

**Monday
22 March 2021**

**Volume 691
No. 194**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Monday 22 March 2021

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: I have a short statement to make. Today marks the fourth anniversary of the death of PC Keith Palmer, who died in the line of duty protecting this Parliament from a terrorist attack. His sacrifice will not be forgotten. May I express on behalf of the whole House our sympathy with his family, friends and colleagues on this sad anniversary? We are grateful every day to the police services in all parts of the country for all that they do.

I gather that there is a technical problem that means we cannot proceed immediately with our business today. I am going to suspend the House for 30 minutes while we seek to resolve the problem.

2.34 pm

Sitting suspended.

3.3 pm

On resuming—

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

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

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Crime Reduction

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to reduce crime. [913694]

Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to reduce crime. [913702]

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to reduce crime. [913703]

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to reduce crime. [913705]

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to reduce crime. [913712]

Robert Langan (High Peak) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to reduce crime. [913716]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): Before I answer the question, Mr Speaker, may I join you in paying tribute to PC Keith Palmer? Keith was a brave, brave officer, dedicated to his work and we will always remember him.

Following last week's meeting of the crime and justice taskforce, chaired by the Prime Minister, the Government have doubled the size of the safer streets fund, which will go towards neighbourhood measures designed to improve public safety and protection.

Felicity Buchan: Knife and gang crime is sadly an issue in my constituency, but, at the same time, two police stations in the north of it are under threat. One is Notting Hill police station, which the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, is planning to sell—he closed its front counter a couple of years ago—and the other is Lancaster Road, where the lease is due to expire. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, given this Government's huge investment in the police, we need physical police stations in London and in the north of my constituency?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I pay tribute to her because she is an incredible constituency MP. I spent time with her on patrol, where she joined me in very much backing and supporting the police. I am incredibly disappointed by what she said about police stations closing in her constituency. It is a fact that they are a vital lifeline to protect communities and the public. She will know that police and crime commissioners are elected to be accountable to the communities they serve, and with that, they also need to be a strong voice when it comes to fighting crime and dealing with, as she rightly highlighted, the issue of knife crime, drug crime and attacks on young people.

Ian Levy [V]: Last year, I oversaw the temporary creation of a mobile police station in Blyth marketplace. This was very well received by the local residents and retailers in the town, as well as being supported by our fantastic local police force. However, a more permanent fixture, as well as the installation of CCTV, would be welcomed by all. Will my right hon. Friend support me, the police and the residents of Blyth Valley in our endeavours to create a safer environment for all?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I commend him because, again, he is a tour de force locally, giving strong voice and representation to safer streets and safer communities and, again, backing the police. He is right to work with the police locally to make sure that more community support and safety measures come into place. I will support and work with him in whatever way I can. He will also know that when it comes to the funding for these schemes, the money is there from central Government. I urge all police and crime commissioners to step up and make absolutely sure that they tap into that funding to ensure that these measures come into place.

Nickie Aiken: May I associate myself with the remembrance today of PC Palmer and the other victims we lost on that day? I remember coming out of Westminster tube at exactly this time four years ago and seeing the aftermath of that dreadful terrorist attack.

I welcome the reopening of the call for evidence on violence against women and girls, which I believe now closes this Friday—26 March—and I encourage as many people to have their say as possible. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is vital that we listen to victims of violence and all women and girls to really understand their experiences in their daily lives, so that we can ensure that the strategy that the Government finally introduce does tackle violence, harassment and abuse of women and girls?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and I echo her call to continue to encourage people to respond to the survey. We have already had in excess of 135,000 people writing in to the survey since it has been reopened. But there is a fundamental point here: in having people join that consultation, that public survey, we want their views, because their views matter, but so do their personal experiences. I am talking about personal experiences and insights, whether someone has been a victim, which is always a terrible, terrible thing, but also if someone has interacted with the system—it could be the criminal justice system, victim support services, the police or any aspect of the system. We want that to come together so that we can have the right type of approach that gives voice and strength to the type of policies and the legislation that we bring forward.

Rob Butler [V]: Over the past year in Aylesbury Vale, robberies have fallen by 35% and many more criminals have been brought to justice for violent offences. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the superb officers at Thames Valley police's Aylesbury police station on those achievements, and can she tell the House how her Department will ensure that those officers can continue to keep people in my local community safe, especially women?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend will have heard me speaking with great praise for Thames Valley police and for its incredible work and dedication, of which there are many examples that we have spoken about in the past. He spoke about Thames Valley Aylesbury's work on reducing crime within the community. That is very much down to great leadership, no doubt about that, and also to resourcing, with the money that the Government are putting in place, and to the new police officers, the visibility, the money that goes into crime reduction and the surge funding that has gone in. I absolutely stand with him and with his local officers who are doing outstanding work.

James Sunderland: Many of my constituents in Bracknell have contacted me recently to express concern about antisocial behaviour. This includes nuisance neighbours, drug abuse, speeding cars and general disorder. Given that the Government have a responsibility to safeguard the law-abiding majority, could my right hon. Friend please confirm what is being done to curb this behaviour?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Knowing his constituency as I do from previous visits, and knowing the way in which the police work locally, we absolutely stand with them in our determination to stamp out criminality and also antisocial behaviour—the things that blight communities. Of course we stand on the side of the silent law-abiding majority—no question about that whatsoever. The funding that we have seen for

more police officers within his force and his constituency, along with the money for the safer streets fund, will go a long way to delivering for his constituents.

Robert Largan [V]: Recently, gangs of bicycle and car thieves have been targeting the High Peak, travelling into the area from Greater Manchester and Yorkshire. Derbyshire police is working hard to try to tackle this problem, but can I urge the Home Secretary to do more to ensure that the different police forces, including the British Transport police, work more closely together to tackle the criminal gangs that operate over county lines?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the blended way in which forces should come together, because county lines cross boundaries. Whether it is the British Transport police, his own police or the neighbouring forces, we need them to pull together to deal with the level of criminality that he has spoken about. That is taking place on one of the biggest issues that faces our country, which is county lines drug gangs. He will know, from when we have spoken previously, of the great operational work that is taking place across our police forces and intelligence agencies to go after the criminals that are out there pursuing such high-harm crimes.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): The shadow Home Secretary will speak about the violence last night in his remarks. I simply want to say that there is never an excuse for violence, and as shadow Policing Minister, my thoughts are obviously with the police who were on duty. I wish them a swift recovery.

Mr Speaker, I want to associate myself with the remarks that you made about PC Keith Palmer and, if I may, I would also like to send my best wishes to the Minister for Crime and Policing, the hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse). I hope he continues to show no symptoms of covid-19 and that the virus was not passed on to anyone working in the Home Office. One would hope that this is a lesson to him of the importance of sticking to the rules.

Thousands of women across the land, including the Home Secretary, have spoken of the danger they feel on the streets and the harassment they have suffered. Now is the time for action. The number of stalking and harassment offences recorded by the police has more than doubled in four years, with 500,000 offences last year, and we know that this is the tip of the iceberg, as most women do not report street harassment. Will the Home Secretary work cross-party to introduce a law similar to the one introduced in France in 2018 to make street harassment a specific criminal offence?

Priti Patel: I say to the hon. Lady that street harassment—in fact, all harassment against individuals, male and female, but particularly women and girls—is absolutely unacceptable. I have spent some time with campaigners who are campaigning to change the law on street harassment, so I am absolutely committed to working with everybody on this. This will be part of our strategy on violence against women and girls. The hon. Lady will know of the work that is taking place on the VAWG consultation right now, and we are going to build on that. We will look at all the calls that come in, and look at how we can have a proper strategy that will formulate legislation to bring about the changes that women and girls quite rightly want to see.

Asylum Accommodation: Northern Ireland

Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP): What recent discussions her Department has had with the Northern Ireland Executive on asylum accommodation in Northern Ireland. [913695]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): Home Office officials meet weekly with the Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership to discuss intake, accommodation and other operational matters relating to asylum accommodation. That is supplemented by formal monthly meetings with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Belfast City Council, the voluntary and communities sector, public health colleagues and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Claire Hanna [V]: Asylum seekers in Northern Ireland are disadvantaged by a lack of parity in specialist services such as trauma counselling and legal advice, but instead of plugging these gaps, this Secretary of State seems obsessed with introducing ever more punitive and dehumanising policies in her approach to dealing with people fleeing persecution. We have seen the outworkings of offshore processing in Australia, which cost lives and hundreds of millions of pounds; it was a human rights disaster. Will the Minister take the opportunity to confirm that the Department is not pursuing plans to use third countries as dumping grounds? Will the Government instead commit to establishing safe and legal routes, and housing with dignity those who need asylum in the UK?

Kevin Foster: It is disappointing to hear the tone of the hon. Lady's question, given that the Belfast City Council area is the only part of Northern Ireland to act as a dispersal area. Securing suitable accommodation relies on local communities taking part. Perhaps she may wish to reflect on what more action could be taken by councils where the Social Democratic and Labour party has a presence to match her words.

Misuse of Drugs Act

Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP): What plans she has to review the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. [913696]

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse) [V]: Before I answer the question, may I reassure the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones) that I did follow the rules? I urge her, and indeed all Members, to get themselves regularly tested on a random basis, whether they have any symptoms or not.

The Government currently have no plans to review the 1971 Act. Obviously, we keep drugs controls under review, in consultation with the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, but drugs legislation is only part of our wider approach to preventing drug misuse, which includes: focusing on education in schools; promoting treatment and recovery; and preventing the supply of illicit drugs.

Allan Dorans [V]: As a former Metropolitan police officer, may I pay tribute to the memory of PC Keith Palmer?

The largest review ever undertaken of 349 research studies from across the globe, carried out by the Centre for Criminology at the University of South Wales in 2017, found that safe or supervised injection rooms significantly reduced drug-related harms and dramatically cut mortality rates. Will the Minister pay heed to this overwhelming evidence and support at least one pilot facility—preferably more—for safe drug consumption rooms in Scotland?

Kit Malthouse: I can understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, given that Scotland currently has a drug death rate three and a half times that of the whole of the UK, and it is a matter that should be of concern to all of us. I have had extensive discussions with my Scottish colleagues, not least the new Scottish Minister for Drugs Policy, about how we could work together to try to tackle this problem. Although at the moment we do not envisage changing the rules to look at safe consumption rooms, there is a huge amount we can do together. I urge the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues north of the border to look at our groundbreaking ADDER—Addiction, Diversion, Disruption, Enforcement and Recovery—projects, which are bringing together the police and the most critical partner for drug recovery, the health service, in five areas across England and Wales to focus on this problem and try to shift the numbers.

Deportation

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to speed up the deportation of (a) serious foreign national offenders, (b) failed asylum seekers, (c) people who commit serious breaches of their visa conditions and (d) illegal migrants. [913698]

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to deport foreign national offenders. [913707]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp): Removing people who should not be here is vital in order to maintain the integrity of our immigration system. In particular, removing dangerous foreign national offenders is crucial to protecting our fellow citizens. In the year to June 2020, there were 5,208 enforced removals. However, that was significantly lower than in previous years, which is why we are going to be bringing forward proposals very shortly to reform the system to make sure we can better enforce our immigration rules.

Mr Holden [V]: I thank the Minister for his answer. My North West Durham constituents want genuine refugees to be supported, but they also want to see foreign criminals and bogus asylum seekers deported. Members of the local Labour party are spreading scare stories about the plans for the Hassockfield site, so will the Minister confirm that it will be a secure facility—essentially a category C prison—with around 80 females detained for as short a time as possible, and that recruitment for 200 local jobs will start as soon as possible? Finally, will he ignore the calls of the hard-left Labour activists who want to have open borders and would allow foreign criminals to stay in the UK, and ensure that those people who have no right to be here are deported as quickly as possible?

Chris Philp: My hon. Friend is right: when people have valid asylum claims, we should of course look after them, but when they do not, we should ensure that they leave. The Hassockfield centre is indeed designed for 80 female detainees and will be a secure facility. As my hon. Friend says, it will create local jobs, and only people with no right to stay in the country will be there. I join my hon. Friend in condemning the local Labour party in his neighbourhood, which appears to be against proper border controls.

Bob Blackman [V]: My hon. Friend the Minister will well know of the frustration when violent criminals who are foreign nationals leave prison and are due to be deported, only for their lawyers to frustrate the process with last-minute appeals. Will he bring forward proposals to prevent such action and make sure that those dangerous criminals who are a threat to this country are deported at the end of their criminal convictions?

Chris Philp: My hon. Friend is right: dangerous criminals, including murderers and rapists, should be deported once their sentence is over. I am afraid he is also right that we face legal challenges, often very late in the day and despite the fact that there have been many previous opportunities to make such claims, the vast majority of which—well over 80%—subsequently turn out to be totally without merit. It is for that reason that the Home Secretary and I will bring forward proposals in the very near future to address exactly that issue.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): We learned this month that under this Government the number of foreign criminals living freely in the UK has exceeded 10,000 for the first time ever, while last year the number deported fell to its lowest level on record. However bad those numbers are, at least they exist, unlike—astonishingly, as I found out today—any figures on the rearrest of previously charged and potentially dangerous terrorist suspects. Does that not show how, for all their tough talk, this Government's record is weak and their competence lacking? It is a totally unacceptable state of affairs when it comes to the safety and security of the British people.

Chris Philp: Given the shadow Minister's new-found concern about deporting foreign national offenders, we will find out whether his actions in the Division Lobbies match his rhetoric when we come to vote on legislation in the relatively near future. Why was it that when we brought forward a charter flight in December to deport dangerous foreign national offenders, Labour MP after Labour MP stood up to oppose that? That is completely wrong.

Fraud During the Pandemic

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to protect people from fraud during the covid-19 outbreak. [913699]

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse) [V]: The Home Office has been working with policing, public and private sector partners to track and mitigate the risk of fraud during the pandemic. The National Cyber Security Centre has taken down tens of thousands of online scams and gov.uk is giving the public the advice that they need to spot scams and avoid falling victim to them.

Mrs Hodgson [V]: Recent months have seen an increasing number of scams related to the coronavirus vaccine. As rumours swirl in the press about a delay to the vaccine in the UK, it is even more important that the Government take urgent action to stop fraudulent opportunists from exploiting the vulnerable. One scam is charging for a fake vaccine on the doorstep. Will the Minister detail what steps the Government can take, in addition to what he has already mentioned, to tackle this dangerous fraud?

Kit Malthouse: I can well understand the hon. Lady's frustration and fear about this issue. For people to be duped by others offering fake vaccines is a disgraceful type of crime, particularly as we face this awful pandemic together. We are working closely with partners across health and law enforcement to make sure that we catch up with these villains as quickly as we possibly can. I have been reassured by the fact that the number of vaccine-related frauds that have been reported is, pleasingly, still quite low, but we continue to monitor the situation carefully. I urge people who come across this kind of instance to report it, please, to the City of London's Action Fraud as soon as they can.

Policing Numbers

Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to increase the number of (a) police community support officers and (b) police officers. [913700]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): The Government are committed to recruiting an additional 20,000 police officers by March 2024. Ahead of that recruitment drive, we already have 6,620 more police officers. The hon. Lady will also be aware of the significant police funding that has come to her own police force.

Kate Hollern [V]: The Home Secretary fails to recognise that Lancashire has lost 750 officers over the past decade and is under a huge amount of pressure as it simply does not have enough officers to investigate some crimes. This causes great concern to residents. Does she feel that that is fair on victims of crime and does she agree that justice delayed is justice denied? Is she concerned that the public could lose faith in the police unless those concerns are addressed urgently?

Priti Patel: The hon. Lady fails to recognise the amount of police funding that her own local area of Lancashire has received. She also fails to recognise the number of new police officers who have been recruited and who are out there, day in, day out, protecting our streets and her constituents. She is right to speak about victims because support for victims is absolutely crucial, but she must reflect on the support that victims receive in relation to particular crimes and offences within the wider criminal justice system, and also on the role of the Crown Prosecution Service. On that basis, it is an absolute shame that she and her party failed to stand up for victims in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill on Second Reading last week.

Street Safety: Women

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): What steps she is taking to help ensure that the streets are safe for women walking home at night. [913701]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): There is no place in our society for violence against women and girls. The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government are putting record levels of investment into the police and that there are more police officers on the streets. We as a Government are ensuring that those individuals who commit crimes against women and girls receive longer prison sentences, which was opposed by the Labour party.

Geraint Davies [V]: Our hearts are with the friends and family of Sarah Everard after her tragic and brutal killing, which comes at a time when recorded rape has doubled since 2014 and when 99% of reported rapes do not lead to charges. Will the Government now enable people instantly to report street nuisance and harassment from their mobile phones in texts and images to allow immediate police intervention? Will she also invest in immediate DNA same-day testing together with Nightingale courts to fast-track rape cases, so that women are safer and justice is done?

Priti Patel: The hon. Gentleman has highlighted some important points around rape, sexual violence and abuse within the criminal justice. I can confirm that, as part of the work of the Crime and Justice Taskforce, the Government, with the Ministry of Justice and the courts system, are looking at a range of measures to see how we can do more to fast-track cases and also to make sure that victims are protected in the right kind of way, as the hon. Gentleman has said. Alongside that, a great deal of work has taken place across Government with the end-to-end rape review.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I am delighted to hear that the Home Secretary has finally joined up with us on trying to do better to address violence against women and girls, and that the taskforce was announced last week; we look forward to working with her. We are hopefully going to enter a new era on street harassment, thanks to the deeds of Labour women here in the Commons and in the other place, who pushed the Government to record misogyny as a hate crime. With that in mind, may I ask the Home Secretary what she intends to do to train police forces? Can she tell us why only half of English and Welsh forces have undertaken Domestic Abuse Matters training, even though research shows that where forces have received it, there is a 41% increase in coercive control arrests?

The Minister for safeguarding, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), said over and over again last week that police training was important in improving the dreadful and worsening outcomes for abused women in this country, so how come, under her watch and the watch of the Home Secretary, only half of forces have undergone the necessary, proven training? Will the Home Secretary tell the House what she has done to ensure that all are trained, other than just saying she wants them to be? We need deeds, not words; otherwise, her Home Office will keep releasing more and more violent perpetrators back on to our streets.

Mr Speaker: Order. We must make sure that questions are short, in order to get through the list, but I do appreciate how important this subject is.

Priti Patel: I am sorry that the hon. Lady has taken the tone that she has. *[Interruption.]* Well, many people are cross, but she should recognise that this should never become a partisan or party political issue. *[Interruption.]* I appreciate that she would like to chunter from the sidelines, but the fact of the matter is that when we look at the work done across this House and by all parliamentarians, we see that no one individual holds the licence to determine the changes in outcomes that we collectively want to see for women and girls. If she was interested at all in getting justice and driving the right kinds of outcomes for women and girls, she would listen to what I have to say on this. A great deal of work is taking place. I am sorry she does not want to listen to the serious points that I am about to make about Government actions; she sits there pulling faces and nodding her head.

I have commissioned a thematic review of violence against women and girls in policing, which will be led by Her Majesty's inspectorate. It will look at how the police deal with these issues. Over the last 12 months, through the National Policing Board, some very strong work has taken place across 43 police forces to look at the work and training in conjunction—*[Interruption.]* Would the hon. Lady like to listen to what I have to say, rather than the sound of her own voice? We are not just looking at the work of police forces; with the College of Policing, we are also looking at the training that is in place and where that training needs to be improved.

Of course, there are standards in the inspectorate, through which police forces are held to account. Those are important benchmarks of quality, but also outcomes; and it is outcomes that matter to the victims that we all care about. We want to ensure that there are fewer victims in the future, because all of us in this House—irrespective of our political party—want to ensure that women and girls, and victims, are safeguarded and protected in the criminal justice system.

Unauthorised Encampments

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tackle unauthorised encampments. [913704]

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tackle unauthorised encampments. [913706]

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse) [V]: We recognise the misery that some unauthorised encampments cause to local communities and businesses. Through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, we are pleased to be delivering on our manifesto commitment to strengthen the powers of the police to arrest and seize the vehicles of those who set up unauthorised encampments and cause damage, disruption and distress.

Ben Everitt: My hon. Friend will have noticed that last week, in voting against the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, the Labour party also voted against giving the police the powers they need to act quickly and effectively against illegal Traveller encampments.

The key word there is “illegal”; illegal encampments are, by definition, illegal. With illegal encampments popping up across Milton Keynes, does my hon. Friend agree that it is wrong to prioritise the rights of criminals, and that we are right to be giving the police the powers they need to act and enforce the law?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend is exactly right; we have to balance the rights of so many Travellers to lead a nomadic life—and the vast majority do, in a legal way—with the rights of those who own property, live in communities, and deserve to live without the distress, aggravation and difficulty that comes from unauthorised encampments. He will know that we are a Government who do not tolerate lawbreaking of any kind. The measures that we are introducing will ensure that the police have the powers they need to tackle this problem—hopefully, once and for all.

Dr Mullan [V]: I recently met a local business that transports food up and down the country from a warehouse in my constituency. It was disrupted by an unauthorised encampment and subjected to harassment and demands for cash payments. Will my hon. Friend confirm that our proposed new laws aim to prevent just that type of behaviour, and that, importantly, the vast majority of the Traveller community, who do not harass or disrupt the local communities they travel through, face no reduction in their rights?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend speaks the truth. I am very sorry to hear about the circumstances that afflicted the business in his community. I know that he works hard to ensure that his part of the world remains a great place for investment, and I hope that business managed to deal with the problem. The country is littered with businesses that have had to put boulders, huge logs or other barriers over their hardstandings or car parks. That is not a situation we can tolerate into the future.

As my hon. Friend says, the vast majority of Travellers go about their lifestyle in a perfectly legal manner, and we should facilitate that and help them to do so, but those who do not and who cross the line into illegality need to be dealt with. We believe that the measures in the Bill will allow the police to do that with much greater efficiency.

Contingency Asylum Accommodation

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to respond to the findings of the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration’s inspection of contingency asylum accommodation. [913708]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): During the pandemic, the number of accommodated asylum seekers has increased, because we have not been able to move people on from accommodation and continuing claims. That means we have needed to secure contingency accommodation options, including two Ministry of Defence sites. We await the inspector’s full report on contingency accommodation, which we will lay in Parliament alongside the Department’s response after his inspection is concluded.

Catherine West: Many constituents have been in touch about the unhygienic conditions at Napier barracks, which risk spreading covid. I understand that the Home Secretary told the Select Committee that she had been following guidance, yet that seems to be the opposite of what Kent and Medway clinical commissioning group said. It stated that there were

“too many people housed in each block to allow adequate social distancing and to prevent the risk of spread of infection”.

Will the Minister once and for all decide that barracks are simply super-spreader venues that should not be used for anyone, let alone vulnerable asylum seekers?

Kevin Foster: We expect the highest standards from our providers and have instructed them to make improvements following the interim report from the independent chief inspector. In future, a core part of avoiding the pressures that result in the need for contingency accommodation will be fixing our broken asylum system, so that decisions are fair, prompt and firmer, and those whose claims are not genuine can be removed more easily.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP) [V]: The Home Secretary said to the Select Committee that

“advice around dormitories and the use of the accommodation was all based on Public Health England advice”.

However, the inspection report reveals that Public Health England had advised that opening

“dormitory-style accommodation at Napier was not supported by current guidance”.

Ministers have claimed that the barracks are

“good enough for the armed services and they are certainly more than good enough for people...seeking asylum.”—[*Official Report*, 8 February 2021; Vol. 689, c. 10.]

However, the report says that they are “impoverished, run-down and unsuitable”. When will those statements be corrected, and, more importantly, why did the Home Office not grasp the fact that the use of dormitory accommodation in the middle of a pandemic was utterly reckless?

Kevin Foster: I note the hon. Member’s points, but I have already outlined that we expect the highest standards from providers and have instructed them to make improvements. A core part of being able to end the use of contingency accommodation in hotels and barracks is having more options and locations for dispersed accommodation. Sadly, Glasgow is the only location currently providing it in Scotland. Part of the solution might be for his council in Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East to agree to be next on the list—something I hope he will reflect positively on.

Stuart C. McDonald: It is well and good for the Minister to ask providers to make improvements, but it is a blindingly obvious fact that whatever is done with dormitory accommodation will not protect against coronavirus. I agree that to fix asylum accommodation, local authorities must have the powers and the funding they need for the job. The Home Affairs Committee has said that several times. If the Home Office agrees to do that, instead of launching the horrendous large-scale warehousing of vulnerable people, more local authorities will get on board and I will, indeed, encourage it. Will the Home Office make sure local authorities get the powers and the funding they need?

Kevin Foster: We can see from the contribution Glasgow makes that a range of support is already available. As I say, we want to end the use of contingency accommodation. It is just that—contingency. As the pressures have reduced, we have moved away from using the Penally site, for example. However, as has been touched on, the solution is for more areas to come forward, because we need local councils to back up some of what they call for with action.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab) [V]: The independent inspector's report states very clearly that

"once one person was infected a large-scale outbreak was virtually inevitable."

In addition, the Kent and Medway clinical commissioning group inspection report on Napier confirmed that some communal areas were cleaned just once a week; that staff were expected to sleep three to a room; and that there were people with pre-existing vulnerabilities, including diabetes, leukaemia and tuberculosis, accommodated there. The public health advice never supported the use of dormitories, so why is Napier barracks still open?

Kevin Foster: As I have already outlined, we have instructed our providers to make improvements, and we want to reduce the use of contingency accommodation through fixing our broken asylum system. I am sure many will be interested to note the Labour party's sudden interest in, and enthusiasm for, securing improvements at Napier barracks now that they are no longer being used by our armed forces.

Cleveland Police

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to support the improvement of Cleveland Police. [913709]

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse) [V]: The Home Office, alongside other policing partners, continues to provide Cleveland police with the support it requires through Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and fire & rescue services' police performance oversight group, a meeting of which I was happy to attend a couple of weeks ago. Cleveland's funding will increase by up to £7.2 million in the next year, and as of 31 December, it had recruited an additional 159 officers through our uplift programme, with a further 70 officers to be recruited in the coming year.

Mr Clarke [V]: Our Conservative police and crime commissioner candidate Steve Turner is rightly calling for a review of the funding allocation formula, so that Cleveland can access future rounds of violence reduction unit funding and start to tackle this menace on our streets. Will my hon. Friend meet Steve Turner and me to discuss this issue and unlock violence reduction unit funding for Cleveland?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend is a doughty and, I have to say, given recent announcements, successful advocate for investment and funding for his part of the world, and I would of course be more than happy to meet him. He is right that Cleveland missed out on violence reduction unit funding last time, falling just outside the funding formula, but I would be happy to

talk to him about what more we can do to help the police and crime commissioner—who hopefully will be a Conservative after the May elections—and the chief constable to tackle some of the violent crime that plagues parts of Cleveland, and bring peace and light into the future.

Border Force Dispute: Heathrow

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): What steps she is taking to resolve her Department's industrial dispute with Border Force staff at Heathrow Airport. [913710]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp): The strike at Heathrow is over temporary arrangements that are designed to keep staff safe during coronavirus. There have been a large number of discussions between Border Force and the union, but I am frankly astonished that the trade union is striking over measures designed to protect the health and safety of its own members.

Ian Lavery [V]: I am not surprised that the Minister is astonished, but as we all remember, Border Force staff have been on the frontline during the pandemic, and have played a pivotal role in keeping the country covid-secure. The imposition of a new roster at Heathrow airport is creating chaos. It is making staff feel less safe, as there are unavoidable covid-19 breaches; and as the Minister mentioned, there has been a 96% positive ballot result. The staff are set to walk out next week, at a time when the airport's own workers are striking over the shameful fire and rehire abuses. Will the Home Secretary intervene to pause these counterproductive changes and allow proper negotiations to take place with the PCS union before Heathrow airport grinds to a halt over the Easter holidays?

Chris Philp: These measures have been introduced on a temporary basis, for just a few months, to protect the health of the Border Force workers, and it is frankly astonishing that the union has decided to go on strike. These measures will cease to apply in July and over 90% of the affected Border Force staff now have rosters that they agree with, so I call on the PCS union to withdraw any proposal to indulge in this completely unnecessary, counterproductive strike against—absurdly—measures that are designed to protect its own members.

Immigration: Hong Kong

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): What progress her Department has made on implementing the immigration route for Hong Kong British Nationals (Overseas) passport holders to settle in the UK. [913713]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): On 31 January, we launched a bespoke immigration route for British national overseas status-holders and their households, allowing them to come to the UK to live, work and study on a pathway to British citizenship. On 23 February, we also launched a fully digital application process, which will allow many applicants to apply from home using a smart device.

Bob Seely [V]: I congratulate the Home Secretary and her Ministers on the excellent work with Hong Kong BNOs, and long may it continue. On the wider point of asylum, may I thank the Secretary of State and her excellent ministerial team for the much-needed reforms to the asylum system that they are introducing, which will make the asylum system significantly fairer to the British people? These changes cannot come soon enough.

Kevin Foster: We appreciate my hon. Friend's warm endorsement of the work done to create this route, which will give many millions the opportunity to make their home here in our United Kingdom, if they decide that that is the right choice for them and their family. We look forward to working with our colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and with local councils and the devolved Administrations, to ensure a warm welcome across our United Kingdom for those who arrive here under the new settlement route.

Violence Reduction Units

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the adequacy of resources for violence reduction units. [913714]

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the adequacy of resources for violence reduction units. [913718]

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse) [V]: The Home Office is working closely with the Treasury on the future funding of violence reduction units. In February, we announced VRU funding of £35.5 million for the coming year, bringing the total investment to £105.5 million over three financial years.

Helen Hayes [V]: The Government's own guidance for violence reduction units requires them to generate long-term solutions. Why, therefore, have the Government announced only piecemeal funding for violence reduction units, one year at a time, which makes it impossible to plan with certainty for long-term interventions? When do they plan to embed the work of violence reduction units within mainstream long-term funding commitments, so that this vital work, including with some of the most vulnerable and traumatised young people, can be guaranteed for as long as it is needed?

Kit Malthouse: We recognise the need to put VRUs on a sustainable funding basis, and the hon. Lady is quite right that much of their work is multi-year, which needs to be reflected in the investment we make. We are working closely with Treasury colleagues and can hope for a multi-year financial settlement, which would allow us to move to that position. Having said that, it is also incumbent on the wider organisations involved in fighting violence, such as the Mayor of London, to embed this kind of work as part of their day-to-day addressing of crime, particularly working closely with young people. I would urge her to lobby City Hall to mainstream the violence reduction unit as part of its activity, rather than relying on Westminster funding, although we will of course support the capital substantially, as we have in the past.

Alex Cunningham [V]: Even when the promised 150 police officers are recruited to the Cleveland force, we will still have 350 fewer police than in 2010, and that in an area where the rate of serious violent crime is among the highest in England. Unlike other areas, Cleveland has not received additional funds to tackle it. The Government are now well known for their bizarre rationale for allocating funding for all manner of things in order to favour areas with Tory MPs, but will the Minister now do the right and mature thing and ensure that Cleveland gets the support that the area desperately needs?

Kit Malthouse: As I said in a previous answer, I am meeting, certainly, a Conservative MP to talk about what more we can do to support Cleveland, and I think it is very unfair of the hon. Gentleman to reflect on the experience of his force in that way. We have put significant extra funding into Cleveland police to allow it to uplift the number of police officers. It is benefiting from wider money that we are spending across the whole country on things such as county lines—from which Cleveland sadly suffers, along with other parts of the country—to deal with that particular drugs problem. That is against an overall spending commitment for UK policing that is the largest we have seen for a decade and has been for two successive years, so I do not think anybody could accuse this Government of skimping on investment in the police; quite the reverse. I hope and believe that, as Cleveland police emerges from a difficult period in its history, with a strong chief constable, the hon. Gentleman will start to feel the benefit on his streets quite soon.

Topical Questions

[913754] **Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con):** If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement following the incidents over the weekend, and particularly the anarchic and violent scenes that we saw in Bristol last night. We have been clear that to save lives and fight this pandemic people must not currently hold large gatherings. Too many this weekend selfishly decided that this did not apply to them. We will always give the police the support and protection that they need. It was sad that, as we saw last week, the Opposition voted against measures to protect our police and also introduce longer sentences. The scenes in Bristol yesterday were utterly shameful. We saw criminal thuggery and disorder caused by a minority who put lives at risk. Our exceptional and brave police officers put themselves in harm's way to protect the public. For them to face criminal violence against themselves while upholding the law is completely unacceptable. My thoughts are with the injured officers and their families. I hope that every single Member of Parliament in this House will join me in condemning the shameful actions of the criminal minority involved.

Mr Davis: I am sure that everybody will join the Home Secretary in condemning what were evil and shameful acts yesterday—there are no two ways about that. The simple truth is that those evil and shameful acts demonstrated only too clearly the need for the police to have powers to deal with disruptive, dangerous actions masquerading behind the right to demonstrate,

and she is right to promote that. That being said, many of us, I suspect including her, view the right to demonstrate peacefully as a foundation stone of our democracy. Can she give the House an undertaking that before we get to Report stage we will make sure that the right to demonstrate peacefully is absolutely guaranteed in our law?

