show political leadership. Our Executive need to lead from the front, and one thing they could be doing is reporting annually to Parliament on an at-risk register—a list of countries in relation to crimes against humanity, to stop them before they become genocide. We would do well to follow the example of the United States in that regard. In 2018, Congress passed the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act, which called for a Government-wide atrocity prevention strategy. We should look into that.

On our language, we must set our own house in order to combat antisemitism and discriminatory and dehumanising language in everything we say. We should increase our offer of sanctuary for victims of terror and for child refugees from around the world. I invite all Members to join the all-party parliamentary group on prevention of genocide. On this Holocaust Memorial Day, we remember the 6 million Jews and other victims

of Nazi persecution, and we say that genocide does not start with genocide; it starts with the denial of rights. I say "Never again".

3.7 pm

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in what is a very important debate. It is very clear that all sides of the House believe that antisemitism is both repugnant and repulsive. Following on from my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland), I say that anyone who is a denier has no place in this modern society. Their voices should be silenced, and they should go and have a look at themselves in the mirror.

I will talk about a personal experience. I went to Yad Vashem with my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) and laid a wreath. It was when I was there that I thought about meine oma, who was born in the late 1920s under Nazi Germany rule and grew up under a Nazi Germany education system. As soon as that war ended, she fled to this country to start again. Even though it is a topic, as Members can imagine, that is not spoken about around the dining room table, I can see in her eyes the pain, the shame and the sorrow she feels for having been a part of a nation—by birth, not by belief—that committed one of the greatest atrocities known to human history. Sadly she lies very unwell at this moment in time, but she asked me today to stand in this House and simply say sorry for her for being a member of that nation and maybe not having the courage that she wished she had to send the fight back against that evil Nazi regime.

I spent eight and a half years as a schoolteacher, and it never ceased to amaze me that when we talked about the holocaust, it was one of the very few topics where I could hear a pin drop in the classroom. Students understand the importance of this subject and that we need to know our history to learn from it and ensure that we do not allow such atrocities to happen again. While we sadly see acts of genocide taking place in China against the Muslim population, we also see crimes against humanity in places such as Kashmir. It is for us as parliamentarians to step up and make sure that global Britain, which I am a huge believer in, takes its rightful place in bringing together nations and leaders from around the world to find an end to these disgusting and awful crimes.

I would like to take one last moment to refer to my predecessor, Ruth Smeeth. She suffered repugnant and repulsive antisemitic abuse, and she continues to receive it to this day. I thank her for having the courage of her convictions and beliefs to always stand up for who she is. I will continue that fight while I am in this place, to be her voice and champion on this very cause. To anyone who continues to give her such abuse, you are not a valued citizen of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke.

3.11 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I, too, am pleased to take part in this most significant debate today and I pay tribute to those who succeeded in bringing this again to the Floor of the House.

Like many Members over the years, I have visited Auschwitz. It was some years ago, as part of a visit organised by the Holocaust Educational Trust with

schoolchildren from my constituency. I pay particular tribute to the HET and its chief executive Karen Pollock for doing such amazing work in this area. It was, for me, a day that I will never ever forget. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) spoke a few minutes ago about the impact of seeing the photographs of the then Princess Elizabeth at Anne Frank's house. For me in Auschwitz, it was not a single photograph but in the hall at the end of the visit where there is pinboard after pinboard after pinboard of photographs that were taken from the wallets of those who had been taken to the camp, exactly the sort of photograph that I carried of my own family in my wallet at the time and which we all doubtless do. It was at that point that one understood the sheer enormity and human cost of what had been perpetrated there.

It is absolutely right that we should have this debate today as an act of remembrance, but I would say that to ensure that we properly honour the memory of those who were murdered in the holocaust, we in this House and elsewhere have a duty to redouble our efforts to ensure that this never happens again to the Jewish people or to any other people in any other part of the world.

Today, I want to pay particular tribute to the British Jewish community for all that they have done when confronted with what they have seen happening in Xinjiang province to the Uyghur Muslim population. *Jewish News* in particular has taken a brave and courageous stand. Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis spoke powerfully this week about the resonances that he, as a Jewish man, could see from Xinjiang province of what his own people suffered in Europe in the 1940s. They were powerful words to which we should listen and pay the most careful attention.

What happened at Auschwitz and elsewhere in the 1940s came, at the end of the war, as a surprise and certainly as a shock to many people, but we now live in a very different age where information travels around the world much more easily than it ever did. Nobody will ever be able to say that they did not know what was happening in Xinjiang province and that they did not know what was happening to the Uyghur Muslims. We cannot now look round, while at the same time paying tribute to those who have perished.

3.13 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): To be number 73 on the list and to be able to make a contribution is quite an achievement, so thank you for getting me in, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I am very pleased to make a contribution in the holocaust debate on man's barbarity to man. I am a pro-Israeli person and as a Christian I want to speak up for the Jewish nation. I also declare an interest as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief for those with Christian beliefs, other beliefs and no beliefs. I am also my party's spokesperson on human rights and chair of the all-party group for the Pakistani minorities.

When we think of this debate—I have spoken at every one there has been in Westminster since my time of coming here—and 6 million Jews murdered owing to man's hatred, we think it can never happen again. There would not be an occasion when the tears do not well in our eyes whenever we look at the programmes on TV or

check the contributions in the press even here in Northern Ireland. Today's debate reminds us never to forget the horrors of the shoah, but we should also reflect on more recent events and our reactions to them. My constituency had many of the Kindertransport children who came across during the second world war, and some of them stayed and married and their relatives are still an important part of our life here. The Millisle farm in my constituency is very much a part of that.

I want to speak about the IHRA definition of antisemitism. It was announced in December 2016 that the Government had adopted that definition, but only last year the Secretary of State for Education highlighted the fact that only a handful of universities had adopted the definition. Also, I say respectfully that Members of this House promoted the Palestine Solidarity Campaign lobby day in December, actively promoting an antisemitic trope—that Israel is an apartheid state—given as an example by the IHRA, but this House did nothing. If there is no penalty for breaching the IHRA definition, its adoption is worthless. If we have learned nothing from the past, we can be certain that it will be repeated. This cannot and must not be allowed to happen.

Genocide has been repeated in other areas. We think of the Uyghur Muslims in China, the Baha'i in Iran, Falun Gong in China and the Rohingyas. This morning, I and other hon. Members had the opportunity to get more information about West Papua in Indonesia, where thousands of people have been murdered and thousands more displaced. Also, Christians all over the world are affected, including in Kashmir and in Russia, where human rights and civil liberties are trampled on directly by Governments. So we say that this must never be repeated, and today we have an opportunity to say clearly that we stand with all those people across the world, to be that voice for the voiceless, to speak up for them whenever they cannot do so, and to remember all those who died in the second world war.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. We are now coming to the Front-Bench contributions, and we are putting the clock on for the obvious reason that the internal clocks here are not right. This is just for the aid of those making Front-Bench contributions.

3.16 pm

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP) [V]: It is a privilege to speak in this debate and I have been very struck by the contributions from across the House. This is one of the most important dates in the parliamentary calendar because of the importance of understanding exactly what happened during the holocaust and what continues to happen in genocides around the world and, as the theme for this year's debate would have it, to "be the light in the darkness". Light is much needed during these difficult times. We need to be mindful that, along with the many obvious challenges and worse that living through a pandemic brings, there is also the fact that it makes everything more fragile. Democracy and the normal strands of life that hold us all together are all the more fragile because of the strains of the pandemic. That means that we have to be ever more watchful, mindful and vocal. As the wonderful girls of the Giffnock Guides, who I visited on a Zoom screen recently, emphasised to me, we must look out for each other, and be kind.

[Kirsten Oswald]

It is my great privilege to represent the majority of the Jewish population in Scotland, as the MP for East Renfrewshire. The diversity of my small community makes us so much the better and is so valued by those of who live here, and the light that some of my fellow East Renfrewshire citizens have shone on the holocaust has been so important. I know the House will join me in expressing my sorrow on hearing of the death last week of Judith Rosenberg of Giffnock. Judith survived the horrors of Auschwitz, where she was taken when she was snatched away at only 22 from her perfectly ordinary family life. She endured indescribable horror and inhumanity, but somehow had the strength of character to share her experience with others so as to help to prevent this from happening again. She said:

“When I was a child, my father taught me that all people are equal, that it doesn’t matter who or what race they are, they are just people.”

Judith worked so hard to make that a reality, and I know that her tireless work made a huge difference to so many people. She will be much missed.

Henry Wuga and his late wife Ingrid also hold a very dear place in the hearts of so many people in my local area and far beyond. Ingrid, who was a lovely woman, was also a remarkable influence on so many people. She sadly died last year, and I know we would all wish to share our condolences with Henry, a fellow Kindertransport child, with whom she spent 75 years of happy marriage and a remarkable joint commitment to sharing their testimony with thousands of schoolchildren. I have had the privilege to see some of that work at first hand, and I know the impact that Henry and Ingrid have had, sharing with kindness, clarity and decency the terrible horrors of the Holocaust and the need to challenge prejudice and hate. I know that the House will also share my great admiration of Henry as he continues with this work.

We all need to understand the horror of this murder of millions and millions of innocent people. There were more Jews murdered than the entire population of Scotland. The lessons in that for us all bear repeating again and again. That is why the work of organisations such as the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and the Holocaust Educational Trust matters so much. I am very grateful to Karen Pollock, who is tireless in pursuing ways to engage our young people. I met my local education director last week and discussed the wide range of important work going on in East Renfrewshire schools to make sure that, at every stage in education, young people confront, understand and learn the lessons of what happened. This is not, and must not be, a one-day-a-year endeavour.

It is sadly true that this is probably more important now than ever, in this fractious, anxious time, when covid and the shadow of Trump and others loom large, fostering the othering, the hate, the misinformation and creating fertile ground for those with ill intent. None of us should kid ourselves that this cannot happen now. We need to raise our eyes across the world, as well as looking at ourselves. My constituent, Kirsty Robson, along with Jaya Pathak and Joe Collins, young people who have set up the excellent organisation Yet Again, know this and have been working hard to shine a light and to tackle the terrible realities of communities experiencing genocide today, such as the Uyghur Muslim

population in China. I am really grateful for their recent focus on the surely inarguable fact that we should not engage in trade deals with nations engaged in genocide.

The young people in East Renfrewshire are very focused on these issues. Holly Edgar, influenced by the Gathering the Voices project, wrote a hugely thought-provoking piece about her visit to Auschwitz, which I published on my website this week, reflecting on the Lessons from Auschwitz project. That focus on all these voices, the individual people and what happened to them is so important—the terrible, all-consuming hatred whipped up against communities, persecuted and murdered because they were Jewish, Roma, gay, disabled, different. That must be a warning from history to us all, and we must have no truck with deniers and minimisers.

I visited Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, a few years ago. The focus there is on all those individual people, families, photos of lovely children, ordinary-looking mums and dads, killed because they were different or other, and what I saw there will never leave me. There were so many little everyday things, including combs, shoes, glasses—that was all that was left. I saw the sheer ordinariness of the things, the people, and then how the creeping hatred and antisemitism spilled over, and the unimaginable horror that followed.

So we need to commit, and we must always focus on being the light. I will conclude by reflecting on the words of Jane Haining, who is a personal hero of mine. Jane was a Scottish teacher, working in Budapest at the time of the holocaust. She stood with her Jewish students in the darkest of times. Jane died in Auschwitz because she refused to leave her students to face their fate alone. She said:

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

That is the light that we need to think about. That is the spirit that we need to reflect on. It is an issue for all of us, and we need to step up.

3.24 pm

Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): The House has made it clear today in this very important debate why future generations must know the history of the holocaust. I congratulate the very large number of Members on both sides on their extraordinarily moving contributions; there were too many, unfortunately, to refer to individually. I also congratulate the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust on the quite remarkable ceremony online last night.

Like many Members across the House, I have also joined a group of students from my constituency on a visit to Auschwitz, and I thank the Holocaust Educational Trust for organising that. We walked in the shadow of the words, “Arbeit macht frei”, tracing the footsteps of millions who walked to an unspeakably brutal death. We stood on the railway tracks where the cattle wagons unloaded their human cargo and where a Nazi doctor selected those who would live and those who would die. We walked through rooms packed with the remains of human lives—shoes, human hair, children’s tiny clothes and toys. The lessons of history could not be starker, more painful or more necessary for a new generation.

I thank, too, Labour Friends of Israel for taking me to Jerusalem, where, like many other Members, I toured Yad Vashem, Israel’s remarkable museum of the shoah,

which catalogues the hatred and demonisation that led humanity into the abyss. The great tragedy is, as many Members have said, that we still have not learned the lessons of the holocaust; genocides happened again in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur, and against the Yazidi, Rohingya and Uyghurs. We see time and again where hatred leads humanity, and it is why all of us have a duty to call out bigotry wherever we find it.

I wish to acknowledge the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), because I share her horror at having realised after 2015 that antisemites had entered the Labour party, intent on infecting our party with their poison. As the Equality and Human Rights Commission report has shown us, our party was too slow to act. My friend, Dame Louise Ellman, a most distinguished former Member of this House, was subjected to the most aggressive antisemitic abuse by some members of her own local party, who demonised her for the wrongs of a foreign Government. A measure of our party's recovery will be when Louise and the others who were driven out feel able to rejoin the party they grew up in and to which they gave so much.

My small contribution during that time was to help establish the Centre for Countering Digital Hate, which runs an operation to identify, expose and disable online antisemitism. The project targets antisemitic extremism on the far left and far right, but where it identified antisemites who had become Labour party members, we reported them immediately for expulsion. When we identified how antisemites were operating online, we proposed legislative change, engaging with both the Government and the Jewish community leadership. I look forward to the online harms Bill bringing forward necessary new safeguards into law.

Labour's new leader made clear in his acceptance speech last April his determination to root out antisemitism and make our party a safe space for Jewish people to be members of and to vote for once more. We understand the hurt that antisemitism has caused to the Jewish community and we will continue to work closely with and listen to the community as we seek to heal that pain. With the support of the Leader of the Opposition, I have asked every Labour council to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism, with all the examples. We have backed the Secretary of State's request for universities to do the same, and we support the establishment of the holocaust memorial and learning centre in Victoria Tower Gardens, right next to this place, the heart of British democracy.

I wish to finish with a story of hope. My friend and constituent Eric Sanders is 101 years old. As far as I know, he is the oldest living member of the Labour party. Eric was born to a Jewish family in Austria in 1919. Growing up, he experienced at first hand anti-Jewish hatred, and restrictions on where he could learn, work and go, and on whom he could love. He watched, personally, Adolf Hitler drive into Vienna after the Anschluss that incorporated Austria into the Nazi Third Reich. Eric came here to Britain, where he joined our armed forces to fight for freedom. After the war, he settled in south London, became a teacher, married a young woman and started a family. Today, Eric is a father, a grandfather and a great-grandfather. He tells me how very proud he was to be awarded the Decoration of Honour by the President of Austria—that country's

highest civil award—just a few years ago. That act of recognition after the wrongs he suffered has allowed Eric finally to make his peace with the country of his birth. Just days before his hundredth birthday, I took a group of Austrian university students to meet Eric at his home in Norbury in south London. It was so moving to see a new generation of Austrians talking with a Jewish member of an older generation about what had happened to him and so many others in their country.

Eric would be the first to say that his story is now mostly in the past, but his story will not end with him if it inspires a future generation to build a better world. Today, as we reflect on the horrors of the holocaust, let us recognise that that anguished cry of 6 million voices from the past is our calling to build a better future, and in that, let us come together and find our light in the darkness.

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): I start by adding my thanks to my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) and all those Members who secured this afternoon's debate, including the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), whose personal bravery and courage in combating antisemitism I think we all admire in this House.

Yesterday, I was honoured to speak at the annual Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony honouring millions of Jewish people and other victims of Nazi persecution. Like thousands of people from across our country, I then lit a candle in their memory, joining them to be the light in the darkness, the theme of this year's commemorations.

As it is for many others, the holocaust is part of my family's story, but it is a universal human tragedy as much as a personal one—a tragedy from which we can all learn something. In doing so, we must draw on the power of the testimony of holocaust survivors. As many Members have said today, it is one of the greatest privileges to meet them. We need to ensure that their stories endure and are understood by us and by future generations.

We have heard today from many Members, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), about the connections that we draw between the memories of atrocities of the past and those of the present. He can be assured that I have already drawn his powerful call for action to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the Metropolitan police war crimes unit.

We remember, as others have said, the subsequent genocides—the millions of victims of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia; the million-plus victims of the Rwandan genocide; the 8,000 Muslim men and boys who were murdered in Srebrenica. We heard powerful first-hand testimony from my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) of those deeply disturbing events within our own lifetime and within the continent of Europe.

It is now more than 75 years since the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. A year ago this week, I accompanied His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales to Jerusalem to mark that occasion. I was pleased that subsequently, we were able to make a £1 million donation on behalf of the United Kingdom to the

[Robert Jenrick]

Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation to ensure that the camp, which many hon. Members have spoken of today, endures as a grim memorial—one of the most unforgettable places that anyone can visit.

It is distressing, but perhaps not entirely surprising, that covid-19 has itself given the hatemongers another excuse to dredge up and repurpose age-old antisemitic tropes, claiming, just as they did as far back as the black death and later, that the Jews were the cause of the virus.

As we have heard in the course of this debate, we see antisemitism everywhere. As my hon. Friends the Members for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) and for Bury South (Christian Wakeford) said, we see it most prominently on social media, where, sadly, antisemitic abuse is rife. We see it on our university campuses, and I pay tribute to the fantastic work and bravery of the Union of Jewish Students, which does so much to ensure that Jewish students can enjoy all that university should have to offer.

No realm of public life has escaped the cancer of antisemitism, which is why I am proud that we are the first Government to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism. It is a tool to identify how antisemitism manifests itself in the 21st century, but as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, it is a tool only as useful as our willingness to apply it robustly. I am pleased that nearly three quarters of local councils have responded to our call and adopted it, and I am most grateful for the strong support of the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed), in that regard.

I was heartened to see the English Premier League adopt the definition, thanks in part to the efforts of the noble Lord Mann, using its fantastic and unique international reach to provide a powerful reminder to those who perpetrate antisemitism in sport around the world. I strongly urge other institutions, councils and universities that have not yet adopted it to do so as quickly as possible. The reluctance of some of our great universities to do so is difficult to explain. It is surely not beyond the wit of our greatest minds and our most liberal institutions to be able to criticise the state of Israel without lapsing into antisemitism. I am pleased that the universities of Oxford and Cambridge agree and have shown the way.

The work of tackling antisemitism will continue, I hope, through a new holocaust memorial and learning centre, which currently awaits the outcome of a planning inquiry. If built, it will be a world-class memorial in our preferred location next to the Palace of Westminster. I thank Lord Pickles and Ed Balls, the co-chairs of the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation advisory board, for their fantastic efforts in pushing this project forward. Some of the opposition to the memorial, the inaccurate reporting and, I am afraid to say, the statement we heard earlier from my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley), who knows perfectly well that his argument of partiality was tested at a judicial review and found to be wanting, only focuses our attention and increases our resolve to make sure that the memorial is built within the lifetime of this Parliament. I am grateful that it has received the full

support of all living Prime Ministers, the Leader of the Opposition and the leaders of the other major political parties and major faiths.

I know that some local residents, including my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West, have concerns about the memorial's setting. However, I too walk there on a weekend when I am in Westminster, and I take my children to play in the playground. I can never forget that my children are the great-grandchildren of holocaust survivors. I want their generation never to go through those horrors, and I want this Parliament to be able to look out upon that new memorial as a lasting reminder and as a source of education and nourishment to future generations.

I am also proud that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government supports holocaust education and remembrance. Like other Members, I pay tribute to Karen Pollock and the Holocaust Educational Trust, and to Olivia Marks-Woldman and her team at Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, both of whom are worthy recipients this year of honours from Her Majesty the Queen. They have done a fantastic job of keeping the flame alight, despite covid-19.

We gather today to fulfil a solemn obligation—an obligation of remembrance, to never allow the memory of those who died in the holocaust to be forgotten. Memory is the constant obligation of all generations. Today we mourn with those who mourn, and we grieve with those who grieve. We pay tribute to those who survived, who all these years have borne witness to that great evil and have served mankind by their example. We honour and remember the memory of all the allied forces who suffered appalling casualties and freed Europe from the grip of tyranny. Today we acknowledge the resilience and strength of Jewish people here in the UK and around the world. Finally, we pay tribute to the memory of those non-Jewish heroes who saved countless lives; those who the people of Israel call the "righteous among the nations". In an age of indifference, they acted. In an age of fear, they showed courage. Their memory and their example should, like the light in the darkness, kindle a new flame in our hearts to do the same in our time.

3.39 pm

Stephen Crabb: In concluding this marvellous, inspiring debate, I thank all 76 Members of this House, drawn from all parties and from all corners of our United Kingdom, who contributed with moving, powerful, intelligent and well-informed speeches. I believe that the best of the House is represented by the debates we have on Holocaust Memorial Day, which has become such an important feature of our national life and our parliamentary calendar. The strong commitment shown by all parts of the House this afternoon underlines and reinforces again the deep commitment that there is in this House to ensure that the holocaust has a permanent place in our nation's collective memory. I am particularly grateful for the contributions from the three Front-Bench speakers at the end of this debate, all of whom spoke extremely well. I was particularly grateful for the contribution of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who spoke also very powerfully last night in the national commemorative ceremony and has a deep personal connection to the issue.

It was good to hear the shadow Secretary of State reaffirm his own personal commitment and his party's commitment to honouring the memory of those who

fell during the holocaust by challenging wrong sentiments and challenging prejudices that may still linger in the political party and in this place.

To conclude, I thank everyone who has participated. It has been a very good debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I visited Auschwitz-Birkenau for the first time last year, and I will never forget what I saw there and nor should I. In 2021, we must all remain on our guard and shine that light until the end of time.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Holocaust Memorial Day 2021.

3.41 pm

Sitting suspended.

UN International Day of Education

3.44 pm

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the UN International Day of Education.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for scheduling this important debate so close to the United Nations International Day of Education. After today's moving debate on Holocaust Memorial Day, I add my tributes to the Holocaust Educational Trust for its crucial work in taking sixth-formers to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau. The visit I undertook with students from Hanley Castle High School will remain forever etched in my memory and, importantly, in their young memories. It is vital that such work continues.

I never thought that we would be marking UN International Day of Education at a time when our schools in the UK are closed to so many children. I share the Government's aspiration to reopen our schools as soon as possible, and would welcome an even earlier date than 8 March, by reopening classes in a staged way, even for part of the day, with reception to year 2 back first, and gradually adding additional classes. Let us also make the most of fresh air and exercise, like the wonderful Forest Schools that so many of the West Worcestershire primary schools enjoy. I welcome the important investment that the Government are making in extra support and catch-up tuition, to help each child make the most of their potential.

Around the world, even before the pandemic, some 258 million children and adolescents were out of school. The majority of them were girls. More than half of 10-year-olds in low and middle-income countries were not learning even to read a simple text. As a result of the pandemic, 1.3 billion children around the world have seen their schools close at some point in the past 12 months. Let me quote:

"Twelve years of full-time education is not the only answer to the world's problems. It is not a panacea, but it is not far short."