Priti Patel: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that the right to protest peacefully is a cornerstone of our democracy, and it is one that this Government will always defend. He references a point in relation to the Bill that is coming forward. He will know my views. I will work with everybody to make sure that when the police need the powers to tackle the type of appalling thuggery and criminality that we saw yesterday, we will achieve that, while absolutely protecting the right to protest peacefully in our country.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): First, I would like to pass on the thoughts of those of us on the Labour Benches to police officers and to local residents who were victims of the unacceptable and inexcusable violence we saw in Bristol yesterday. Officers should never face that kind of behaviour as they undertake their work to keep us all safe, and anyone involved in those violent and appalling scenes should face the consequences of their actions.

I would also like to pay tribute, along with the whole House, to the victims of the Westminster Bridge attack four years ago today, and to the memory of PC Keith Palmer, who was tragically killed outside this House protecting all of us and our democracy.

In recent weeks we have heard extraordinarily powerful testimony from women and girls about the level of violence and abuse they continue to face. Now is the time to act decisively to address the appalling behaviour on our streets that causes distress and intimidation. In answer to the shadow Crime and Policing Minister, the Home Secretary spoke about a strategy, which of course we all contribute to, to recommend legislation, but the need for action is urgent. So will she work with me to introduce a specific law on street harassment and tougher sentences for stalking?

Priti Patel: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about the tragic attacks here in Westminster. I refer him to the comments I made earlier to the shadow Minister for Policing and the Fire Service, the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones). I am sorry that it has taken so long for the Labour party to contribute to the survey on violence against women and girls. This survey is fundamental, so that we take a balanced approach. It is all very well to say that we need action right now, but there is action taking place. It is important that we listen to people. It is also important that we engage with those affected by violence against women and girls, street harassment and the unacceptable harassment and abuse that takes place against women and girls.

We are going to work with everybody involved in this. I do not think that this should become a partisan or party political issue one bit. I would like our work, our strategy and the legislation we bring forward to build upon the work that this Government have led already when it comes to protecting women and girls, whether it is on issues such as stalking protection orders, sexual

risk orders, the introduction of Clare's law or the fact that we have a landmark Domestic Abuse Bill going through Parliament.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The problem is that the longer we wait, the worse the situation becomes. More than two years have passed since this Government announced their end-to-end rape review, and there has been no action. In that time, rape convictions have shamefully fallen to the worst on record—an all-time record low. Systemic change is needed, but action is urgently required, so I put another suggestion to the Home Secretary: will she commit to working cross-party to create new specialised rape and serious sexual offence units in every police force in England and Wales now?

Priti Patel: The right hon. Gentleman disparagingly dismisses the end-to-end rape review that is taking place. [*Interruption.*] Yes, it has taken time, and once the right hon. Gentleman reads the review, he might understand why it has taken time. There is extensive work taking place with the individuals who are contributing and have contributed to the rape review. I am sure that he, of all people, will recognise many of the sensitive issues around rape and the handling of rape cases, and it is absolutely right and proper that we as a Government provide the time, the space and the ability for those who want to contribute to do so in a very candid way. That is how we can shape legislation to drive the right kind of outcomes, not saying that we need action now and coming up with ideas that will just make people feel better at this particular moment in time.

[913755] **Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): Mr Speaker, you may not be aware that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is an adopted daughter of Stoke-on-Trent, having formerly lived there while at Keele University. The people of Stoke-on-Trent are proud of their Home Secretary because she backs our police, sides with the victims of crime and speaks for the law-abiding citizens of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke. Does she agree that there could be no better second home for the Home Office than the city of Stoke-on-Trent, bringing with it well-paid jobs and investment and delivering on our commitment to level up Stoke-on-Trent?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend has tapped into my affection for Stoke-on-Trent and done so with great flair. He is right: his constituents are brilliant individuals, and I have been to Stoke-on-Trent many times. They saw sense by voting for more Conservative Members of Parliament at the last election.

We are scoping new locations for a second site for the Home Office, and we are going to go beyond the conventional Government footprint and size. I can confirm that we are looking at long-term plans, and I will share our proposals with my hon. Friend and the House in due course.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab) [V]: I join the Home Secretary and shadow Home Secretary in paying tribute to PC Keith Palmer, who lost his life keeping us safe four years ago, and in sending support to the Avon and Somerset officers injured in the unacceptable violence in Bristol yesterday.

Scientists estimate that there are now up to 2,000 new cases of the South African variant a day in France. Can the Home Secretary tell us how many of the 15,000 people arriving in the UK each day are travelling here from France, and does she intend to put France on the red list?

Priti Patel: The right hon. Lady will know that red-listing countries is a matter for my colleagues in the Department for Transport and the Department of Health and Social Care. She is absolutely right to point to the prevalence of the South African variant in France. That is why we have effective measures in place at the border, with compliance checks and upstream checks for people who are travelling to the United Kingdom, alongside measures to test road hauliers, which, as she will be aware, we have been doing in Kent.

[913756] **Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con) [V]: In my own police area, our excellent police and crime commissioner, Alison Hernandez, piloted an allowance for our hard-working special constables who did a set amount of hours over the winter months. Would the Department work with her to enable police forces to use the special constabulary as a paid reserve, in the same way as the Army uses reserves, to provide additional resource at times of need?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend raises what is an excellent point and an important one. If I may, I would like to praise the work of her police and crime commissioner for the work that she is doing around special constables. Currently, we have no plans to set up a formal police reserve. However, my hon. Friend will know we are seeing more and more special constables joining to become full-time police officers. We are working with them. We are also looking at new protections for them. Of course, it is absolutely right that local forces should have the ability to reward volunteers for their valuable contributions. That is something that I fully back.

[913757] **Sarah Owen** (Luton North) (Lab) [V]: Earlier this month, the inquest into the death of Leon Briggs finally reported. Seven years after his death, it showed that neglect and the way the police restrained Leon “more than minimally” contributed to his death. As well as this, Leon’s family have said they “think race is very much an issue”.

What action is being taken so that no family have to face this tragedy again or wait seven years to know how their loved one died, and what is the right hon. Lady’s Department doing to tackle racism in the justice system?

Priti Patel: The hon. Lady raises an incredibly important issue around equality and the fair treatment of individuals in the justice system. There is a great deal of work taking place across both the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice, but specifically in relation to policing, this does come back to much of the police training, the work that we do with the college and the work that our forces do as well—not just when they recruit, but how they constantly train individuals. I would like just to say that I am very sorry about the time that it has taken for the Briggs family to receive justice. Seven years is far too long. Clearly, we want to stop such appalling time periods and families being left in limbo for such an unacceptable period of time.

[913762] **Ian Levy** (Blyth Valley) (Con) [V]: This is a matter very close to my heart. Last year, 12-year-old Charley Patterson, one of my constituents, tragically took her own life after horrific abuse she received online from her peers. Will my right hon. Friend do all she can to encourage social media companies to take action straight away to tackle harmful content or activity, and would she please meet me to discuss Charley’s case and the campaign that her family have launched surrounding this?

Priti Patel: I will absolutely meet my hon. Friend to discuss Charley Patterson’s case and, if the opportunity arises, meet the family as well. These are tragic cases and I am so saddened and sorry to hear of the case that my hon. Friend has raised. So much more work is required by social media companies. Extensive work is taking place across Government. In fact, I will also speak to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport because we are looking to introduce the online harms Bill and across Government we need to come together to hold these social media companies to account. It is a tragedy. So many of us have constituents and know of constituents who have suffered in the same way as the Patterson family and that is wrong. We need to stop that.

[913758] **Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD) [V]: There are reports today of a covid infection control specialist in the NHS potentially facing deportation from the UK. At the moment, I have a Bill before Parliament expressing the desire that those who work on the frontline and have put their lives at risk have the right to remain in this country indefinitely. Can the Home Secretary assure me that this matter will be given some consideration by her Government in the light of the sacrifices that people have made?

Priti Patel: The hon. Lady is absolutely right, and I thank her for raising the case. I will look at the specific case that she has spoken about, but she is right. There are many measures that we have undertaken to ensure that those from overseas who are on the frontline in the NHS are supported, and we have made various changes to ensure that they can stay, but I will happily look at the case she raises.

[913763] **Jacob Young** (Redcar) (Con): Last year, a person was more likely to be a victim of violent crime in Cleveland than anywhere else in the country. Does the Home Secretary agree that it is vital that we end Labour’s running of Cleveland police and elect a Conservative police and crime commissioner, Steve Turner, on 6 May, and will she visit Teesside to meet our 159 new police officers, who are doing all they can to make our area safe?

Priti Patel: You bet—absolutely. My hon. Friend will know of the support that we are giving to Cleveland police in particular, which had a particularly difficult time, but I will join him and others campaigning to get absolutely the right outcome in the police and crime commissioner elections.

Mr Speaker: I am now suspending the House for two minutes to allow the necessary arrangements to be made for the next business.

4.5 pm

Sitting suspended.

Human Rights Update

4.7 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs and First Secretary of State (Dominic Raab): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the treatment of the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang.

This is one of the worst human rights crises of our time and I believe the evidence is clear, as it is sobering. It includes satellite imagery; survivor testimony; official documentation and, indeed, leaks from the Chinese Government themselves; credible open-source reporting, including from Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International; and visits by British diplomats to the region that have corroborated other reports about the targeting of specific ethnic groups.

In sum, the evidence points to a highly disturbing programme of repression. Expressions of religion have been criminalised, and Uyghur language and culture discriminated against on a systematic scale. There is widespread use of forced labour; women forcibly sterilised; children separated from their parents; an entire population subject to surveillance, including collection of DNA and use of facial recognition software and so-called predictive policing algorithms.

State control in the region is systemic. Over 1 million people have been detained without trial. There are widespread claims of torture and rape in the camps based on first-hand survivor testimony. People are detained for having too many children, for praying too much, for having a beard or wearing a headscarf, for having the wrong thoughts.

I am sure the whole House will join me in condemning such appalling violations of the most basic human rights. In terms of scale, it is the largest mass detention of an ethnic or religious group since the second world war, and I believe one thing is clear: the international community cannot simply look the other way.

It has been two and a half years since the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination called on China to stop arbitrarily detaining Uyghurs and other minorities in the Xinjiang province. It is over 18 months since the UK led the first ever joint UN statement on Xinjiang at the UN General Assembly's third committee, back in October 2019. The number of countries now willing to speak out collectively has grown from just 23 to 39 as the evidence has accumulated and as our diplomatic efforts have borne fruit. That is a clear signal to China about the breadth of international concern.

Last year, 50 independent UN experts spoke out about the situation in an exceptional joint statement calling on China to respect basic human rights. Last month at the Human Rights Council, I led the calls on China to give the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet—or some other fact-finding expert—urgent, unfettered access to Xinjiang. Since then, Ms Bachelet herself has reinforced in the clearest terms the need for independent access to verify the deteriorating situation. We regret that, instead of recognising those calls from the international community, China has simply sought to deny them. Chinese authorities have claimed that the legitimate concerns raised are fake news. At the same time, the authorities continue to

expand prison facilities, surveillance networks and forced labour programmes. China continues to resist access for the UN or other independent experts to verify the truth, notwithstanding its blanket denials.

For the UK's part, our approach has been to call out these egregious, industrial-scale human rights abuses, to work with our international partners and ultimately to match words with actions. In January, I announced a package of measures to help ensure that no British organisations—Government or private sector—deliberately or inadvertently can profit from human rights violations against the Uyghurs or other minorities, and that no businesses connected with the internment camps can do business in the UK.

Today, we are taking further steps, again in co-ordination with our international partners. Having very carefully considered the evidence against the criteria in our global human rights sanctions regime, I can tell the House that I am designating four senior individuals responsible for the violations that have taken place and persist against the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang. Alongside those individuals, we are also designating the Public Security Bureau of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. That is the organisation responsible for enforcing the repressive security policies across many areas of Xinjiang. The sanctions involve travel bans and asset freezes against the individuals and asset freezes against the entity we are designating. The individuals are barred from entering the UK. Any assets found in the UK will be frozen.

We take this action alongside the EU, the US and Canada, which are all taking similar measures today. I think it is clear that, by acting with our partners—30 of us in total—we are sending the clearest message to the Chinese Government that the international community will not turn a blind eye to such serious and systematic violations of basic human rights, and that we will act in concert to hold those responsible to account.

As the Prime Minister set out in the integrated review last week, China is an important partner in tackling global challenges such as climate change. We pursue a constructive dialogue where that proves possible, but we will always stand up for our values, and in the face of evidence of such serious human rights violations, we will not look the other way. The suffering of the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang cannot be ignored. Human rights violations on this scale cannot be ignored. Together with our partners, we call on China to end these cruel practices, and I commend this statement to the House.

4.13 pm

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): There is no question but that this is a welcome step, and I welcome the moves by the EU today and other partners. I am sure the whole House will stand in solidarity with our fellow European parliamentarians who have been sanctioned by the Chinese Government in response. This is an unacceptable attack on democratic lawmakers simply for highlighting the horrific evidence from Xinjiang.

However, the Foreign Secretary has just read out the evidence that we have known about for years. He rightly called it barbaric, but when it has come to taking concrete steps, for years he has not listened. He did not listen to his hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani) or his right hon. Friend the Member for

[Lisa Nandy]

Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith). He did not listen to us. He did not listen to the Board of Deputies. He did not listen to the World Uyghur Congress. Yet suddenly today the Foreign Secretary has discovered a new-found sense of urgency about the desperate plight of the Uyghur, despite that mounting evidence over several years. The truth is that the timing is grubby and cynical; it is designed to send a signal first and foremost not to the Chinese Government but to his own Back Benchers. It is motivated primarily by a desire to protect the Government, not the Uyghur. For all the talk of being a force for good in the world, it is only when this Government are staring down the barrel of defeat that they discover a moral centre. Only now that the US and the EU have acted has the Foreign Secretary finally moved to take this step.

I urge all Members, especially those brave and conscientious Conservative Members, to think carefully before accepting that this signals a change of approach from this Government. This week we learnt that, despite his protestations, the Foreign Secretary has been talking up a trade deal with China in private at gatherings with Beijing officials. This week, the Prime Minister launched his global Britain policy, signalling a closer economic relationship with China. Members had eagerly awaited details of the Indo-Pacific tilt; we did not dream for a moment, from the talk over the last year, that it would be a tilt towards China.

Today is perhaps the most acute example of the Government's decade-long incoherent, inconsistent approach to the Chinese Government. On the day the Foreign Secretary finally announces sanctions on some of the officials responsible for human rights abuses in Xinjiang he is also pulling every trick in the book to stop Parliament gaining the power to block any bilateral trade or investment agreement with China based on a determination of genocide.

I ask hon. Members to pause and ponder: if this is about co-ordination, why has it taken so long? The Government could have taken co-ordinated action with the United States when it brought sanctions in July last year, or if they felt so strongly they could have moved independently from the EU, as they have done in sanctions on other countries over the last year. Where are the sanctions on officials in Hong Kong when the US took that step this week? We should be taking a leadership approach given our historical commitments in the bilateral treaty, which China is in breach of. We are signatories to the joint declaration, not the United States. Where is the tougher sanctions regime that brings corruption into scope? Why did the Foreign Secretary say at a private gathering earlier this month that he had no reason to think that we could not deepen our trading relationship with China? Why did the Prime Minister say last month that he was committed to strengthening the UK's ties with China

"whatever the occasional political difficulties"?

If this signals a change in approach, why on earth on the same day as the Government are announcing these sanctions are they twisting the arms of Back Benchers who want to support the genocide amendment?

Today I urge all parliamentarians to stand firm: to stand with the public, who overwhelmingly support a principled stance on genocide; to stand with their

consciences; and most of all to stand with the Uyghur people. After a decade of rolling out the red carpet for Beijing and turning a blind eye to human rights abuses, this is the moment when we will finally force a change in Britain's foreign policy, live up to our values as a country and be a force for good in the world.

Dominic Raab: I think the hon. Lady welcomed the step, notwithstanding everything she said that followed, but let me correct some of the—frankly—false statements she made. First, she said I talked up a free trade agreement with China—

Mr Speaker: Order. May I just say that I do not think any hon. Member would deliberately make a false statement, would they?

Dominic Raab: I did not say "deliberate".

Mr Speaker: No, but you said "false". I am not sure that it was false, and I am not sure that all the script was read out either; certainly my pages did not match what was said—I am not sure whether it was the same for the shadow Foreign Secretary—in which case we all might feel a little aggrieved if we did not see the full script. It was only when you read it out that I realised that the pages were not corresponding.

Dominic Raab: On the first point, I am certainly not imputing bad faith, but what the shadow Foreign Secretary said is wholly inaccurate and I will correct the record shortly. In relation to the statement, the only bit that has been removed was reference to the individuals sanctioned, because for legal and propriety reasons we cannot give that out in advance. I hope you will accept my apologies for that, Mr Speaker, but we were doing it so as not to frustrate the very purpose of the sanctions.

In relation to the remarks, or rather selective snippets, made by the shadow Foreign Secretary, it is wholly inaccurate to suggest that I talked up an FTA with China. I made it very clear that there was no realistic or foreseeable prospect of a free trade agreement and that the way to deepen our trade with China was for it to improve its human rights record.

On the one hand, the hon. Lady welcomes the fact that we have proceeded in concert with 30 partners, including ourselves. On the other, she says it is too slow. It is the Goldilocks of criticism. She suggests it was linked to the Trade Bill. [Interruption.] I know she believes in human rights. I had hoped that she would at least recognise that 30 countries imposing targeted sanctions on China for human rights abuses is an important moment. It is a bit disappointing to hear her trying to score political points in relation to this important step, let alone suggesting that the concerted and unprecedented action of 30 countries is somehow tied up with the UK's domestic legislative timetable.

The reality, on the genocide amendment, is that we absolutely recognise the ability of this House to hold the Government to account. Through support for the Neill amendment and further concessions, we continue to want to see maximum scrutiny of the Government by Parliament. The reality is that this British Government under this Prime Minister have done more to stand up for human rights around the world than any previous British Government. We have demonstrated that through our diplomatic leadership in the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly Third Committee. We have

demonstrated it through the actions that we are taking on modern slavery. We have demonstrated it in the offer that we have made to the British nationals overseas from Hong Kong. And we have demonstrated it again today with these Magnitsky sanctions.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con) [V]: I very much welcome the announcement of sanctions that the Foreign Secretary has made this afternoon. He knows that he has no greater supporters on this decision than the Foreign Affairs Committee. However, may I ask him—a gentleman who has devoted so much of his career to human rights law—what is it in human rights law or in the UN definition of genocide that fails to get him to use the word in this circumstance? My understanding—I admit I am not a lawyer—is that the attempted destruction of a people or its culture in whole or in part constitutes genocide. What he has just described to the House sounds to me like it fits that definition, so I am just wondering why he is reluctant to use the word.

Given that the Foreign Secretary rightly identified that sanctions on individuals operating in the UK are a matter of great concern, will he please let the House know when he intends to bring forward a foreign agents registration Act? He knows as well as I do that there are, sadly, too many British people in the UK—sometimes, sadly, even former Ministers or those connected to Government—using their influence in a surreptitious manner to further the aims or interests of a country such as China, which is so violating human rights.

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee. There will be ample time for further discussions of the Trade Bill, but the arguments around genocide and the importance of its being determined by a court are well rehearsed. Equally, we have made clear the importance of this House in controlling the Executive in relation to free trade policy. On further legislation, an announcement will be made by the relevant Secretary of State in due course.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP) [V]: The SNP wholly condemns the human rights violations taking place in China.

Last week, the Prime Minister published the long-awaited integrated review, which stated:

“Our first goal is to support open societies and defend human rights, as a force for good in the world.”

Despite that, the Prime Minister wants to forge closer ties to some of the worst human-rights-violating states in our world. Moreover, in the immediate aftermath of the review’s publication, the Foreign Secretary lamented that restricting trade because of human rights abuses would mean missing out on growth markets. The Foreign Secretary’s remarks last week do not chime with today’s statement. His insistence that the UK will seek to do trade deals with countries that violate standards enshrined in the European convention on human rights—the very laws drawn up by British officials after the horrors of the second world war—marks yet another record low for this UK Government.

China is a serial human rights violator and we must call out the appalling state-backed human rights violations taking place there. It is crystal clear: it is genocide. Indeed, the Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy think-tank

found that through its actions in Xinjiang, China has breached every single article of the UN genocide convention and has accused China of clearly demonstrating

“intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group”.

Shamefully, the UK Government refused to back the genocide amendment to the Trade Bill, making clear their desire for a trade deal with China as opposed to the preferable tougher approach on human rights.

The Foreign Secretary can talk tough on China but until he takes action it does nothing for those living under oppression in Xinjiang and elsewhere. Will he tell the House and the world what specific actions he intends to take to ensure that the UK upholds human rights and that this is a new approach that will not be characterised by the inconsistency, ambiguity and policy incoherence that has defined this Government so far? Finally, will he call out what is happening in China? It is quite simply genocide.

Dominic Raab: The hon. Gentleman made a whole range of remarks that suggest he lives in a parallel universe. I have to say that some of what he said was just pure nonsense. I made it clear that we would never do an FTA with a country with a human rights record that is beyond the pale. Through the recent action we have been taking under the Modern Slavery Act 2015, particularly in relation to supply chains, we have demonstrated that we will not allow businesses that profit from modern slavery either here or abroad to do business in the UK, and we have introduced the Magnitsky sanctions.

The hon. Gentleman raised the question of whether we would ever trade with countries that do not have ECHR-level human rights; I put it to him that neither he nor the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) has ever once suggested that we should tear up any of the free trade deals that we have with countries that still have the death penalty, which of course does not comply with the ECHR. If he wants to keep making that argument, will he tell me which of the FTAs—whether with Korea or Japan, or the negotiations with the US—he is opposed to?

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con) [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for his welcome statement. Does he agree that it is because a Conservative Government put in place Magnitsky legislation that we are able to make these designations, and that by working closely with the United States, the EU and others we can lead the charge against authoritarian regimes that have poor human rights records?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Of real significance today is not just the groundbreaking measures that we are taking but the fact that 30 other countries are taking action in concert. We are far more likely to have an impact that way and far more likely to get China to think twice.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind) [V]: I thank the Foreign Secretary for his statement. I am glad that this Government and others are now taking seriously the treatment of Uyghur people and the violation of their human rights. Will he tell us what action is being taken over the historic profits made by British companies from manufacturing in that part of China? By the same token, will he undertake that the UN requests about the

[Jeremy Corbyn]

treatment of those being discriminated against—such as the Dalit peoples in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh—will also be included in the advice given to British companies, so that we do not profit from the abuse of human rights in any country around the world? If we do, we put ourselves in further violation of the universal declaration of human rights.

Dominic Raab: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. He makes an important and focused point about the fact that the requirements under the Modern Slavery Act, particularly in respect of the transparency of supply chains, apply across the board. He is absolutely right on that, and it is an issue on which we ought to work with businesses but ultimately be willing to fine them if they do not comply.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): What China has been doing to the Uyghur people and others, including the Tibetans, is nothing short of absolutely appalling. Frankly, as the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), said, we are dancing elaborately around the whole idea of genocide when it is clear that that is what is going on.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on making this statement. He knows that I and many others in this place have called for action for some time, so I welcome it. As I understand it, though, two people are not on the list. First, Chen Quanguo, the political commissar of the infamous Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps—which is on the list, but he is not—is the architect of what is going on in Tibet and in Xinjiang. Will my right hon. Friend please take that into consideration?

Secondly, the buck for all this stops with the President of China, who was recently quoted as saying that the Chinese should show the Uyghur people “no mercy”. When do we start calling his name up?

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend. First, may I pay tribute to him for his campaigning efforts in this regard? I know he will feel no small sense of accomplishment today, because he has eloquently and powerfully made the case in the House. I will certainly look at any names he has. Of course, we have a clear, specific legal regime, and I and the Government have to assess the evidence based on it, but we should be willing to call out. The action we have taken both today and more generally, with the Magnitsky sanctions regime, shows that we are not afraid not just to talk, but to act.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD) [V]: May I too give a warm welcome to this announcement of these sanctions? They have been long sought and they are welcome now that they have finally arrived. May I say to the Foreign Secretary that while he is on a roll we might possibly see some positive announcement on the Alton amendment later on today, as he has a taste for this? Will he also give urgent consideration to the recent report from the Select Committee on Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, which came forward with good and constructive suggestions about how to tackle the issue of the use of Uyghur slavery in the supply chain of many goods available in this country, possibly including the eventual linking of that to the disqualification of directors?

Dominic Raab: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for welcoming the action we have taken today. More generally, in relation to the Committee’s reports, may I say how important it is, as I mentioned in response to a previous question, that we take action on supply chains? Often, particularly in relation to the internment camps in Xinjiang, which are profiting, the best source of action is to follow the money, to cut it off and to prevent those who are profiting from making money out of it—if they do so, it should certainly not be through UK companies or through UK consumers.

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement and welcome the sanctions on the Chinese regime. What steps are he and the UK Government taking with our Five Eyes partners to co-ordinate a response to China’s appalling aggression and human rights abuses?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend will have noticed that we have taken action with our Canadian and US counterparts, and we have also engaged closely with my Australian opposite number; they have legislation that is being actively considered at the moment. I have also had engagement with my New Zealand opposite number. The Five Eyes are important, and the EU is important. What we really need to do is broaden the caucus of countries, like-minded on values, that will take action and have the courage to stand up for these important universal rights.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) [V]: I thank the Secretary of State for his strong action in today’s statement. China’s systematic persecution and abuse of Uyghurs and Christians, and Buddhists in Nepal, is outrageous and despicable. Following the latest news that the EU has imposed sanctions on Chinese officials, due to what some of us are terming as the genocide of the Uyghurs, will the Secretary of State outline what discussions have taken place with global powers to send a joint message that the removal of children from their parents and their being sent to orphan camps will not be tolerated by the global community and that these words will be followed up with economic action?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman and I absolutely share his concerns. Those are some of the appalling violations of human rights that I set out before the House today. They clearly violate the most basic human rights protected under not just domestic law but international human rights law. We have taken sanctions partly in response to the evidence related to them, and we will continue to do so. They are some of the worst and most egregious violations we have seen.

Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con): I thank the Foreign Secretary for his statement and for his long-standing personal commitment to upholding human rights around the world. What steps has he taken to rally further international support for action on Xinjiang? Does he agree that China can be considered a leading member of the international community only if it abides by basic human rights norms?

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend for his support. It is crucial, although we have 30 countries taking this stance today, that we swell those numbers. Different regions and countries around the world take a different

view, but it is crucial that we swell the ranks and also hold China to keeping its obligations. This is in part about human rights, and in part about a leading member of the international community being held to account and living up to its international obligations.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab) [V]: The Foreign Secretary has described what is happening to the Uyghur Muslims as

“barbarianism we had hoped was lost to another era”.—[*Official Report*, 12 January 2021; Vol. 687, c. 160.]

He has previously set out measures on the use of forced labour from Xinjiang province in supply chains, so will he now commit to strengthening section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to stop forced labour being supported by UK business supply chains completely?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman for, I think, welcoming the measures we have taken today. He will have seen the Modern Slavery Act supply chain measures and action that I announced to the House some weeks ago. If there is a specific further piece of action that he would like us to take, he should write to me or to the Home Secretary and I would be very happy to consider what we do on that.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con) [V]: I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Just 25 years ago, it was China that hosted the UN's platform for action to ensure greater equality for men, women, girls and boys, yet today we are seeing the appalling record that he has set out. Does he agree that China will be considered a leading member of the international community only if it abides by basic human rights norms in its day-to-day business?

Dominic Raab: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. China is a leading member of the international community, and we want a positive, constructive relationship with it, but that is in no small part dependent on what China does. As a permanent member of the Security Council and a leading member of the United Nations, it must stand up and respect the basic tenets that come with that status.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): At what point will China's repeated human rights abuses become a barrier to trade?

Dominic Raab: We have been pretty clear that there are no realistic prospects of a free trade deal on the horizon. Of course, given China's size, there is an economic reality that we recognise, as every other country around the world does. As I have said before, the best route to engaging more deeply with China on trade, including going down the track I have set out today, is for China to improve its human rights record, but that is for China itself to demonstrate.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con) [V]: I welcome today's announcement, but I am afraid that, as China's power and influence grows, our ability to pressure it into following the international rules-based order shrinks. Does my right hon. Friend welcome the recent revival of the quadrilateral security dialogue, and does he agree with the Australian Prime Minister that the largely benign security environment in the region has gone?

Dominic Raab: I am in very close co-ordination with my Australian opposite number. We understand that Australia is very much on the frontline in all sorts of different ways relating to some of the challenging and threatening behaviour from China. We worked very closely with China, and we obviously collaborate with what the Quad is doing. We will continue not just to deepen and expand that but to look and see if there are concrete areas where we can do more.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab) [V]: Given the actions and the rightful condemnation that the Foreign Secretary has announced today, does he still feel it will be appropriate to hold the winter 2022 Olympics in Beijing?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Lady raises a perfectly legitimate question, but we have a long tradition in this country of keeping politics and sport separate. Of course, she will also know that that is an independent decision made by the sporting authorities, and not one for the Government.

Robert Lorgan (High Peak) (Con) [V]: Last year, along with many other Members, I signed a joint letter organised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani) condemning China and calling for sanctions and an independent investigation, so I welcome the sanctions announced today. The Chinese Government continue to issue denials. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that for Beijing's denials to have even a shred of credibility, China must give the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights full access to Xinjiang immediately?

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend, and I certainly agree with that statement. Indeed, the UK, alongside the United States and Canada, has reiterated the calls in a common statement today to precisely that effect.

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance) [V]: Article 2 of the convention on genocide sets out five different aspects of genocide. I hope that the reluctance to invoke the term “genocide” is not based on avoiding the widespread responsibilities that arise from that under international law. Will the Government now automatically grant refugee status to all Uyghur people fleeing to the UK?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman. Asylum applications are quite rightly done independently, rather than just on a political whim. He refers to the definition in the genocide convention. Before coming to the House, I worked on war crimes, including in The Hague. It is very rare that a tribunal has found human rights abuses to amount to genocide because of the specific legal definition, but we do think the right thing is that a tribunal, whether it is domestic or international, makes that judgment.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement today, but it is one element of so much more that needs to be done. Everything he referred to as industrial scale assaults on human rights against the Uyghurs has been committed by the Chinese Government against the Tibetans since 1959, until recently by one Chen Quanguo, who brought what he called “ethnic stability”—it is what we know as “ethnic cleansing”—to Tibet and who is now bringing genocide to the people of Xinjiang. So why is he not on

[Tim Loughton]

the list? And when our Five Eyes partners, such as America and Canada, and allies such as the Netherlands have referred to this as genocide, and many other countries are considering doing so, why can we not call it out for what it is: genocide, pure and simple?

Dominic Raab: The reality is that genocide has a very, very complex legal definition, which is why, in war crimes tribunals since Nuremberg, it has very rarely been found. The right thing to do is to respect the legal definition and allow a court to make those determinations. It is principally for the purposes of finding criminal accountability, but I understand the wider points that my hon. Friend makes.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab) [V]: The Foreign Secretary said in January that we should not be doing trade deals with countries committing human rights abuses

“well below the level of genocide”—

yet now, in private, he has been caught out on record saying that he is happy for the Government to do trade deals with countries who fail to meet international human rights standards. Indeed, just this month we have signed one with Cameroon. Is the Foreign Secretary concerned that he has been misleading the House?

Mr Speaker: Order. I think that needs to be withdrawn—I will let the hon. Lady withdraw it. Nobody misleads the house.

Charlotte Nichols: I withdraw that.

Dominic Raab: I am not sure what is left of the question with that bit withdrawn, but the reality is that it is a totally inaccurate reflection—I am sure inadvertently—of the remarks we have made. I made it clear that we will never do free trade deals with countries whose human rights records are beyond the pale. We are taking Magnitsky sanctions, as well as modern slavery action measures, precisely because we never shirk our human rights and responsibilities. But we do recognise the value of trade deals, and if we held countries around the world to ECHR-level standards, we would be—I do not hear Opposition Front Benchers calling for this—ripping up trade deals with Korea and Japan and not engaging with other countries that have either the death penalty or corporal punishment. We take a balanced approach, but, as we have shown today, we will never shrink from standing up for human rights and holding those to account, and we have done more than any other Government in this country's history, and certainly more than the Labour Government before.

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement word for word and, of course, the sanctions that so many of us have argued for for so long.