Those are not my words; those are the words of our Prime Minister when he was Foreign Secretary. He knows that in many of the poorest, most conflict-torn countries, it is mainly girls who drop out of school early, who lag behind boys in literacy levels, and who have children when they too are still children. The Prime Minister continued:

"Female education is the universal spanner,".

He said it is the "Swiss army knife" that helps tackle so many of the world's problems, and that

"the best and biggest thing that we can do for the world, is to make sure that every girl gets 12 years of full-time education."

It is wonderful as we begin 2021 and the UK presides over the G7 that girls' education has made it on to the agenda. My wonderful colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant), has been appointed the Prime Minister's envoy. The UK's G7 goal was to secure a commitment to getting 40 million more girls into education and 20 million more girls reading by the age of 10. Here in the UK we are rightly concerned about the importance of laptops for remote education, but we should also not forget the importance of low-tech and simple things, such as exercise books, pencils, chalk, and textbooks, as

[*Harriett Baldwin*]

well as older technology such as radio, for children around the world who are also having to undergo remote education.

It is wonderful that later in 2021, the UK and Kenya have agreed to co-host the replenishment of the global partnership for education, which is the only multilateral organisation that crowds in funding from richer countries to help education budgets in very poor countries. I wholly endorse the leadership that the Prime Minister and the Government are showing on education globally. A better educated world will be a healthier, more peaceful and more prosperous one, and that surely benefits us all. But that leadership will need bolstering with money from the UK aid budget.

The Minister will know that I oppose the temporary reduction of the overseas development assistance target, as it not only breaks our manifesto commitment, but will mean that there is less money available to tackle hunger, deliver vaccines, educate children in poor countries and make sure they have clean water. I welcome the commitment that the UK has made to the Vaccine Alliance, and the commitment that we have made to doubling international climate finance, but can the Minister reassure the House today that the cut to the aid budget is not going to affect the money spent on education for the world's poorest children? Will our contribution to the replenishment of the Global Partnership for Education be at least as generous and ambitious as before? Will as many girls as before be helped to remain in school through projects such as the Girls' Education Challenge? Will she consider launching more UK Aid Match projects so that we can all donate more and have it matched by UK aid? What progress is she making as Minister for the European Neighbourhood and the Americas in encouraging our friends in the US to step up and spend more on global education under the new Biden Administration?

With new vaccines coming on line, we are starting the process of building back better after this awful pandemic, and of levelling up our own country as we recover. We also have a key role to play in building back and levelling up the world by ensuring that every child—both in our country and around the world—gets a quality education, no matter how poor the country into which they are born. That will be the most important way in which we can build a stronger, more resilient and healthier world for our children.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Members will be aware that there is to be a time limit of three minutes per speech for Back Benchers. I know that that is very short, but I must explain that if everybody takes three minutes, not everyone who is on the list will get in. If Members were able to take just a little bit less than three minutes and share out the time equally, everybody would have the chance to speak.

3.52 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab) [V]: Today I will focus on the sustainable development goals, specifically SDG 4 on global education and SDG 5 on gender equality.

Even before the pandemic, 258 million children were out of school, including one in two children with disabilities, more than half of school-age refugee children and

75 million children whose education was disrupted by humanitarian crises. Covid-19 has obviously made everything so much worse. This week, the International Development Committee released a report on the secondary impacts of covid-19, highlighting a global education crisis. With schools shut down and teaching disrupted, decades of progress are at risk. Some 1.6 billion children and young people are suffering educational disruption and are unable to access their basic rights. Over 460 million children are unable to access remote learning while out of school. In addition, as livelihoods are lost, informal economies shrink and remittances from abroad plummet, struggling families are left unable to pay the school fees required in many schools. Unsurprisingly, all this impacts most on the children who are already marginalised: refugees, the internally displaced, children with disabilities, and girls.

This is a gendered crisis. Girls of secondary school age are far less likely to return than boys when the schools reopen. That is against the existing backdrop of young women accounting for 59% of the total illiterate youth population. Online and remote learning is insufficient to reach all children during lockdown, as many do not have internet access or mobiles. Covid-19 has heightened economic pressure on family finances, with children forced into child marriage and child labour to help support their families. It increases violence and sexual exploitation, leaving children, particularly girls, to drop out of school permanently—and there are strong links between girls leaving education and subsequent increases in trafficking and exploitation.

With both the presidency of the G7 and the Global Partnership for Education, the Government have two major opportunities to galvanise action and remedy stalled progress towards SDGs 4 and 5. The Government made strong educational pledges before the cuts were announced. I ask the Minister: do those pledges still stand? The UK has still not pledged a penny to the Global Partnership for Education. The Government must pledge big and pledge now. The UK spends a paltry 5.6% of aid on education, and in 2018 just 0.3% was spent on ending violence against women and girls. I commend the Government's intent on girls' education, but their aim can only be achieved by increasing gender equality and real financial investment.

3.55 pm

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): I am hugely honoured to be the UK's special envoy for girls' education, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) for her very kind words. My role is to champion globally the Prime Minister's message that providing every girl on the planet with 12 years' quality education is the best way of tackling many of the problems facing the world today. Investing in girls' education is a game changer. A child with a mother who can read is 50% more likely to live beyond the age of five, twice as likely to attend school themselves, and 50% more likely to be immunised. Girls' education is therefore vital for women and girls, who make up 51% of the population, but it is also vital to levelling up society and developing economies and nations.

Even before covid-19, the world was facing a learning crisis. Tragically, the pandemic has become one of the biggest educational disruptors in our history, affecting 1.6 billion children at its peak in 2020. Many of these

children are girls, and many of them will never return to school, or even start school, lowering their chances of future employment and decent livelihoods. To avert this tragedy, we must up our game globally and respond. For the UK, this has begun with leadership from the very top. Our Prime Minister has put 12 years' quality education for every girl at the very heart of our G7 presidency. Our Foreign Secretary has agreed global targets that include getting one third more girls reading by the age of 10 and 40 million more girls in primary and secondary school by 2025. This year, too, the UK will co-host with Kenya the financing summit for the Global Partnership for Education, working hard with our partners to get the replenishment commitments needed for girls' education for the next five years.

I know that the weight of the challenge regarding girls' education is very significant, but our ability to make a change in the world, if we work together, should never be underestimated. The international community must, however, adopt a more ambitious and co-ordinated approach to girls' education. There needs to be more focus on quality, and on secondary education. We must also listen more carefully to what girls and young women say about what they want and need. Vitrally, global leaders need to speak out much more, as our Prime Minister has done, on the importance of educating girls, explaining all the advantages for girls and women, their children, their families, their communities and their nations. Together, if we can make this happen—and I believe we can—the human race will be in a much, much better place.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I apologise to the House and to the hon. Lady; the clocks are simply not working. In case it looks strange, I should tell the House that I have decided to work from my own clock. We will proceed from there.

3.59 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP) [V]: It is right that there is a recognised day to highlight the importance of education internationally. As a former teacher of 23 years' standing, I am deeply saddened by the current closure of our schools during this pandemic, although I understand why it is necessary. I genuinely feel for all the pupils who have had their learning disrupted. The socialisation that school so uniquely and comprehensively allows them is currently beyond them. Covid has disrupted the education of 1.6 billion students in more than 190 countries, and it is very damaging that they are all being denied their right to quality, safe and inclusive education.

I am sure we all welcomed the UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development, which was adopted by UN member states in 2015 and recognises the importance of education globally, but the goals must be delivered. Giving girls access to schooling is a central part of eradicating global poverty. Better-educated women tend to be healthier, participate more in formal labour markets, have fewer children and marry at a later age. Better-educated women tend to be more informed about nutrition and healthcare, and their children are usually healthier, too. Combined, they are more likely to help to lift countries and communities out of poverty.

Undoubtedly, educating girls strengthens economies and reduces inequality. It contributes to more stable, resilient societies that give all individuals, including men and boys, the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

For this to happen, girls must feel safe in schools, which is why the safe schools declaration is so important. Too often, girls in developing countries face barriers to education caused by poverty, cultural norms, poor infrastructure and the threat of violence, so international collaborations between Governments, civil society and a whole range of agencies should and must do better to help to mitigate and overcome these challenges, and the UK aid budget must reflect how important that is.

Even in the UK, schools can be an outlet through which to access richer cultural experiences through literature, poetry and debate, an escape from poverty and an opportunity to work for a better life. That is certainly what school offered me, and so many others. Today, let us celebrate the transformative power of education and vow to ensure that we will do all we can to make sure that the reach of education is truly global, so that we can change the lives of all children—boys and girls—for the better.

4.3 pm

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribbles) (Con) [V]: [*Inaudible.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): We cannot hear Katherine Fletcher. I apologise to the hon. Lady; we will pause and come back to her when we can. Let us go to Taiwo Owatemi in Coventry North West.

4.4 pm

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab) [V]: I am thrilled to be able to commemorate this special day, and extend my thanks to the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) for securing this debate.

“A quality education has the power to transform societies in a single generation; provide children with the protection they need from the hazards of poverty, labour exploitation and disease; and give them the knowledge, skills and confidence to reach their full potential.”

Those were the words of Audrey Hepburn, a very successful actress and even greater humanitarian who was a goodwill ambassador for UNICEF. Those words ring particularly true: education is the key to wider possibilities for young people all around the world.

As one of the sustainable development goals, quality education for all is important for peace, prosperity and global development. Last year, the coronavirus pandemic dealt a crippling blow to young people's education, and we are currently experiencing a global education crisis. Young people in the United Kingdom have had their education disrupted because of difficult school closures, with those from poorer backgrounds and with disabilities and learning difficulties paying a higher price. The digital divide is further exacerbating the issue, with many students not having access to the technology that they need for remote learning, and many are being priced out of education, with limited or no internet access whatsoever.

Some 1.6 billion children and young people across the world are having their education disrupted, and children with disabilities and girls are feeling this acutely. Pre covid, 258 million children and young people were already out of school, and with the pandemic now in full swing, it is estimated that more than 20 million girls and half of all refugee girls in secondary school are unlikely to return to schools once they reopen. Girls whose education relied on specialised programmes to keep them in school are at particular risk due to the cuts

[*Taiwo Owatemi*]

in global education funding. The UK Government pledged to ensure that 40 million girls receive an education and that 20 million girls will be reading by the age of 10 across the world. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that we meet those targets, especially considering the impact of the coronavirus?

The UK development fund for the education of girls has been in steady decline since 2016. It is well below the international benchmark that donor Governments invest at least 15% of their aid in education. The Minister must let us know whether she plans to raise the aid budget allocated to girls' education and how she plans to ensure that the UK keeps its commitment. I will end with the words of an African proverb: if you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation. The United Kingdom must lead the global community in tackling the structural barriers that shut girls out of their learning, exclude them and deprioritise their education.

4.5 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I am a humbled to be the first man to take part in the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) on her brilliant opening speech, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant) on her important new appointment.

There are many interventions we can make to fundamentally change the world. We can ensure that people have clean water. Dirty water and water-borne diseases still kill thousands of children every day. We can vaccinate children, which is a UK priority. In the last Parliament, British taxpayers vaccinated a child in the poor world every two seconds and saved the life of a child in the poor world every two minutes from diseases that, thank goodness, our children do not suffer from today. We can exhort contraception and family planning, allowing women in the poor world to decide whether and when they have children.

But for me, education, and educating girls in particular, is top of the list of ways we can change the world. If we educate a girl, she will almost certainly marry later. She will ensure that she educates her own children. She is likely to be economically active. She will adopt a leadership position in her family and her community, and these women are increasingly seen in national government. The UK has been a leader in this area under both parties, and our Prime Minister eloquently extols the importance of every girl having 12 years of education as a critical way of improving the world. We see in Africa the extraordinary way in which education is valued by parents and children as the ladder out of poverty. They walk so far every day to get an education and wrap their textbooks in the brown paper that shows their value.

When so many children cannot go to school here and in the poorest, most deprived parts of the world, this is not a time for Britain to renege on its promise to the poorest through the 0.7%. Every Member of this House was elected on a promise to stand by the 0.7%. It is just 1% of the debt we have racked up this year. The 0.7% is already reduced by nearly £3 billion, because gross national income has gone down so much this year. If these cuts persist, it will mean that 1.6 million fewer

children go to school, 12.6 million of the poorest women in the world will not have access to contraception, 3.4 million starving and hungry people will not get humanitarian support, 9.3 million children will not get vaccinated and 6.3 million who would previously have got access to clean water and sanitation will not get it.

If the Government try to protect one or more of those areas, the effect on the others will be even worse. It is a dismal start to the UK's presidency of the G7 to cut this budget, when we have seen the United States increase its aid spending as a priority just this week. We know from the pandemic that we will not be safe here until we are safe everywhere. It is a terrible mistake to cut the 0.7%, and I urge the Government to think again.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): We are now going back to Katherine Fletcher.

4.9 pm

Katherine Fletcher [V]: Education is the route to changing the world and people's lives for the better. That is a stark statement, but it is true. On this International Day of Education, I reflect on my family's journey and how much they valued school and learning. Back in the 1930s, in back-to-back terraced Manchester, my grandma was made to leave school at 12 and go to work in a shirt factory, missing her education. She has passed through my family a fierce appreciation of the power and opportunity that education can give. My grandma, my mum and me have all benefited a little bit in each generation from education.

You will notice, Madam Deputy Speaker, that it is all women in that story, and that speaks to another truth. Education for women and girls is vital—vital for community advancement out of poverty; vital for the environmental stewardship of our planet; and vital for the health of individuals and families.

I was recently honoured to be appointed as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Mozambique, reconnecting with old friends and making new ones. Along with our excellent high commissioner, NneNne Iwuji-Eme, and her team, the UK's focus on mutually beneficial trade is underpinned by another commitment of the Prime Minister: namely, our pledge to work so that all girls across the world get 12 years of quality education. For some communities in Mozambique, Africa and around the world, educating girls empowers women, helps lift communities out of poverty, fights back against violence against women and girls, and helps build the ability to bounce back from today's global challenges, such as the covid pandemic or the awful recent storms and flooding in southern Africa—I am thinking of you. My friends in Africa have all the skills and attitude to make things happen. It is a brave man or woman who tries to tell Mama Jay or Mama Patricia or Princess that they do not need an education or that they cannot start their own business or lead large teams of people—good luck with that, because those ladies are in charge. My grandma was like those African women, my friends. They have all the brains and skills, but less than 12 years of good education. In the 21st century, it should not take generations for women and girls to access what they need and set themselves up for life. This Government have rightly prioritised a pledge to work with the world to make that happen, and I personally pledge support, with my new

friends in Mozambique, through all my actions, and to help them benefit in the same way that my family has done for generations.

4.11 pm

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): I congratulate the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) on securing this important debate, and I pay tribute to the Members who have already spoken for their contributions. As others have pointed out, the immediate health and economic emergencies of the pandemic have demanded a great deal of Government attention and parliamentary debate across the world, yet it is important to note too the devastating impact that covid-19 has had on children and young people.

The widespread disruption of education offers the most obvious example of the challenges that young people have had to endure. Over 1.6 billion students globally have faced disruption. They face months of uncertainty and prolonged periods without seeing friends and the luxury of some normality. Hon. Members are right to raise concerns about the consequences of this disruption on children's learning, and I fear that the long-identified link between poor attainment and poverty will have been further exacerbated by the digital divide. Just as worrying is the impact that the disruption of the past year has had on young people's wellbeing.

Now, I of course understand that this disruption to education and lives was sadly unavoidable in the UK, and I would like to take this opportunity to extend my gratitude to our young people, their parents, teachers and lecturers for the extraordinary resilience that they have shown over the past year. In return, I think we have an obligation to play our part. Here in the UK, we should ensure that the support packages that are in place to support families through the crisis are maintained. To prevent an entire generation losing out on education, I believe we must be prepared to spend whatever it takes to ensure that schools, colleges and universities have the resources and flexibility necessary to allow our young people to catch up on any tuition that they have lost over the past year.

Then there are those skills and experiences found beyond the classroom, which are more difficult to quantify but are just as invaluable. Youth organisations and outdoor educational centres have always played a key part in this regard—places such as the Llangrannog Urdd camp in my constituency—and they need financial support now so that they are ready to open and return to capacity as soon as restrictions can be lifted safely.

I draw a comparison between children in the UK and internationally, because although children across the world have seen their education and lives disrupted, at least children in the UK can expect efforts to be made to make up for the past year. We can be confident that we have the means necessary to achieve all this for children in the UK. The same is not true for other countries. When we consider that globally 265 million children and adolescents do not have the opportunity to attend a complete formal education, it seems clear to me that we have a duty to help. Therefore, the decision to reduce the UK's aid spending must be reversed if we are to play our part in the global effort to secure equitable access to education for all.

4.14 pm

Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con) [V]: I am very proud to co-sponsor this important debate on the United Nations International Day of Education, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) on securing it.

First, I welcome the important steps that the Government have taken to support education in the United Kingdom and throughout the world. In his first speech as Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend committed to ensuring that all girls receive 12 years of quality education, and that is something with which I fully agree. The Prime Minister also announced £515 million to help get more than 12 million children into school in some of the poorest countries in the world. This week, I took part in an evidence session as a member of the International Development Committee, and I was very pleased to hear the Foreign Secretary reiterate the Government's intention to continue to use UK aid to support girls' education. It is an important step in ensuring a better, more prosperous and fairer future for all of us.

This week, I have also been part of the United Kingdom's delegation to the Council of Europe. From discussions with our European partners on the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, on which I sit, it is clear to me that we must continue to work together to tackle the issues that cause people to become displaced. It is also a matter that many of my constituents take a keen interest in, through groups such as Stafford Welcomes Refugees. It is important to remember that when children have sadly been displaced, they must still continue to be educated. That has never been clearer to me than when I visited the Malala school in Lebanon with Save the Children. Malala herself is a leading example of how education can transform people's lives, and I was honoured to visit the school to see at first hand how UK aid is being used to educate displaced Syrian girls. The school will help to ensure that a generation of girls is not being lost, thanks to the education they are receiving from British teachers. In the future, they will be able to return to Syria and become its future teachers and doctors.

That point is why it is critical that this summer the UK and Kenya are due to host the Global Partnership for Education replenishment summit. The GPE has a shared commitment to ending the world's learning crisis and is the largest global fund dedicated to transforming education in lower-income countries. Since 2015, the UK has supported more than 15.5 million children overseas to gain a decent education. With the UK set to hold that key summit this year and host the G7 in 2021, there has never been a better time for us to champion education. We should use our role in global Britain to ensure that the UN sustainable development goal on quality education is always achieved.

4.17 pm

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD) [V]: I congratulate the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) on securing this important debate and thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting it. We mark this International Day of Education in a year like no other. More than half of the world's student population still face significant disruption to their education. This year we have been outraged by the number of British children who cannot learn from

[Layla Moran]

home. More than ever, it has become clear that access to the internet and, more importantly, the information it carries, should be a right as much as clean running water. This emergency extends far beyond our UK borders. The scale of the education emergency is almost impossible to comprehend. At least a third of the world's schoolchildren have been unable to access remote learning at all during the school closures. According to UNICEF data, three quarters of children not reached by remote learning globally live in the poorest households or rural areas.

The consequences of that are far-reaching. It means that more children will be forced into child marriage or child labour. It may also mean more children permanently dropping out of education altogether. It is one of the great injustices of our times, and there will not be a vaccine that will immediately fix it. In the year when the UK has the presidency of the G7, we are also hosting COP26. The eyes of the world are looking to us to lead. The Foreign Secretary has said that girls' education is a core priority for the Government. That is a laudable aim and one that I fully support. The thing is, though, the official development assistance allocations released on Tuesday paint a slightly different picture. The Government's proposed cut in aid to 0.5% of gross national income, counter to their manifesto promises, comes on top of a year-on-year decline in the share of the aid budget allocated to education.

I heard just this week that the budget for education in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is to halve. I would like to know whether that is true, but it is worth looking at this year's figures. A total of 5.6% of our development budget is currently spent on education. That is well below the 15% international benchmark. Halving that would be very short-sighted and, frankly, a scandal.

The UK must lead in the creation of the global education plan. The fact that so far nothing has been pledged, despite our hosting that summit in the summer, flies in the face of the Government's own policies. I urge our country to pledge the £600 million to the Global Partnership for Education, as suggested by the Send My Friend to School campaign. There is, of course, the climate crisis and the two are linked. Many studies have shown that investing in education is one of the best ways of tackling the climate crisis. There is no better way for us to make a difference in this world than investing in education, and I urge the Government to do exactly that today.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. The hon. Lady has exceeded her time. I call Kim Johnson.

4.21 pm

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab) [V]: I too welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate today. Covid-19 is steadily turning the global learning crisis into a catastrophe, both at home and abroad. Existing inequalities are widening at a terrifying rate, threatening to leave behind a lost generation and undo decades of progress.

Currently, 1.6 billion children and young people globally are suffering from educational disruption, risking the future of the world's most marginalised children, and this is particularly so for girls and children with

disabilities. Educational development enriches society and minds. It could be a lifeline to those from disadvantaged backgrounds and it paves the way to a thriving, more enriched and liberated society for all to enjoy and to prosper in.

Even before the coronavirus, UNESCO estimated that 258 million children and young people were out of school around the world, and millions more were attending school but not learning the basics. Once again, I ask the Minister to commit to uphold the current aid commitment of 0.7% of gross national income, at a time when coronavirus is throwing decades of progress on poverty, healthcare and education into reverse. Not to do so is a dangerous decision for millions of the poorest people around the world. We have a moral responsibility to support them.

These cuts are most likely to affect the children who are already the most marginalised, impacting support for refugees and the internally displaced, supported children with disabilities and specialist programmes to keep girls in school, and displacement are due to crop failure and famine as a result of climate change. Natural disasters and conflict over resources are another key disruption to education. Those displaced face significant barriers, including saturated school capacity, destroyed infrastructure, linguistic barriers and discrimination.

Pushing ahead with further cuts to our aid budget, this Government are yet again turning their back on those most in need. If covid has taught us one thing, it is that we have responsibility for each other. It is a recognition that, when children in one country are left without an education, we all are poorer as a result. Education is the defining factor in building a fairer, more prosperous society. It is the foundation for building a better future with global development, peace and prosperity at its heart. It is a power to change lives. Will the Government take the opportunity today to demonstrate global leadership in their commitments to funding education for those most vulnerable, marginalised and desperate children in conflict and crisis settings by increasing their aid allocation to education to 15%, and will they utilise our position as president of the G7 and COP26 to encourage other donors to step up and increase their funding too?

4.24 pm

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con) [V]: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) for securing this incredibly important debate.

This global pandemic has exposed many inadequacies and inequalities in education, not only in our country but around the world. From access to computers and broadband to a supportive environment, disparities have been replicated in every country. Teachers have had to adapt and be creative, often having to learn new skills—especially digital ones—very quickly. I salute every single teacher and member of support staff in every school.

Education is the major way out of poverty, and I fear that covid will have a long-term impact on the next generation if substantial measures are not introduced quickly. Some young people will be of an age when it appears more productive for the family to have their children out working rather than being educated, especially if they have lost income during the pandemic.

Governments and international organisations must put financial and other help in place to encourage pupils back to school, because if they do not return, it will cast a long shadow over the economic wellbeing not just of the individual but of the whole country. A recent OECD report states that if they miss one third of the school year, primary and secondary schoolchildren can expect their income to be some 3% lower over their entire lifetime. Providing information to parents and children about the benefits that education will bring them in the long term is crucial.