I will cut to the chase: my right hon. Friend talks about supply chains. He knows that my Select Committee—the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee—produced a report on this. Let us just blacklist companies that are based in Xinjiang. We cannot go in and check what is happening, and we know that it is basically a prison camp. Secondly, because I agree word for word with my right hon. Friend's statement, I assume that he

is going to be in the Lobby with me tonight backing the genocide amendment, because without it, the Neill amendment excludes the Uyghurs. Let us not have a two-tier genocide policy. Let us make sure that the Uyghurs have their case heard.

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend, who continues to campaign with her usual eloquence and tenacity, and I pay tribute to her on the issue of the Uyghur Muslims. We will look very carefully at the BEIS Committee report, not least because of the action that we are taking on supply chains under the MSA. She will understand my position on genocide, which I have already set out.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP) [V]: Amnesty International's report, “Hearts and Lives Broken: The Nightmare of Uyghur Families Separated by Repression” tells a very chilling story of families who have no idea where their children are. What is the Secretary of State doing to make sure that the Uyghurs and all Chinese ethnic minorities who have been separated are facilitated to get back to their children and to put those families back together?

Dominic Raab: All I can say to the hon. Lady is what we have set out before the House, which is that we are taking action under the Modern Slavery Act and that we are using the Magnitsky sanctions. I was asked earlier, I think, about asylum. Of course asylum will be applied independently in the normal way. If there is anything else that she would specifically like me to consider, I am very happy for her to write to me.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab) [V]: Two weeks ago today, we celebrated International Women's Day. Many of us spoke about the abhorrent persecution of the Uyghur women, but this community is clearly experiencing genocide by the Chinese Government. I am appalled to hear that the Secretary of State told his staff candidly that he planned to trade with any country regardless of their human rights record. If that is true, it is shameful. When will he call out the genocide of the Uyghur people and when will the UK take a world-leading role on this matter?

Dominic Raab: The remarks that the hon. Lady quoted are simply wrong. Today, we are demonstrating the world-leading approach that we are taking to hold to account those responsible for human rights abuses in Xinjiang.

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): It is extraordinary to hear the Opposition criticise the Government for not working with the international community one week and then criticise us this week for working with the international community. Today, we are taking a lockstep approach with 30 other countries. If the Opposition will not ask the salient questions then we will. May I ask how the Foreign Secretary will look to include or expand the list of those named in China and how we will be able to further engage the international community to take action where human rights violations take place?

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend for his powerful statement and his welcome support. Obviously, we do not comment on individual names, not least because we do not want to give them foresight or advance warning

if we were to take measures. We keep the evidence under review. If he has any particular evidence—I have talked to other Members of the House in relation to some of the third-party and open-source information that has been published—we will, of course, look at it very carefully.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab) [V]: I warmly commend what the Foreign Secretary has announced today, not least because I have been calling for it, like many others across the House, for weeks and weeks. It is a delight to hear what he has had to say today, but I wish he would be a little bit less of a lawyer about all of this. Sometimes it ends up looking as if the Government are trying to have it both ways all the time. Yes, they announce sanctions against those involved in what I would certainly call genocide in China, but, at the same time, they drag their feet about it, take too long to deal with the human rights abuses in Hong Kong being perpetuated by Carrie Lam, and quite often refuse to take action against the dirty money, for instance, from Russia that is coming into the UK. May I urge the Foreign Secretary to think seriously about how we make the Magnitsky sanctions regime, which he very wisely and courageously introduced, have more of a parliamentary angle to it, so that we can help review and bring these sanctions into place?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman and pay tribute to him, because, back in 2012, he was one of the cross-party alliance in favour of these measures. I remember his moral courage and tenacity in calling for it in relation to the Uyghur Muslims. He has complained about lawyerliness. Let us remember that we are talking about a legal regime that imposes visa bans and asset freezes, which affects the rights of others. It is absolutely right that we take very seriously the legal criteria and the evidence base for doing so, and there is absolutely nothing stopping him, either in relation to the regime or by providing evidence to the Government, from playing a full role. However, let us also ensure that we have due process, otherwise the risk is that we trip up, we get legally challenged and we give the PR coup to precisely those whom we want to be calling to account.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con) [V]: I warmly welcome the Foreign Secretary's statement. States where the fundamental human right of freedom of religion or belief is respected are more likely to be stable and therefore to be more reliable trading partners, and less likely to pose a security risk. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that it makes good sense for the UK to promote FoRB across the world, apart from this being the right thing to do?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I pay tribute to her for her eloquent and tenacious role as a champion for freedom of religion and belief, and as the Prime Minister's special envoy. She is right that we should do this as a point of principle because it is the right thing to do, but she is also right to say that liberal democracies that respect, more or less, freedom of religion or belief, and other principles of open societies, are easier to trade with and resolve problems with, and that we are less likely to find ourselves in conflict or dispute with them.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): It is good to see action finally being taken with regard to the atrocities being perpetrated in Xinjiang. I urge the Foreign Secretary to take further steps regarding the

situation in Hong Kong. Last week, it was reported that Lord Neuberger will remain on the Hong Kong court of final appeal for another three years. Does the Secretary of State accept that such decisions risk legitimising China's failure to abide by its international commitments, and will he agree that it is no longer appropriate for UK judges to sit in Hong Kong courts?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Lady for raising a really important point. I have had discussions about this not just with the Lord Chancellor, but with the President of the Supreme Court. We have agreed a common set of principles that should apply. The challenge is whether, by removing UK judges wholesale, we would actually be removing a moderating impact on the way in which the national security legislation is applied. I hope the hon. Lady will know that the Hong Kong Bar and other countries around the world have suggested to us that they would prefer those international judges to stay. With one narrow exception, I do not think that any other country has removed its judges. We are very much seized of the issue, and I hope that my answer demonstrates that.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I welcome the Foreign Secretary's statement and the action being taken, and congratulate him on the personal role that he has played in building the international coalition to highlight the atrocities against the Uyghurs. What in his opinion would be the ideal response from the Chinese regime to the actions today, and what response does he fear we will actually get?

Dominic Raab: That is a great question. Of course, we live in hope; I always want the door to be open on this and other issues where we want to engage. What I would like to see is either for China to moderate its action, or—if it contests that this is all fake news and nonsense—for it to allow Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to go in and verify the facts. That would seem, under all international auspices, a fair and reasonable way to determine the accuracy of all the allegations that have been made.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind) [V]: In their 2019 report on human rights and democracy, the British Government rightly label the death penalty “abhorrent”. Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that the British Government will not attempt to secure new trade deals with countries where the death penalty is operational in order to give global Britain a moral underpinning?

Dominic Raab: We already have free trade deals—indeed, the EU did such free trade deals—with countries around the world, from Asia to Africa, which have the death penalty or corporal punishment. I am curious to know whether the hon. Gentleman is actually advocating that we tear up those existing deals. I do not think that that would be the right thing to do. Of course, different countries have different approaches and different legal systems, but we are very clear that we would never do trade deals with countries whose records are beyond the pale. Notwithstanding whatever trade or investment we have, as we have demonstrated today, we will impose Magnitsky sanctions to hold to account those individually responsible for whatever abuses they may be involved with.

Mr Speaker: I am now suspending the House for two minutes to enable the necessary arrangements to be made for the next business.

4.53 pm

Sitting suspended.

Integrated Review: Defence Command Paper

4.56 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace):

As a young officer, 30 years ago almost to the day, I was summoned to the drill square to have read aloud key decisions from the Government's defence review at the time, "Options for Change". We did not know it then, but the world was set for massive change. The fall of the Soviet Union, the rise of China, the global impact of the internet and the emergence of al-Qaeda were some way off, which meant that no one was really prepared for what happened.

I was part of an Army that, on paper, fielded three armoured divisions in Germany but, in reality, could muster much less. It was, in truth, a hollow force. While I know that some colleagues would rather play Top Trumps with our force numbers, there is no point boasting about numbers of regiments while sending them to war in Snatch Land Rovers or simply counting the number of tanks when our adversaries are developing new ways to defeat them. That is why we have put at the heart of the Defence Command Paper the mission to seek out and understand future threats and to invest in the capabilities needed so that we can defeat them.

In defence, it is too tempting to use the shield of sentimentality to protect previously battle-winning but now outdated capabilities. Such sentimentality, when coupled with over-ambition and under-resourcing, leads to even harder consequences down the line. It risks the lives of our people, who are truly our finest asset. It would, of course, similarly endanger our people if we simply wielded a sword of cuts, slicing away the battle-proven on the promise of novelty, without regard for what is left behind. Old capabilities are not necessarily redundant, just as new technologies are not always relevant.

We must employ both sword and shield, because those of us in government charged with defending the country have a duty to protect new domains, as well as continuing investment in the traditional ones, but always adapting to the threat. History shows us time and again that failing to do so risks irrelevance and defeat. As the threat changes, we must change with it, remaining clear-eyed about what capabilities we retire, why we are doing so and how they will be replaced.

The Prime Minister's vision for the UK in 2030 sees a stronger and more secure, prosperous and resilient Union, better equipped for a more competitive age, as a problem-solving and burden-sharing nation with a global perspective. To become so requires Britain's soft and hard power to be better integrated. In this more competitive age, a global Britain has no choice but to step up, ready to take on the challenges and shape the opportunities of the years ahead alongside our allies and friends. Let us be clear: the benefits and institutions of multilateralism, to which we have all become so accustomed, are an extension of, not an alternative to, our shared leadership and our hard power. UK diplomacy should work hand in hand with the UK armed forces abroad, and we will invest in our defence diplomacy network in order to strengthen the influence we can bring to bear. At this point I wish to pay tribute to all our civil servants in the Department, and further afield in defence, whose

professionalism and dedication is every bit as vital to UK security as all the other component parts of the defence enterprise. In the past, we have been too tempted to fund equipment at the expense of our service personnel's lived experience. That is why we will spend £1.5 billion on improving single living accommodation over the next four years, and £1.4 billion on wraparound childcare over the next decade.

The Government's commitment to spending £188 billion on defence over the coming four years—an increase of £24 billion, or 14%—is an investment in the Prime Minister's vision of security and prosperity in 2030. Previous reviews have been over-ambitious and underfunded, leaving forces that were overstretched and underequipped. This increased funding offers defence an exciting opportunity to turn our current forces into credible ones, modernising for the threats of the 2020s and beyond, and contributing to national prosperity in the process. It marks a shift from mass mobilisation to information-age speed, readiness and relevance for confronting the threats of the future. These principles will guide our doctrine and our force development.

The integrated operating concept, published last year, recognises that changes in the information and political environments now impact not just the context, but the conduct, of military operations. The notion of war and peace as binary states has given way to a continuum of conflict, requiring us to prepare our forces for more persistent global engagement and constant campaigning, moving seamlessly from operating to warfighting if that is required. The armed forces, working with the rest of Government, must think and act differently. They will no longer be held as a force of last resort, but become a more present and active force around the world. Our forces will still be able to warfight as their primary function, but they will also have a role to play before and after what we traditionally consider as war, whether that is supporting humanitarian projects, conflict prevention and stabilisation, or United Nations peacekeeping.

However, technological proliferation and the use of proxies and adversaries operating below the threshold of open conflict mean that the United Kingdom must also play a role in countering such aggressive acts. As such, the steps to sustaining UK leadership in defence must start with ensuring we are a credible and truly threat-orientated organisation, and we must do so in conjunction with our allies and friends. Today's reforms will ensure that we continue to meet our NATO commitments on land and enhance our contributions at sea. As the second biggest spender in NATO, and a major contributor across all five domains, we have a responsibility to support the alliance's own transformation for this more competitive age. Today, I am setting out in this defence Command Paper the threats we are facing; our operating concept for countering them; and the investments in our forces that are required to deliver the nation's defences. Those threats demand that we make the following investments in, and adjustments to, the services.

We have been a maritime nation for many centuries, and it is vital that we have a navy that is both global and powerful. The Royal Navy, because of our investment in the Type 26, Type 31 and Type 32, will by the start of the next decade have over 20 frigates and destroyers. We will also commission a new multi-role ocean surveillance ship, which will protect the integrity of the UK's maritime

zones and undersea critical national infrastructure. We will deploy new automated minehunting systems, which will replace the Sandown and Hunt classes as they retire through the decade. The interim surface-to-surface guided weapon will replace the Typhoon missile, and we will upgrade the air defence weapon system on our Type 45s to better protect them from new threats.¹ We will invest further to implement the availability of our submarine fleet and start development of the next generation of subsea systems for the 2040s. The Royal Marines will be developed from being an amphibious infantry, held at readiness, to a forward-based, highly capable, maritime-for-future commando force, further enabled by the conversion of a Bay class landing ship to enable littoral strike.

Our land forces have been for too long deprived of investment. That is why, over the next four years, we will spend £23 billion on their modernisation. The British Army will reorganise in seven brigade combat teams—two heavy, one deep strike, one air manoeuvre and two light, plus a combat aviation brigade. In addition, a newly formed security force assistance brigade will provide the skills and capabilities to build the capacity of partner nations. In recognition of the growing demand for enhanced assistance and our commitment to delivering resilience to those partners, we will establish an Army special operations brigade, built around the four battalions of the new ranger regiments. This new regiment will be seeded from 1 Royal Scots, 2 Prince of Wales Royal Rifles, 2nd Battalion Duke of Lancaster and 4th Battalion The Rifles.²

Our adversaries set a premium on rapid deployability, so we will enhance the existing 16 Air Assault Brigade with an additional infantry unit, supported by upgraded Apache attack helicopters. Together, they will create a global response force for both crisis response and warfighting. The third division will remain the heart of our warfighting capability, leading in NATO with two modernised heavy brigades. In order to ensure that we are more lethal and better protected, it will be built around a modern armoured nucleus of 148 upgraded Challenger 3 tanks and Ajax armoured reconnaissance vehicles, with the accelerated introduction of Boxer armoured personnel carriers.

As I have repeatedly said, recent conflicts in Libya, Syria and the Caucasus have shown the vulnerability of armour, so we will increase both manning and investments in electronic warfare regiments, air defence and uncrewed aerial surveillance systems, all complemented by offensive cyber-capabilities.

The Army's increased deployability and technological advantage will mean that greater effect can be delivered by fewer people. I have therefore taken the decision to reduce the size of the Army from today's current strength of 76,500 trained personnel to 72,500 by 2025. The Army has not been at its established strength of 82,000 since the middle of last decade. These changes will not require redundancies. We wish to build on the work already done on utilising our reserves to make sure the whole force is better integrated and more productive.

There will be no loss of cap badges and, as I said earlier, the new structures will require fewer units. Therefore, 2nd Battalion The Mercian Regiment will be amalgamated with the 1st Battalion to form a new Boxer-mounted battalion. To administer the new infantry, we will reorganise the regiments to sit in four infantry divisions. Each will

1.[Official Report, 25 March 2021, Vol. 691, c. 5MC.]

2.[Official Report, 25 March 2021, Vol. 691, c. 6MC.]

[Mr Ben Wallace]

comprise a more balanced number of battalions and give the men and women serving in them a wider range of choices and opportunities in pursuing their careers and specialties. To ensure a balanced allocation of recruits, we will introduce intelligent recruiting for the infantry, and each division of infantry will initially feed the four new-range battalions. The final details of these administrative divisions, along with the wider Army restructuring, will be announced before the summer. No major unit deletions will be further required.

Today's Royal Air Force is now deploying world-leading capabilities: P-8, Rivet Joint, A400M and the latest Typhoons. The F-35, the world's most capable combat aircraft, is now being deployed to frontline squadrons. In recognition of its battle-winning capabilities, we will commit to growing the fleet to 48 aircraft. The E-3D Sentry, two generations behind its contemporaries, will be replaced by a more capable fleet of three E-7 Wedgetails in 2023. These will be based at RAF Lossiemouth, transforming the United Kingdom's early warning and control capabilities, as well as contributing to NATO. As the transport fleet improves availability, we will retire the C-130J Hercules in 2023, after 24 years' service. Twenty-two A400Ms, alongside the C-17s, will provide a more capable and flexible transport fleet.

Our counter-terrorism operations are currently supported by nine Reaper drones, which will be replaced by Protectors in 2024. These new platforms will provide the enhanced strategic ISR—intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance—and strike capabilities that are so vital for all our forces.

All forces evolve, and the increasingly competitive and complex air environment means that we must set the foundations now for our sixth generation of fighter. The Typhoon has been a tremendous success for the British aerospace industry and we will seek to repeat that with £2 billion of investment in the future combat air system over the next four years, alongside further development of the LANCA unmanned combat air vehicle system. We will continue to seek further international collaboration. All services recognise the importance of unmanned aerial systems, which is why we will also develop combat drone swarm technologies. To ensure that our current platforms have the necessary protection and lethality, we will also upgrade the Typhoon radar and introduce Spear Cap 3 deep strike capabilities.

The lessons of current conflict demonstrate that however capable individual forces may be, they are vulnerable without integration. UK strategic command will therefore invest £1.5 billion over the next decade to build and sustain a digital backbone to share and exploit vast amounts of data through the cloud and secure networks. To ensure that our workforce are able to exploit new domains and enhance productivity, the command will invest in synthetics and simulation, providing a step change in our training.

The National Cyber Force will lie at the heart of Defence and GCHQ's offensive cyber-capability and will be based in the north-west of England. The need to keep ourselves informed of the threat and ahead of our rivals means that defence intelligence will be at the heart of our enterprise. We will exploit a wider network of advanced surveillance platforms, all classifications of data and enhanced analysis using artificial intelligence.

Strategic command will partner the RAF to deliver a step change in our space capabilities. From next year, we will start delivering a UK-built intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance satellite constellation. Space is just one area in which the Ministry of Defence will prioritise more than £6.6 billion-worth of research, development and experimentation over the next four years. Those investments in our future battle-winning capabilities will be guided by the science and technology strategy of 2020 and a new defence and security industrial strategy to be published tomorrow.

Our special forces are world leading. We are committed to investing in their cutting-edge capabilities to ensure that they retain their excellence in counter-terrorism, while becoming increasingly capable of also countering hostile state activity.

To conclude, if this Defence Command Paper is anything, it is an honest assessment of what we can do and what we will do. We will ensure that defence is threat-focused, modernised and financially sustainable, ready to confront future challenges, seize new opportunities for global Britain and lay the foundations of a more secure and prosperous United Kingdom. We will, for the first time in decades, match genuine money to credible ambitions; we will retire platforms to make way for new systems and approaches; and we will invest in that most precious commodity of all—the people of our armed forces.

To serve my country as a soldier was one of the greatest privileges of my life: serving to lead, contributing to keeping this country safe, upholding our values, and defending those who could not defend themselves. Putting oneself in harm's way in the service of our country is something that, fortunately, few of us are ever required to do, but we all have a duty to ensure that those who do so on our behalf are as well prepared and equipped as possible. Therefore, the success of this Defence Command Paper should be judged not on the sophistication of its words, but on the implementation of its reforms and, ultimately, on the delivery of its capabilities into the hands of the men and women of the armed forces. It is they who keep us safe and will continue to do so in the years ahead. It is to them, their families and all those across defence that we owe it to make this policy into reality. The work to do so has only just begun.

5.13 pm

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for an advance copy of his statement and an advance copy of the White Paper a little earlier, although I believe, Mr Speaker, that the House will share my dismay that so much of the content of the White Paper has been given in advance to the media over the past week, despite your warning to the House and to the Defence Secretary last Monday. Our forces deserve better, as do the public and Parliament.

This defence review could not be more important. Last year we were promised

“the most radical reassessment of”

the UK's

“place in the world since the end of the Cold War”;

we need just that. The integrated review last week confirmed that

“State threats to the UK, and to our allies, are growing and diversifying”.

In the defence review, the Secretary of State was right to set out that grey zone warfare, terrorism, climate change and organised crime mean that the threats to our national security and international stability are becoming less conventional, less predictable and more continuous.

We need this reassessment, because the last two Conservative defence reviews have weakened the foundations of our armed forces—they cut our full-time armed forces by 45,000, cut the defence budget by £8 billion, and cut critical defence capabilities and upgrades, largely to deal with budget pressures. The Prime Minister promised an end to this era of retreat, and the Defence Secretary pledged that this defence review would be different, yet I fear that it is set to repeat many of the same mistakes. The strength of our armed forces is being cut again; crucial military capabilities are cut again; and there are plans to complete a full overhaul of the Army in 10 years' time—again. How do the Government square this circle? The threats to Britain are increasing, and our forces will be forward deployed further from home, yet this is a plan for fewer troops, fewer ships and fewer planes over the next few years.

Our armed forces are rightly respected worldwide for their professionalism and all-round excellence, but size matters. Our full-time forces are already nearly 10,000 below the strength that Ministers said in 2015 was needed to meet the threats Britain faces. The Defence Secretary goes further today, confirming that the Army alone will have its established strength cut by 10,000 to just 72,500 over the next four years. How can he argue that these deeper cuts will not limit our forces' capacity to simultaneously deploy overseas, support allies, maintain strong national defences, and reinforce domestic resilience, as they have done in helping our country through the recent covid crisis? What does he say to the ex-Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir David Richards, who recently said that further cuts to the Army would mean the UK was no longer taken seriously as a military power, and that this would damage our relationship with the US and our position in NATO? What does the Defence Secretary say to each and every voter who heard the Prime Minister say this at the launch of the Conservatives' 2019 election campaign:

"We will not be cutting our armed forces in any form. We will be maintaining the size of our armed forces?"

We welcome the plans announced today for cyber, for space, for defence science, for artificial intelligence and for the next generation of fighter jets, but these new technologies may take years to come on stream, so this is a plan for cuts now with a promise of jam tomorrow.

Let me ask the Defence Secretary a series of questions. When will the war fighting division promised in 2015 finally be battle-ready? When will we have enough British F-35 jets to fly from our aircraft carriers? Will there be any short-term cuts in anti-submarine warfare capabilities? How will the new Ranger regiment be recruited? Where will it be based, and when will it be fully operational? Will the plans for the combat service support battalions mean any reduction in the number of Army medics? Finally, on funding for single living accommodation, I was not going to raise this, but the Secretary of State said today that, as the Ministry of Defence has told the National Audit Office, the plan is for £1.5 billion over 10 years. However, page 36 of the White Paper says £1.3 billion. Is that a cut, or is it an error?

The finances for the last defence review were a fiction. The MOD's budget was balanced in 2012, but the NAO has now judged the defence equipment plan "unaffordable" for four years in a row, and it reports a black hole of up to £17 billion. We welcome the Prime Minister's extra £16.5 billion, but there is a risk that we will be throwing good money after bad. How much of this extra money will be swallowed by the black hole in the current programmes and not used to fund the new ones that the Secretary of State has announced today?

Ministers talk about the rise in capital funding but not the real cut in revenue funding over the next four years. That cut in day-to-day spending is the Achilles heel of defence plans. The Secretary of State should never have agreed it. Will he today spell out the consequences of that real-terms cut in revenue funding for forces recruitment, training, pay and family support?

The MOD's bad habits run deep. Only three of its 30 major projects, together worth a staggering £162 billion, have a clear green light, and are on time and on budget. It is clear to me that Parliament needs a system of special measures for the MOD. The Secretary of State's new Office of Net Assessment and Challenge will deal with policy but not money or delivery, so will he commission a special capability review of the MOD, conducted by a top team of internal and external experts, backed by the NAO and reporting to this House?

On nuclear, Labour's commitment to the renewal of our deterrent is non-negotiable, alongside our multilateral commitment to nuclear disarmament and greater arms control. The Secretary of State made no mention in his statement of reversing 30 years of proud non-proliferation policy in the UK under successive Governments, and the White Paper does not come close to explaining, let alone justifying, this change. Parliament, the public and our allies are owed a much fuller account of this decision from Ministers.

The White Paper also has little to say on the lessons from covid. Pandemic was indeed identified as a tier 1 threat in 2015 and 2018, but no preparation was done, and when the virus hit, less than 1% of our personal protective equipment was sourced in the UK. Full-spectrum society resilience requires training, planning and exercising that must be led by the Government and involve private industry, local agencies and the public. Some countries are ahead of us with such civil-military strategies for the grey zone. Why does the White Paper have nothing to catch Britain up?

Finally, on the principal threats, China is certainly a great and growing power challenge that the US, backed by democratic countries such as Britain, must meet. However, the White Paper rightly confirms that Russia remains Britain's greatest state threat. Our highest priority must therefore be Europe, the north Atlantic and the High North—our NATO area. While the Prime Minister talks up Britain's Indo-Pacific focus, how does the Defence Secretary reassure NATO that we are not neglecting the leading role that our alliance countries, including the US, continue to require of Britain?

We want to see this defence review succeed, but there is a growing gulf between the Government's ambitions and their actions—a gulf that we will challenge hard in the months ahead, and that the Secretary of State has much more to do to close.

Mr Wallace: Oh dear. I get the impression that no matter what I brought to the House today, that speech would have been trotted out. This is not the defence review that usually takes place in an environment of cuts. The right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) is wrong: there is not a cut to the resource departmental expenditure limit over the four years. It is flat, or if not, there is a tiny increase in RDEL. That slightly undermines the desperate attempt to make £24 billion-plus look like some form of cut. He asked what impact that will have. First of all, he obviously got the Command Paper delivered electronically, but there should be an insert in the printed ones that shows that the figure is actually £1.5 billion, not £1.3 billion. The impact of that RDEL is obviously wraparound childcare for £1.4 billion over 10 years. That is a plus, in case anyone missed it from the tone of his speech.

When it comes to the MOD budget, I have been very honest in this House. I would admit the role that former Conservative Governments have taken in defence reviews, but I have never once heard the right hon. Gentleman own up at all, or admit that the Government he served in produced what the 2010 NAO audit report showed was £38 billion of overspend; it was £3 billion in the last year. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), who is shouting, was himself a Minister in the MOD. I have never heard Labour Members say, “Under our Government, we delivered lots of regiments, but we delivered our soldiers into Snatch Land Rovers.” I have never heard them say with a sense of apology or humility that they took soldiers into war ill-equipped, ill-trained and often unable to make the peace. That is really important, because behind all this are the men and women of our armed forces.

We are trying to strike the balance between our ambition, the funding and looking after those people. In defence, we are all ambitious to do more around the world, but if I let my enthusiasm get away with me, I would end up hollowing out the equipment the men and women of the armed forces have, and that is no legacy to leave those people. That is why, in this blueprint for a future force, we are almost setting out two parts of our forces: forces for war fighting, and forces to prevent conflict or help rebuild countries afterwards. We know we can win the conflict, because we usually do it with allies, and we can deploy our armoured divisions or brigades—*[Interruption.]* My right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) is wrong. In Telic I, it was not a division but two armoured brigades—16 Air Assault and 3 Commando Brigades—that deployed.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): A Russian armoured division has three brigades.

Mr Wallace: If my right hon. Friend wants to see what happened to a Russian armoured division, he should look at what happened in Syria last year, in the weeks when 172 tanks were wiped out by Turkish unmanned aerial vehicles. I wonder what comfort that would have been to the 3,000 Syrian soldiers—fighting for the wrong regime, however—who no doubt thought that somehow their mass gave them protection. *[Interruption.]* They were Russian.

In the China-Russia war I think it was, a British officer went to observe and saw the machine gun being used for the first time, and his report back said, “They’re

not British. We don’t need the machine gun,” and the rest was history. Therein lies the fault and the fallacy of defence reform. If we wrap ourselves in sentimentality, what we get is a betrayal of the men and women who go to fight.

On other points that the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne raised, we will go beyond the 48 F-35 fighters, and we will continue to purchase them until we have decided whether we have the right numbers to continue. We are on track to deliver the squadrons required as planned and to man our aircraft carriers. There will be no reduction in combat medics as a result of these reorganisations. He and I both know the importance of the role they have played in covid. Indeed, they are a key enabler that will be useful not only for ourselves, but when it comes to conflict prevention and winning the peace.

On the nuclear deterrent, we do not believe that the changes to the number of warheads in any way breach the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, and that advice is backed up by the Attorney General. Of course, if the right hon. Gentleman is correct about his party’s new-found love of the nuclear deterrent since his previous leader, or indeed since the shadow Foreign Secretary voted against renewing it, he will of course agree with me that a nuclear deterrent should be credible; otherwise, it would just be a massive waste of money.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Yes!

Mr Wallace: I knew that was what the hon. Member from the Scottish nationalist party was going to say; it was predictable. I remember the former leader of the Labour party suggesting to the good people of Barrow that they would be allowed to continue to make submarines, and could maybe use them for tourism purposes. Maybe that is the true version of the Labour party’s manifesto on defence.

I would take on board many of the criticisms and charges by the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne if he came to this House with a mea culpa about his own Government’s role in producing defence reviews over time that were both over-ambitious and underfunded; if he accepted that when we over-sentimentalise our armed forces or avoid taking the tough decisions, the people who suffer in the end are the men and women of the armed forces; and if he came here and acknowledged that the men and women of the armed forces who I served with who perished, some of them in Snatch Land Rovers, did so because in the end we overstretched, underfunded and failed to recognise that the best thing is to be honest, with a well-funded armed forces that we do not overstretch and with which we are not over-ambitious.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, may I just pay tribute to PC Keith Palmer, who was killed on this day four years ago? There is much to welcome in this Command Paper today, and the Defence Secretary is to be congratulated on advancing our force structure and investments in cyber, special forces and autonomous platforms, but they come at a huge price to our conventional defence posture, with dramatic cuts to our troop numbers, tanks, armoured fighting vehicles and more than 100 RAF aircraft, including fast jets and heavy lift—cuts that,

if tested by a parliamentary vote, I do not believe would pass. Why? Because the Government's own integrated review paper spells out in very clear language how dangerous this next decade will be—more so than in the cold war, when defence spending was 4%-plus of GDP.

Today, we face multiple complex threats to our security and our prosperity, yet our defence spend remains at a peacetime level of just 2.2%. With international rivalry increasing and western influence on the retreat, we must wake up to how dangerous the next decade will be. Is it not the time to increase the defence budget to 3%, so that these dangerous cuts to our conventional hard power can be avoided?

Mr Wallace: Asking any Defence Secretary in history if he would like to support an increase in his budget is usually going to get only one response. The reality is that I am dealing with a budget that is incredibly generous compared with those of my colleagues in other Departments in the middle of this pandemic. Indeed, many people object to the increase in the defence budget. It is a defence budget big enough to allow me to fix the issues of the past and to invest in modernisation.

I understand my right hon. Friend's concerns, and my answer to him would be about ambition. How ambitious and how global do we wish to be? I do not believe that our security is at threat from this document. I think it provides a very good foundation for our homeland security. What comes next is how much we help our friends around the world and what ambition we have for them. I can give him and the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) the assurance that our defence priority No. 1 is our commitment to membership of NATO, because that coalition and that part of the world—western Europe and the Atlantic—is key to our own security. That comes first, as does, for those on the Government Benches, our nuclear deterrent as our guarantor for security from aggressive states. That is maybe where my right hon. Friend and I will disagree, and we will no doubt explore that, and the extent to which our ambitions are matched, during the Defence Committee meetings.

Where we are today, we can match our ambitions with this defence paper but, as I have always said in this House, if the threat changes, we should always be prepared to change with it. I cannot say what will happen in 2035. I cannot say what will happen even further out from there, and that is why I think that at the heart of this paper is something on which my hon. Friend and I do strongly agree, which is that our approach should, for once, be threat-driven. That should drive what we buy. That should drive how we equip our people. That should drive what we do. We are determined to do it, and as Defence Secretary, it is my job to provide the rest of Government—the Prime Minister and the National Security Council—with the range of options and range of tools to allow them to follow those ambitions.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of the paper and his statement, and I apologise to him for the difficulties we had in trying to get each other on the phone earlier. Like the Select Committee Chair, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) I, on behalf of SNP Members, acknowledge the anniversary of the death of PC Keith Palmer and, indeed, the right hon. Gentleman's own bravery on that day.

Turning to the paper, I think it does seek to ask some of the right questions. Within the broader context of the integrated review and what the Minister will no doubt reveal to us tomorrow, I can see where the Government are trying to go. The problem we have is that it comes to some of the wrong conclusions, not least—and let me be unequivocal on this—in terms of the increase in the nuclear stockpile. We think that that is an expensive folly that should be cancelled with immediate effect.

However, in terms of the changing nature of threats that the document and the Secretary of the State have outlined, there are some things that are worth exploring and that this House should have debated long ago. We welcome, for example, the investment in space research, not least because my own city of Glasgow produces more satellites than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. But the reliance on technology, which I accept is a new feature of defence and security, and particularly on autonomous weapons, does raise some serious concerns. While the Government have paraded all this flashy, expensive new tech—I understand that hon. Members, and not just those on the Government Benches, get very dazzled with this stuff—what are we going to see in terms of the proper oversight of its use? We cannot have a situation where killer robots are sent into battlefields with no proper oversight of weapons deployed on our behalf and in our name.