However, this crisis has also brought an opportunity for education systems to look at different ways of teaching, innovating, and changing assessment and examination systems. Sustainable development goal 4 was set to provide “inclusive and equitable quality education and...lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

We need systemic reform of our education system here in England as much as we do in other countries, and we need to learn from each other about good practice and pedagogy, adjusted to our individual countries. We need to realign the curriculum, assessment and examinations, and move away from a system that helps elite students and towards actual skill distribution to the entire student population. The UK Government’s White Paper on skills is an example that can be shared.

Countries must embrace a new vision of education for the future. If remote learning has taught us one thing, it is that e-learning can be harnessed if there is decent connectivity, and the right software can be highly cost-effective and help with knowledge and lifelong learning. It must be a priority for all Governments to improve access to technology and the connectivity of their populations, to address the glaring disparities that have come from those who have not had access to online learning.

We should see this crisis as a catalyst for sustainable and innovative reform, at the same time as building the foundation for greater resilience and sustainability in education. I hope that all Governments will seize this opportunity.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. There will be three more speeches from the Back Benches and then I am afraid we will have to go directly to the wind-ups.

4.26 pm

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab) [V]: I congratulate the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) on securing this important debate.

Education is essential to eradicating global poverty, achieving every child’s potential and achieving the global goals. Girls’ education is especially neglected, and it too is essential. We can all agree on that, but one crucial element of education is often overlooked. By underfunding that element, not asking whether schools have it and not giving it priority in educational terms, we are letting down another generation and holding back the post-covid opening of schools.

So what is this magic but missing educational ingredient? It is WASH: water, sanitation—toilets—and hygiene education. Cleaning has become a major part of covid control in schools here in the UK, and it is no different around the world, yet I went to many schools before covid that had very few toilets or sinks and very little soap. Teachers are doing a great job of struggling on,

but their educational facilities mean that girls miss school every month because they cannot manage their period at school, and many children with disabilities cannot go to school because there are no toilets accessible for them.

Half of all schools globally do not have soap and water available to students, 620 million pupils do not have decent school toilets, and every year, diarrhoea and intestinal infections together kill nearly 140,000 school-age children. Poor WASH in the first years of life is closely linked to chronic malnutrition, leading to stunting, which then leads to long-term effects in the development and learning potential of children.

Opening schools safely when it is covid-safe to do so is an urgent priority, but clean water, toilets and hygiene are essential to enable that. A school without those is not a safe environment. I urge the Government not to cut the 0.7% aid budget, and I urge the Government, the Minister and all Members to keep asking, “What about WASH?” in every discussion about education. This summer, the UK will co-host the Global Partnership for Education funding summit, with Kenya, and there will be a particular focus on getting girls to school. That is very welcome, but we need to have ambitious amounts of money dedicated by the Government—civil society is calling for £600 million—and for ensuring that WASH investment is a part of that as well. Facilities must be inclusive and accessible, and ensure privacy, safety and dignity. So I hope to hear a response from the Minister today to this crucial question for global education: what about WASH?

4.30 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con) [V]: As a governor at a special school in Dudley, I saw many of the challenges faced by highly skilled and dedicated teachers in providing top-quality education to children with learning disabilities, even in a country with all the advantages of the United Kingdom. But I also saw the incredible difference the school made to those children and to their families, not only to their education, but to their social and emotional development, and to tackling barriers and inequality.

When I went with Results UK and Leonard Cheshire Disability to see projects being run using UK aid for children with learning and physical disabilities in Kenya, I saw that the difference that education was making was on a completely different scale; children who had until recently no hope of even the most basic of schooling were able to enjoy so many of the benefits that we all take for granted. Without this schooling, too many children with learning disabilities, particularly girls with disabilities, were kept shut away at home, their opportunities in life unbelievably and heartbreakingly limited. But with school, funded through UK aid, they were growing and developing just like any other child of their age, with joy on their faces that could light up any room—this was genuinely changing lives.

It is more important than ever when budgets are tight that money is spent on the things that will make the most difference, and nothing could make more of a difference than investing in making sure that some of the most vulnerable children in the world can access quality education. I am proud that the UK set the example in replenishing funding for education which cannot wait, to make sure that children in emergency zones, whether places of conflict or areas where people

[Mike Wood]

have been displaced by famine, disease or climate change, have an education that can transform lives. I am pleased that other countries, such as the United States, the Netherlands and Germany, have stepped up to increase their own donations during the current crisis, when so many people around the world face even more barriers to accessing that education. I hope that the UK and our Government will use the opportunities as they host the G7 this year to make sure that not only our country, but our partners match our commitments with actions that meet the scale of the challenges we face to deliver on quality global education for all.

4.33 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD) [V]: I am very grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to slip under the wire for this very important debate. Like other hon. Members, I reflect on what education has meant for my family. I have two sisters, and the three of us are the first generation in our family to have gone through higher education. That is not an accident; it is not some freak of nature whereby this is suddenly a generation where the Carmichaels got smart. It is because my generation were given opportunities that were denied to my parents, grandparents and other generations before us. So it pains me to see that with 90% of our children out of school as a result of school closures arising from the pandemic, we risk losing and taking away these opportunities from our own coming generations. The pandemic has illustrated better than most things the full consequences of the digital divide, with which we have lived for too long; we see those areas of the country that have access to connectivity and those that do not, and the families who have broadband and sufficient devices for everybody to get home schooling opportunities, and those who do not. So when we come to the end of the restrictions and to rebuilding our economy, we must also look at rebuilding our own education system. Significant though these problems are, I suspect that most young people and teachers in most countries in the world today would love to have the problems that we will have when it comes to rebuilding after the pandemic. The progress that we made against the millennium development goals in terms of getting young people into primary education was significant, but let us not ignore the fact that we did not actually meet the millennium development goals, so it is now more important than ever that we try to meet the sustainable development goals.

The one point that we have to understand is that giving opportunities to young people in other countries—in the developing world, in particular—is not some act of altruism; it is actually good for our own children and communities. I look at the work that has been done by Anderson High School in Lerwick for decades now through its participation in the Global Classroom Partnership, and I see what that has added to the young people coming through that school in Shetland. The money—in hard cash terms—that we would be required to put in to meet the 0.7% GNI target would already be much reduced; not actually to meet that 0.7% target is criminal. The Government must think about this again, not just for the benefit of people in the developing world, but for the benefit of our own children and their educational opportunities.

4.36 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP) [V]: I thank the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) for bringing forward this important debate. On the UN International Day of Education, we must renew our commitment to UN sustainable development goal 4, pledging that by 2030 quality education will be accessible to all children and young people, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation or class. This was always going to be a challenge. However, the pandemic has further highlighted unequal access to education. We must redouble our efforts to address long-standing educational obstacles and the new challenges that we face as a world in lockdown.

At the height of covid restrictions, schools were closed to more than 1.6 billion learners globally, and the impact has been felt most acutely by the most vulnerable. In the UK, as many as 1 million children and young people suffer from digital exclusion. I welcome measures from broadband providers to extend internet access to the most disadvantaged children. I also pay tribute to teachers in Glasgow, who, in some cases, have been going around houses to hand out dongles to those in need. However, more needs to be done at a UK Government level so that no young person is ever disadvantaged because of digital exclusion.

Internationally, remote learning remains out of reach for at least 500 million students. Many Members have pointed out that those most affected will be girls. Pre pandemic, 132 million girls worldwide did not attend school due to poverty or gender-based discrimination and violence. As a result of covid school closures, millions more are dropping out of school, with the Malala Fund estimating that an additional 20 million girls could be out of school by the time the pandemic ends. This is an entire generation of girls for whom life chances and choices are limited. We should also all take note of the comments from the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) regarding WASH.

Although I welcome the Government's commitment to supporting 12 years of quality education for girls, and their support for the UN refugee agency for education of refugee children, these announcements are sullied by the decision to reduce the UK aid budget from 0.7% to 0.5% of GNI. Even a short-term cut will impact children struggling to access an education, and it is notable that Members on both sides of the House have criticised this cut today.

One of the most challenging groups to support are learners in conflict zones. The Secretary of State has previously stated that he is proud of the UK's aid generosity and that aid is a very positive vision for the UK as a "force for good" in the world, but if we are truly to emerge as a progressive global Britain, we must also acknowledge the impact on children and their access to education of UK foreign policy. Whether we are discussing generations of Palestinian children confined to refugee camps or the plight of children in Yemen after years of a war partially facilitated by the arms trade with Saudi Arabia, it is our duty to recognise the consequences of our actions and flawed foreign policy decisions. Only then can the UK sincerely call itself a resolute force for good in the world.

Finally, I echo the words of the UN Secretary-General: "education is the foundation for expanding opportunities, transforming economies, fighting intolerance, protecting our planet and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals."

These are objectives that all Members share, so I call on all of us to continue working towards safe, accessible and quality education for all—especially girls—both at home and around the world.

4.40 pm

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) on securing this debate. I pay tribute to her excellent work as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on global education.

Benjamin Franklin said:

“An investment in knowledge pays best interest.”

We know that, even before the pandemic, vast educational inequality existed. In the world’s poorest countries, nine out of 10 children were unable to read a basic book by the age of 10. The covid-19 pandemic and measures taken to contain it have highlighted and exacerbated that inequality around the world. Communities around the world are struggling, and this virus continues to destroy lives, livelihoods and opportunities.

Members rightly highlighted that the covid-19 pandemic has triggered a global educational crisis and that this educational deficit is not new. My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) spoke about the equalities goal. I commend her work, as Chair of the International Development Committee, on overseas development assistance. My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North West (Taiwo Owatemi) talked about the importance of educating girls, because it lifts the whole country, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Kim Johnson). My hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) talked about the importance of clean water. I know that she speaks with expertise, as somebody who worked in the aid sector before coming into the House. The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) also argued for the importance of education.

During the first wave of the pandemic, 1.6 billion children in almost 200 countries suffered educational disruption. Save the Children reports that nearly 200 million children continue to be out of education. We know the importance of washing our hands to stop the spread of deadly viruses such as covid, yet globally, half of all schools do not have soap and water available to students. Will the Minister tell us what her Department is doing to rectify this situation?

Nationally, the Government’s record throughout the pandemic, I have to say, has been shambolic. We are still waiting for a clear path to schools opening safely. The UK has an important role to play in pushing global co-operation to ensure that students are able to return safely to school as quickly as possible. However, does the Minister find it difficult speaking with international counterparts, given the abject failure of the Secretary of State for Education, who has lurched from one failure to the next?

Many marginalised children rely on school meals, as well as on health services and menstrual hygiene products. School closures have deprived 370 million of the most vulnerable children of their daily school meal. Does the Minister agree that these children deserve a nutritious diet? Almost half a billion children worldwide have not been able to access remote learning while schools have been closed. Where it is accessible, it is not given to girls.

The Malala Fund estimates that 20 million secondary school-age girls in poorer communities could be out of school after the pandemic has ended.

We know that investment in girls’ education will suffer. However, proper investment in girls’ education can lead to global equality, which can then help nations to prepare for the effects of climate crisis as well.

This pandemic has threatened to turn the clock back on gender equality. We know that girls are far more likely to be kept out of school, take on burdens of care and forced into early marriages or domestic duties. Will the Minister make it clear that our Government will take action to tackle the structural causes of gender inequality, through the G7 later this year? What steps is she taking to overcome the causes, not just the symptoms? What contribution will her Government make to the replenishment of the Global Partnership for Education?

We are aware that the Minister and her Department are currently developing the girls education plan. What assessment has she made of the risk that the narrow targets for the girls education plan, announced in November last year, would lead to box-ticking programmes that do not genuinely tackle the multiple barriers that girls face in getting quality education? How will she ensure that the barriers for girls, teenagers and young women are all considered and that access is widened?

We have heard time and again that the Prime Minister is committed to advancing girls’ access to education, yet he has decided to signal the UK’s retreat from the world stage by scrapping a world-renowned Department in the middle of a pandemic, when that Department should have been rightly focusing on saving lives. He also refused to disclose the details of the cuts to life-saving and life-changing aid programmes. It appears that the slashing of the aid budget was purely politically motivated.

Unless swift action is taken, the current cut to the aid budget will put those commitments at risk at a time when poor countries that are already suffering are going to suffer even more. In fact, last year the Government cut a project that supports 200,000 young people in Rwanda and which had led to a reduction in teenage pregnancy and sexual violence. Does the Minister agree that cancelling a project that invests in the future of Rwandan girls is totally at odds with the Prime Minister’s stated commitment to girls’ education? Was that a mistake, or was it a lack of oversight and strategic vision within this newly created Department? Given the state of global education and the clear need for extra support, how much official development assistance will be spent on education in 2021, and how will it compare with 2019 and 2020?

Finally, what signal does the Minister think the Government’s bluff and bluster and cuts in aid, contradicted by sanctions, send to our allies, such as President Biden?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Just before I call the Minister, I should explain, for those who can see, either in the Chamber or elsewhere, that the clock in front of us is wrong by about three minutes, so the official time up there for when this debate will finish is 5.3 pm. I do not want the hon. Ladies who are about to speak to think that they are being short-changed in any way whatsoever. They are not. It will, in fact, be 5 o’clock in the real world, but it will say 5.3 pm up there.

4.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Wendy Morton): I will endeavour to follow one or other of the clocks, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I hope I will get it right, safe in the knowledge that if I do not, you will gently nudge me in the right direction.

I would like to start by saying what an honour it has been to sit in this debate to mark the UN International Day of Education. I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) for securing this debate, and I pay tribute to her for her exceptional work as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on global education and in her previous role as a Minister. I also thank the many Members who have contributed to today's debate. I am conscious that many more wanted to contribute but were unable to get in. I know from listening to the contributions that people spoke with a real passion for education and approached it from many different angles, both domestically and internationally.

In any year, the UN International Day of Education is an important moment to celebrate the hard work and dedication of teachers, lecturers and tutors all around the world. But this year, after 12 months when they have had to adapt like never before, it is particularly important that we pay tribute to the resilience, ingenuity and dedication that teachers have shown throughout the pandemic. I think of those around the world and those closer to home, even those in my constituency of Aldridge-Brownhills.

Education is the centrepiece of our international development work, because it transforms lives and transforms societies. That is why we are committed to UN sustainable development goal 4 on quality education and to our manifesto pledge to stand up for the right of every girl to 12 years of quality education. Countries that provide their children with the springboard of education will be more prosperous and stable, which over time helps to maximise the opportunities for Britain abroad and minimises the number of threats that we face from abroad.

The challenge, however, is huge. Some have estimated that, even before the pandemic, only one in 10 children in low-income countries was able to read a simple story by the age of 10. For the sake of this generation and generations to come, the international community needs to redouble its efforts. As a demonstration of the political and strategic clout that we want to bring to our work, the Prime Minister recently appointed my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant) as the UK's special envoy on girls' education. We heard her speaking in the Chamber earlier, and I know she will be a real advocate and a real champion for this. We are already working together to improve the lives of millions of girls, and benefiting from the breadth of her experience in championing gender equality and protecting women and children.

It is abundantly clear that the covid pandemic has set back educational progress around the world. At the height of the pandemic, more than 1.6 billion children were out of school. Today, children in more than 30 countries are navigating nationwide school closures. Across the globe, this is hitting the poorest and most marginal children the hardest. Millions of children in

the most vulnerable places may never return to school, and this will inflict long-term harm that will also damage communities and national economies.

As if this were not enough, girls are also experiencing a shadow pandemic. As we have heard in some of the contributions this afternoon, when girls do not attend school, they are more vulnerable to violence and sexual abuse, as well as early child marriage and forced labour. So in response to covid-19, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has been supporting some of the most fragile education systems. In 20 countries with the greatest gender disparities, we are working to make sure that girls are not disproportionately impacted. For example, in Bangladesh, we have developed and delivered distance learning to almost 700,000 children through radio and mobile phones; in South Sudan, we are paying school and re-enrolment fees and helping schools to provide a covid-safe teaching environment; and in Sierra Leone, we are supporting young women to become qualified teachers and run distance learning study groups.

As hon. Members know, 2021 is a year of international leadership for the UK, and strengthening the delivery of quality education around the world is an important part of our agenda. We are putting girls' education at the core of our G7 presidency. Alongside Kenya, we are co-hosting the Global Partnership for Education replenishment summit here in the UK this summer, and we will be hosting COP26 in Glasgow, which is a further opportunity to make a real difference for girls who are disproportionately impacted by the devastating effects of climate change, but whose leadership is vital in tackling the crisis. We will seek to mobilise investment and make sure that funding is spent most effectively. We will rally the international community around two global targets: first, to increase the number of girls around the world who go to primary or secondary school by 40 million; and, secondly, to increase the proportion of 10-year-old girls able to read by one third. These are ambitious targets, as is the sustainable development goal to ensure an inclusive and equitable quality education for all, but 2021 offers renewed hope: the chance to get children and teachers back to the classroom; the chance to reinvigorate the international community under our leadership; and the chance to get global education standards moving in the right direction. That is exactly what this Government are working for.

I would like to touch on as many of the specific questions that were raised by hon. Members in the debate as possible. There were several comments and questions around funding, which I will come on to, and around gender and violence against women and girls. Let me see how far I can get in the time that I have.

Many hon. Members asked about the impact of the 0.5%. As most Members are aware, due to the severe impact of the pandemic on our economy, we have had to take the very tough decision to spend 0.5% of our national income on official development assistance rather than the usual 0.7%. However, girls' education will remain a priority for UK aid.

On the Global Partnership for Education replenishment, the UK, as co-hosts of the replenishment, will use all the levers at our disposal to secure a successful GPE replenishment. This includes our own pledge to the fund. Of course, I am unable to commit to what that will be, but the details will be decided by the Foreign Secretary and announced in due course.

Hon. Members also raised the issue of violence against women and girls, which I know we take very seriously in this place. The Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative is still a major priority for the Government, alongside girls' education. It will play a part in our G7 presidency priorities as well as the work we do with the presidency of the UN Security Council.

Covid-19 has clearly created big challenges for girls out of education and for getting them back to school. As we have heard today, there are many challenges that link into that. We have heard about the importance of the WASH agenda. We have heard about the challenges that girls also face in not just accessing learning, but staying safe in schools.

Let me close by saying that we have set out very ambitious global goals to see that all girls access school and learn: 40 million more girls into school by 2025; and 20 million more girls reading by the age of 10 in developing countries. We are developing a girls' education action plan to set out how we will be doing that. I hope the House can get behind us in supporting all the work we are doing in 2021 to support girls' education.

4.58 pm

Harriett Baldwin: It has been an excellent debate. I want to thank all 14 colleagues who were able to get in on the debate, but especially the eight colleagues who had wanted to speak from the Back Benches but were unable to do so on this occasion.

We travelled from the north of the UK in Orkney and Shetland, down to the south and Meon Valley, off to the west in Ceredigion and Maidstone in the east. We heard a consistent message about the importance of education, with some particular themes coming through: girls' education, inclusive education, the importance of sanitation in schools and the importance of quality teaching.

From every speaker today, whether Opposition or Government Members, we heard about the importance of the UK's leadership around the world in this issue. The UK Parliament has dedicated time to this subject today. Through the International Parliamentary Network for Education, which I co-founded with Kenya in the last year, we are arranging for many Parliaments around the world to speak this week about the UN International Day of Education and the importance of education.

We went all around the world in the speeches. We heard about Bangladesh. We heard about Syrian refugees in Lebanon. We heard about Mozambique. All Members who have spoken today agree on the importance of education. We want to see and follow the money in this Parliament, because we want to see the Government's rhetoric matched by the appropriate level of funding for the various replenishments, so that we are not only encouraging others to contribute but making our own contributions. This has been a wonderful, female-dominated debate, for a change, and I thank everyone who took part.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the UN International Day of Education.

Business without Debate

ADJOURNMENT (CONSTITUENCY RECESS)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 25),

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 11 February, do adjourn until Monday 22 February 2021.—(*James Morris.*)

Question agreed to.

Covid-19: Extension of Driving Theory Test Certificates

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*James Morris.*)

5.1 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I want to start by thanking Mr Speaker for selecting this debate. This is an issue that adversely impacts tens of thousands of people right across the British Isles, and I know that the Minister will bear that in mind when she responds on behalf of the Government.

The covid-19 pandemic has had untold impacts on so many aspects of our lives, particularly as many of us have had to adapt to working from home. However, there are certain industries in which working from home is not possible. Throughout the pandemic, driving instructors have been restricted in their ability to work and teach. While lessons resumed for a short period during the summer last year, many driving instructors now find themselves in the same position they were in last March, when countries across these islands first went into lockdown.

Many people require a driving licence for employment and simply to get around. However, it is looking increasingly likely that they will have to pay additional fees to resit their theory tests and then wait months for an available space to sit the practical test, which will undoubtedly be overbooked. That will mean that when restrictions are eased, instead of getting straight to sitting their practical tests and hitting the roads, many people will be out of pocket and twiddling their thumbs, waiting for a test space to become free.

A quick fix exists for the UK Government, but they have declined to make it thus far. Just like they extended the MOT expiry dates at the outset of the pandemic, they are now being called upon to extend the theory test validity, which I would argue is actually less risky. Northern Ireland is a clear example of how extending the validity of a theory certificate can be done safely. Initially, the Northern Irish Executive extended the validity of theory certificates that expired between 1 March and 31 October by eight months, and then they went further and extended the validity of certificates by an additional four months. I am urging the UK Government to do the same and to extend the validity period of the driving theory certificate.

When organisations such as the National Associations Strategic Partnership have written to the UK Government, safety concerns are highlighted as one of the main reasons for not extending the driving theory certificate. The UK Government have said:

“Learner drivers were prohibited from practising during COVID-19. This lack of practice is likely to mean that their knowledge and skills base diminished, and research would suggest that this would be particularly detrimental to hazard perception skills.”

However, I spoke to the Driving Instructors Association, and it was made clear to me that much of the knowledge learned in the theory test is reviewed by driving instructors during the practical lessons and test. In fact, 97% of learner drivers take some training with a qualified driving instructor, thus learner drivers will continually be assessed and tested on their theoretical driving safety knowledge. While I understand the safety concerns, it seems to me

that the practical driving test will ensure that all new drivers have retained their knowledge from the initial theory test.

MOT due dates for cars, motorcycles and light vans were automatically extended by six months from 30 March to help prevent the spread of covid-19. For many people, that action represented a greater threat to road safety than the need to retain the two-year validity of theory test certificates, and the theoretical knowledge of learner drivers. Most of us—probably including the Minister—would probably say that greater risk is associated with someone driving a car with worn brake pads, than with the prospect of their forgetting what to do if their brake light stays on. If the UK Government were willing to extend the MOT duty by six months during the pandemic, surely the same should be done for driving theory test certificates.

When considering this issue it is important to recognise who will be most impacted. Young adults will be the most affected. They have to pay £23 to apply to a company to resit a theory test that they have already passed, and throughout the pandemic young people have repeatedly faced the most consequences. As we heard in the previous debate, their education has been disrupted, they have faced huge redundancies, and we also face a mental health crisis among the younger generations.

For some young people, a driver’s licence is essential for obtaining future work, and without a licence, their opportunities are increasingly limited. If young people have to wait months to resit a theory test that they have already passed, while also paying £23 to do so, the wait for an available space to complete the practical test will only add to the time in which they are unable to secure work. That is bad news for getting the economy moving again, as we seek to build back better. Extending the validity of theory test certificates would provide a huge amount of relief for young people, who are already concerned about the additional costs of learning how to drive.