That takes me on to the wider issue of international norms, not just on lethal autonomous weapons, but in terms of data and AI. What are the Government doing not just nationally but to work with partners internationally to develop international norms on this stuff? I accept that Russia and China will always pose a challenge in trying to develop international norms, but I want to hear more about what the Government are doing to do so, especially within NATO.

Turning to the armed forces, it has rightly been mentioned—and I suspect we will hear it again during the responses to this statement—that the Secretary of State will have some convincing to do here in Parliament that he will be able to retire the old, bring in the new and not have such a big gap in the middle. On numbers, what will be the impact of the reduction on the Scottish footprint in 2025? During the past few Defence Question Times I have raised with the Secretary of State the fact that the 12,500 promise made to Scots seven years ago has never been met, so we can now assume that those numbers will be even further from the promise made by his own party ahead of the 2014 referendum. That will be not just a breach of that promise, but a breach of his own manifesto commitment. I accept that the Secretary of State is trying to clear up a lot of what his predecessors have done—indeed, I partly commend him on being honest with the House on that today—but he does have some convincing to do, not just here but back in communities that he knows well.

When will we see something on terms and conditions for the armed forces? We want to see a pay increase for members of the armed forces. We know that four in 10 serving personnel do not believe their pay properly reflects their work. That is work that all of us in here admire; indeed, I have seen it in Castlemilk in my own constituency during the covid pandemic, where we have the vaccination and testing centre. When will the Secretary

[Stewart Malcolm McDonald]

of State bring forward a real and proper pay rise and give them the money they deserve? Surely that is something all of us in the House could agree with.

Mr Wallace: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns both about reliance on technology and the human in the loop issue. Britain has been one of the leaders in trying to raise those discussions in places like the United Nations, to ensure that there is a standard that is acceptable—a moral standard, making sure that there is a human in the loop at nearly all times. That is important for reassurance.

On AI and data, Britain leads within NATO on cyber. It pushed NATO to examine cyber, but not in being a cyber nation—Estonia is probably one of the greatest cyber nations, although there is a data issue that I am sure the hon. Gentleman's party would disagree with about relying on data that much. But fundamentally it is incredibly important, and Britain's work alongside some of its allies in NATO has pushed NATO to look at both hybrid threats and cyber and to start making sure that it reforms and modernises to address that.

I understand the concerns about troops and personnel in Scotland. There are over 28,000 people currently in Scotland who rely directly on defence: that is the civil servants, the regulars, the reserves and those in industry. When we send the E-7 Wedgetails up to Lossiemouth there will be an increase of a few hundred people to work in that part of the world, which is to be welcomed. Decisions exactly on where the Rangers will be and how it will develop will come soon. What I will say to the hon. Gentleman is that it is a tribute to Scottish infantry and Scottish heritage that 1 Scots will become the seed of the Rangers. As anyone who knows Scottish military history will be aware, the Lovat Scouts and brave souls like that have set the fierce reputation of Scottish soldiers around the world. I hope that that will be recognised as they go forward.

On pay and allowances, I have started a process of reviewing allowances. On the allowances I have already signed off, I chose to protect the lowest paid at the expense of the highest paid. I am not a socialist. I would not be surprised if the hon. Gentleman might be —[*Interruption.*] Or he might not. However, I felt that the lowest paid should be protected, as well as overseas allowances and individuals with children. Of course, if the hon. Gentleman's Government in Scotland would like to pledge to give our troops in Scotland the same £500 bonus they have given NHS staff, we would be absolutely delighted. Perhaps the extra tax that the SNP—[*Interruption.*] I'll tell you what, Madam Deputy Speaker, maybe the hon. Gentleman has an opportunity here. I will do a deal with him. If he will cover for one year the extra money we pay to mitigate the tax burden that falls on Scottish soldiers, we shall pass that on to them. Would he like to do that now? He has the chance. [*Interruption.*] I think the Scottish National party are busy spending all that money on lawyers.

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con) [V]: I welcome the clarity of my right hon. Friend's statement today and I look forward to the publication tomorrow of the defence and security industrial strategy alongside it, which will provide, I hope, a degree of coherence that will be very welcome to all those involved in supporting our armed forces.

In light of the necessary decision to proceed with upgrading the warhead for the strategic deterrent, can my right hon. Friend explain to the House the rationale for increasing the number of warheads during the transition from one system to the next? Will the cost in developing the strategic deterrent absorb any of the welcome £6.6 billion R&D programme that has been announced?

Mr Wallace: My right hon. Friend laid the foundations for linking prosperity in a much more deliberate and thoughtful manner into defence and defence procurement. I hope he will see that reflected in the strategy tomorrow. It is of course welcome that the review brings more prosperity—the investment in Boxers to be made in places like Telford; Ajax in Merthyr Tydfil, a Challenger upgrade and the commitment to a next generation of aerospace. As a Lancashire MP, I know that the prosperity that Typhoon has given us all in my part of the world is incredibly important.

On the rationale of the deterrent, it cannot be taken from a one-sided view. We have to look at our adversary, Russia, and see the investments it has made, as well as its plans to both break the intermediate nuclear treaty, which was broken in 2018, and to invest in new weapon systems and missile defence. If we are going to keep it as credible, then we need to make sure that we do that.

On the R&D budget, I am not aware—I will write to my right hon. Friend with a correction if necessary—that the £6.6 billion is anything to do with the nuclear warhead programme or anything else. For clarity, the United Kingdom does not buy warheads from other countries. Under the nuclear proliferation treaty, warheads have to be developed within that very country itself.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I should make it clear that neither I nor my party can agree with the proposal to increase the number of nuclear warheads. We also have grave doubts about some of the spending decisions the Government are making within the context of the defence budget.

May I turn the Secretary of State's attention to something that I think is close to both our hearts? What he has said about the cadet force is welcome; I seek to determine whether the cadet force will be supported in the most outlying parts of the UK, such as Wick and Thurso in my constituency. More broadly, I myself served in the Territorial Army; will the Secretary of State go a little further in outlining what is going to happen for our volunteer service personnel in the Territorial Army and others right across the UK?

Mr Wallace: The Reserve Forces 2030 review on the next iteration of reserves will report to Parliament very soon and will certainly show our desire to build on the direction of travel in respect of the reserves over the years and integrate them further into defence. That is incredibly important. The skills and force-multiplier effect that they bring are incredible. In previous decades there has been too much resistance within our Department to using them properly or involving them, especially in the Army. We need to do more on that.

On the cadets, we have exceeded our target of providing opportunities for 130,000 cadets in state secondary schools across the United Kingdom. We are going to go further by investing in the cadet expansion programme to bring this fantastic opportunity to young people up and down the United Kingdom.

Mr Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con) [V]: The Government are absolutely right in their vision of a global Britain that does not simply watch from the sidelines, so I welcome today's commitment to a more persistent global engagement. Will my right hon. Friend tell the House what this more active approach will mean for our gallant armed forces personnel?

Mr Wallace: It will mean more opportunities for them to do the job that they have trained for to help to deliver Britain's influence around the world. They will be able to go forward and train abroad in countries such as Somalia and Kenya, provide reassurance and resilience and, indeed, hopefully prevent conflict. The prevention of conflict is a noble thing and is not something to be separated from the armed forces—they are not mutually exclusive, because sometimes the way in which we prevent major conflict is to intervene in support of allies and friends. We will give young men and women throughout the country plenty of opportunity around the world, and at the same time they will be able to train fully as soldiers and follow their specialities.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP) [V]: I recognise that the Secretary of State will come before the Defence Committee so look forward to more detailed consideration in due course. I welcome the recognition of the defence procurement footprint in Northern Ireland and the suggestion that, given the cyber-security and advanced engineering capacity in my constituency and throughout the Province, we are well placed for future investment. On the balancing of new technologies with old footprint, will the Secretary of State commit today to the sustained continuance of the Northern Ireland garrison, and in particular 2 Rifles at Thiepval barracks in Lisburn?

Mr Wallace: Yes, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that there will be no change to that. We continue to invest in Northern Ireland equipment and engineering—only recently, we signed a £96 million contract for very short-range anti-air missiles in Belfast.

Antony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con): Last week's integrated review made it clear that the threats that our country faces are changing rapidly and that our adversaries are increasingly operating in the grey zone, where they perceive the risks of repercussions to be far lower. Will the Secretary of State confirm that what he has announced today will give us the ability to respond to such threats in a far more meaningful way, because they threaten us and our allies?

Mr Wallace: One way in which our adversaries use sub-threshold activity is by corrupting or undermining a fragile state. By being able to deploy, either in support of partner host nations or by improving their training, we will help to build their resilience. At same time, we can sometimes supply or co-train in respect of key enabling, as we do in Kenya with the bomb disposal college. We work alongside the Kenyans to train people, and we now train countries from other parts of Africa together.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: Our strategic threats are from China, which grows stronger each day from manufacturing trade, and Russia, which is threatened by China and relies on fossil fuel exports.

Instead of focusing on cutting one in eight soldiers and stockpiling nuclear weapons, what discussions has the Secretary of State had across Government about using COP26 to put a carbon tax on trade, in order to check Chinese power and to help transition Russia from fossil fuels towards a wood economy for construction, to tackle climate change, so that holistically, we can protect the world without escalating the risk of war and destruction?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am sure the Secretary of State will find a way of answering what was a slightly wide question.

Mr Wallace: The hon. Gentleman actually raises an important point. At the beginning of the Command Paper is a chapter about the global trends and the direction. Climate change poses a security threat because it could deliver instability, poverty and problems in other parts of the world that would drive migrant flows and increase friction over precious resource. That is absolutely true.

The hon. Gentleman is also right to point out that one of the ways we are going to tackle our security threats is working together across the whole of Government to deal with them. The direction of travel on climate change will hopefully be set at COP26. Defence will play its part in both trying to solve its own emissions and making sure that it provides stability in some of the poorest countries, such as Sudan, where we recently had people, to make sure that the security threat sometimes delivered by climate change does not boil over and threaten regional stability.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con) [V]: I welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to innovation, to the economy and to generating great high-skilled jobs right across the UK, such as those at Cook Defence Systems in Stanhope in County Durham, where we make the tracks for all Britain's armoured vehicles. I would really like the Secretary of State to visit to see some of the innovative work being done there, as our tracked vehicles are maintained as part of the armed forces for the significant future.

Mr Wallace: I would be delighted to visit. We are investing in upgrading our Challengers and Ajax, and I would be keen to come to see how the engineering is done.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: The Government have frequently confirmed their commitment to the non-proliferation treaty, which they recognise plays

"an unparalleled role in curtailing the nuclear arms race and keeping the world safe."—[*Official Report*, 1 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 10WS.]

But this Government are now feeding, not ameliorating, nuclear risk. Will the Secretary of State publish the detail of the Attorney General's advice to explain why he is seeking to break yet another international agreement, undermining our legal position, and why, rather than cutting nuclear warheads, as is his obligation, he is increasing them by 44%?

Mr Wallace: Madam Deputy Speaker, you will know, having been in the House for many years, that Governments do not publish the Attorney General's advice. We do

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not believe in any way that we are breaking the nuclear proliferation treaty, and what we really need to do is make sure that we maintain a credible deterrent.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con) [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for his Defence Command Paper, which I broadly welcome, in particular the integrated review, which looks forward to the modern threats we face and embraces the capabilities we need to develop to meet those threats. When it comes to the nuclear deterrent, we must remember that this is a bipartisan policy that has been supported by both sides of the House until now and that we want to maintain that consensus. May I echo what has been said about the need for discussion and exploration of why we need to increase the cap on the number of warheads? I am convinced that we need to maintain a credible deterrent, and I am sure that the Government would not be doing this unless there were very strong arguments for doing it to maintain the credibility of the deterrent.

Mr Wallace: Obviously, detail around development, use and, indeed, deployment of nuclear warheads is a very sensitive subject. However, I will see what I can do to provide further briefing to Members and to specific Committees, if that is a better way to furnish more detail in a secure environment.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP) [V]: As the UK Government announce billions more for Trident, while my constituents have been forced to turn to food banks, another poll—this time by BMG Research—has found that the majority of Scots want independence. Does the Secretary of State really think that prioritising yet more weapons of mass destruction, on top of the billions already being spent on them, is doing the so-called Union any favours, when the salaries of NHS workers and service personnel are either stagnant or being cut?

Mr Wallace: I am not quite sure whether the hon. Lady now belongs to a party that does want to belong to NATO or does not. If it does want to belong to NATO, which I think is its current position this week, it is, of course, a nuclear alliance and therefore she is tacitly accepting the existence of the defence provided by nuclear weapons. So there is a sort of sleight of hand there. She should also know that, despite the polls, in the last actual vote on being a member of the United Kingdom, the people in Scotland who wanted to stay in the United Kingdom won and the quote was “not for another generation”.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee, Dr Julian Lewis.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): On the threats from Russia and communist China, will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that conflict in the grey zone is the modern equivalent of the old cold war—in both cases, hostile moves were deliberately kept below the threshold for open warfare? So does he accept that those who warn against cold war containment policies should seriously reflect and reconsider their position?

Mr Wallace: I think my right hon. Friend is very right about a lot of these things. A number of activities take place below the threshold of “violence” or “overt”. They are unacceptable. They are carried out by China, Iran and other countries against this country and other countries. People cannot sweep that under the carpet and we must take action against it. Sometimes we take it in an overt space or through the Foreign Office calling out or attributing certain events, such as cyber and other things, but also that is why we are taking the capabilities to hand where we, too, can reject or repel such actions in the grey zone.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): First, can I say to the Secretary of State that he should actually read the National Audit Office report of 2010 on the deficit in 2010, because it said it would be between £6 billion and £36 billion if you had flat cash—we did not have that because in 2010 and onwards the defence budget was cut by 16%? Can I ask about the F-35? The Command Paper commits the Government to the 48 jets we have already purchased but there are no commitments for any further—there is just an aspiration. The Defence Secretary knows that we need four aircraft to provide one operational. At the current rate there will be 12 aircraft available—six on each carrier, or 12 on one and none on the other. I do not think that will be a great threat to the People's Liberation Army. But could he say when the numbers are going to be increased and at what cost, or is it the case that we will be able to deploy our carriers only if we do so with the US marine corps?

Mr Wallace: I have read the NAO report. In fact, I usually bring it to every session of parliamentary questions because the good thing about it is that it shows that in the final year of the Labour Government they spent £3 billion without any idea whatsoever where they were going to get it from—it says it quite clearly in the executive summary. This was the same Government who said the carriers would cost £3 billion and they cost £6 billion. That is a record not to be proud of. We do not recognise the 4:1 ratio the right hon. Gentleman talks about in respect of the F-35s. We will deliver the 48 F-35s to our forces by 2025 and, as it says in the paper, we will go beyond that number.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con) [V]: I welcome the announcement that my right hon. Friend intends to grow the UK fleet of frigates and destroyers so that Britannia will once again rule the waves. What impact does he expect this to have on the Royal Navy's operational outputs and on the UK shipbuilding industry? Will those ships be built with good, strong Sheffield steel?

Mr Wallace: First and foremost, the key thing about our ships is to make sure that they are available to use. As the Secretary of State for Defence, I want them on the seas, able to project power and supporting our allies and friends. One of the problems in the past, which goes back to the issue of over-ambition and underfunding, was that we had lots on paper but if you went to Portsmouth you found a number of them—you still do—tied up in a sorry state. This Command Paper will ensure that the new ships, and indeed the existing Type 45s and some of the Type 23s, will be more available, more deployed and more ready to help Britain. The new ships are going to be made on the Clyde and in Rosyth, apart of the United Kingdom where, together, collective defence provides

jobs for thousands of people, and, where possible, we will use as many British parts and as much British equipment as we can.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab) [V]: As a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee, I am under no illusion about the evolving nature of the security threats that we face, but could I ask the Secretary of State about the reduction in the number of members of the Army? At the Conservative party manifesto launch in 2019, the Prime Minister, in response to the journalist Tom Newton Dunn, said:

“We will not be cutting our armed forces in any form. We will be maintaining the size of our armed forces because we are increasing funding for them”.

After the announcement today, does the Secretary of State regret the Prime Minister promising this to the British people at the last general election?

Mr Wallace: No, I do not. If the hon. Lady wants to know one of the reasons why we have taken a slightly different position, it is Operation Spring Shield, which relates to the Turkish incursion into north-west Syria. As she is a member of the ISC, perhaps she should look at the impact of that type of change in tactics and use of technology on a conventional armoured force. It became blatantly clear that unless we modernised and updated our land forces in a proper way, they would be deeply vulnerable to those types of attacks. That is the responsibility I have to protect the men and women operating that equipment so that I can deploy them, and I will not take it lightly. If I have to have a few less people to make sure they are better protected, better equipped and better deployable, but also more lethal, that is a decision I would take, and I am sure that most Members in this House would.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con) [V]: There is much to welcome in this statement. My only concern relates to some of the cuts in our conventional forces, because quantity still has a quality all of its own. For example, no matter how potent a naval vessel might be, it cannot be in two places at once. May I turn my right hon. Friend's attention to the importance of soft power in helping to avoid conflict in the first place? I know that this is something he agrees with. What plans are there in the integrated review and the Command Paper to increase resource investment in defence diplomacy as a means of increasing our soft power capabilities?

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend and I completely agree on this matter. We are going to invest in and increase the number of defence attachés around the world. We are going to invest in better comms for them, and we have already started the process of improving their curriculum, so that they are better trained and more knowledgeable. I have also instructed the Chief of Defence People to make a separate career stream for those people, so that they can start at junior level and follow it all the way through to become a professional in a certain part of the world, speaking the language, understanding the importance of inter-regional actions and therefore really adding value and being able to complement the UK's diplomatic effort and potentially other efforts around the world to provide stability. In that way, we can hopefully get in early and not end up in a place where we have to go and fight a conflict when things have failed.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab) [V]: The Defence Secretary has justified the decision to cut troop numbers because of evolving threats, but there is a hole in that logic. If the threat has changed so much, so quickly, what is there to say it will not change again? Given the uncertainty, it seems unwise to cut the one thing that, above all else, gives us our edge: our people. I ask the Secretary of State to think again.

Mr Wallace: I know that the hon. Gentleman comes with good experience of the armed forces, and he will also know the real balance that I have to strike, both as a leader and now in this job as Secretary of State for Defence. Yes, people are our most important asset, but protecting them is our most important duty, and we have to get that balance right. It is no good being over-ambitious in deploying them if we cannot support them. Yes, the threat can change—absolutely it can change. In 2035, I will not be in this job, but the person who is should be able to come to this House and increase the size of the armed forces, should that be required. They should be free to make that decision, and I would certainly support anyone who did that, if they demonstrated what the threat was. Threat goes up and threat evolves, and in the past we have been too slow to follow the threat because we have been following either more shallow arguments or promises that were never kept.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there has been a lot of uninformed hysteria in reaction to the announcement that we are increasing the cap on our number of warheads? If we are to have a nuclear deterrent, it must be credible. I appreciate the sensitivity of the subject, but with a number of warheads always having to be serviced, a cap of 180 is not credible. That is especially true if we see the debate in context: the French have around 300 warheads; the United States 3,800; and the Russians 6,800. More than half the nuclear weapons in the world are Russian at a time when Russia has shown its aggressive intent on other countries.

Mr Wallace: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is nothing in what he has said that I disagree with. Let us put it in context. Of the declared nuclear powers, we have the lowest stockpile. We need to keep it credible. I fully respect people who do not want a nuclear deterrent or who are in favour of unilateral disarmament, but if people believe that a nuclear deterrent has helped to keep peace in this country and around Europe for 50 years, then we must make sure that it is credible. Not to do so is to make a laughing stock of the whole thing.

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): I am anxious to allow the Secretary of State a chance to expand on that. What exactly is the new threat, or the change to the strategic environment, that the Government consider requires a stockpile of 260 warheads, rather than 180, to offer that minimum credible deterrent that was presumably offered before? Furthermore, how can that 45% increase in the number of warheads be reconciled in any way with a sincere, meaningful commitment to arms control, disarmament and this country's obligations to nuclear non-proliferation?

Mr Wallace: Disarmament is achieved when both sides are credible in what they offer up. To offer up something that is not credible would see us get taken to

[Mr Wallace]

the cleaners, and the other people would just carry on, especially with the completely unbalanced numbers of warheads around the world.

Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con) [V]: I congratulate the Secretary of State and his team on these forward-thinking and rather smart proposals. Does he agree that the opposition parties need to understand the reality of modern warfare, which is a shift towards the grey zone and high tech? We could have thousands of tanks, but they would be of no use to us. The moment that we deploy on the battlefield, our enemy would destroy them. Perhaps the Secretary of State can arrange a briefing for the Opposition parties on what happened to all those tanks in Syria, or what all those Armenian conscripts suffered from a modernised Azeri military, because they do not seem to understand.

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I made available to Members of the House a briefing by the Chief of Defence Intelligence last week where he set out the range of emerging threats, all the way from Russian ballistic missile defence to the proliferation of technology into the hands of, often, non-state militias. That is one of the big challenges of today that our conventional forces need to grapple with. It is no longer tank on tank necessarily; it could be Syrian fighters using pick-ups but firing top-generation anti-tank missiles. That is the game changer. We must be able to deal with it. If we do deploy armour, we must be able to better protect it, or we must find other ways of dealing with it. It has been blatantly clear over the past 12 months—in Libya, in Syria, and in the Caucasus—that we are incredibly exposed on the battlefield if we can be found even by some of the most low-tech weapons systems.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): The confirmation of a reduction in troop numbers will obviously be a huge concern to many service personnel, including those based at Leuchars in my constituency. I was working for Career Transition Partnership at its Scottish resettlement centre during the last round of redundancies linked to the strategic review, so may I ask the Secretary of State what engagement he has had with CTP over the impact of the changes announced today on resettlement services? Will he commit to ensuring that all service leavers get full support on the resettlement journey?

Mr Wallace: All service leavers will get full support on the resettlement journey, but there will be no redundancies of service personnel related to these reductions.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab) [V]: The Secretary of State knows that the Defence Committee has been briefed on the emerging threats and the change in technology on the battlefield over the past year or two. He seems to be arguing that, in order to modernise the armed forces, it is okay to reduce their numbers. I would argue that we can have an increase in our armed forces, the new technology and the modernisation that he has talked about. May I ask him a specific question? Our special forces, as we know, are world class. In the reduced Army, how will he maintain the calibre and quality of recruits to the special forces?

Mr Wallace: First and foremost, when it comes to numbers, carriers used to take 1,800 members to crew them; they now take 800. That is simply the direction of travel with automation and modern equipment. Tanks and armoured vehicles often have less crew than they used to. That is a fact, and it is how some of the equipment has developed. It is therefore logical to understand that sometimes we need fewer people to achieve the same lethality, or sometimes even fewer people to achieve even more lethality. A battalion of the first world war is very different from a battalion of today, and that is blatantly obvious to anyone who looks at defence capabilities.

When it comes to the recruitment of special forces, two things will help: the development of a Ranger battalion and the future commando force, where we will increase the spending, training and equipment available to them. The basic training being around the areas that we might have seen the special forces doing 10, 15 or 20 years ago will be a great grounding. We also see that the reserve special forces regiments are becoming a very good recruiter for the regulars.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): The Defence Committee's very unsentimental report on army procurement recently concluded:

"This report reveals a woeful story of bureaucratic procrastination, military indecision, financial mismanagement and general ineptitude, which have continually bedevilled attempts to properly re-equip the British Army over the last two decades."

The Secretary of State's statement did not mention the £400 million that has just been wasted by the cancellation of the Warrior upgrade. Taken with the TRACER—Tactical Reconnaissance Armoured Combat Equipment Requirement—programme and the FRES—Future Rapid Effects System—programme in the report, that is nearly three quarters of a billion pounds of British taxpayers' money wasted by the Department for nothing. When will the Defence Secretary finally accept that procurement is the Achilles heel of the MOD? Although I do not agree with Labour that the whole Department should be put in special measures, Defence Equipment and Support undoubtedly should, because it is a basket case, and until we solve it, the rest of the review is a waste of time.

Mr Wallace: I read that report—of reports I have read in my time, I think I would give it one out of 10. [Interruption.] First of all, four members of that Committee accumulated over a decade in the Department that bought the armoured vehicles. There was no sense whatsoever of that irony in the criticism I just heard from my right hon. Friend—none at all. [Interruption.] Since I got into the Department, the first thing I did was commit to signing up Boxer, which had not been done. It had sat on the shelf for a bit. I made sure we developed Boxer, signed it up and got it delivered, and it is going to be made in the United Kingdom in a partnership between BAE and Rheinmetall. I took decisions—he may not like the decisions—about the Warrior upgrade programme. It had been, as he knows, wandering around for many, many years, including the years that he was in the Department. TRACER, if he remembers as far back as I do, was cancelled by the United States, of which we had been a partner in the mid-90s. FRES, if he remembers—I am sure he does, but it does not seem to appear in the report—was affected by the changes to the attacks on personnel by

the proliferation of basic anti-armour capability into the hands of the likes of the Taliban. That is why FRES had to be up-armoured, changed in size and changed in scale—the threat changed. *[Interruption.]* He might not have liked the consequence, but would he rather—I was not in that Department, and I am sure this would be his defence when he was in the Department—have progressed with an inadequate vehicle, where soldiers got killed, or took the decision to potentially cancel it and move on? The Boxer—

Mr Francois: I was not in the Department—you don't know what you're talking about.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I think yelling at each other is really not a good look. I think the Secretary of State has come to the end of his answer.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: May I bring a bit of peace to the Chamber by suggesting that what we all need is some stability in the Ministry of Defence? I think this is the sixth Secretary of State since 2010. I come from an Army background—my father and two brothers served in the British Army—and I represent Huddersfield, where David Brown and other major defence manufacturers are located, but it seems we want it all. We want the modern technology—I have always believed that we need an independent nuclear force—but, as I have consistently said to the Secretary of State's predecessors since 2010, despite all the other things we want, at the end of the day, the Russians and the Chinese will look at us going down to 72,000 men and women in our armed services and think we have run up the white flag. What does he have to say about that?

Mr Wallace: First of all, the Russians will look at the fact that we have learned the lessons of Crimea and elsewhere and will be investing in deep fires, which were a place where we were deeply vulnerable. They have not been upgraded, which has allowed the Russians a strategic edge. They will look at the fact that we are starting to invest in ballistic missile defence capabilities and anti-missile capabilities, which we have been missing for many, many years, which is why our adversaries went there. They will look at the fact that we will invest in a multi-role surveillance vessel to protect our critical infrastructure, because the Russians worked out that we had not invested in that protection. They will see that we have seen what they are up to and we are going to do something about it. They will also see that the area where they seem to have got away with the most—the sub-threshold or grey zone, where they have inflicted cyber operations, corruption and all sorts of espionage on this country and her allies, and our citizens—is where we, too, are going to be, to compete back against them.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): We have another 12 questions to get through and we have run rather over time already, so I urge Members to be brief.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): Although I am concerned about cuts to my own service and possible stretch, I recognise that this is an excellent bit of work, and I commend my right hon. Friend for the intellectual rigour that has gone into this modern and innovative paper. Given our increasing focus on expeditionary capabilities and our allies, notably in the Pacific, does he see any change to how we might operate east of Suez?

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend makes a really important point about how we operate to make sure that we not only defend ourselves but project our influence. Being present is half the battle. Our adversaries know that, and for too long we have often remained here in the homeland and not necessarily been present. As a former Royal Logistic Corps officer, he will also recognise the key importance of enablers. The days when enablers were in the background and not given the audience or importance they deserve are over. Many countries around the world which might not want infantry or tanks to help them often want signallers, enablers or logistics. They are just as important in projecting Britain's forces and power around the world and making sure that the brand of Britain stays true to its values and helps people around the world.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab) [V]: At a time when the Government say there is no money for a proper pay rise for NHS workers, they are going to give the military the biggest financial boost since the cold war and waste billions more increasing the number of UK nuclear weapons by 40%. Each UK nuclear warhead has an explosive power eight times that of the nuclear bomb barbarically dropped on Hiroshima at the end of the second world war, killing over 140,000 civilians. If we are going to spend billions more increasing the number of nuclear weapons, what is to stop others doing the same, in a new global arms race?

Mr Wallace: We are not going to spend billions increasing the number of nuclear weapons. In 2016, the House voted collectively for a nuclear deterrent—I am sure the hon. Member did not, and certainly the leader he used to follow did not either. That is what it believes, and I think the number of people who do not believe it are probably joining the hon. Member in the room where he asked the question.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I congratulate and thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. The review specifically refers to a more productive integration of the reserve forces. Will he give a bit more detail on that and confirm that the reserves have to remain a vital part of our whole force structure?

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the reserves are really important; they are more important than they have ever been. Looking across the three services, we see that some services embrace them well and some could do a lot more. I have already started the process of trying to remove barriers—for example, by ensuring that the attitude in the Department to using reserves is not as a last resort, but as an integral part of what we wish to do. RF30 will report soon. No doubt, my hon. Friend will be interested in the results. In response to covid, there has been seamlessness between reserves and regulars across the services. We need to embrace that even more to ensure that the men and women who want to contribute to this country's defence—no matter who they are—can do so and can bring those skills to bear.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP) [V]: I would like to hear a little more about how the reduction in troop numbers is going to be managed. Will the Secretary of State confirm that there will be no redundancies? In the past, a shortage of personnel has

[Carol Monaghan]

meant an increased workload for those who remain. How will he ensure that personnel are able to maintain a good work-life balance if they are having to carry out the work of more people?

Mr Wallace: First of all, there will not be any redundancies. This process can be managed over the next five years by reducing inflow on recruitment. Secondly, to ensure that people are not overburdened, we are going to apply intelligent recruiting, which will allow people greater choice when they arrive at the recruitment centres or at training to ensure that units that are undermanned are properly in receipt of enough people.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): I welcome this thoughtful defence Command Paper, particularly the new investment in space, cyber, autonomous vehicles, defence intelligence and defence science. But is it not the case that there is still a need for metal on the ground? I welcome the new investment in the Boxer vehicle programme and the Challenger 3 programme. Those programmes are very welcome throughout the west midlands, but will the Secretary of State tell the House what they will mean for Shropshire in particular? Finally, may I put in an early bid for the new special operations brigade to come and reside in Shropshire, near to Hereford—the SAS—and to the Welsh training mountains?

Mr Wallace: There is the first bid, from my hon. Friend's constituency. My hon. Friend is a doughty fighter for his constituents. He has consistently asked me to ensure that upgrades to the Boxer and Challenger vehicles happen. I am delighted to say to him, first of all, that Boxer is coming, and I have asked for its delivery to be accelerated to ensure that the Army gets it. In addition, the Challenger will be upgraded, which is good news for his work and his constituency.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): I see that units of Government press officers have been on manoeuvres this past week, but unfortunately they have been spinning on cuts to our Army. The regular Army will have shrunk from 113,000 to 72,000 under Conservative Governments since 2010, so why does the Secretary of State not accept that reducing the size of our forces makes our country less agile and less secure?

Mr Wallace: I do not think it does. When the hon. Gentleman's party was in government, it did not reverse the reductions from the time that I was in the Army. As I have said throughout this afternoon, the key is getting the balance of giving our soldiers and sailors the right protections they need, ensuring that our ambition does not overstretch them, and ensuring that they have the right training and investment in themselves so that they not only stay, but have a fulfilled career.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I very much welcome my right hon. Friend's words from the Dispatch Box this afternoon, especially his commitment to more than 20 frigates and destroyers by the end of the next decade, but I was slightly concerned by the vague reference to the new automatic mine-hunting system, which will replace the Sandown and Hunt classes. My right hon. Friend knows that these two classes do

far more than just hunt mines; they are a great deterrent and deliver a presence in supporting our allies around the world. Will he give us more detail on what this new automatic mine-hunting capability is, and on whether the Sandown and Hunt classes will be replaced like for like?

Mr Wallace: If my hon. Friend would like me to, I would be delighted to get him a briefing on the exact progress of that system. Automated mine-hunting can currently cover, in key points, far more area than a ship, and it is really important for some parts of the patrols and areas that we cover. I would be delighted to give him some more detail; I will get him a briefing.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab) [V]: Last week, the Prime Minister was unable to state how the Government's commitment to international law fitted with breaching article 6 of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. The Defence Secretary has since said that the raising of the cap on the nuclear warhead stockpile is to ensure the UK has a credible nuclear deterrent in response to Russia and others, and that we will still have one of the lowest stockpiles. Will he explain for exactly how long our deterrent has not been credible? How does this increase—below others—make it now credible?

Mr Wallace: I am afraid that I cannot, at the Dispatch Box, tell people about the credibility of our nuclear deterrent in detail, because to do so would undermine its security. However, I can assure the hon. Lady that we keep it under review, and as we announced last week, it is important to increase the warheads in stockpile—which still makes us the lowest of the declared nuclear powers—to make sure it remains credible.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con) [V]: The detail of the announcement, wide-ranging and important as it is, will be chewed over over the coming days, and there will be some good bits and some bad bits. However, I congratulate the Secretary of State on the honesty, the directness and the detail in this Command Paper, which is very refreshing indeed.