From a purely administrative point of view, once lockdown is lifted a flood of individuals will seek to resit their theory tests. On 8 January the number of expired theory test certificates due to lockdown stood just shy of 50,000, according to Marmalade insurance. At £23 per theory test, that is a loss of £1.1 million for UK learner drivers.

Let us be clear about exactly how bad the situation is. Last month, *The Scotsman* reported that Scottish learner drivers are facing a 100-mile trip and a four-month wait to resit theory tests, because of what the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency says is “unprecedented demand.” Will the Minister reflect on how ludicrous it is to ask someone from Fife to travel to England just to sit an exam that they have already passed?

Undoubtedly, many individuals will be looking to resit their theory tests once restrictions have been eased. The backlog in cases will be tough to process, potentially increasing the amount of people at test centres, and that will make an already awful situation much worse. It does not need to be like this. Just as happened in Northern Ireland, with the stroke of a pen Ministers in the Department for Transport can end this unnecessary chaos.

The UK Government should extend the validity of driving theory certificates, as that will relieve a lot of unnecessary stress for young people and driving instructors. I have a great amount of sympathy for Ministers who, at the beginning and throughout the pandemic, have

been trying to spin numerous plates relating to every facet of their lives. The first time around, the Government said that they did not want to extend the validity of theory test certificates, but circumstances have changed. Lockdown has been prolonged. It is now approaching a year, and this issue needs revisiting. Given that circumstances have changed, it is time for Ministers to change their mind and exercise what I believe is common sense, which I am sure will be met with cross-party approval in the House.

5.8 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean): I thank the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) for securing this important debate, which I am sure is being watched closely by many drivers up and down the country. The covid-19 pandemic has been an unprecedented challenge for us all, and following the announcement of national lockdown restrictions to help stop the spread of coronavirus, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency has once again had to suspend all routine theory tests and practical driving tests until restrictions are lifted. The hon. Gentleman fully outlined the resultant challenges for learners, and I assure him that I understand those challenges. He also recognised that Ministers have had to balance a number of conflicting issues when making decisions on these matters and many others. On the advice of scientific advisers, we need to take action to protect the NHS and save lives.

The requirement to undertake a driving theory test before a practical driving test is set out in the Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations 1999. The theory test is administered by the DVSA and has two elements: first, an assessment of the learner's knowledge and understanding of the rules of the road and safe driving, comprising 50 multiple-choice questions, of which candidates must answer 43 correctly to pass; and secondly, the hazard perception test, to which the hon. Gentleman referred and which is an assessment of the learner's ability to identify developing hazards, with 75 points available, of which candidates must score 44 to pass. Candidates must pass both elements during the same theory test.

Regulation 47(6) states that a theory test certificate has a validity period of two years. The maximum duration of two years between the passing of a theory test and the taking of a subsequent practical test is in place to ensure that a candidate's road safety knowledge and ability to identify developing hazards is current. It is set in legislation and we currently have no plans to lay further legislation to extend it. I realise, of course, that that will affect and disappoint some learners—including the hon. Gentleman—and driving instructors, for understandable reasons, but it is nevertheless important that road safety knowledge and hazard perception skills are up to date at the critical point at which a candidate drives unsupervised for the first time.

Those with expiring theory test certificates will have taken the theory test in early 2019; since then, unfortunately, their lessons and practice sessions will have been significantly curtailed during recent lockdowns, and it is likely that their knowledge base will have diminished.

David Linden: I have a huge amount of respect for the Minister, but she will be aware that it is possible for someone in this country to have taken a driving test,

say, 20 years ago and never to have driven in that 20-year period, but they will still have a valid licence and can get into a car and drive off. How does she reconcile that with the argument she is making?

Rachel Maclean: The hon. Gentleman tempts me into a broad discussion that it would not be appropriate for me to undertake at this point, because we are discussing the particular issue of extending the theory test. I want to do full justice to this issue, and I will answer the questions that he has asked.

As I was saying, learner drivers will have had their practice sessions significantly curtailed. It is vital that we ensure that new drivers have current relevant knowledge and skills—that is a vital part of the preparation of new drivers, who are disproportionately represented in casualty statistics. That is important and relevant to the point the hon. Gentleman just made. A 2008 study by the Transport Research Laboratory indicated that one in five new drivers had a collision within their first year of driving unsupervised. I am sure the hon. Gentleman would agree that that is a high proportion. The Transport Research Laboratory also found that the hazard perception test is linked to a measurable reduction in some accidents. Those with higher scores on the test have safer records as new drivers.

The DVSA has not stood still on this issue: following a series of improvements to the learning and testing process, a 2017 reevaluation found that only one in 11 new drivers had a collision within the first six months. Although that is a significant improvement, we cannot afford to be complacent about road safety and the risks to new drivers.

There will be those who ask—the hon. Gentleman made this argument powerfully—why the theory test expiry date cannot be extended in the same way as MOT certificates were extended during the first lockdown. The hon. Gentleman asked me to address this point, suggesting that it is a quick fix. Unfortunately, driver theory testing and MOT testing represent different issues in terms of the underlying legislation, road safety risk and potential risk of covid-19 transmission. For that reason, they cannot be directly compared.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me specifically why, if the Government of Northern Ireland have made the decision, we cannot do the same thing. We have, of course, looked at the matter and considered it as part of our deliberations, but ultimately such matters are devolved to the Government of Northern Ireland and it is rightly a decision for them.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, the MOT due dates for cars, motorcycles and light vans were automatically extended by six months from 30 March 2020 to help prevent the spread of covid-19. Drivers at that time, however, were advised that all vehicles must continue to be properly maintained and kept in a roadworthy condition.

The DVSA's focus should rightly be on developing solutions to address the availability of theory tests and the backlog of practical driving tests that has arisen as a result of the pandemic. I am aware of proposals to allow approved driving instructors to sign off their learner and issue driving test pass certificates. Unfortunately, that is not possible. The Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations 1999 require driving test examiners to pass an examination before being authorised by the Secretary

[Rachel Maclean]

of State to conduct practical driving tests. The Road Traffic Act 1988 allows a full driving licence to be issued only if the person has passed the test of competence to drive.

To increase the availability of theory tests, which I know the hon. Gentleman is concerned about, the DVSA has extended theory test centre opening times where possible and extended the booking window from three months to four months to give candidates more choice of available dates.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): On the point about increasing the availability of theory tests in future to deal with the anticipated backlog, will the Minister consider, certainly in some rural areas such as Ceredigion, introducing perhaps even temporary theory centres? At the moment, if somebody lives in Lampeter, not only did they lose the practical test centre two years ago, but they face a 50-mile round trip to attend the theory test centre. Will she consider that?

Rachel Maclean: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we want to ensure that theory tests are available to all candidates. I will certainly consider the matter that he raised and discuss it with my colleague in the other place, Baroness Vere of Norbiton.

I assure hon. Members that once testing can resume safely, the DVSA will continue to work closely with Pearson, the provider, to monitor demand and explore ways in which it can further expand testing capacity and reduce waiting times. We are very focused on social distancing at those test centre sites, the wearing of face coverings and using physical screens between test booths.

David Linden: The Minister is being very kind in giving way once more. There is also this issue: if the Government are so insistent—as it sounds like they are today—on ensuring that people have to go back and resit an exam that they have already passed, will they at least waive the £23 fee? That strikes me as being a reasonable compromise at this stage. Are they willing to consider that?

Rachel Maclean: Of course, we have considered this issue. The current view is that, actually, the candidate whose theory test certificate has expired will have received the service for which they paid the fee. If we are to waive that fee for subsequent tests, someone has to pay, and ultimately, it will be the taxpayer, so that is not a decision that we are taking at this time.

So what are we doing to increase the number of driving tests available to tackle the backlog once it is safe for tests to resume? Some of the measures include offering overtime and annual leave buy-back to examiners, asking warrant card holders who are qualified to carry out tests to do so and conducting out-of-hours testing. A recruitment campaign is also under way to increase the overall number of driving examiners available for testing. The DVSA will continue to assess further options for increasing testing capacity and is committed to reducing the backlog as quickly as possible.

David Linden: If I understand things correctly, the Government are going to try to bring in other examiners. Given that this whole debate is about current knowledge, will the Minister clarify that the examiners who will be brought in will have their knowledge refreshed before they pass judgment on people?

Rachel Maclean: Yes, of course. All these measures will be taken according to road safety and the regulations and standards that we rightly expect the DVSA to abide by.

I would like to address again the points that the hon. Gentleman made on the refund of fees. While I have said that the candidate whose theory test certificate expires will have received the service for which they pay the fee, if a practical test is already booked at the time when the theory test expires, the DVSA will refund the fee for the practical driving test. I hope that he would welcome that approach.

It is also important to put on record that during the current lockdown, the DVSA is offering a mobile emergency worker testing service in England and Wales. This is a limited service, and it is restricted to candidates working in the NHS, health and social care and public bodies involved in work responding to threats to life.

To conclude, I understand very well the impact the pandemic is having on individuals and businesses, and I am grateful to all learners and training providers for their continued patience during this challenging time. Keeping Britain's roads safe must remain our priority. The decision has been made not to extend theory test certificates, and learners will need to pass another theory test if their certificate expires. I hope that with the engagement I have mentioned, I have been able to offer some reassurance to address the hon. Gentleman's concerns.

Question put and agreed to.

5.20 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 28 January 2021

CABINET OFFICE

Contingencies Fund Advance

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove): The Cabinet Office has sought a repayable cash advance from the Contingencies Fund of £429,000,000.

The requirement has arisen due to increased costs relating to urgent expenditure, including that relating to the covid-19 response.

Parliamentary approval for additional resources of £429,000,000 will be sought in the supplementary estimate for the Cabinet Office. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £429,000,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

[HCWS744]

Conflict, Stability and Security Fund Allocations 2020-21

The Paymaster General (Penny Mordaunt): I wish to update the House on the progress of the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) for the Financial Year 2019/20, as well as to announce the initial regional and thematic allocations for this Financial Year, 2020/21.

The CSSF is a cross-Government fund which uses both official development assistance (ODA) and non-ODA resources to deliver against both national security and UK Aid objectives, through security, defence, peacekeeping, peace-building and stability activity. In 2019-20, the CSSF spent £1,234.3 million against a cross-Government allocation of £1,266.2 million (97.5%). A further breakdown of spend against regional and thematic allocation, by department and by discretionary and non-discretionary spend is included in the CSSF's Annual Report for 2019-20, published today.

The report outlines the impact that the Fund has had, and demonstrates how the Fund is contributing to the delivery of national security and UK Aid objectives. The report also highlights ways in which the Fund has made further improvements to programme management processes including how it monitors and measures results. A copy of this document will be placed in the libraries of both Houses and has been published on gov.uk.