I welcome the concentration on climate change in the integrated review. The Secretary of State will know very well that the worrying rate of retreating ice in the Arctic presents commercial opportunities as well as threats, yet at the same time, the Russians have increased their submarine and above-surface capabilities in the Arctic very considerably in recent years. What does the Secretary of State intend to do with regard to safeguarding our commercial vehicles, which may well be making use of the northern sea route, in years to come?

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out the challenges and opportunities around the high north, and indeed the growing activities of the Russian navy's northern fleet. That is why we think one of the best ways to secure that commercial traffic is to be more present: we recently sent ships into the Barents sea for the first time since the cold war, and will continue to do so. We will always work with our allies up there, whether that is Norway, the United States or even France, on some of these issues. That is why it is part of NATO's home beat, and it is one of the reasons why it is

important to make sure we have a fleet that is viable, but also available to always respond to the different threats as they emerge.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): Our brave and highly trained military servicemen and servicewomen are, as the Defence Secretary himself stated a short while ago, our finest defence asset. However, while talking tough on defence, the Conservative Government have eroded their morale and strength by cutting over 45,000 personnel during this decade of decline, made worse still by today's manifesto-breaking commitment to reduce the Army's size to a mere 72,500, to the extent that our smaller Army is now a cause for serious concern for our global allies. Does the Secretary of State agree with the Chief of the Defence Staff that the ability to field a warfighting division is the standard by which the UK Army will be judged as credible by its allies?

Mr Wallace: First of all, yes, and we can. Secondly, if the hon. Gentleman really wants to know what is morale-sapping, it is something I experienced under his Government and, indeed, the Conservative Government: sitting in the back of something that is unprotected and vulnerable to the people who want to kill you.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I very much welcome this defence review: it is a proper look at the threats as they evolve and at what is moving forward, which is a welcome change from what has gone on in the past. However, we must also recognise that article 42 of the Lisbon treaty, on permanent structured co-operation, puts at real risk the NATO alliance, especially given—as we have seen in the past weeks—the unreliability of the EU and the commitments it makes. Our naval presence is going to be so important to our trade routes and protection of our data cables, so I ask my right hon. Friend whether he will have the capability after this review to react quickly and upgrade our naval capability if, sadly, we cannot rely on allies we thought we could rely on.

Mr Wallace: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. NATO, first and foremost, is the guarantor of European security; no other organisation is, and we do not forget that. Of course, we sit around as NATO Defence Ministers and Foreign Ministers and discuss that with all those partners. There is a proper process of verifying and holding to account our commitments, which is why the national readiness initiative that, predominantly, the United States kicked off a few years ago was all about making sure we were ready and able. It is a constant process of being validated and making sure we can deliver what we are supposed to, and NATO publishes its annual reports and does indeed hold us to account. We are confident that we can do that, but also, as the second biggest spender in NATO

and with a large group of forces—despite the narrative that is being put out by the Opposition—we are capable of doing concurrent operations and other types of operations if needed.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab) [V]: According to Admiral Mike Mullen, the ex-chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, 70,000-odd armed forces is about the same size as the entire US special forces. To quote him, he said that the UK forces will be getting “pretty small”. I know that our armed forces are very special, but perhaps the absence of the right hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) is explained by these announcements. His lesson—and, I am sure, that of the Secretary of State—was that we needed boots on the ground if we were ever to win the peace. That was surely the lesson of Sierra Leone, Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan. How on earth will we achieve that in future?

Mr Wallace: The lesson of Sierra Leone and other places is actually that if we engage in conflict prevention early enough and build out the capacity of a country to resist insurgencies and subversion, we avoid having a war or conflict in the first place. The lesson of Iraq is that, yes, we can put lots of troops on the ground, but once the Iraqi army is defeated, if we do not have an alternative way to start building the state again, we have people sitting around in tanks and armoured vehicles after the conflict who are attacked on a daily basis and are the wrong people in the wrong place. I heard what the senior and respected United States admiral said today; he also said that if General Sir Nick Carter, the Chief of the Defence Staff, whom he knows well, is in support of this, then so is he.

Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con): I welcome the announcements today, especially on the formation of the Ranger regiment. I see the Secretary of State has set himself up for a win by recruiting it from 4 Rifles, which came from the legendary 2nd Battalion, the Royal Green Jackets—my own regiment. When does the Secretary of State think it will be fully formed and operational for deployment?

Mr Wallace: I think we have a volunteer here, Madam Deputy Speaker. If my hon. Friend is ready to deploy, I have somewhere I can send him next week. I have asked the Chief of the General Staff to make sure that the initial funding for starting and equipping is rolled out to at least one regiment. We obviously have to start to train them up. It is a new discipline and an addition to what they have already done, and that will take time to establish. Like my hon. Friend, I am keen to get on it as soon as possible, and then perhaps he can deploy as their honorary colonel or something.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement.

Points of Order

6.32 pm

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have given notice of my point of order. This week, the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee on which I sit published a report on supply chains linked back to Xinjiang. I raise this point of order to gain your advice and judgment on the situation I now find myself in. Officials from the Chinese embassy in London are accusing Members of Parliament, the Committee and, therefore, the House of lies. I have been bombarded by tweets. One claims that:

“Some politicians chose to believe the lies made up by a few... They chose to dance with the few anti-China elements in their clumsy dramas”.

Another states:

“Such frivolous and preposterous farces aimed to discredit and smear China will only end up undercutting their own reputation as a laughing stock.”

It goes on about facing

“the condemnation of conscience and the reckoning of justice.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, I need you to provide me with some guidance on whether this goes against the grain of allowing MPs to conduct their work without fear. Is accusing a Select Committee report of being “full of lies” a contempt of Parliament? Colleagues have noted that the language to which I have been subjected publicly could be considered threatening, but I seek your guidance. I hope you agree that we should not allow foreign interference to challenge the House, a Select Committee or any MP for doing what they were elected to do.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Lady for giving notice that she wished to raise this point of order. It is clearly unacceptable that members of Committees of this House should feel in any way threatened as a result of the views they express. Any kind of intimidatory behaviour directed at members of a Committee is wrong and this House should take it very seriously. In this case, I note that the official concerned has stated that he is not seeking to be threatening. However, if the hon. Lady feels that the issue is not resolved, I would encourage her to pursue it with the House authorities.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I too gave notice that I would raise this point of order. I understand that the Northern Ireland Secretary will lay matters before this House to take upon himself powers to direct the Northern Ireland Department of Health and, indeed, the Assembly on the devolved and controversial matter of abortion. This will have grave implications for the “New Decade, New Approach” agreement and the devolution settlement. It would be unprecedented for a London Department to direct a devolved Northern Ireland Department. Has the Secretary of State indicated to the Chair that he intends to make a statement on this? How can we scrutinise this properly and hold this Government to account?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving notice of his point of order. I cannot speak for the business managers, and I am not aware of notification of a statement, but I am sure that Government Front Benchers will have heard what he has said about the desirability of notice of a debate on such matters.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani), I do not think that it is a case of whether one feels intimidated; surely it is a case of somebody attached to a foreign embassy sending an electronic message directly to the Twitter account of a parliamentarian that would make anybody feel intimidated. I do hope that you and Mr Speaker will consider whether some representations can be made about conduct, or misconduct, of this sort.

Madam Deputy Speaker: As I think I made clear, it is extremely important that members of Committees or Members of Parliament in general do not feel threatened. As I say, I would suggest that any further representations should be made to the House authorities if there is a feeling that this is in any way continuing or has not been resolved in a satisfactory manner.

I will now suspend the House for three minutes for arrangements to be made for the next business.

6.37 pm

Sitting suspended.

Trade Bill

Consideration of Lords message

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I must draw the House's attention to the fact that financial privilege is engaged by Lords amendment 3E. If any Lords amendment engaging financial privilege is agreed to, I will cause the customary entry waiving Commons financial privilege to be entered in the *Journal*.

After Clause 2

TRADE AGREEMENTS AND GENOCIDE

6.41 pm

The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands): I beg to move,

That this House insists on its Amendments Nos. 3C and 3D and disagrees with the Lords in their Amendment No. 3E.

Let me start by saying that I heard the point of order from my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani), and the apparent targeting of her in an intimidatory way by anybody, including foreign embassies, is totally unacceptable. I will pass her comments directly to the Foreign Secretary. The Government take very seriously indeed the intimidation of Members of Parliament, as indeed do the House authorities. I remember that about 10 years ago, in a meeting, actually, with Lord Alton and the North Korean Speaker, I was shoved by a North Korean diplomat, and it was taken up very seriously by this House and by the Foreign Office at the time.

The Government agree with the principle that our proposed free trade agreements should be subject to the most searching parliamentary scrutiny in any instance where genocide may be occurring. The amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) passed by this House on 9 February delivers on that principle, and that is why the Government continue to support it today.

That amendment ensures that the Government must put their position on the record in writing, in response to a Select Committee publication raising credible reports of genocide in a country with which we are proposing a bilateral free trade agreement. Where the Committee is not content with the response, it can insist on a parliamentary debate, and the Government will be obliged to make time for that.

The amendment also affords the responsible Commons Select Committee the responsibility to draft the motion for debate. That is a very powerful ability for Parliament to stop any free trade agreement negotiations. This is a substantial concession, affording Parliament significant control over the process, and it has the Government's full support. On timing and effectiveness, to be very clear, the Government expect that their production of a report and the scheduling of any subsequent debate would be undertaken swiftly and within agreed timescales.

I note that in the amendment passed by the Lords, tabled by Lord Alton, peers have removed the role that they had previously proposed for the High Court. Hon. Members will recall that it is the Government's long-standing position that the determination of genocide is a matter for a competent court. As I have previously made clear, competent courts include relevant international courts and domestic criminal courts.

Let me be clear on this point: we are not changing settled Government policy here. But likewise, in supporting the amendment from the Chair of the Select Committee on Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, we are not asking Parliament to make a determination on whether genocide has occurred. We are instead supporting a process that guarantees scrutiny and debate where Parliament has established for itself that credible reports of genocide exist. That is not the same as a judicial finding; nor is it intended to be. It is both a lower bar and swifter to establish credible reports than it is to prove genocide itself, and it leads to a debate on a substantive motion. I believe that that is the right way forward.

That brings me to the latest amendment passed by a former Liberal MP, Lord Alton, in the other place, which seeks to give a quasi-judicial role to an ad hoc parliamentary judicial Committee to make preliminary determinations of genocide. Lord Alton proposes that this ad hoc Committee would be comprised of five Members from either House who have all held "high judicial office". It should be clear that this approach is problematic, first, because it is in conflict with the Government's settled policy. Competent courts must make determinations on genocide, not parliamentary Committees.

6.45 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I do not pretend to have expertise in this controversy, but I recall that one of the objections made when it was last debated was that an outside court would be taking power away from this Parliament if it were to make the determination, yet now the Government seem to be objecting to parliamentarians making the determination, even though they are highly qualified by dint of being former judges. That seems to be a little bit of a cake-and-eat-it situation.

Greg Hands: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention, because there are clearly areas of possible confusion in this space, so let me be absolutely clear that the objection from the Government was because the High Court would be determining that there be a debate in Parliament. That is the crucial difference between the previous Alton amendment and our objections to this one. It is not about whether genocide is determined; it is about whether the courts dictate the proceedings of Parliament.

The approach that Lord Alton proposes is problematic, first, because it is in conflict with the Government's settled policy, as I have said. Giving such a power to an ad hoc parliamentary judicial Committee would represent a fundamental constitutional reform. It would blur the distinction between courts and Parliament and upset the separation of powers, and so the Government cannot support it.

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way and for his comments earlier. However, I am slightly anxious that he may be misrepresenting the situation from the Dispatch Box.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Unintentionally.

Ms Ghani: Unintentionally, yes; forgive me. The term "quasi-judicial" has a meaning in law. The Alton amendment proposes that Members of the House of

[Ms Ghani]

Lords who were previously judges are able to make and review any decision that the House of Commons Select Committee makes. It is not a court; it is just a Select Committee in the House of Lords. What has the Minister got to fear?

Greg Hands: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, but the definition in the amendment of those who have held “high judicial office” would, in the view of the Government, inevitably confer quasi-judicial status on that Committee. By definition it would have five Members who have held high judicial office; it would be very difficult not to have the impression that it would operate in a quasi-judicial manner.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Greg Hands: I am going to make some progress; there is very limited time.

Let me deal with the matter of engaging financial privilege. When an amendment is designated as engaging Commons financial privilege, the Government are procedurally required to provide this as the reason if disagreeing to the motion, although our reasons for disagreeing in this instance are much broader, as I have just set out. Financial privilege is sufficient reason in itself to deem the amendment disagreed to. The designation of Lords amendments as engaging financial privilege is an impartial process determined by the Speaker on the advice of House authorities.

We have listened closely to debates in both this House and the other place and take seriously the issue of genocide and the passions it has rightly stirred on all sides. Consequently, I can announce from this Dispatch Box today that the Government are willing to work with Parliament and relevant Select Committee Chairs should they choose to establish new Joint Committees or sub-committees or to engage the expertise of former members of the judiciary in considering reports of genocide in the context of our proposed free trade agreements.

For example, a new Joint Committee could be made up of members of both Select Committees. The relevant Lords Committee would have Cross-Bench membership and it would be possible for the convener to ensure that at least one of those members was an ex-judge. That is the established process followed for other Committees, which have been chaired by ex-Law Lords. In addition, with the agreement of the usual channels, it would be possible for additional Members with relevant expertise to be appointed to the Joint Committee, as is the case with the Lords Sub-Committee on the Northern Ireland protocol. The Joint Committee would also be able to take evidence from other former members of the judiciary, if desired.

Tim Loughton: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: I am going to make more progress.

In any case, it is not necessary to set out such provision in legislation. In fact, I would be surprised if hon. Members voted today to bind themselves by setting out in legislation the procedures of a parliamentary Sub-Committee. Parliament is free to amend its Standing

Orders to set up Committees and Sub-Committees as it chooses, and to take evidence from those with legal expertise if it deems that to be necessary. Legislating for these matters would only serve to remove flexibility from both Parliament and Government should the issue of genocide as it pertains to trade arise in future. A more nimble and flexible approach may be necessary depending on the context.

The precise details remain to be worked out—by Parliament, quite properly—but I hope it will be clear from what I have said today that the Government are supportive of working with hon. Members on this issue, and we are committed to doing so in line with the process previously agreed to by this House on 9 February.

Tim Loughton: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: There is very limited time in this debate.

However, we regret that we cannot support the creation of a parliamentary judicial Committee as envisaged in Lord Alton’s amendment, as it blurs the distinction between the legislative and the judicial, and runs contrary to Government policy that it is for competent courts to make determinations of genocide.

Finally, I would like to highlight the statement that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made earlier today on the sanctions that the Government will be undertaking. I hope that that is another illustration of the Government’s commitment in this very important area, taking tough action on China in relation to Xinjiang with Magnitsky sanctions, in conjunction with our international allies.

In the light of what I have said, I hope hon. Members will support amendments 3C and 3D.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I inform the House that the Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of Nusrat Ghani.

Before I call the shadow Secretary of State, I inform the House that there will be a three-minute limit on speeches for Back Benchers. There is a countdown clock for those in the Chamber, and for those participating virtually it will be on their screens.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): By my calculations, it has been three years, two months and two weeks since this House first debated the Government’s proposed Trade Bill, so if today’s debate proves to be the final one on a long drawn-out Bill, it would be appropriate to thank all Members of both Houses, all the parliamentary Clerks and all the officials in the Department for International Trade who have contributed to its passage.

Looking back at the very first day of debate in January 2018, I was struck by two things that were said by the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), the then Secretary of State, which seem very prescient in retrospect. The first was:

“Trade is an issue that transcends party politics”.—[*Official Report*, 9 January 2018; Vol. 634, c. 220.]

Time and again over the past three years, we have seen that to be the case, as Members from all sides of the House have campaigned together on different issues from farming standards to online harms. It seems fitting, after more than three years, that we should have been

left with one final issue to resolve: a cross-party consensus on where we stand as a Parliament and on what we believe as a country will be most important.

That relates to the second thing that the former Secretary of State said three years ago, which I believe is equally relevant today. He said that

“trade is not only about self-interested commercial gain.”—[*Official Report*, 9 January 2018; Vol. 634, c. 209.]

For me, that simple statement of principle goes to the heart of the debate we have had in recent months, and especially in the past week, about human rights and trade. It goes to the heart of the decision that we have to take today on the Alton amendment to the genocide amendment.

I know that some people believe that the choices we make as a country on with whom to sign trade deals should be entirely dictated by our commercial interests and that considerations about human rights should be dealt with entirely separately. But there is another point of view—I believe it is shared by the majority of people in this country and by the majority of MPs in this House—which is simply this: there is a line that needs to be drawn; there are certain countries whose crimes are so great that they cannot simply be ignored on the basis of commercial self-interest; and Britain as a country must be willing to say no to trade deals with countries that cross that line.

The Alton amendment, as advanced today by the hon. Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani), seeks to draw that line by giving Parliament the power to debate whether Britain should sign any form of bilateral trade or investment deal with a Government held responsible for genocide by our country’s most experienced judges. Whether Members in this House decide to support the amendment today should have nothing to do with what party they represent. It should have nothing to do with the long overdue sanctions against Chinese officials announced by the Foreign Secretary earlier today. With all due respect to the Minister for Trade Policy, it should have nothing to do with the points of constitutional precedence that he made in his opening speech.

Whether we support the Alton amendment should only come down to the fundamental question, which is one we must all ask ourselves: should Britain be willing to sign trade agreements with Governments who are committing genocide? Should Britain be willing to sign trade deals with a Government who are engaging in torture, mass detention, slave labour, organ harvesting and non-judicial executions—not on an isolated basis, but on an industrial scale—against the Uyghur population in Xinjiang? Should Britain be willing to sign trade deals with a Government who are separating hundreds of thousands of children from their parents and re-educating them in different languages, religion and history in an attempt to wipe the Uyghur culture off the Chinese map? Should Britain be willing to sign trade deals with a Government who are carrying out the systematic sexual abuse, rape and sterilisation of hundreds of thousands of women in Xinjiang in an attempt to guarantee that this current generation of Uyghur children is the last?

I cannot see how anyone in this House can read the evidence of those crimes being committed against the Uyghurs and think that a potential trade or investment

deal with China can be considered only on its commercial merits and not on the basis of morality. That is surely where we need to draw the line, and that is what the Alton amendment seeks to do. That is why I urge Members from all parts of the House to look into their souls this afternoon, to vote with their conscience and to make clear that this is the line that Britain is not prepared to cross.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: I beg to move amendment (a), to leave out from House to “with” and insert “agrees”.

I rise to continue the debate that has been going on among us about what constitutes a fair and reasonable settlement with the Government. I started by moving the amendment standing in my name, and that of my hon. Friends the Members for Wealden (Ms Ghani) and for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), because I think that the Government have got themselves twisted up in knots, and I think my right hon. Friend the Minister knows that.

My right hon. Friend knows very well that, when the amendment was first put through the Lords, I spoke to a number of Ministers. I must say that the reaction of each of them was, “I don’t think there is a problem here. You have met our red lines, and this is a Committee in the Lords.” Suddenly, late in the day, they discovered this phenomenal red line called “quasi-judicial”.

On the definition the Government have given us today, “quasi-judicial” can be applied to any Select Committee in the House of Commons. Here is what a quasi-judicial committee is defined as in legal terms:

“A proceeding conducted by an administrative or executive official”.

That is important, because Parliament does not have any of those on its Committees—Parliament is separate from the Executive—so that does not apply to Parliament. The Minister knows very well that in this amendment, we have allowed the Government to set the terms of how the Committee will sit, the balance of evidence and the kind of peers who would sit on it, which is to do with the judiciary.

7 pm

Tim Loughton: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is very difficult to see a position that the Minister would actually agree to, yet the Lords have changed and tried to compromise so often? Does he also agree that the Uyghurs do not come under the remit of the Government’s amendment to the Bill, and therefore would be given no protection by this House?

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: Yes; I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. The problem is that this Lords amendment incorporates the original Neill amendment in its entirety and makes two adjustments. First, there are already trade arrangements with China, but they are pushed aside in this. It can only be an FTA, and it is a prospective one, which means that the Uyghurs are not going to get in front of the Select Committee at all. Secondly—this is very important—it opens the door, because of the definition, to any state activist who has nothing to do with the authority in that state. All QCs who have seen the amendment have accepted that this is a major problem, so we have dealt with that, made it a better arrangement and added the legal Committee.

[*Sir Iain Duncan Smith*]

It seems to me that the Government simply do not want to have these judges involved. They say, “We’ll have a judge, if you want, on one of the Select Committees.” Does that not apparently make it another quasi-judicial Committee? If the Minister does not mind me saying so, it is a bit sad that the Government could not have accepted this amendment. There was no need for us to be here today voting on it. This was a major compromise, and it would have settled everything.

My right hon. Friend the Minister knows that I have huge respect for him in the job that he has to do right now, but I simply say this. We have a chance tonight, following a very good statement by the Foreign Secretary, to send the message that we simply will not put up with this; we are not frightened of finding that this is genocide, and we are not frightened of saying it from the steepletops. We know that we have to stand up for those who have no voice. This Chamber has a history of doing that. It has an opportunity tonight to do that, and I am sorry that my Government, whom I hugely respect, do not think that they can do it. I urge Members to vote for this Lords amendment.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP) [V]: Madam Deputy Speaker, I notice that the countdown timer is running, but I assume that I get the Front-Bench privilege for this speech.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): The hon. Gentleman certainly does. It is a mistake if the countdown timer is running.

Drew Hendry: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The original intent of the Lords amendment on genocide was to bind the Government, to ensure that their trade policy was not actively engaging in propping up the economy of a country that was committing genocide. The SNP regarded that as being reflective of the bare minimum standards of what should be our commitments to human rights and global citizenship. I say “bare minimum” because much more power should be given to that commitment than was contained even in that amendment. We should see an approach along the lines of a comprehensive cross-departmental strategy aimed at preventing atrocities and binding the Government in their behaviour and intent. The original amendment from Lord Alton was a bit hingu-tringum; despite the fact that it was not nearly strong enough, we supported it, as it was at least a step in the right direction. Make no mistake: as we debate the text of this Bill, we are very far away from even that place.

Any idea that we are actively debating accountability on human rights, even on the terms originally intended, is blown apart by the very Government texts that the House is now considering. The Government have maintained that they do not need the law to reflect their commitments to human rights, and that they would not do anything to compromise them. Furthermore, they maintain that their so-called compromise amendment facilitates a new level of commitment, but as soon as one Minister pours honey in the public’s ears, another drops the mask and lets slip the poisonous truth that condemns those warm words as cozenage.

It is clear from the remarks of the Foreign Secretary, who is also the de facto Deputy Prime Minister, that there is absolutely no substance to the Government’s rhetoric about their being champions for human rights at every turn; shamefully, they are willing to actively pursue an unethical trade policy. If there was ever any doubt about the hollowness of the maxim of global Britain, it has rung out loud and clear in the Foreign Secretary’s words. The amendment backed by the Government is completely inadequate in checking their actions. It would bind them to naught, and it is crystal clear that in reality the Government would rather not be subject to any moral position or restriction on their trade policy.

The Government could have committed in the Bill to maintaining existing consumer and labour standards; they turned that chance down, and the public should ask why. The answer is because they are all too willing and ready to sacrifice them to get a deal—any deal. Anyone naive enough to think that that is not the case should look at what is happening with the NHS and human rights. The Government could have taken the opportunity to ensure the protection of all aspects of the NHS from private foreign procurement, but they turned the chance down. Why? Well, in a sign of the times, they have been busy allowing the sale of NHS GP practices to US companies, with the US health insurance giant Centene Corp quietly assuming control of the care of half a million patients in recent weeks. Donald Trump may mercifully be gone, but few will forget the rare moment of honesty when he confirmed that the NHS is on the table in a US-UK trade deal. We all know that it very much still is. His Tory cohorts are still here and have earned zero trust over their deeds and actions.

We now see the Government looking to shirk their commitments on matching their trade policy to our values on protecting human rights. Why? Again, we know exactly why, thanks to the words of the Foreign Secretary. The cat is not only out of the bag, but running feral, alerting the world to the fact that human rights abuses will not matter to the UK. This Government will forgive almost anything in their haste to get a deal—any deal. They turned down the chance to do the right thing. We can hear loudly and clearly that behind the scenes, this does not matter to the Government; publicly, we can see the Government retreating from their legally binding manifesto commitment to international aid spending. The amendment does not do justice to the intentions of Members from all parties who have sought to meet that commitment head-on.

The Government’s empty words on global Britain have no bearing on virtually any aspect of their policy on protecting the most vulnerable around the world, on how we determine any notion of responsibility for who the UK sells arms to, or now, apparently, who we trade with. If this issue were not so serious, it would be laughable that this Government are trying to rest on laurels that simply do not exist. They should wake up to the reality that the UK’s moral standing is already badly damaged. This legislation makes matters worse. With their actions today, the Government have done nothing to repair that standing; they are solely responsible for bringing it into such disrepute.

Today, as the UK Food and Drink Federation publishes details of how exports of beef, pork and cheese to the EU have been savaged, having fallen by more than 80%—for salmon it is 98%, which is in effect an utter wipeout of a

major Scottish export—another poll shows that the people of Scotland have had enough of this attitude; it confirms majority support for independence, as does the long-term poll tracking. The people of Scotland see for themselves the economic and moral vacuums being created by this Tory Government. When they look at this shameful situation, they know that the only way to protect our international trade reputation, and to be represented in the way that they want, as global citizens, is if Scotland once again joins the international community as an independent nation.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): Following that speech, I will return to the subject we are discussing. I thank the shadow Secretary of State for her generous words and her accurate quotation. None of us actually believed the process would take quite as long as it did when we began. On the point of order made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani), I am extremely distressed that she should feel frightened by the intervention of a foreign power in her actions in the House of Commons. Given the level of cyber-intrusion in the United Kingdom in general, it is perhaps something we should all be afraid of.

There are three brief reasons why I support the Government's position, and I have set them out before. First, I do not believe we should make generic law on the basis of specific cases. The history of our legislation is littered with victims of unintended consequences, which come about when we make law in that way. We should have specific actions for specific issues, such as the actions set out by the Foreign Secretary today on the atrocious way the Chinese treat the Uyghurs. That is the appropriate way to proceed.

Secondly, I believe that the House can vote down any free trade agreement through the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 process. If a preferential free trade agreement with China was proposed that gave China greater access to the United Kingdom market than it would have under World Trade Organisation regulations, we would already have the ability to block it; but I do not believe, for a range of reasons, that we are likely to see that any time soon. The trade conditions, never mind the human rights conditions, mean that is not going to happen.

Thirdly, I do not believe we should restrict the right of the elected Government and the House of Commons to implement policies on which a Government were elected. That is the point of principle that I have raised in every single debate we have had on this issue. The House of Commons should reject unwarranted intrusion, whether by an unelected Lords Committee of senior judges or the courts, on to the rights of democratically elected Governments to implement the policies on which they have been elected. This House should not put limits on what they can do, or, moreover, allow elements outside the House of Commons to do so. That would set a constitutional precedent that we would come to regret in time, whatever the good reason was for considering those changes.

Ms Ghani: In this place we should recognise a win, so I am grateful that the Government have accepted the principle that they cannot be unaccountable when negotiating trade deals with genocidal states. That is the proposition in the Government's Neill amendment, which

we have banked. However, the proposed Government amendment excludes the Uyghurs, which makes no sense considering the very forceful statement made by the Foreign Secretary just a few hours ago. I welcomed the Foreign Secretary's statement, especially the sanctions. We have also banked that, but the message we are sending to tyrannical states by denying the genocide amendment is that we have a two-tier genocide system, from which the Uyghurs are excluded.

In case it has to be said, I support my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith)—and my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton)—who is moving my amendment to agree with the Alton amendment, formally known as the genocide amendment. I regret that I cannot support the Government's amendment, because it responds to the Uyghur crisis by producing an amendment that excludes them. The Government amendment applies only to countries that are formally negotiating a free trade agreement. The genocide amendment excludes the Uyghurs. Considering everything that has been said today, I really think that is a shameful way to deal with our international and national responsibility. It fundamentally sends a message that we have a two-tier system.

I was trying to explain this to my daughter this morning. It is as if the Government put together a call for evidence on violence against women and girls and said, "We're not going to allow women and girls to give evidence." Let me explain. The forced sterilisation of Uyghur women is at a rate that makes "The Handmaid's Tale" seem like a fairy tale. There is a birth rate drop of 84%—a clear marker of genocide. We are saying to Uyghur women, "You don't matter. Anyone else but you can present to the Select Committee."

Tim Loughton: Not only does the Government's legislation not cater for the Uyghurs at all, but this afternoon's announcement, welcome though it was as an extra step, does not include Chen Quanguo. As my hon. Friend knows, he is the chief of the Communist party in Xinjiang. He is the author and architect of some of these genocidal activities and he needs to be held to account.

Ms Ghani: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. This is why it is so important that we back the genocide amendment and give teeth to all the statements made in the House.

7.15 pm

I know that the president of the World Uyghur Congress has written to many Members and said, "We do not understand why the UK Government would treat us like this, bringing forward a proposal which excludes us in response to a campaign which is all about the suffering of our people." I am grateful for how far the Government have moved, but we moved too. I just wanted to ensure that the Uyghur people were treated equally to everybody else facing a similar plight. Today, we have an historic vote on a simple question: do we apply genocide policy equally to all people or do we have a two-tier genocide policy now? The Board of Deputies of British Jews wrote

"we are always extremely hesitant to consider comparisons with the Holocaust."

But it also “noted the similarities” between what is happening in China and what happened in Nazi Germany. By backing the genocide amendment, we can act when we say, “Never again”, by allowing the Uyghur to be included in, not excluded from, the Government motion. I hope colleagues will join me in the Aye Lobby on the genocide amendment, which just gives further teeth to the Government’s earlier sanctions and tidies up a little flaw in the Government’s proposal. We cannot have a two-tier genocide process. We have moved so far forward, let us not fall at the last hurdle. We must and we can be on the right side of history, by voting for the genocide amendment.

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab) [V]: I support the motion tabled by the hon. Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani) and very much appreciate the opportunity this evening for a straight vote on the Alton amendment, which is particularly welcome in the light of the procedural shenanigans that prevented it last time. I want to call out the rank hypocrisy of the Government on their approach to the whole issue of determining whether a genocide is taking place. They have always ducked the question of whether the Chinese regime is committing genocide against the Uyghur people in Xinjiang by saying that the determination of genocide is a judicial decision, not a political one, and that it requires legal determination. The Prime Minister said that when he was the Foreign Secretary; when answering Foreign Office questions in November 2017, he said:

“genocide is a strict legal term, and we hesitate to deploy it without a proper judicial decision.”—[*Official Report*, 21 November 2017; Vol. 631, c. 839.]

In fairness, that has been the position of successive Governments, but this Government know that there is no international mechanism that will enable a legal determination on genocide against the Uyghurs because China will use its veto. None of the options for competent courts under international law is viable.

Now that there is a way forward in a domestic setting with the new Alton amendment, which in itself is a significant compromise—we are no longer considering a role for the High Court, but one for former senior judges in the House of Lords to make a determination on genocide—the Government say that they are happy to leave this issue to parliamentary Select Committees instead. This is unconscionable, unacceptable, breathtaking hypocrisy, and the House should take a stand against it today. If the Government are acting in good faith, I cannot think of any reason why they will not accept a role for the judges panel in the House of Lords, as per the Alton amendment. So we all have a fundamental judgment to make today. It has nothing to do with constitutional precedent or any other separate actions that the Government have announced today, in particular their welcome, though long overdue, decisions on deploying the Magnitsky sanctions regime. Today is simply about whether we draw a line in the sand and say that Britain must not do trade deals with countries that commit genocide. That is the only issue at stake here today, which is why I urge all Members to vote for the Alton amendment this evening.

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): I would like start by commending the Department for International Trade for its fantastic work in continuing to secure free trade agreements around the world. Last week, I hosted a webinar on exporting, in partnership

with the Department and my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Imran Ahmad Khan). It was inspiring to hear of the opportunities our small and medium-sized businesses were taking in boosting skills and jobs in our local areas. With about 6.5 million UK jobs supported by UK exports, it is vital that we continue to support and encourage businesses to export, which will help drive a jobs-led recovery from the covid-19 pandemic.

The Bill updates and builds on our existing continuity trading relationship, which formed part of our membership with the EU. I particularly welcome the WTO’s agreement on Government procurement, which will secure access for UK businesses to overseas procurement opportunities worth £1.3 trillion a year. I also welcome the new trade remedies authority, which will enable Britain to secure the benefits of freedom while providing a safety net for domestic industries.

This country leads the way in making the case for human rights, as proven by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary’s statement this afternoon, and we have not embraced an independent trading policy to do otherwise. Our trading policy must therefore reflect our human rights priorities in a way that is both practical and coherent with our constitution. First, in order to work effectively, the determination of matters of genocide needs to be practical and follow established methods. As a result, it is perfectly reasonable for the judgment to rest with the competent courts, which include domestic criminal courts and relevant international courts, rather than Governments or non-judicial bodies. We all support the objective of upholding human rights; it is a question of how we best achieve that in practice.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands) has already stated, the Government have listened and given an assurance that Parliament and Select Committee Chairs will be part of the process to establish new joint committees or sub-committees or to bring in the expertise of former members of the judiciary. Amendments proposed by the other place, however, would apply a wrecking ball and enable the High Court to fundamentally challenge the royal prerogative. In my view, such a move would undermine our confidence in Parliament.

Brexit was about strengthening the voice that Parliament has. This Bill and the amendment from my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) give a clear role for Parliament to act quickly and decisively in human rights situations, while also seizing the new global opportunities ahead.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD) [V]: As the shadow Secretary of State for International Trade pointed out earlier, we have had many debates in this place about the Trade Bill, but today there is only one question before us: should the UK have trade deals or agreements with countries that practise genocide on their own people? It seems very clear to me and my fellow Liberal Democrat Members that we need to grab this opportunity to make that very clear statement. We welcome the Foreign Secretary’s statement earlier today about the Magnitsky sanctions, but we absolutely must follow that up and make it so clear in everything we do that we do not tolerate genocide in any shape or form.

The Liberal Democrats therefore remain unflinching in our support of Lord Alton’s amendment. We welcome the fact that their lordships have once again returned

the Bill to the Commons with this amendment. I urge the Government to listen to all the cross-party voices on this issue and allow the amendment to stand. Time is short, so I will not rehearse all the reasons why this genocide amendment is so necessary in combating the actions of regimes against their own people, such as we are currently seeing against the Uyghurs in China at this very moment.

It continues to baffle me that this Government, which fought so hard for the rights of the UK to agree its own trade deals, have so little to say about how they plan to use that power. They have resisted calls from across the House to use the power of our trade deals to demand environmental, social or human rights improvements from our trading partners. How can we ensure that our goods and services will not be cheaply traded away if the Government will not even allow this amendment? The Government's objections to the original amendment have been ably addressed by their lordships, and we will be voting this evening for the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani).

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I would have no hesitation in voting against a trade deal with a state that commits genocide, nor would I have any hesitation in voting against a trade deal with a state whose oppressive behaviour and conduct fell short of the legal definition of genocide. But either way, those are political decisions and should be taken here; therefore, we need a political process to deal with those.

That is why, despite the changes, there still remain difficulties with the latest iteration of this Bill to come back from their lordships. The problem is given away by the language, which was recognised by the shadow Secretary of State when she referred to a finding by our country's most experienced judges. That is the rub of the wording of the amendment. When it talks about a "Parliamentary Judicial Committee" and "a preliminary determination", later defined as "a public finding", that is the language of courts rather than of Parliaments.

The tension is further revealed by the provisions specifying the procedure by which judges may be appointed to the parliamentary judicial committee. That is constitutionally inaccurate, never mind anything else, because once former members of the judiciary sit in the other place, they sit there as former members, no longer as judges. They have ceased their judicial function. To pass this amendment with its current wording would be constitutionally illiterate. Although the expertise of the former members of the judiciary is very great and very welcome, it is surely objectionable in principle to create a parliamentary Committee on which only one class Member of either House can serve by reference purely to their previous occupation.

Secondly, it seems to me undesirable that, by statute, we should seek to circumscribe so closely both the membership of a Committee of either House or the proceedings by which such a Committee operates, which normally should be a matter for Standing Orders. I would have thought that that was much the better way to go.

Emily Thornberry *rose—*

Sir Robert Neill: I will give way to the shadow Secretary of State, as I referred to her speech.

Emily Thornberry: The thing that has always concerned me about the hon. Gentleman's amendment is that it is for Select Committees to make decisions about whether there has been genocide, but the Chairs of the Select Committee who would be the primary candidates have all said that they do not think that they are up to it, that they do not feel that they have sufficient experience, and that it would be the sort of thing that someone with judicial experience would be better able to do.

Sir Robert Neill: That would lead the right hon. Lady back into the constitutional problem that was recognised and rejected by this House on a previous occasion with the first version of the Alton amendment. Secondly, I posit that the better way forward is to use the Standing Orders of this House to set up a Joint Committee of both Houses to scrutinise the matter. That could, of course, from the Crossbench Members of the other House, include Members of the House of Lords with former judicial experience, but they would be there as Members of the House, not as former judges and that is their proper constitutional position. None of them has sought to suggest that they will be doing so otherwise.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP) *rose—*

Tim Loughton *rose—*

Sir Robert Neill: I am sorry, but time presses. I have given way once, and, with respect, it would not be fair on other people.

I hope that, when the Minister responds to the debate, he will make it clear that the Government would facilitate the bringing forward of motions to enable the establishment of such a Joint Committee of both Houses and I hope very much then that Members of the other place with high judicial experience might well lend their expertise to that. The obvious precedent is the work of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, ably chaired by the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman). Over the years, that has established a very high reputation for its rigour of scrutiny, the quality of its decision-making, and the respect in which it is held. It is inconceivable that such a Committee would be ignored by any Government on an issue as important and significant as potential genocide by a potential trading partner. I urge the Government to take that as the right way forward rather than falling yet again into the totally well-intended, but none the less undesirable, constitutional trap of this latest iteration.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend is making a speech that contradicts the Government's position right now. The Government do not believe that what this House, or a joint House, would do is decide that genocide has taken place, so, in a sense, he is quite a long way towards our amendment.

Sir Robert Neill: I fear that my right hon. Friend misunderstands—inadvertently, I am sure. My stance is entirely consistent with that of the Government because it would be for the Select Committees to refer the matter to the Joint Committee, which would then take a view as to whether genocide had potentially taken place. Ultimately, that would then be a matter that informed the House as to whether it decided to go through with the signing off of a trade agreement. Even under the CRAg process, this House has control over that matter. There is,

[Sir Robert Neill]

therefore, with respect to my right hon. Friend, no contradiction at all. The nonsense would be to have a situation where we seek to create—however well intended—a quasi-court in the other place through the language of this amendment. That would, I suspect, do more harm than the good that is intended by it. I hope that, if the Government make clear their intentions and facilitate the setting up of a Joint Committee, we will have a better and an altogether more suitable resolution.

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab) [V]: Genocide is the most horrific act of barbarity that humans are capable of. In 20 years' time, I probably will not be around, but most Members will be. By then, the true horrors of what the Chinese regime is doing in Xinjiang will be known by all, and each Member of this House will want to look back with the knowledge that, when presented with the opportunity to do something, they took it.

7.30 pm

When we hear the word “genocide”, we think of the Nazi concentration camps, gas chambers and the horrors of the holocaust. What is happening in Xinjiang is more subtle. It is genocide by stealth: forced sterilisation, the forceable transfer of children and forced labour camps—all of a specific ethnic group. In this case it is the Uyghurs. In this case it is genocide. The genocide amendment would help us to prevent our nation from being complicit with genocidal regimes. The status quo of determining genocide is not good enough. It is foolish to rely on the International Criminal Court. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China will veto any trial. Imagine a murder suspect vetoing their own trial; the situation is ludicrous.

It has now been 75 years since the Nuremberg trials. In that time, our country has never succeeded in recognising genocide while it was happening. This is our chance to do so. In January, I joined Members across the House to remember the victims of the holocaust and to say “never again” to genocide. Now is the time to take action and put those words into practice. I appeal to all Members of this House: consider your vote carefully and vote with your conscience. In years to come, no Member wants to look back with regret. Do not be party to this Parliament looking the other way.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: Tonight the Government have to decide whether they allow Parliament to intervene in trade deals, specifically in relation to genocide. We have all heard the stories of mass rape, concentration camps, people unable to have babies, brainwash and cultural genocide. The issue is whether Parliament is given the ability, on the basis of evidence, to restrict trade in these situations.

Last time, of course, we saw a Lords amendment that said that the courts should decide whether there is conclusive evidence of genocide, and then we—the politicians in Parliament—would decide whether we restricted trade or not. It was said that these were not competent courts. Of course if you refer to “competent courts” as international courts, China can veto them, which defeats the object. It was said that that amendment would mean judicial interference in Parliament, when of course it would not.

The Lords have come back with a new amendment, saying, “Fair enough; if that’s the way you see it, we’ll have a Committee making decisions on the basis of concrete evidence that is judicially prepared.” Now the Government are saying, “Well, you can’t do that because that’s the judiciary interfering with Parliament.” They cannot have it both ways. It does seem that, in essence, this is an intentional evasion by the Government to prevent Parliament from its solemn duty to defend our intrinsic values.

I certainly do not accept the point made by the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) that the Government have some sort of mandate to muzzle debate and blur scrutiny. We must be free to debate and to decide based on the evidence. The Government must explain what they are doing if trade continues with perpetrators of genocide. We should know the economic cost of protecting our values and decide whether to act.

These are fundamental questions of humanity. The Government have no right to quash or stifle our parliamentary duty to consider them. The fundamental question is: are we going to bow to the power of China and back-room deals, or are we going to rejoice and empower Britain’s gift to the world—that is, robust and unfettered parliamentary debate on the basis of sound evidence in order to make key decisions on when and whether to put our values above our economic interests? We are morally obliged to support this amendment, and I certainly will be doing so.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): The last speaker before I call the Minister is Paul Howell.

Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con) [V]: As a member of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, which recently produced our report on Uyghur forced labour in Xinjiang and UK value chains, I understand the concerns lodged around trading with countries where genocide is suspected to be happening, or, in particular, where it is felt it is almost certain that it is happening. The supply chains of all companies operating in this space need to either dramatically increase their capability and delivery of transparency, or accept the presumption that they are profiteering from exploitation.

It is who determines getting past the key statement of whether genocide is happening in law that this amendment questions, and I believe it is clear that the place for that determination is in the courts. The Government have been consistently clear that it is for competent courts, not Committees, to make determinations of genocide. I do not believe it needs a trade agreement discussion to engage in actions on concerns as significant as genocide. I welcome the statement earlier by the Foreign Secretary on taking steps, along with our partners, where evidence is apparent of actions incompatible with our values. I wholeheartedly support his words. Indeed, I would encourage him to go further.

I believe the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) meets the concerns raised around parliamentary scrutiny in that, should a credible concern of genocide be raised within a country that we are proposing a new free trade agreement with, it ensures that a debate and a vote in Parliament would result. Credible reports rather than determination constitute a lower level of proof for stimulating this intervention, and that is wholly appropriate,

as the practical difficulties in proving genocidal intent mean that genocide is very difficult to prove even when apparently obvious.

I am convinced of the need for us to ensure that any new free trade agreements should not be made with countries where there is a credible concern regarding genocide or, indeed, any other significant human rights issues, but I am not convinced that this amendment is the mechanism by which it should be done.

Greg Hands: This has been a short but good debate. As my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) said, the amendment from the other place will have significant unintended consequences in creating a so-called parliamentary judicial Committee, destabilising the balance of powers between Parliament and judiciary while not actually helping those suffering at the hands of the Chinese authorities or those elsewhere in the world. When it comes to China, the UK is leading action internationally, as we saw earlier in this House, when the Foreign Secretary, who had already announced a series of targeted measures in respect of UK supply chains and trade, announced concerted international action through Magnitsky sanctions with 29 of our friends and allies. We will continue to hold China to account for its actions in Xinjiang.

This Bill is a hugely important and necessary piece of legislation for the UK economy. The sooner we enact it, the sooner importers, exporters and the general public can harness the benefit that it brings. Let us not forget that it is the Trade Bill—it is about trade. I will return to that in a moment.

The shadow Secretary of State spoke eloquently about human rights abuses in Xinjiang and I agreed with every word of what she described. Less than a year ago, however, she was seemingly urging us to do a trade deal with China. On 12 May 2020, from that Dispatch Box, she attacked the Government for engaging in negotiations with the United States. She said that she would not agree measures with the United States

“that would constrain the UK’s ability to negotiate our own trade agreement with China”.—[*Official Report*, 12 May 2020; Vol. 676, c. 111.]

[*Interruption.*] It is in *Hansard*. She should not have said it if she did not want to say it. So she is opposed to a trade deal with the United States in case it jeopardises a trade deal with China.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who suggested that it was difficult to see what position the Government would agree with. I would say that we agree with the amendment put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill).

Others asked, “What does this do to help the Uyghurs?” This is a Trade Bill. It is mainly about the continuity of previous EU trade agreements and trade defences and trade data. We do not have a free trade agreement with China. We have no plans or intention to negotiate a free trade agreement with China. There is no historical free trade agreement with China. None of this is even in the range of the Bill as it was written. But nor is it clear to me, with the Alton amendment, that there is a significant agreement in scope to cancel. This is a Trade Bill dealing with free trade agreements. There is no FTA with China. That is why Xinjiang and the Uyghurs

would not be in the scope of the Trade Bill. That is why, instead, the Foreign Secretary and others are taking the tough action that we propose.

We heard from the SNP spokesman, the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), whose speech was more about the EU, Brexit and Donald Trump than about trade, China or the Uyghurs.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani) talked passionately about the cause, but the parliamentary judicial Committee would be given a new power in law to make a determination of genocide, and the Government cannot agree with that. Instead, we agree with the approach of my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, who describes the parliamentary judicial Committee as “constitutionally illiterate”. The Government would facilitate such motions as he asked to allow Select Committees to set up a Sub-Committee to examine these issues if the Select Committee chose to do that. That is the most important point.

I hope that hon. Members can now come together to underscore our support for this approach in place of the approach proposed by the other place, and to pass once more the amendment in the name of the Chair of the Justice Committee.

7.41 pm

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 300, Noes 318.

Division No. 243]

[7.41 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Buck, Ms Karen
Abrahams, Debbie	Burgon, Richard
Afriyie, Adam	Butler, Dawn
Ali, Rushanara	Byrne, Ian
Ali, Tahir	Byrne, rh Liam
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Cadbury, Ruth
Amesbury, Mike	Callaghan, Amy
Amess, Sir David	Cameron, Dr Lisa
Anderson, Fleur	Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Campbell, Mr Gregory
Ashworth, Jonathan	Carden, Dan
Bardell, Hannah	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Barker, Paula	Chamberlain, Wendy
Beckett, rh Margaret	Champion, Sarah
Begum, Apsana	Chapman, Douglas
Benn, rh Hilary	Cherry, Joanna
Betts, Mr Clive	Chishti, Rehman
Black, Mhairi	Chope, Sir Christopher
Blackford, rh Ian	Clark, Feryal
Blackman, Bob	Cooper, Daisy
Blackman, Kirsty	Cooper, Rosie
Blake, Olivia	Cooper, rh Yvette
Blomfield, Paul	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Blunt, Crispin	Cowan, Ronnie
Bone, Mr Peter	Coyle, Neil
Bonnar, Steven	Crawley, Angela
Brabin, Tracy	Creasy, Stella
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Cruddas, Jon
Brennan, Kevin	Cryer, John
Bridgen, Andrew	Cunningham, Alex
Brock, Deidre	Daby, Janet
Brown, Alan	Davey, rh Ed
Brown, Ms Lyn	David, Wayne
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Davies, Geraint
Bryant, Chris	Davies-Jones, Alex

Davis, rh Mr David
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Drax, Richard
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Girvan, Paul
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George

Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Johnson, Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lockhart, Carla
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Loughton, Tim
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 Mackinlay, Craig
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte

Nicolson, John
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norris, Alex
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paisley, Ian
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Seely, Bob
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron

Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Warburton, David
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jeff Smith and
Bambos Charalambous

NOES

Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Browne, Anthony
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Chalk, Alex

Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinanage, Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian

Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, rh Simon
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony

Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, Wendy
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Morrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine

Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Maria Caulfield and
Michael Tomlinson

Question accordingly negated.

The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.

Main Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 319, Noes 297.

Division No. 244]

[7.53 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Brokenshire, rh James
Browne, Anthony
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, rh Conor
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Chalk, Alex
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Daly, James
Davies, David T. C.

Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Garnier, Mark
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Glen, John
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Kate
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, rh Simon
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James

Heaton-Harris, Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kearns, Alicia
Keegan, Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewis, rh Brandon
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Loder, Chris
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Macleane, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morrissey, Joy
Morton, Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nici, Lia
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Opperman, Guy
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, Chris
Pincher, rh Christopher
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Pritchard, rh Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, rh Dominic
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Roberts, Rob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, rh Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Simmonds, David
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain

Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Mr Robin

Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Maria Caulfield and
 Michael Tomlinson**

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bonnar, Steven
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy

Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Chishti, Rehman
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Drax, Richard
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris

Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Girvan, Paul
 Glendon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive

Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lockhart, Carla
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Loughton, Tim
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 Mackinlay, Craig
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norris, Alex
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Ahare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paisley, Ian
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel

Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Seely, Bob
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison

Thomas, Derek
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Warburton, David
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Jeff Smith and
 Bambos Charalambous

Question accordingly agreed to.

The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.

Resolved,

That this House insists on its Amendments Nos. 3C and 3D and disagrees with the Lords in their Amendment No. 3E.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83H), That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for insisting on Commons amendments 3C and 3D and disagreeing to their amendment 3E;

That Greg Hands, Maria Caulfield, Michael Tomlinson, Emily Thornberry and Drew Hendry be members of the Committee;

That Greg Hands be the Chair of the Committee;

That three be the quorum of the Committee.

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—(*Tom Pursglove.*)

Question agreed to.

Committee to withdraw immediately; reasons to be reported and communicated to the Lords.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We are not going to suspend, because the Dispatch Boxes have already been sanitised and are ready to go.

Fire Safety Bill

Consideration of Lords message

[Relevant documents: Second Report of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, Cladding: progress of remediation, HCV 172, and Fifth Report of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, Pre-legislative scrutiny of the Building Safety Bill, HC 466.]

After Clause 2

PROHIBITION ON PASSING REMEDIATION COSTS ON TO LEASEHOLDERS AND TENANTS

8.2 pm

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in their amendments 4B, 4C, 4D and 4E.

I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for engaging in this very important debate, both now and throughout the passage of the Bill. I particularly thank my hon. Friends the Members for Kensington (Felicity Buchan), for Ipswich (Tom Hunt), for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst) and for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond), and Members across the House, for the keen interest they have shown in this matter. I will keep my opening remarks short, as I know that many Members are keen to contribute, and I shall wind up later on.

The Government remain steadfast in their commitment to delivering the Grenfell Tower inquiry phase 1 report's recommendations. This Bill is an important first step in delivering those recommendations. The Government have always been clear that all residents should be safe and feel safe in their homes. That is why we will be providing an additional £3.5 billion to fund the removal and replacement of unsafe cladding on residential buildings.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister give way?

Christopher Pincher: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman later on; let me conclude my initial remarks.

This will be targeted on the highest-risk buildings—that is, those buildings over 18 metres tall that have unsafe cladding. The scale of this investment should not be underestimated, with over £5 billion of taxpayers' money, and more when the developer levy and the developer tax are taken into account. We have an ambitious timescale to ensure that remediation of unsafe cladding is completed at pace. We are also now seeing tangible progress from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors revising its guidance on EWS1 forms, lenders committing to adhering to RICS guidance, and more developers now allocating significant funds for remediation.

As parliamentarians, we have a duty to implement a clear framework and transparent legislation to support fire and building safety reform. I am afraid to say that, despite the best intentions of these Lords amendments—I absolutely accept the sincerity with which they have been posited—they are unworkable and impractical. They would make the legislation less clear, and they do not reflect the complexity involved in apportioning liability for remedial defects. I have had extensive conversations about the effects that the amendments might have with my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood, who has pressed me hard on this, as have others. These amendments would also require extensive

redrafting of primary legislation, resulting in delays to the commencement of the Fire Safety Bill and to our overall programme. They could also have unintended and possibly perverse consequences for those that the amendments are intended to support, and we would still be no further forward in resolving these issues.

I shall give way to the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) when I return to speak later, but let me say in concluding my opening remarks that we cannot accept these Lords amendments and we encourage the House to vote against them and for the Government amendments.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): I am pleased that so many Members have put in to speak today. I will keep my remarks fairly brief, but I want to make three points. First, thank goodness I am not standing at this Dispatch Box again and pleading with the Government to agree at the very least a timetable to implement the vital fire safety measures from the first phase of the Grenfell inquiry. I am pleased that the Government have agreed in the other place to Labour's suggestion of a timetable. Before the second anniversary of the Grenfell phase one recommendations, the Government have committed to regulations to implement them, and that will be by October this year. They said that this would delay the Bill, that it would be too complicated and that it would be too hard to do, but they have now agreed to a version of it. It is not quite what we wanted, but it is something close.

I have lost count of the number of times we have voted on the Grenfell recommendations and the number of times we have been pushed back, and it is quite extraordinary that the Government have taken so long to get us here. Labour's previous amendment, which the Government have now agreed on a timetable to deliver, would do four things: the owners of buildings that contain two or more sets of domestic premises would share information with their local fire and rescue service about the design and make-up of the external walls; they would complete regular inspections of fire entrance doors; they would complete regular inspections of lifts; and they would share evacuation and fire safety instructions with residents and the fire service. These measures are straightforward and are supported by key stakeholders.

In the Minister's letter that sets out details of the Government's concession, he wrote that the Government would lay regulations to make responsible persons produce and regularly review evacuation plans for their building. The Grenfell recommendation, and our amendment, said more than that. They said that that information should also be shared with local fire and rescue services and residents. I would like the Minister to clarify in his closing remarks who these evacuation plans will be shared with and how this will be enforced, but I am grateful to him for seeing sense and heeding our calls to do the right thing, because it has been ages.

I come to the second point that I want to make. It has been nearly four years since 72 people so tragically lost their lives in the Grenfell Tower fire. In those four years, Grenfell United, the families, the survivors and the entire community have fought tirelessly for change. It is thanks to their hard work and dedication that the Government have finally agreed to implement the recommendations by October 2021. I pay tribute to them and their ongoing fight for justice. I pay tribute to

our firefighters who keep us safe every day. We know that cuts to their service have hit hard—response times are inevitably affected, and morale is affected—and now they have a pay freeze, which is no way to thank them for going above and beyond during the covid pandemic.

I come to my third and final point. Leaseholders should not have to fund the cost of fire safety remediation works when they are not to blame and they are the least able to pay.

Stephen Doughty: I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend on that point, as she well knows, because of the leaseholders who are affected in my constituency. While the Welsh Government have put forward an additional £32 million in their new Budget for this very issue, leaseholders in Wales are still in the dark from the Government's announcements about what moneys there will be for Wales and how the levy and tax will work. Does she agree that the Government should sit down with the Welsh Government Housing Minister and sort this out for the benefit of all leaseholders?

Sarah Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I have a sense of déjà vu, because we have been saying all this for some time, as have Members across the House. Of course the Government should sit down with the Welsh Government and work out whether any of this funding will go to Wales and how that will work.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a powerful point about the needs of leaseholders. Does she agree that, as well as dealing with the gaps in the support so far announced, it is vital that there is much more clarity on what leaseholders should be entitled to—particularly those in shared ownership arrangements, where the quality of work done and the relationship with the social landlord can vary? This is causing them great confusion and anxiety and, indeed, great difficulty in selling their properties.

Sarah Jones: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. The plight of people in shared ownership properties is dire and needs to be looked at by the Government, as does the plight of the many thousands of people who are still trapped in unsafe buildings or buildings they cannot sell, who face extortionate bills for remediation work or who face huge increases in insurance and waking watch costs and other costs that they simply cannot afford. People are going bankrupt.

We cannot feel it in this place, but every time we have a debate or a vote on this issue, thousands of people write to all of us and say, "We are hoping against hope that you do the right thing this time." We have people writing with heartfelt pleas. Their stories are stark, and every time we have this conversation, people's hopes are raised, and there is a groundswell on social media and in our inboxes of people saying, "Maybe now the Government are going to do the right thing." They are watching us now, hoping that we are going to do the right thing. It is very sad that the Government are indicating at the moment that they are not going to take this issue seriously.

This is taking a heavy toll on people's mental health and putting millions of lives on hold. Leaseholders have been trapped in this impossible position for too long.

[Sarah Jones]

Throughout the passage of the Bill, we have continually campaigned on this issue, and we welcome the latest amendment from the Bishop of St Albans. Like Labour's previous amendments and those tabled by Members on both sides of the House, this amendment would prohibit the cost of replacing unsafe cladding being passed on to leaseholders or tenants.

In February, the Housing Secretary told thousands of people across the country that they will be locked into years of debt to fix fire safety problems that were not their fault, and we hear that the Government have decided to lay a motion to disagree with the Bishop of St Albans's amendment. That is a direct and deliberate betrayal of the promise that Ministers have made over 17 times that leaseholders should not be left to foot the bill. Over the weekend, I wrote to Members of Parliament across the House who have constituents affected by this, urging them to back the amendment, and I sincerely hope that together we will stand up for the rights of leaseholders today and all Members will do the right thing. Given the risk of fire and looming bankruptcy, we cannot wait while the Government delay with inaction and failed proposals to keep leaseholders out of debt.

Today is another chance for the Government finally to put public safety first and to bring forward legislation to protect leaseholders from the deeply unfair situation of paying for fire safety repairs for which they are not responsible. Members across this House are united on this issue and are determined that innocent leaseholders should not foot the bill. Today should be the day when people across the country can go to sleep with a great sense of relief that the Government have listened and put into law protections for leaseholders, so I sincerely hope that the Minister will change his mind. It is not too late for the Government to do the right thing and protect innocent leaseholders across the country.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): A three-minute limit is being imposed now on all contributions. Apologies to those Members who are on the call list and simply will not get in because there will not be enough time.

8.15 pm

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): There is not the time to say what the Government have done for leaseholders. The Fire Safety Bill, in the form the Government want to return it to, if they get the House to reject the Lords amendments, would place an automatic, unchallengeable financial burden on residential leaseholders in building safety remediation costs, even in circumstances where a lease may have excluded such an obligation. I refer the Minister, if he has time, to the article by Martina Lees in *The Sunday Times* "Home" section about some of the building costs that are not justified.

The bishops' amendments are intended to protect leaseholders from being solely responsible for the costs. The Bill strengthens the landlords' and freeholders' legal rights over leaseholders. The amendments provide for more balanced liability for costs. These Lords amendments should not be overturned. The alternative, which the Government are asking us to agree, wrongly and disproportionately disadvantages innocent leaseholders. Many are unable to pay, and they are frightened.

This is a Home Office Bill, and the Home Secretary gave this as her reason for rejecting previous Lords amendment 4:

"Because the issue of remediation costs is too complex to be dealt with in the manner proposed."

I say, and I think people on both sides agree—and probably the Minister does so privately—that what is being proposed cannot be supported. It is too simple: it loads costs on leaseholders, who are the only people who cannot be responsible for putting right a building that they do not own and will never own, and of which in legal terms they are only the tenants.

I ask the Minister to ask his colleagues to let him agree to accepting these Lords amendments, and to set the leaseholders free.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab) [V]: I support the Lords in the message it has sent back. The Lords is proposing very important changes to the Government's position. First, not just leaseholders but tenants should not have to pay. For example, in a block where the social housing provider is the freeholder, according to the Government's proposals, leaseholders would not have to pay, but social housing tenants—if it is not ACM cladding that is being removed—would have to pay through their rents for the removal of cladding. That tenants have to pay and leaseholders do not simply cannot be right.

We are not quite sure what costs leaseholders in blocks under 18 metres will face, because there is still an awful lot of vagueness and lack of clarity about what the Government's loan scheme will actually mean. When the Minister for Building Safety and Communities came to our Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee recently, he said that leaseholders would not be responsible for paying the loan, but neither would freeholders; the charge would be on the building. A building cannot be legally responsible for a charge on a loan placed on it. Some organisation or some individual has to be responsible. Is it the freeholder? Is it the leaseholder? There is an awful lot of unclarity about that, and about how we limit leaseholders' charges to £50 a month. There is a great deal of confusion. The Government are still working that through, so as things stand there cannot be an absolute assurance that leaseholders will not have to pay on blocks of under 18 metres.

Finally, there are issues other than cladding. It is not just that cladding will have to be taken off; very often, the cost of doing other fire safety work on blocks of flats is greater. Again, we were told that if the other work is associated with the removal of cladding, it will be covered by the Government's financial help. If insulation is a composite part of a building's structure along with the cladding, presumably it can be removed, as it is associated with the cladding. However, if the insulation is completely separate and distinct from the cladding, the Government funding might pay for the cladding removal but not the insulation removal. Very often, leaseholders simply cannot afford to pay for that, but the Government will not allow any of their funding to go ahead unless the leaseholders can find the additional costs.

None of those positions is acceptable. I support a position where neither leaseholders nor tenants are asked to pay to make their buildings fire-safe.

Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con) [V]: I thank the Lord Bishop of St Albans and the Lord Bishop of London for ensuring that we have the opportunity to vote on the amendments today. It gives us the chance to divide the House on whether leaseholders should be responsible for paying for historical fire safety costs. I urge the Minister and the Government to accept the amendments or, if there is something wrong with them, to table their own. They should work with us and with leaseholders to try to resolve this issue.

It is unacceptable that people feel that we want taxpayers to pay. Leaseholders do not want taxpayers to pay and Members across the House do not want taxpayers to pay; we want those who are responsible to pay—the developers, the insurance companies and the building regulators who said that these properties were safe over the past 20 to 30 years, when many of the leaseholders who will be forced to pay these bills were in primary school or not even born. It is not acceptable, it is not fair and it is not right. What we are doing today is shameful.

The amendments would maintain the status quo with regard to the costs of remediation. I understand the Minister's point that this is a small Bill and not the right place to deal with the costs of remediation. I agree with him, but it is he who is transferring the liability to leaseholders in this Bill. The status quo is that leaseholders are not responsible for the costs of anything to do with external walls or doors. It is this Bill that amends the legislation. It is this Bill that will make leaseholders responsible for paying for historical fire safety defects. Again, that is not fair.

I was at a building today and it became clear very quickly that the estimated costs of remediation are greater than the value of the properties within it. Can the Minister give me an answer? What will happen in cases where the costs of remediation are greater than the value of the building and the properties within it? Will the building be written off, like an insurance company would write off a car? Will those people be made homeless? We know that if the Bill goes through, even more leaseholders will face bankruptcy and huge issues of homelessness.

At the moment, the interim costs are bankrupting leaseholders up and down the country. Leaseholders are screaming for help; they are screaming in pain. And what are we doing? Today, we are saying to them, "Thanks for paying the interim costs. Once you've finished that, we're going to load you up with the remediation costs on top." That is tens of thousands of pounds that people just do not have.

We are nearly four years on from Grenfell, and it appears to me that the Government have given up on those who should be responsible for paying and are pushing the costs on to leaseholders. It is morally unacceptable.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab) [V]: I will be supporting the amendment moved by the Bishop of St Albans, because in circumstances where leaseholders are beset by worry, fear and uncertainty, it will provide them with the reassurance that they will not have to pay to fix a problem for which they are not responsible. It will also make the Government realise that they have to come forward with a different solution.

There are two problems here: the first is dangerous cladding and the second is other fire safety defects, which have been discovered in building after building. The Government appear to be in the position where the funding they have announced will pay for the remediation of missing fire cavity barriers where they are integral to the replacement of dangerous cladding, but not where they are not—in other words, where they are elsewhere in the building. I do not really understand that. Can the Minister say whether, if the works the Government are prepared to fund through the scheme are completed, the buildings in question will be declared safe so that the waking watch and insurance costs disappear even if the other fire safety defects have not been fixed?

Time, however, is not on our side, because we know how long making all of these homes safe is going to take, even if all the necessary funding had already been identified.

There are detailed inspections to be done, tenders have to be put together, firms found who are willing to do the work, and scaffolding and building materials have to be ordered before the work can even begin. So, given the scale of this, it is going to take a long time. But that is the one thing that leaseholders do not have, because, as we have heard, they are paying bills that they cannot afford.

Even worse, the bills are now starting to arrive on their doormats demanding payment to fix the cladding. One recent example was a demand for £71,000. It might as well be for £1 million, because there is no prospect of leaseholders being able to find that kind of money.

So the longer this goes on, the more likely we are to see leaseholders becoming bankrupt. What are the local authorities going to do when they turn up at their door and say, "I'm homeless; I need somewhere to stay"? And make no mistake: the anger that leaseholders are feeling at the moment will be something else again when they find themselves being made homeless through no fault of their own.