Allocation	FY 2020/21 Allocations (millions)		Total
	Non-ODA	ODA	
Middle East	£20.00	£163.13	£183.13
North Africa			
South Asia	£9.43	£93.64	£103.07
Africa (sub-Saharan)	£33.60	£65.17	£98.77
Overseas Territories	£54.35	£4.65	£59.00
Eastern Europe, Central Asia	£25.69	£55.59	£81.28

Allocation	FY 2020/21 Allocations (millions)		Total
	Non-ODA	ODA	
Western Balkans	£7.50	£72.50	£80.00
Americas	£0.38	£18.25	£18.63
Asia Pacific	£0.75	£15.00	£15.75
Turkey	-	£2.00	£2.00
REGIONAL TOTAL	£151.70	£489.93	£641.63
Migration	-	£7.50	£7.50
Counter Extremism	£14.93	£26.08	£41.00
Multilateral Strategy	£4.50	£28.50	£33.00
National Security Communications Team	£2.50	-	£2.50
Serious and Organised Crime	£10.50	£11.70	£22.20
Cyber	£0.50	£12.00	£12.50
Gender and Human Rights	-	£4.90	£4.90
THEMATIC TOTAL	£32.93	£90.68	£123.60
Peacekeeping	£306.10	£81.99	£388.09
MOD DMAP	£50.00	-	£50.00
MOD Afghan Security	£100.00	-	£100.00
MOD UNFICYP	£18.10	-	£18.10
MOD UN Ops Africa	£21.40	-	£21.40
Non-Discretionary TOTAL	£495.60	£81.99	£577.59
Corporate Delivery Support & Other (this includes Stabilisation Unit, Joint Funds Unit and pilot activities)	-	£23.23	£23.23
TOTAL CSSF	£680.22	£685.83	£1,366

The annual report can be found at:

CSSF: Annual Report 2019/20 (FCDO0044 CSSF Report 2019-20 v4.pdf)

[HCWS740]

TREASURY

Double Taxation Convention: United Kingdom and Germany

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jesse Norman):

A protocol to the Double Taxation Convention with Germany and a joint declaration were signed on 12 January. The protocol will give effect to certain OECD/G20 base erosion and profit shifting recommendations that protect tax treaties against avoidance activities, ensuring that the UK's double taxation agreement with Germany meets the minimum OECD/G20 recommended standards. The text of the protocol and joint declaration are available on HM Revenue and Customs' pages of the gov.uk website and will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses. The text of the protocol will be scheduled to a draft Order in Council and laid before the House of Commons in due course.

[HCWS743]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Contingencies Fund Advance

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Oliver Dowden): The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has sought in its supplementary supply estimate 2020-21 the resources, capital and cash it requires to operate for this financial year.

The funds associated with this estimate will not be released until the Supply and Appropriation Bill achieves Royal Assent in early March. The Department has therefore sought a Contingencies Fund advance which will be repaid once Royal Assent has been obtained.

Parliamentary approval for resources of £1,668,432,000, capital of £520,836,000 and cash of £57,000,000 has been sought in a supplementary estimate for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £2,246,268,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

[HCWS742]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Covid-19: House Party Fines and Domestic Enforcement Measures

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): On 28 September, the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Self-Isolation) (England) Regulations 2020 came into force. These regulations mean that self-isolation is a legal requirement for individuals who have been notified by one of the bodies specified in the regulations (in practice, mainly NHS Test and Trace) that they have tested positive for covid-19 or are a close contact of someone who has tested positive. Non-adherence to these regulations can result in a fixed penalty notice (FPN) ranging from £1,000 to £10,000. Failure to pay the FPN can result in criminal proceedings and conviction.

Ensuring that infected individuals and their close contacts self-isolate is one of the most powerful tools for controlling transmission of covid-19. Increased compliance with self-isolation will reduce transmission of the virus, preventing family and friends from contracting coronavirus, and protecting the NHS.

The Government expect individuals to comply when they are required to self-isolate. Where there are reports of suspected breaches, the police approach to engage, explain and encourage compliance is the right one. But, on occasion, this approach needs to be backed-up with enforcement against those who flout the rules and put others at risk.

We have been working closely with colleagues on the National Police Chiefs' Council to ensure that the information we share with them supports effective enforcement where that is necessary.

In order to issue a fixed-penalty notice, the police need to be satisfied that they are engaging with the right person, that the person is aware of their duty to self-isolate and that the person has indeed breached that legal requirement.

NHS Test and Trace currently shares the following information with the police:

- First and last name of individual
- Home address and telephone number
- Period of self-isolation
- Date notification to self-isolate was received

Following consultation with the police it has become clear that further information is necessary to strengthen the effectiveness of the enforcement regime around self-isolation.

Following a report of suspected non-compliance, and following checks by NHS Test and Trace to confirm the individual is under the legal duty to self-isolate, NHS Test and Trace will henceforth share the following additional information with police on a case by case basis, as necessary:

- Details of how the individual was notified by Test and Trace, including address, telephone number and email address where relevant
- Date of birth
- Whether the individual is a positive case or a close contact
- A copy of the notification issued by Test and Trace, where possible
- Whether the individual is taking part in coronavirus related research (and is therefore exempt from the legal duty to self-isolate)

These changes will support the police in taking enforcement action when that is appropriate. In particular, it will enable them to share a copy of the notification to self-isolate if an individual says they did not receive it.

It will also enable the police to gather relevant evidence should criminal proceedings ensue in the event that an FPN is issued and not paid. In such cases, it is important for the police to know, and where appropriate evidence, the precise circumstances around each individual breach and how the duty to self-isolate arose. Information on whether individuals are under a duty to self-isolate due to having tested positive or as a result of being a close contact of someone who has tested positive (including in the copy of the notification) will only be shared and will only be used where necessary for "the purpose of carrying out a function under regulation 10, 12 or 13 [functions regarding enforcement, issuing FPNs and bringing proceedings] or otherwise for the prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of offences under these regulations". These changes will help improve the effectiveness of police action against reported breaches of self-isolation.

As announced last week by the Home Secretary, regulations will also increase fixed penalty notices for those caught attending illegal gatherings in private dwellings and student accommodation (such as house parties)—of more than 15 people from £200 to £800 in England. Fixed penalty notices for such offences will double for each successive offence up to a maximum of £6,400. This will provide the police with the enhanced powers they need to tackle egregious breaches of the law. We have been committed from the beginning of this pandemic to following the science, and the science is clear that larger gatherings of people in indoor spaces present a significant risk of transmission and spread of the virus.

The necessary amendments to the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Self-Isolation) (England) Regulations 2020 and the introduction of an enhanced

FPN for indoor gatherings over 15 people will be laid before parliament, and will come into force, on 29 January 2021.

[HCWS746]

NHS England and NHS Improvement: Annual Assessment 2019-20

The Minister for Health (Edward Argar): Today, I am laying before Parliament my annual assessment of the NHS commissioning board (known as NHS England) for 2019-20.

Covid-19 has presented an unprecedented challenge, the scale of which the NHS has not seen in its 72-year history. I would like to begin by giving my utmost thanks and appreciation to all colleagues throughout the NHS for their dedication and hard work responding to the virus.

My assessment of NHS England and NHS Improvement's (NHSE/I) performance for 2019-20 reflects the impact these challenges have had on the health service and differentiates between performance before the pandemic took hold and the subsequent impact managing the virus has had on delivery. To this end, I have defined performance pre-covid-19 as the period April 2019 to end January 2020. Evidence from this period has been used to make a reasonable assessment of where performance would have been had covid-19 not happened.

2019-20 was a transitional year for the NHS, that saw NHSE/I embed the first phase of delivery against the NHS long term plan. NHSE/I has worked closely with local health systems to develop robust, system and local-level implementation plans. In 2020-21 these plans will need to be revised to reflect possible new and longer-term demands caused by covid-19 and to account for the Government's 2019 manifesto commitments. To ensure these plans are workable NHSE/I must ensure disciplined financial management across all organisations. I am therefore pleased to see most NHS providers reporting a year-end position that is equal to or better than their agreed control totals.

To ensure performance targets are appropriate and help improve clinical quality and outcomes, NHSE/I has field tested proposals in urgent and emergency care, routine elective care, cancer and adult and children's mental health as part of the clinically led review of NHS access standards. The impact of covid-19 has delayed the final evaluation report and I expect NHSE/I to continue to work with wider Government and local NHS organisations to produce evidence-based approaches. An increase in demand for services in 2019-20 pre-pandemic has meant that performance targets on NHS constitutional standards were not on track to be met by the end of the year. Between April 2019 and January 2020, demand for urgent investigation of possible cancer and emergency admissions via A&E increased by 8% and 3.5% respectively, compared to the same period last year, making it harder for the NHS to treat patients within the agreed targets. Key to managing demand in the system is ensuring a steady flow of patients through to the point at which they can be safely discharged. Despite great efforts in both health and social care, the average delayed transfer of care (DTC) figure of 4,000 or fewer delays remains

challenging and the trajectory up until January 2020 was 5128 leaving a cumulative target of 1,182 beds to be delivered.

Another key element of the NHS long term plan was publication in June 2019 of NHSE/I's interim people plan that was reinforced in August 2020 with the "We are the NHS: People Plan for 2020-21—action for us all". The publication of the overarching NHS people plan will need to account for new workforce demands and costs due to the pandemic as shortages remain a critical risk to service recovery. It is also critically important that we have rigorous plans in place to deliver the additional 50,000 nurse places that the Government promised to deliver in this Parliament. I am also grateful that NHSE/I has taken the lead in supporting members of our workforce who are most vulnerable and provided an enhanced staff health and wellbeing offer, including targeted support for our BAME colleagues and, where possible, offering opportunities for flexible and remote working.

I am pleased to see NHSE/I support the Government's health and social care pledges set out in the 2019 manifesto. Great progress has been made on capital in 2019-20, which was underpinned by the health infrastructure plan (HIP), published in September 2019. The Government are committed to building 40 new hospitals, and the NHS has already made significant progress in developing these plans to deliver world-class care in world-class facilities. Similarly, the NHS has pressed ahead with delivering the 20 hospital upgrades announced by the Prime Minister in August 2019. I am assured NHSE/I has committed to work with the Government to improve public confidence in hospital food and commend them for supporting the commitment to abolish hospital parking fees for those patients and families in greatest need.

Looking forward, I am pleased to see NHSE/I use evidence from responding to covid-19 to reduce barriers and improve the way services are delivered. The pandemic has also brought to light the burden placed on the NHS by the interoperability of systems and the need for more effective information sharing between care settings and organisations, as well as between professionals and the public, to enhance health outcomes and quality of care. I am therefore eager to see the implementation of the technology standards set out in the "Future of Healthcare" to better integrate information flows.

The NHS remains this country's most valued public service, an institution that is there for every family, everywhere, at the best of times and at the worst. In light of covid-19, the Government want to continue to ensure that the NHS has the space, certainty and funds to deliver a transformative plan that will ensure patients benefit from a ground-breaking health service into the next decade.

We will continue to work closely with NHSE/I to help them deliver this ambition, address the challenges that lie ahead and provide a sustainable and efficient health service with quality, transparency and safety at its heart.

Copies of my annual assessment and NHSE/I's annual report will be available from the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office.

[HCWS741]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Accredited Financial Investigation Powers: Consultation

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse):

I intend to lay a statutory instrument this year which will grant accredited financial investigator powers to an additional five agencies. This will bring the total number of agencies with access to these powers to 36 in addition to all police forces and local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Accredited financial investigator powers grant civilians working for that agency access to certain Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 powers, which assist in the effective recovery of proceeds of a crime that falls under that agency's jurisdiction. Accredited financial investigators have the ability to use financial intelligence for more complex financial investigations and are able to contribute to the recovery of the proceeds of crime.

The following organisations have sought access to accredited financial investigator powers: the Service Police, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, the Information Commissioner's Office, the Department for the Economy Northern Ireland and the London Fire Brigade. I have assessed the value of extending the

powers to each of these agencies—in particular whether effective criminal justice outcomes could be reached in their jurisdictions without access to these powers—and I have concluded that we should seek to grant the powers to all five. However, I intend to seek the views of the wider public as to whether these organisations should be granted these powers.

Currently, the previously mentioned agencies either rely on other agencies designated with financial investigation powers—such as the National Crime Agency or police forces—or have no access to recover proceeds of crime within their jurisdiction. Granting these organisations access to the powers will improve the law enforcement outcomes that they can deliver. The Home Office committed to grant these powers to additional organisations in the asset recovery action plan, published in 2019.

As such, I intend to publish a consultation for seven weeks from 28 January. This consultation will seek to establish the views from the public on whether or not these organisations should be granted the financial investigator powers.

I will arrange for a copy of the consultation document to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS745]

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**not later than
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