So, let us do the right thing today to protect leaseholders, and then the Government can turn their attention to finding an answer that will actually work. At a time when people are getting bills to the tune, as I have just said, of £71,000 through the letterbox, to stand up and say, "I'm really sorry, but this isn't the right legislation" demonstrates a failure to understand the nightmare that so many of the people we represent are living through.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I will call the Minister to wind-up the debate at five to 9.

Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): First, may I put on record my thanks to the Lord Bishop of St Albans and the Bishop of London, without whom this amendment would not be back here tonight?

Not to try to outdo the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), in my hand this evening I have an invoice. It is an invoice for service charges and remediation of fire safety defects; it is an invoice for nearly £79,000. Imagine for one moment you are trapped in a flat you have been told is unsafe. Night after night you go to bed with the fear of fire. You cannot sell your flat because it is worthless. Everyone knows that none of this is your fault, but then an envelope drops through your letterbox. When you open it, there is a bill for £78,000 to put defects right that are not of your making.

[Royston Smith]

I am asking Members across the House to vote tonight to agree to the Bishop of St Albans amendment—better, or formerly, known as the McPartland-Smith amendment to the Fire Safety Bill. I am asking them to vote with us tonight because bills like this one have already started to arrive and they are not going to stop. Everyone knows what is happening, and if they do not they should open their emails and read the heartbreaking experiences of their constituents. This is not politics; it is not ideology—in fact I do not know what it is, but is it any wonder that some leaseholders feel that there is some sort of a conspiracy against them?

Are we going to let the innocent continue to pick up the tab for the guilty? What are we doing about the developers, the contractors and the manufacturers? What are we doing about the insurers and the National House Building Council? What are we doing about local authority development control and others that signed off these buildings as safe? Are they sleeping soundly in their beds tonight?

There is an economic reason for voting for the amendment, and there is a political reason for voting for it, but beyond that there is a moral reason. If this Bill becomes law, we will be abandoning hundreds of thousands of innocent people, and I am not going to have that on my conscience.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab) [V]: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak this evening. I have been contacted by and met hundreds of concerned constituents, many of whom are trapped in unsafe leasehold properties. I have also met Clad DAG, a group set up to ensure the voices of disabled leaseholders are heard, and I hope the Minister will also meet them. Many of those I have spoken to bought their first home through Government schemes that they believed would help, rather than hinder, them. They now wish to move on, but are instead facing bankruptcy due to astronomical bills. Understandably, they want to know why those who should be taking responsibility are not.

Let us look at the example of Berkeley Homes and its subsidiary St James. Unlike other developers and housing providers in the constituency, the chief executive officer of Berkeley Homes has refused three times to attend public meetings that I have organised, or to answer leaseholders' reasonable questions about remediation costs. The company remains in dispute with the owners of Aragon Tower in Deptford about whether the firebreaks in the building are faulty. Meanwhile, more than 160 residents are fearful of what might happen while they are asleep.

8.30 pm

The stress of paying for remedial works is particularly acute for leaseholders in shared ownership blocks, including Norfolk House in Deptford. Residents do not qualify for the Government's new cladding grants, as their building is under 18 metres. They therefore face having to pay back costs at £50 per month. The estimated total for removing the cladding is £3 million, meaning that residents would have this debt hanging over their heads for many years to come. On top of that, they are facing additional fire safety charges, including for a waking watch. The cost of that, to be billed from September, is a staggering £74,000 a month. Many constituents are

also finding that banks will not lend on properties without external wall survey certificates, despite Government advice that the document is not a legal requirement. Just as the country faces another financial crisis, leaseholders will be forced into higher mortgage rates for homes that in many cases are no longer suited to their needs. The Financial Conduct Authority merely suggests using mortgage intermediaries. Ministers promised on at least 15 occasions that cladding costs would not be passed on to leaseholders, yet for years they have failed to deliver. Tonight, I call on the Government to support those amendments that would absolve leaseholders from bearing the costs of a crisis not of their making.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab) [V]: Nearly four years after Grenfell, it is very disappointing that the Government still have not finalised support to make people's homes safe, and that leaseholders are still waiting for the protection that Ministers promised multiple times, and that the Lords amendments could help deliver.

I am in touch with more than 3,000 households affected in my constituency, and hundreds of leaseholders have completed my online survey. These are people left in limbo by our Government, but already facing the cost of service charges or waking watches. There are also those facing costs where there is an uncertain timeline for the work. Seven out of 10 people who completed my survey said that works had been identified as necessary but they had yet to get the date for repairs. There are also people whom the Government deliberately excluded from help with compartmentalisation safety measures, and people living in buildings less than 18 metres tall. I am working with people living in 28 such buildings, and with people who have seen delays in Government action, despite the Government having failed to ensure that regulations meant that house building and renovations were safe. Of course, other people have seen Government guidance needlessly affect their insurance or mortgage.

Today, I am supporting the Lords amendments, but I am also asking the Government not to profiteer from this situation. I am seeking, with cross-party backing, including from the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Royston Smith), who has already spoken, a VAT exemption on essential works required through fire safety surveys, in line with VAT changes made three years ago for some new builds. If that measure is adopted, the Government's building safety fund will go 20% further, as money will not be lost to VAT. That fund goes on not luxury changes, but essential remedial works required by the Government to make people's homes safe. Put simply, we cannot go from dishy Rishi eating out to help out last year, to rip-off Rishi profiteering from people's misery today. I hope that this cross-party request will gain further support, and that Ministers will meet campaigners on this issue.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) [V]: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle). The Government have moved swiftly to try to remediate the cladding on tall buildings. There has been slow progress, but progress is being made. In medium-rise buildings—those below six storeys—leaseholders will have to bear a cost, but we do not know what that cost will be, and we do not yet know the results of the proposals for the loan scheme. It is quite clear that the Government are trying to find a way forward, but we have yet to see the details.

There is also the issue of fire safety in buildings. The Bill is vital to preserving fire safety across the country in all buildings, whatever their structure. The Grenfell inquiry lifted the lid on the scandal of the tall buildings erected in this country without following proper fire safety regulations. Once a survey is carried out on a building, we know the extent to which work is required, whether regulations were followed, when the building was put up and whether the materials used in the building were correct. The people who provided substandard materials should be made to replace them free of charge. If builders put buildings up without following the proper regulations, we should go back to them and required them to carry out the remediation.

The one set of people who are completely and utterly innocent are the leaseholders. They did not build their building; they bought their lease in the belief that it was safe and secure. We should send out the strongest signal tonight that leaseholders should not have to pay a penny piece towards the cost of remedying things that were not their fault.

The Minister may say that the Bill is the wrong place to put that provision, but it will take at least 18 months—possibly two years—to bring the building safety Bill to fruition. Leaseholders do not have time to wait for us to deliberate, so let us join together and send the signal that leaseholders do not have to pay a penny. If the Government believe that Lords amendment 4B is somehow flawed, let them come forward with an amendment that is satisfactory and will result in the key outcome: not requiring leaseholders to pay.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD) [V]: I am pleased to see the Bill back before us, and proud that it was an amendment that I tabled last June in Committee—new clause 3—that first introduced the principle that leaseholders must be protected from the extortionate costs of fire safety remediation. I am very grateful to my noble Friend Baroness Pinnoch for taking up the idea in the other place, and to the hon. Members for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland) and for Southampton, Itchen (Royston Smith) and the Lord Bishops of St Albans and London for improving it along the way.

The arguments for and against protecting leaseholders in the Bill are now well established. The Government continue to attempt to fob us off with the inadequate and flawed remediation fund, but fire safety experts have debunked the fund's arbitrary 18-metre cut-off. Meanwhile, leaseholders keep trying in vain to tell the Government that it is not just about cladding; buildings of any height would still be left liable for non-cladding remediation of missing firebreaks, flammable balconies or dangerous insulation, as well as having to pay for waking watches and additional alarms.

I have listened with interest as Ministers continue to reject the amendment. We hear time and again that it is not sufficiently detailed, that it would require substantial drafting of primary legislation and that it could cause litigation, delay remediation work and have unintended consequences—that is a new one. The Government claim that it is Members who back the amendment who are apparently responsible for causing delays to the Bill, when it is the Government who have taken almost four years to bring forward a two-page Bill. Not once have the Government acknowledged the risks of the Bill passing without the amendment. Not once have the

Government addressed the fact that financial costs will be incurred by leaseholders from day one if the Bill goes through without the amendment.

The Government have spent nine months finding fault with the amendment, but at no point have they brought forward their own. Leaseholders cannot rely on the flawed building safety fund, nor can they wait any longer for promises of hope in a building safety Bill that may or may not help in the future. Ministers can see the strength of feeling in this House, even among those on their own Benches, and they can hear the pleas from millions of desperate homeowners. This amendment may not be perfect, but it is the only proposal on the table to protect leaseholders from the financial repercussions of fire safety defects that are not of their making. I call on all Members to do the right thing and support it.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): I understand why the Government will not accept the amendment, and I do not want to go there again, but what we need is urgency. Time is not just money; it is also worry, anxiety and uncertainty, and I echo the points made in one of the many excellent letters from my constituents in Portishead on this. It says: "It is not right that leaseholders have to worry about the costs of fixing safety defects that we did not cause." We all agree with that; the question is who should pay. If the costs are a direct result of legislative change made by the Government, it is reasonable for taxpayers to contribute to that. If they are not, builders and insurers should pay, including for non-cladding related defects.

The second point that my constituent makes is this: "We recognise that the additional £3.5 billion announced by the Secretary of State is a step forward and we do welcome this funding. We are still awaiting the full detail of this funding announcement, as well as that of the proposed loans for medium-rise buildings." In the last debate, we were told that more details would be forthcoming after the Budget. It is after the Budget, and we have still not had the details we are looking for, and these are real-time problems for which our constituents require real-time solutions.

My constituent goes on to say that "providing funding for buildings over 18 metres while forcing leaseholders in buildings under 18 metres to pay via a loan scheme is entirely unfair, because building height alone does not determine fire risk." We understand that, and again it is about appreciating that there needs to be a cut-off to stop taxpayers having to sign a blank cheque, but the cost for remediation should be met by those who are actually responsible for the problems in the first place.

The final problem that my constituent raises—it has been raised so often in this debate and previous debates—is negative equity and the difficulty of resale, which is causing immense distress. It can be a major generational problem for people who are looking to sell or downsize. It can cause them a great deal of anxiety. We have heard that the market should sort it out, as we would normally expect, but we are still waiting for elements of that that the market would normally regard as being necessary.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Dr Fox: I will not, because time is short and so many Members want to get in; I apologise to my hon. Friend.

[Dr Fox]

Last time, I asked what direct contact Ministers had had with the Association of British Insurers, the building societies and the banks, because without their help, we are unable to deal with the negative equity and resale problems that are at the heart of so much of the distress we find. I know from talking to so many of my constituents about this issue that they appreciate that the Government have already come a long way. They are very grateful for taxpayer support. The problem is that we need more details, and for real-time issues, we need real-time solutions. Urgency is the key.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: I am grateful to colleagues in the other place for the opportunity to reconsider amending this Bill. I also thank the hon. Members for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland), and for Southampton, Itchen (Royston Smith), for their perseverance in holding the Government to account over this cladding scandal.

Much has been said in this Chamber about why leaseholders should be protected from fire safety remediation costs, and I could repeat the long list of powerful arguments that colleagues from across the House and I have put to the Government, but instead I draw on the experiences of those whose voices are not often heard in this debate, and in particular want to mention the problems faced by disabled leaseholders. I pay tribute to the work of the Leaseholder Disability Action Group in highlighting them.

For many disabled constituents in Vauxhall, the difficulty finding accessible homes in London means that, where possible, they choose to invest in a property that they view as a potential property for life.

In many instances, shared ownership with a housing association is an affordable option for those who do not have enough for a large deposit or even a mortgage. Many disabled leaseholders will have spent thousands of pounds adapting their flats to suit their needs, including with bathroom and kitchen adaptations, which will often have been funded through local authority disabled facilities grants. But like so many leaseholders caught up in this crisis, they are now facing the additional burden of remediation costs, on top of other fire safety measures, putting them at risk of bankruptcy and losing their home for life. What is more, we know that disabled people are less likely to have the savings or income to meet unforeseen bills, and these are all subject to means-testing. This cannot be right. The important amendment before us this evening would help to end this nightmare for all leaseholders, so I urge all colleagues across the House to join me in voting for it.

8.45 pm

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab) [V]: There is a simple question for the House to consider today: should leaseholders be forced to pay for essential remediation works that they are compelled to undertake to their properties that have come about through no fault of their own? The only possible answer is no.

We know that the cladding calamity that has befallen so many of our constituents did not come about because leaseholders have failed in any way. All the costs that are attributable to the cladding scandal are down to

failures by developers and successive Governments, who have presided over shocking, scandalous regulatory failure, which has pushed thousands of wholly innocent people to the brink of financial ruin.

We all know that the costs of the regulatory failure that has created this crisis are in the many billions of pounds, but they must not fall on the ordinary people who are not responsible for this mess. There are other ways, I believe, that the Government can raise the necessary money. They should introduce a levy on developers and the construction industry to fund the cost of remediation—both cladding removal and remediating the many other fire risks that many of us in the House have been raising for quite some time.

The Government should also strengthen procurement regulations so that local authorities and metro Mayors can prevent developers and construction companies that are failing to live up to their moral obligations and put right the fire hazards that they are responsible for creating from bidding for any further publicly funded development contracts. In that way, we can reward those who are doing the right thing and putting right the cladding issues in the buildings that they were responsible for putting up and, hopefully, force a rethink on the part of those who are failing to live up to their responsibilities by preventing them from bidding for further taxpayer-funded contracts.

But what is clear is that the Government must not pin the spiralling costs of this crisis on the ordinary people who are currently facing financial ruination. I urge all Members to keep the amendment tabled by the Bishop of Saint Albans in the Bill, because to do anything else is a dereliction of our duty. This House must do the right thing by leaseholders this evening.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

The first thing to say is that I agree with many of the comments that have been made. It simply cannot be right that leaseholders are faced with bills of tens of thousands of pounds. Nevertheless, I cannot support the amendment because I do not think it is effective, for a number of reasons. First, it seems to put somebody—an indeterminate person—on the hook for fire safety remediation forever. As I read it, it is not limited to historical defects.

Royston Smith: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Kevin Hollinrake: I do not think I should, because of the timescales, but as my hon. Friend is an author of the amendment, I will.

Royston Smith: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I want to ask him this simple question, which I am sure he will appreciate. We have been back here three or four times now to discuss this, over and over, and every time I have said that if the amendment is defective, the Government should make it work and have it as their own. Does he agree that that is the way to go?

Kevin Hollinrake: After the previous debate, I offered my hon. Friend the opportunity to sit down and look at an amendment that might work, in concert with the Government.

The other difficulty with the amendment is that it would put the onus back on a building's freeholders. Many people would say that that is fine—that it is better than the leaseholders having that responsibility—but I do not think it would put the leaseholders in a better situation, because the freeholder would simply close down the company and hand back the responsibility, which would fall back on to the leaseholders. I simply do not think the amendment works.

I have a couple of general comments. I was a member of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee at the time of the Grenfell tragedy, and the first thing for which we campaigned—straightaway, like many Members in this House—was a complete ban on combustible cladding. That is exactly what the Government stepped in to do. Of course, that ban is prospective, and it left a retrospective issue. The Government have clearly stepped in on the retrospective issue of cladding on high-risk buildings, which is exactly what the Select Committee campaigned for—those 1,700 high-risk buildings that were over 18 metres. That is what the £5 billion of funding remediates.

Many people in this debate have asked about the other elements, such as the missing fire breaks. It is of course absolutely right that we cannot expect leaseholders to take on a debt of tens of thousands of pounds; that is simply not right. We need to take a risk-based approach to the issue. Lots of buildings, particularly lower-rise buildings, can be safely remediated without necessarily replacing cladding: sprinklers, fire alarms and other systems can make those buildings just as safe.

We need to form a coalition of people right across the sector—be it building owners, contractors, managers or manufacturers—to find the best risk-based solution to the problem while minimising the cost for anybody, not least leaseholders. Of course developers should pay, and in many cases they have—Persimmon has just put £70 million to one side to remediate some of its buildings—but the difficulty is that we are often trying to deal with developers that are no longer there. The levy that the Government have introduced is absolutely the right solution, and I urge them to extend it to materials manufacturers and in particular insulation manufacturers, which I feel are principally responsible for the scandal of the situation in which we find ourselves.

On leaseholders, we of course do not want to see anybody go bankrupt as a result of these costs. There is a cap on costs for lower-rise buildings; it may well be that there should be a cap on the costs of remediating these issues for any leaseholder in any building. We should look into that, along with the possibility of the Government top-slicing the risk to make the insurance costs much lower. There are solutions and we all need to work together to provide them.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call Sir Robert Neill, who must resume his seat at 8.55 pm or before.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I have great respect for my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) and his expertise in this policy area. I accept that the amendment is not at all perfect, but it is the only thing that is currently available to keep the issue in play, which is why, unfortunately, I cannot support the Government tonight. I had hoped we would have a solution by now.

The simple point is that whoever is at fault—there may be a number of them as this has happened over a period of time—the people who are not at fault are the leaseholders who bought in good faith. They relied on surveys and regulations that appeared to suggest that their properties were in order and had no reason to think otherwise. It therefore cannot be right that they are out of pocket, regardless of the height of the building. I quite understand that there may be perfectly good reasons for using 18 metres as a threshold of risk for prioritising work, but it has no relevance to responsibility, moral or otherwise, so it is an arbitrary cut-off point.

I had hoped that Ministers would have taken the opportunity between the previous debate and this one to come up with a further scheme. I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister, who I know is trying to do the right thing and has put a great deal of money into the matter, to continue to think again and work urgently on this matter because, as my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) said, time is pressing. The only people who do not have the cash flow are the leaseholders. By all means go after those at fault, be they builders, developers or contractors, but in the meantime we cannot leave leaseholders, who have done nothing wrong, facing bankruptcy because they are effectively in negative equity and are having to fork out for a significant amount of costs, as are my constituents at Northpoint in Bromley.

This is destroying people's lives. None of us wants to do that and I know that the Government do not want to do that. To find a solution, we have to cover the costs for those people who are not in a position to fund these costs over the length of time between this Bill imposing a liability on them and the Building Safety Bill coming along perhaps 18 months—12 months at best—down the track. It is covering that gap that needs to be done. That gap has to be covered in a way that treats and protects all leaseholders equitably regardless of the height of the building. I hope that the Government will use the opportunity of this going back to the other House to think again and urgently to crystallise a solution that we can all join around. The intentions are the same across the House, but we must have something that does not leave leaseholders—those who are not at fault—exposed. It is not a question of caveat emptor. They relied on professional advice and assurances. They are not the ones at fault. Be it loan or grant, either way they should not be picking up the tab for something that was not, ultimately, their responsibility.

Christopher Pincher: I am grateful to all right hon. and hon. Members for their contributions to this debate. Members have spoken passionately and sincerely on behalf of their constituents. I think that everybody, from all parts of the House, wants to see the cladding scandal ended once and for all, and ended quickly, which is what the Government are about.

Stephen Doughty *rose—*

Christopher Pincher: As I did not give way to the hon. Gentleman earlier, I suppose that it is only right for me to give way to him now.

Stephen Doughty: The Minister is being very generous. He kindly agreed the other day to speak to his ministerial colleagues about getting a sit-down meeting with Julie James, the Welsh Minister for Housing and Local Government, to resolve some of these unanswered issues. She did

[Stephen Doughty]

write on 10 February to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. She has yet to receive a reply. Can we please get that meeting arranged and please get some answers to her very reasonable questions on behalf of leaseholders in Wales?

Christopher Pincher: Not only did the hon. Gentleman speak to me in the Chamber, but, even more importantly, he spoke to me in the Tea Room. I shall certainly ensure that he gets a response as swiftly as possible.

In the time that I have, let me speak to the effectiveness of this amendment. As parliamentarians, no matter what the issue is before us, we have a duty, as I said earlier, to implement a clear framework and transparent legislation to support fire and building safety reform. Despite the best intentions of those who have tabled this amendment, I have to say that it is unworkable and impractical. There are three specific points that I should raise. First, the amendment does not take into account remedial works that arise outside of the fire risk assessment process—for example, costs identified as a result of a safety incident or building works taking place. In such cases, this will not prevent costs being passed on, so it does not deliver what Members want it to do. Furthermore, if these amendments were to be added to the Bill and become law without the necessary redrafting of the legislation, the Government, and thereby the taxpayer, would in all likelihood fall liable to protracted action by building owners in the courts. Building owners could use litigation to claim for costs that they feel are entitled to be pursued from leaseholders. While that litigation is ongoing, there could be further delays to construction work carried out on urgent remediation. It could be a waste of time and a waste of taxpayers' money. Redrafting the Bill is not something that can be done at the stroke of a pen. It requires parliamentary counsel and parliamentary draftsmen to work at it to ensure that any changes are sound and that any secondary legislation is also prepared, so that the Government, and thereby the taxpayer, can avoid legal challenge. We would not be able to get it done in this Session.

Furthermore, the amendments do not reflect the complexity involved in apportioning liability for remedial defects. The Government have announced how they will distribute costs, including from developers and industry, through our upcoming levy and tax. A decision through this amendment to pass all these costs to the building owner would be overly simplistic and it could be counter-productive. It would be self-defeating if landlords, faced with remediation costs, simply walked away. Many could do that. They could activate an insolvency procedure and just walk away. That is not about protecting freeholders, but about protecting leaseholders. It is about their position, because if leaseholders are left behind as the owners walk away, they would be in the same position as they are now, with no certainty on how works would be paid for or when they will be done. There is a real risk that this amendment could make the problem worse for leaseholders. We would be left in a situation where there would be delays to the commencement of the Fire Safety Bill, delays to our wider building safety programme, greater uncertainty for leaseholders and, quite possibly, unintended and deleterious consequences for them. We would not be any further forward in resolving the issue.

9 pm

We have been working hard to ensure that those with broader shoulders and those that should pay do pay. That is why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced at the Budget that there will be a levy on tall buildings and a tax on the sector. We do not want to absolve the industry of its responsibility. We are finalising how the levy will be calculated and the Treasury is leading on the development of the tax. Of course we want to ensure that it works effectively, and that small and medium-sized developers are not unfairly disadvantaged. We want to get it right and we want to get it done as quickly as we can.

I am also encouraged that we are now seeing developers step forward in this effort by putting aside significant funding: Taylor Wimpey has put aside £125 million of funds to de-clad the buildings for which it is responsible; and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) mentioned, Persimmon has put aside £75 million, and has committed to pay all ACM and non-ACM remediation and inherent defects in the buildings for which it is responsible. The sector is now stepping forward, and we encourage more developers to do so. We will bring forward as soon as we possibly can the workings of the financial support scheme that we announced at the Budget that will ensure that leaseholders in buildings below 18 metres pay no more than £50 a month.

This has been a crucial debate.

9.2 pm

One hour having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the Lords message, the debate was interrupted (Programme Order, 24 February).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair (Standing Order No. 83G),

That this House disagrees with Lords amendments 4B, 4C, 4D and 4E.

The House divided: Ayes 322, Noes 253.

Division No. 245]

[9.2 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel	Bhatti, Saqib
Afolami, Bim	Blunt, Crispin
Afriyie, Adam	Bowie, Andrew
Ahmad Khan, Imran	Bradley, Ben
Aiken, Nickie	Bradley, rh Karen
Aldous, Peter	Braverman, rh Suella
Allan, Lucy	Brereton, Jack
Anderson, Lee	Bridgen, Andrew
Anderson, Stuart	Brine, Steve
Andrew, rh Stuart	Bristow, Paul
Argar, Edward	Britcliffe, Sara
Atherton, Sarah	Brokenshire, rh James
Atkins, Victoria	Browne, Anthony
Bacon, Gareth	Bruce, Fiona
Bacon, Mr Richard	Buckland, rh Robert
Badenoch, Kemi	Burghart, Alex
Bailey, Shaun	Burns, rh Conor
Baillie, Siobhan	Butler, Rob
Baker, Duncan	Cairns, rh Alun
Baker, Mr Steve	Carter, Andy
Baldwin, Harriett	Cartlidge, James
Barclay, rh Steve	Cash, Sir William
Baynes, Simon	Cates, Miriam
Bell, Aaron	Chalk, Alex
Benton, Scott	Churchill, Jo
Beresford, Sir Paul	Clark, rh Greg
Berry, rh Jake	Clarke, Mr Simon

Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Dineneage, Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert

Hall, Luke
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damien
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony

Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Nici, Lia
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Richards, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew

Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Maria Caulfield and
Michael Tomlinson

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Fleur
 Ansell, Caroline
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Barker, Paula

Baron, Mr John
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman, Bob
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Clark, Feryal
Colburn, Elliot
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Philip
Davies-Jones, Alex
Davis, rh Mr David
De Cordova, Marsha
Debonnaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dodds, Anneliese
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Ferrier, Margaret
Fletcher, Colleen

Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Furniss, Gill
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Gardiner, Barry
Gill, Preet Kaur
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Girvan, Paul
Glindon, Mary
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hammond, Stephen
Hanna, Claire
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Hopkins, Rachel
Howarth, rh Sir George
Hunt, Tom
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Lavery, Ian
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Lloyd, Tony
Lockhart, Carla
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCabe, Steve

McCarthy, Kerry
McCartney, Jason
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Neill, Sir Robert
Nichols, Charlotte
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norris, Alex
Offord, Dr Matthew
Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Owatemi, Taiwo
Owen, Sarah
Paisley, Ian
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rimmer, Ms Marie

Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rodda, Matt
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Cat
Smith, Nick
Smith, Royston
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Stammer, rh Keir
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Tugendhat, Tom
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Warburton, David
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Wilson, rh Sammy
Winter, Beth
Wragg, Mr William
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Bambos Charalambous and
Jeff Smith

Question accordingly agreed to.

The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83H), That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments 4B, 4C, 4D and 4E.

That Christopher Pincher, Tom Pursglove, Mike Wood and Sarah Jones be members of the Committee.

That Christopher Pincher be the Chair of the Committee.

That three be the quorum of the Committee.

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—
(*James Morris.*)

Committee to withdraw immediately; reasons to be reported and communicated to the Lords.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): In order to observe social distancing, the Reasons Committee will meet in Committee Room 12.

We will now suspend for three minutes.

9.13 pm

Sitting suspended.

9.16 pm

On resuming—

COUNTER-TERRORISM AND SENTENCING BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 9 June 2020 (Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Bill (Programme)):

Consideration of Lords Amendments

(1) Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

Subsequent stages

(2) Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

(3) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—(*James Morris.*)

Question agreed to.

Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Bill

Consideration of Lords amendments

Clause 23

TERRORISM SENTENCE WITH FIXED LICENCE PERIOD:
SCOTLAND

9.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Philp): I beg to move, That this House agrees with Lords amendment 1.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): With this it will be convenient to consider the following:

Lords amendments 2 to 17.

Lords amendment 18, Government motion to disagree, and Government amendments (a) to (e) in lieu.

Lords amendments 19 to 77.

Chris Philp: We had a very constructive debate on the Bill when it passed through the House last year, and I am delighted to speak to it again this evening.

Lords amendment 18, in the name of Lord Anderson of Ipswich, proposes a new upper time limit of four years for the duration of a terrorism prevention and investigation measure. The Bill as originally drafted sought to remove the current two-year limit and instead enable a TPIM to be renewed annually for as long as necessary. Having carefully considered the amendment tabled by Lord Anderson and consulted with him, the Government, in disagreeing with the amendment, have tabled amendments (a) to (e) in lieu, which set a five-year limit instead of a four-year limit.

I am given to understand that the noble Lord Anderson is content with that, and we believe that it represents a reasonable compromise between a desire to set a reasonable limit on the maximum duration of TPIMs and protecting our fellow citizens. We heard evidence from Assistant Chief Constable Tim Jacques during the passage of the Bill that occasions have arisen when there has been a cliff edge and people have posed a risk to the public after the expiry of a TPIM. The Government believe that a five-year hard time limit is, ultimately, a reasonable compromise.

Of course, TPIMs are reviewable on an ongoing basis. They are reviewed and renewed, and if somebody ceases to be a threat, the TPIM will be discontinued. Under the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011, there is not only an ability to have regular review hearings under section 9 but a right to appeal to the courts under section 16 for people wishing to challenge a decision for their TPIM notice to be extended. Given Lord Anderson's agreement that five years rather than four is reasonable, I hope that the House will consent to our proposed amendments (a) to (e) in lieu.

Lords amendment 17 was a concession made in the Lords, and the Government will therefore support it. It elevates the burden of proof required before imposing a TPIM from reasonable suspicion, as originally proposed in the Bill, to reasonable belief, which is a slightly higher standard of proof. Again, I hope the House will agree that this represents a reasonable compromise between this House and the upper House. The Government

[Chris Philp]

believe that with that slightly higher standard of proof, we can still keep our fellow citizens safe, and we feel that Lords amendment 17 strikes the right balance. We will therefore be supporting it, and it is backed up by Lords amendment 19, which creates an ongoing annual review by the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation of the use of TPIMs, commencing for the first time next year.

I do not want to detain the House long with the other amendments, because there are a total of 77 and I do not wish to go through all of them one by one. [HON. MEMBERS: "Go on!"] I can hear that there is enthusiasm for that, but I am going to disappoint the audience by not going through each one individually. I will just say that a number of them relate to the devolved Administrations. In particular, we have removed the polygraph clauses from Scotland and Northern Ireland, because the legislative power already exists there, should those Administrations wish to use it. We have also made some technical changes concerned with single terming in Scottish law, and some technical amendments that are consequent on the passage of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

In summary and conclusion—always a popular phrase—I think we have now arrived at a good set of measures, which will protect the public while also respecting and protecting fundamental rights. I therefore commend these amendments to the House.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the Minister, and I will not detain the House long or speak to each of the 77 amendments. However, there are some issues that I want to raise. I will start by thanking the Minister; I know we had a robust exchange today across the Dispatch Box, and I am sure we will have many more, but his conduct in speaking to and informing me over the course of not just this weekend, but the passage of the Bill, has been exemplary. I want to acknowledge that.

Clearly, we also want to thank those across counter-terrorism, policing and the security services and all their partners who selflessly put themselves in harm's way to advance the effort to keep people safe. Following the horrific events of Fishmongers' Hall, Streatham, Reading, and the Manchester Arena attack and others like it, I think that everyone across this Chamber acknowledged that there was a clear need for a change, both in legislation and approach. These Lords amendments, and particularly those that the Government have accepted, speak to the heart of that, and it is why we welcomed and supported this Bill in principle all along. It has returned to us from the other place in better shape, and I am pleased to see that some of the proposals that we made in Committee have influenced it.

However, even as amended, it is arguable whether any of what the Government have brought forward in the Bill would have had a significant role in preventing any of those attacks. I do not think there are many new tools here, if any, that the Government did not already have at their disposal. Since the passage of the Bill began, we learned that the perpetrator of the Fishmongers' Hall attack was deemed a high-risk, category A prisoner before his release, and that there was intelligence suggesting he might be planning an attack. We know that the

perpetrator of the Reading attack had been released from prison only two weeks previously, following a 17-month sentence for affray and assault, raising concerns about the influence and consequences of radicalisation in prisons, and that the ongoing inquiry into the Manchester Arena attack has already identified some serious questions about how terrorist suspects are monitored, as well as aspects of security around major events. We know that the number of offenders on licence for terrorism-related convictions recalled to prisons is steadily rising for 2020; up to just June of that year, it had doubled from what it was a decade before. That is why it was surprising for me to find out that the Government do not have any idea how many terrorist suspects are rearrested following their release after previously being arrested or charged.

On the specifics of the amendments, particularly Lords amendment 17, Lords amendment 18 and amendments (a) to (e) in lieu, the Government initially rejected our call for a review of so-called lone wolf terrorists last summer. We have since learned that they have, in fact, conducted one, but they are not willing to share the results or make clear the impact or actions that have come out of it. I have asked for a briefing on it and have not heard back. I do not think that is in keeping with my experience of my relationship with the Minister and his colleagues, and I hope that we can find a way to resolve that. [Interruption.] The Minister says from a sedentary position that it is a different Minister. He is right, but it is the same Department, and I trust that now and again they cross each other's paths and liaise on matters relating to the Home Department.

We note the announcement in last week's integrated review that the Government intend to set up a new counter-terrorism operations centre, but there is nothing in this Bill about that, and we have little detail about how it fits into current structures, where it will be based, who it will be accountable to and what it will do. Of course we then have the ongoing review of Prevent. Things move quickly in the sphere of counter-terrorism, and it is important that the police, the security services, their operational colleagues, this House and, above all, the British public have confidence that the Government are adapting to emerging threats and, indeed, pre-empting them. Tough talk is fine, but we need to see it matched with tough action.

In Committee, we tabled amendments that would, for example, have led to additional judicial oversight and an even higher burden of proof, and compelled the publication of an exit strategy for TPIMs. I think I argued rightly that it is not in the interests of anyone to allow individuals to remain on TPIMs indefinitely, not least in terms of bringing them to justice.

On the issue of the burden of proof, we want TPIMs to be robust but flexible. That is why we struggle to see the logic in lowering the standard of proof, whether from a procedural, administrative or operational perspective, because no prior TPIM request had been rejected at that threshold, proving that it was no impediment. That is why we tabled an amendment that would have raised the standard of proof, like the one that the Government are proposing now some nine months later, to try to find a middle way on "reasonable and probable grounds". The provisions before us now effectively retain that higher standard, and of course we welcome that.

We acknowledge the work of colleagues in the other place on Lords amendment 18 and the amendments in lieu in the Minister's name. We welcome the fact that the Government have responded to our concerns and those raised by hon. Members across this House and, indeed, those in the other place, accepting the general principle of Lord Anderson's amendment but making the limit of a TPIM notice five years rather than four. We accept that; it is a good concession. As I said before, however, we will endeavour to monitor its workings and impact as we move forward.

Again, we acknowledge the Government's response to issues raised about the use of the polygraph. That is welcome too, and I appreciate the Minister's engagement on that with the official Opposition and colleagues from other parts of the UK.

Finally, we welcome Lords amendment 19. We believe that the framework around TPIMs will undoubtedly be improved and enhanced by the input of the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation.

We will always be uncompromising in tackling terrorism and, in that spirit, willing to compromise and work constructively with the Government. That has been our approach throughout the Bill's passage, and it is good to see that, in large part, the Government have listened to our concerns. However, I raise those questions, particularly because, as the Minister will be aware, this is a fast-changing environment and we need to be responsive. Getting that right is of the gravest importance for us all. Alongside scrutinising and, as appropriate and without apology, criticising the Government, I will always commit to working together where we can in this endeavour.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I have been encouraged by those here physically who tell me that they will make short contributions to try to do this without imposing a time limit. May I encourage those participating remotely, if they have prepared short speeches, to stick with the speeches they have prepared?

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I shall be as short as comes naturally to me, Mr Deputy Speaker.

This is a very important Bill, because the topics are of profound significance to every citizen of this country. It is a difficult and sometimes very fine balance that has to be achieved between the key obligation of any Government to protect the citizen, and our commitment to the rule of law, due process and sensible and rational sentencing in dealing with people who are suspected of being, or have been, involved in the gravest of offences. The endeavour to get it right was very important. I think the Bill has been improved by the scrutiny. I, too, thank the Minister for his approach—it is a pleasure to follow him and the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn)—and I think that we have got to a sensible place. I was grateful for the Minister's briefing to me about the Government's thinking on the Bill. As he knows, I have raised the two issues that we are discussing tonight on earlier occasions. I am grateful to the Government for listening and for the tribute to the noble Lord Anderson of Ipswich, who has vast experience in this field. I am pleased that the Government have taken on board the genuinely felt views and experience of many practitioners in the field, and I think that we have ended up in a sensible place of compromise.

9.30 pm

The position on burden of proof is recognisable and entirely coherent, and I hope that it can now be sensibly interpreted by the relevant authorities and courts whenever necessary. It still provides a significant hold, as the Minister said, in a number of other ways to deal with the matter. The five years also seems to be a sensible compromise.

I hope that we can now send the Bill forward for Royal Assent, get it on to the statute book and make sure, above all, that we thank those in the security services and the legal system who deal, day to day, with grave and pressing matters on our behalf, sometimes in ways that cannot be seen and are not always recognised. He must also make sure, where due process has to happen and we have to take exceptional measures, which are not within the norm of the way that we would deal with these things—as TPIMs are not—that we get the balance right. Efforts have been made on both sides to do that, and the Bill is therefore welcome for the way in which it provides for a balanced, constructive way forward.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP) [V]: I want to make just three short points, including on the standard of proof required for TPIMs and on the number of extensions that can be granted. First, however, it would be appropriate for me to start by acknowledging that many of the Lords amendments that we are considering tonight, though perhaps not speaking about, respond to concerns about how the Bill would apply to Scotland. That includes, as the Minister said, concerns about polygraph testing and the calculation of release dates. These concerns were raised previously by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Kenny MacAskill) and by the Scottish Government through our Justice Secretary, Humza Yousaf. I welcome the fact that UK Ministers and officials have engaged with those concerns and that a set of amendments has been agreed during the House of Lords proceedings that is acceptable to both Governments. I thank everyone involved for their work on that. That meant, of course, that legislative consent was granted by the Scottish Parliament.

Secondly, turning to TPIMs and the number of times that they can be extended, both Lords amendment 18 and the amendment in lieu are clearly better than the Government's original position of having no effective upper limit on extensions. However, it is still worth taking a step back and reflecting on the fact that, either way, we will now be doubling, or more than doubling, the length of time that a person can be made to live under really serious TPIM restrictions, while at the same time lowering the standard of proof for imposing them. That still is concerning.

As Lord Anderson said in the House of Lords, there is a danger of TPIMs becoming a more attractive option to the authorities than prosecution. Meanwhile, the warehousing of TPIMs subjects risks becoming the norm in place of genuine attempts to develop and implement exit strategies. To my mind, the four years provided for in the Lords amendment is way more than a sufficient concession to the Government already. For the Government to push for still longer shows a bit of a

[Stuart C. McDonald]

tin ear to the real and genuine concerns about the nature of these orders. However, with the Opposition having decided to compromise and with Lord Anderson reportedly content, there is no need to divide the House.

Finally, and similarly, the Government and the official Opposition have also previously agreed amendment 17, setting the standard of proof for a TPIM measure as reasonable belief. Again, as we have heard, that is another compromise. It is not as low as reasonable suspicion but not as robust as the balance of probabilities. I believe that the very real concerns about the appropriateness of these standards of proof, raised previously by the Scottish National party, have still not been properly addressed. Those accepting the compromise amendments in the Lords suggested that the difference between reasonable belief and balance of probabilities would be a fine one. I acknowledge that there are very significant legal minds who are content with that compromise, yet, as the Government's explanatory notes make clear, and as the Minister made clear in his speech, reasonable belief is clearly a lower standard.

As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West said at an earlier stage of the Bill, the case for lowering the standard of proof required "has not been made out".—[*Official Report*, 21 July 2020; Vol. 678, c. 2085.]

Indeed, Jonathan Hall, QC, the independent reviewer, remarked in his evidence to the Public Bill Committee:

"If it is right that the current standard of proof is usable and fair, and I think it is...if it ain't broke, why fix it?"—[*Official Report, Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Public Bill Committee*, 25 June 2020; c. 7, Q6.]

My colleagues and I agree with the independent reviewer and regret that the Government and the official Opposition do not at this stage. Instead of dividing the House, we will have to monitor the use of TPIMs ever more closely than before.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD) [V]: I, too, will speak briefly about TPIMs and the five-year limit. I listened very carefully to the Minister's speech and the one thing that he did not offer in respect of the extension from four years to five was any actual evidence or justification. It says a lot about the way the Government do business that they seek always to expand the scope of any provision just because they can, rather than because they have any good reason for it.

My noble Friends in the House of Lords tabled an amendment for a two-year limitation on TPIMs, so the move to four years was already a significant compromise. The Minister has not brought forward any reason or evidence to justify the extension to five years, other than the fact that they can.

Like the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), I do not intend to divide the House this evening, but it is worth putting down a marker. I do not think the Minister was in the House when the issue of control orders was in play, which led eventually, after some judicial intervention, to the creation of TPIMs. It seems to me that by constantly wishing to extend the boundaries of TPIMs, to lower the standard of proof and to extend the period for which they can be introduced, the Government run the very real risk of returning to the courts at some

stage. We will eventually be forced back here again because the Government have insisted on acting without proper evidence or justification.

That said, the Government will clearly proceed as they choose tonight, but I fear that this is not the last we will hear on the subject.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call Jim Shannon via video link. [*Interruption.*] No, so let us go to Ben Everitt in the Chamber. We will go back to Jim Shannon if we can establish a proper audio link.

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Can you hear me okay? [*Laughter.*]

This is a genuinely important Bill, because those who commit serious acts of terror must be met with the full weight of the justice system. Those who take lives in callous attacks on our streets should face sentences that match the severity of the crimes they commit.

I am pleased to say, as a member of the Bill Committee, that the Bill ensures that where offenders do not receive a life sentence, they will spend a minimum of 14 years behind bars. More importantly, it recognises that dangerous offenders who commit the most serious offences should not have the prospect of early release.

I am pleased that we have found a compromise on TPIMs, because the new measures in the Bill on TPIM notices are a tool of last resort, but they will ensure that the safety of the public is paramount.

Terrorism is a malign force that is ever changing and ever harder to fight with the tools of the past. This legislation will strengthen our hand against new threats, with stronger sentencing, improved monitoring and more agile tools. I imagine we all wish that the Bill were not necessary, but as long as these threats exist, we need the wherewithal to tackle them and this Bill provides it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I am afraid we have not been able to establish the link with Jim Shannon, so we will go straight to the Minister.

Chris Philp: I think I can say with some confidence that we will hear from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on another occasion, which I look forward to very much.

May I take this opportunity to put on record my thanks, and I think the thanks of the whole House, to the security services and the police, who do so much to keep us safe in what are often very difficult and dangerous circumstances? I also thank the shadow Minister, the Front Bench spokesmen for the Scottish National party and the other parties, and the Chair of the Justice Committee for the very constructive way in which they have engaged in the passage of the Bill. I will respond briefly to one or two points that were raised.

The shadow Minister was looking for briefing on, I think, lone actors. The Minister for Security, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire) would be the Minister to give that briefing. Obviously, he has had some health problems recently, but I hope that, through his private office, we can get that arranged as soon as he is back to his regular duties.

One or two questions were asked by the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) about the five-year time period. I would emphasise that there are very few TPIMs in use. At the time we took evidence last year there were only six in use. Moreover, the subject has a right of appeal, as I said, under section 16 of the TPIM Act, so there are protections in place.

The hon. Gentleman also posed a question about evidence on the need for five years, rather than four years. As the shadow Minister will recall, we took evidence from assistant Chief Constable Tim Jacques, who said that there is a risk if the TPIM is terminated too early and somebody slips out. It takes time then to regather evidence to reimpose a new TPIM. He mentioned two examples: one where it took 12 months and another where it took 16 months. We are very keen to avoid that sort of situation, so I think there is good evidence.

Let me conclude by saying that the Bill is a very important measure. It constitutes decisive action to keep our fellow citizens safe from the scourge of terrorism. We saw in Streatham, at Fishmongers' Hall and elsewhere how much of a threat former terrorist prisoners can pose on release. The Bill is designed to protect the public from those risks. I commend it to the House.

Lords amendment 1 agreed to.

Lords amendments 2 to 17 agreed to.

Lords amendment 18 disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) to (e) made in lieu of Lords amendment 18.

Lords amendments 19 to 77 agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We will now suspend for three minutes.

9.43 pm

Sitting suspended.

AIR TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT AND UNMANNED AIRCRAFT BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

Ordered,

That the Order of 2 February 2021 (Air Traffic Management and Unmanned Aircraft Bill [Lords] (Programme)), be varied as follows:

(1) Paragraphs (4) and (5) of the Order shall be omitted.

(2) Proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion two hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

(3) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.—
(*James Morris.*)

Air Traffic Management and Unmanned Aircraft Bill [Lords]

Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

New Clause 1

DUTY TO LIMIT NOISE IMPACTS

‘(1) The CAA must have a primary duty to reduce, minimise or mitigate significant adverse noise impacts of aviation.

(2) The CAA must have a duty to ensure that airport operators promoting an airspace change proposal include options that limit the number and class of aircraft that may use airspace in a managed area to achieve a sustained reduction in aircraft noise.’—(*John McDonnell.*)

This new clause would place statutory duties on the CAA to reduce, minimise or mitigate significant adverse noise impacts of aviation.

Brought up, and read the First time.

9.47 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab) [V]: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 2—*New CAA general duty: net zero aviation emissions*—

‘(1) In subsection 70(2) of the Transport Act 2000, after paragraph (d) insert—

“(da) to ensure the achievement of net zero aviation emissions by 2050 and a progressive and material reduction in aircraft noise impacts, in each case pursuant to guidance to be provided by the Secretary of State.”

This new clause would amend the CAA's duties, as set out in the Transport Act 2000, so that it is required to meet net zero emissions and reduce noise impacts.

New clause 3—*Reduction of noise from military aircrafts*—

‘The Secretary of State must consider in any airspace change proposal the inclusion of measures to reduce the noise pollution arising from military aviation.’

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to consider including measures to reduce noise pollution from military aviation in any airspace change proposal.

New clause 4—*Consultation on airspace change proposals*—

‘(1) Where a consultation on an airspace change proposal is underway but not completed before the passing of this Act—

- (a) the consultation must be stopped, and
- (b) a new consultation must be started.

(2) A consultation under subsection (1) includes a consultation being conducted by an airport or group of airports.

(3) The airspace change proposal that is the subject of the consultation may not be progressed until the new consultation under subsection (1)(b) has been completed.

(4) The new consultation must take account of any externalities arising from the airspace change proposal including—

- (a) air pollution,
- (b) noise pollution, and
- (c) road traffic congestion.”

This new clause would require any consultation on an airspace change proposal underway at the time the Act is passed to be stopped, and a new consultation started. It also specifies externalities the new consultation must take account of.

New clause 5—*Financial Impact Assessment on the Airspace Change Organisation Group*—

‘(1) The Secretary of State must conduct an impact assessment of the effects of this Act on the costs of the Airspace Change Organisation Group (ACOG) for a period of two years, beginning with the day this Act comes into force.

(2) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a report of the impact assessment required by subsection (1) within six months of the day this Act comes into force.

(3) The Secretary of State must include within the report required by subsection (2) a plan to manage the impacts identified within the report.’

This amendment would oblige the Secretary of State to investigate and publicise the financial impact on the air industry of compliance with the Act.

Amendment 3, in clause 2, page 2, line 4 at end insert—

‘(e) prepare an assessment, including a financial assessment, of—

(i) any externalities arising from an airspace change proposal that has been prepared or implemented, and

(ii) the geographic distribution of these externalities.’

This amendment would enable the Secretary of State to direct a person involved in an airspace change proposal to carry out an assessment of any externalities arising from the proposal.

Amendment 4, page 2, line 5, at end insert—

‘(1A) For the purposes of subsection 1(e), “externalities” include—

(a) air pollution,

(b) noise pollution, and

(c) road traffic congestion.’

This amendment is linked to Amendment 3.

Amendment 5, page 2, line 14, at end insert

‘modernisation of controlled airspace as part of the’.

This amendment will narrow the scope of direction by the Secretary of State to cases where a direction relates to airspace modernisation, so that enforcement orders may not be used in cases unrelated to airspace modernisation.

Amendment 6, in clause 3, page 3, line 2, at end insert

‘modernisation of controlled airspace as part of the’.

This amendment will narrow the scope of direction by the Secretary of State to cases where a direction related to airspace modernisation, so that enforcement orders may not be used in cases unrelated to airspace modernisation.

Amendment 2, page 3, line 34, at end insert—

‘(9) When the airspace change proposal relates to airspace used by military aircraft, the Secretary of State for Defence must require the cooperation of Military Air Traffic Control with the CAA to ensure the airspace change proposal incorporates measures to reduce military aircraft—

(a) noise; and

(b) pollution.’

This amendment would require the Secretary of State for Defence to reduce noise and pollution from military aircrafts where an airspace change proposal relates to airspace used by military aircrafts.

Amendment 1, in clause 5, page 4, line 29, at end insert—

‘(6) The CAA must publish emissions, noise and health impact information associated with the airspace change proposal as part of their consultation process.’

This amendment would establish a transparency duty on the CAA to publish emissions, noise and health impact information.

John McDonnell: I wish to speak to new clauses 1 and 2 and amendment 1, standing in my name. I will seek to be as brief as possible, Mr Deputy Speaker; with your permission, I will aim to speak for no more than 10 minutes. Over the years, I have tried to use every legislative or policy debate opportunity to place the issues of noise and emissions at the heart of every discussion in this House on the future of aviation policy. These amendments seek once again to do just that.

I think I am the only Member of the Commons who can claim to have attended every major planning public inquiry and court case relating to the expansion of Heathrow airport over the last nearly 50 years. Over the years, I have attended as an interested local resident, then as the local Greater London Council councillor, then as the Member of Parliament for the Heathrow area. In addition to the deeply felt worries of local residents about the demolition of their homes and villages, two issues have been the consistent basis of challenge in these inquiries and legal contests. They are the impact of noise, and the impact of emissions on the community in the immediate area, as well as across large areas of London and now more widely.

At the terminal 4 inquiry, there was general support for limited expansion of the airport, as long as there were conditions attached to any permission to expand in relation to noise. By the time of the terminal 5 inquiry, a great deal of that support had turned to opposition, as the noise agreements had proved so ineffective in guaranteeing people’s quiet enjoyment of their homes, gardens and open spaces. By that time, much more evidence had emerged about the effect of noise on health, and about air pollution as the cause of severe respiratory conditions, vascular problems and cancers. It was because of the environmental impact that the planning inspector recommended that there be no further expansion at Heathrow after terminal 5. Heathrow Airport wrote to me and my constituents saying that if it was granted terminal 5, it would not need or seek a third runway. Of course that was a lie, and within six months it was publicly lobbying for a third runway.

Subsequently, we have also grown aware of the role that emissions play in climate change. I find it hard to comprehend why, despite our facing the existential threat of a climate emergency; despite knowing that 40,000 people a year die from air pollution; and despite all that we now know about the health implications of noise and sleep impairment, consideration is still being given in Government to airport expansion. We need to ensure that all the aviation legislation we consider addresses the critical issues of noise and emissions, which is what these new clauses and amendments seek to do.

I am grateful to the Minister for writing to me explaining the Government’s attitude to my amendments. On a positive note, I see from this correspondence that although the Minister does not support my new clauses or amendments, he does not disagree with the intention behind them. I welcome his commitment to ensuring that the issues raised by them are addressed in any future review of air navigation guidance and noise policy.

Let me briefly run through the new clauses and amendments, and some questions in response to the Minister’s position. New clause 1 would place a statutory duty on the Civil Aviation Authority to reduce, minimise or mitigate significant adverse noise impacts of aviation. The Minister has argued in correspondence that applying

a new general duty to all the CAA's functions is not desirable because safety must remain the primary duty in the context of section 70(1) of the Transport Act 2000. The intention of the new clause is not to reduce safety as a priority, but rather to raise noise and emissions reductions up the priority order. It should be the duty of all public bodies to ensure that we are safe from noise, air pollution and climate change.

The Minister states that the CAA must take account of any guidance on environmental objectives given to it by the Secretary of State, and that is true. However, the effect of the legislation is to subordinate all the environmental matters to section 70(2)(a) and the duty

"to secure the most efficient use of airspace consistent with the safe operation of aircraft and the expeditious flow of air traffic".

Noise and emissions are always reduced to being second-class citizens in this ranking order.

The Secretary of State has powers under section 78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982 to limit numbers and types of craft active during the night period at Heathrow and the other airports designated under the Act, so one question that needs to be addressed now is whether this section should be amended to include limits on numbers and types of aircraft during the day as well.

The Minister referred in correspondence with me to the consultation on noise caps in the aviation strategy Green Paper, and said that noise reduction would be looked at again as we come through the pandemic. I welcome that, but the Green Paper applied to all airports other than Heathrow, and so does not provide communities under Heathrow flightpaths with any certainty for the future. I would welcome it if the Minister considered amending the aviation national policy statement to ensure that a noise cap was considered in relation to Heathrow and potential expansion there.

The Minister has stated that noise restrictions should be placed on airports, and not, as in new clause 1, on the airspace around the airport. He argues that the latter would—I quote—"create a significant burden on the airspace change process and add great complexity to the day-to-day management of airspace." That response unfortunately highlights my concern that enhancing capacity is prioritised over reducing the harm to overflowed communities and the environment. In my view, airspace and airport capacity should be increased only subject to strict noise and emission reduction conditions. That is a role that the CAA should have a hand in playing. Giving permission to expand capacity on the basis of asserted benefits that cannot be translated into conditions, and whose delivery the regulator cannot monitor and enforce, is not consistent with the Government's stated policy on noise or climate change.

New clause 2 would amend the CAA's duties, as set out in the Transport Act 2000, to require it to achieve net zero emissions and reduce noise impacts. The Minister has asserted that the Government cannot support this amendment because the word "ensure" would make it difficult for the Civil Aviation Authority to accept any proposal that did not reduce emissions and aircraft noise, regardless of the overall benefits of the proposal. However, section 70(2) of the 2000 Act is intended to list all the factors that the Civil Aviation Authority must consider. None is supposed to have a greater weight than the others, and a variety of language is used for the different objectives—everything from "secure" to "satisfy"

and "take account of". Some hierarchy of responsibility seems to be emerging in the discussions about the role of the Civil Aviation Authority and what should be taken into account. I do not see why "ensure" would be any more problematic than, for example, "secure". We need clarity about the role that the CAA can play in ensuring that we can move towards net zero emissions, because it plays an important role in tackling climate change by developing an environmental aviation strategy.

Amendment 1 would place a transparency duty on the Civil Aviation Authority to publish emissions, noise and health impact information. The Minister has said that assessments covering noise, health, local air quality and greenhouse gas impacts must be submitted by proposers along with any formal airspace change proposal, and he argues that they are subsequently published on the CAA website. My amendment would simply require this information to be published more clearly, alongside the proposed changes. That would help deepen community understanding of the proposals and the alternative options.

Last week, the Government announced kickstart funding for the airspace modernisation strategy. The Minister must ensure that local communities have a genuine voice in this process. It is vital that the redesign of airspace delivers mutually balanced outcomes for the industry and local communities alike. The Government should commit to publishing assessments of the noise and health impacts of concentrated flightpaths before any final strategy is signed off.

I thank the Minister for the courteous way in which he has responded to my amendments to the Bill in correspondence. He offered a meeting, which unfortunately, due to last-minute business in the House to which I was committed, did not take place. However, the issues we are addressing today go well beyond this legislation, so I hope he will agree to meet me and a few colleagues to take the discussion further, as this is so important to communities living close to airports—and, given the concerns we all have about climate change, all our constituents.

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), who speaks with great authority on this particular topic. I am also grateful, as he was, to the Minister for his kind consideration of the issues I have raised about the Bill as it has proceeded to this point.

I would like to speak to my amendments: new clause 4, which would seek to halt, or essentially cancel, and then start new consultations on airspace changes that are currently under way; and amendments 3 and 4, which speak to the requirement for the Minister and the reviews he proposes to take into account a financial assessment, and within that particularly to take account of the externalities comprising part of that financial assessment. With your leave, Mr Deputy Speaker, and that of the House, I would like to talk through each of those.

10 pm

As the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington has said, there are already some concerns that this Bill, although a tremendous step forward, could do more in recognition of some of the environmental impacts—how we reshape our airspace and how we expand, or potentially

do not expand, the airports that serve this country. The issue on new clause 4 is that the considerations—those in the Bill and those that have come up as we have proceeded with our discussions—will not apply to any consultation that is already under way.

The Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but I believe that there are a very limited number of consultations currently in progress. As far as I am aware, there is only one, and that relates to a consultation on the airspace change between Luton airport and Stansted airport. The effect of it will be to change quite dramatically the flightpath of aircraft into Luton airport, moving them away from their current location further north into Huntingdonshire and then down over my constituency. It seems to me to be wrong that the consultation should proceed at this time. It really ought to be halted so that the Bill can take effect.

The Minister will know that this consultation has taken place entirely through the covid period, and he will know that there are many concerns that no effective alternatives have been offered to those that were thought of by the presenters in the first place. He will also know—he may not know, but I have certainly said to him—that it does have a number of hallmarks making me think that this is being driven purely by the commercial interests of the airports, not by considerations about those whom the airspace changes will affect.

Many representations have been made to me by constituents and by parish councils that will be affected by this change, and it seems to me to be entirely appropriate that this consultation should be stopped and that a new one should be started under the new provisions of this Bill, as directed by the Minister. If the Minister will not accept that as a new clause in the Bill, perhaps he would use his offices and the powers he already has to seek a renewal and change of that consultation.

Amendments 3 and 4 seek, in a different way from the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington, to promote the issues of environmental considerations as part of the responsibilities of airspace changes in the future. In particular, I am seeking to make sure that any assessment the Secretary of State or Minister makes for airspace changes must be a financial assessment that includes an assessment of the externalities arising from airspace change proposals and an understanding of what the geographical distribution may be of any economic externalities. Amendment 4 states that those externalities should include

“air pollution,...noise pollution, and...road traffic congestion.”

To go back to the particular issue of Luton airport, it is of course a privately owned airport, but it is on land owned by Luton council. Luton airport has been growing over the years and it plans to grow even further. Before this debate I looked up the airport revenues and found that in 2009 the revenues were £98 million and that in 2019, just 10 years later, the figure had more than doubled to £226 million. It is a rapidly expanding airport, which means that there is more noise pollution, more environmental pollution, more air pollution and, of course, more congestion. These are natural things that occur when airspace changes are required, usually because airports are increasing the size of their footprint and the number of passengers they carry. The cost of those changes falls disproportionately on people in the surrounding areas—the people of Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Milton Keynes—but

all the benefits go to those who institute the airspace changes: the airport operators and the people who take a profit or rent from the land. That is not a fair basis for the Minister to proceed on. We really ought to make sure that in future the assessment of airspace changes is required to take account of the externalities that affect the villages and people who suffer because of the congestion, noise pollution, air pollution and other effects.

An additional responsibility comes to light in the case of Luton airport, because the land on which the airport operates is owned by Luton Borough Council, which is part of the public sector. Surely there ought to be an additional responsibility on airports on land that is owned by the state. It is interesting that Luton Borough Council takes £20 million a year directly into its coffers from Luton airport and a further £10 million in charitable contributions that are only for charities based in Luton, while the rest of the people who suffer because of the air pollution, noise pollution and traffic congestion get absolutely nothing.

It would be interesting if the Minister addressed the issue in his winding-up speech. Will he look—in future, if not in the Bill—at the cost of the externalities of airspace changes? Does he believe that airports on land owned by the public sector have an additional responsibility to take wider account of their social responsibilities? If so, will he have a word with his colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, who just three or four months ago gave a bail-out to Luton Borough Council that was not available to Central Bedfordshire Council or Bedford Borough Council because they were no longer getting rent money from the airport? Will he request that the Ministry says that if the council wants to continue to benefit from that loan, it must start to share the benefits of its profits from the airport? That would be a way of making sure that those externalities are covered.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I thank all hon. Members who have spoken or will speak on Report today, and those who spoke on Second Reading or in Committee, as well as Members in the other place, for their work on the Bill. I remain certain of the requirement for this legislation. The Minister and I have a shared ambition for airspace modernisation in the United Kingdom. As I have said before, the country has been managing its airspace with analogue technology from the previous century, with piecemeal updates as demand has grown—an analogue system in a digital age. The Bill is vital to hasten and co-ordinate an ambitious airspace change programme fit for the 21st century.

Part 2, which involves the regulation of air traffic control services, is very welcome. I am pleased that the Bill is addressing regulation now; all hon. Members present agree that the changes will enable the Civil Aviation Authority to maintain the UK's excellent flying safety record and continue to be a world-class leader in aviation safety. The Minister and I have discussed airport slots ad nauseam, including on Second Reading and in Committee. Labour has supported the Government on recent statutory instruments to extend the temporary waiver on slot regulations owing to the covid-19 pandemic. I am content that clause 12 will provide the Government with the tools to tackle airport slot allocation issues that arise from the pandemic.

Part 3, which provides further police powers over the use of unmanned aircraft, is long overdue; I am grateful that tonight we are closer to bringing those powers into effect. As technology has moved on, drones have become more and more common, and it was only a matter of time before an incident such as the one at Gatwick airport in 2018 that disrupted air traffic. I am grateful to the Minister for addressing the concerns raised in Committee and am content to support this part of the Bill today.

It would, however, be remiss to speak on this Bill tonight and not mention the current situation in which the aviation sector finds itself. The covid-19 pandemic has devastated the industry. The UK was previously the third largest aviation market in the world, but now we are not so sure. The Government, through neglect and their belief that the markets would be able to support this huge section of our national economy, have hamstrung the entire sector.

Twelve months ago we were led to believe that the Treasury would be offering a bespoke support package for airlines, aerospace, airports and ground-handlers and other support services; a year later no specific aviation deal has emerged. It is vital that when the global travel taskforce reports to the Prime Minister on 12 April the Department for Transport and colleagues across Government roll out a robust and comprehensive plan to enable aviation to lift off into the skies again. This summer will be make or break for the sector, and the ambition presented by this Bill will be for nothing if we cannot maintain our advantage on the world stage with one of our leading industries after the pandemic draws to a close.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I hope you noticed that I was very good to you there, Mr Kane, by not interrupting you even though you went a bit wider than you should have.

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): It is a genuine pleasure to follow the shadow Minister the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane). This is one of those events where we sit down and think, “This is Parliament at its best.” I served on the Bill Committee, where we rattled through our work—at an interceptor pace is the best way to describe it, using an aerospace metaphor.

As the shadow Minister said, this modernisation of our airspace is long overdue; it is what we need to do to keep our skies open. We need to find a way for co-existence between those interceptors—the Typhoons that fly through our sky and keep us safe—passenger jets and unmanned aircraft, because the sky is becoming an increasingly busy space. I talk about co-existing from a position of fairly strong expertise being the MP for Milton Keynes North, because of course we co-exist with our robots—our delivery robots that wander around delivering groceries and are part of everyday life. Drones are essentially sky robots, and we need to find a way of co-existing. This is a hybrid Parliament, and we now have hybrid skies and hybrid airspace. So if we co-exist with our sky robot friends, we need to find a way of making judgment day a matter for the regulators, not the robots.

Our airspace is our gateway to the world. Let me deal specifically with the points raised in the Bill Committee and here tonight. This modernisation will make us more efficient. It will make our airspace more efficient, reduce noise, reduce pollution, reduce congestion, and, of course,

as others have said eloquently, it will reduce the impact on the communities over which the airspace lies.

I support Government on this Bill. The UK is and will remain a global leader in aerospace, and in fact global MK and global Britain will be open for business because our skies will be open for business.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP) [V]: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt). Sadly, my speech will not have any references to Skynet or “Terminator 2”, but I do rise virtually to speak to amendments 5 and 6 and new clause 5 in my name and on behalf of the Scottish National party.

It is fair to say that I have been rather a vocal critic of this Government’s action—or inaction—in relation to the aviation industry. For the industry that has been hardest hit by the pandemic not to merit a single mention in the Chancellor’s Budget speech is quite something. While I will continue to press the Minister and his colleagues on other issues relating to the sector, including support and equal access for UK aviation operators to EU markets, as they do to ours, I thank the Minister for responding to my calls on behalf of the sector to help fund the immediate future of the airspace modernisation strategy.

10.15 pm

The work undertaken by the Airspace Change Organising Group is crucial for a sustainable aviation sector and to help drive down emissions in the process. As I have said to the Minister previously, that role should be formally acknowledged by asking ACOG to sit on the Government’s Jet Zero Council.

Updating our airspace is long overdue, given that it has not been reviewed and renewed since the 1950s. While we are on the cusp of developing electric and hydrogen-powered aircraft, our airspace is stuck in the age of the Vickers Vanguard. Let us forget that the Government are coming a little late to the party and embrace the fact that they showed up at all. The group’s work will bring long-needed efficiencies to airspace management and provide a potential boost to regional connectivity as the sustainability of air services outside of London improves, potentially allowing improved connections for airports such as Glasgow in my constituency, with a consequent boost to employment and prosperity for local economies.

The £5.5 million funding announced is a drop in the ocean out of a near £900 billion of public expenditure. It is two Downing Street press briefing rooms. However, if that support had not been provided, the detrimental impact on the aviation sector and connectivity across these islands could have been huge. That being said, £10 million of direct funding to cover the next two years would have been better. Perhaps we will have to come back to that, but credit where it is due. For that reason, I confirm that I will not press new clause 5 to a Division. I look forward to the important work of the Airspace Change Organising Group bearing fruit in the near future.

Given the time pressures, I will speak briefly to amendments 5 and 6, which relate to my concerns about some of the language in the Bill about the powers granted to the DfT, the Secretary of State and the CAA. Clauses 2 and 3 would give the Secretary of State the power to

give a direction regarding any aspect of airspace change. That may well be necessary to implement the wholesale change envisaged by the strategy currently under way, but I am hesitant about the Department having the power in the longer term to mandate relatively minor changes to airspace management with potentially no scope for oversight or amendment by the industry, this Parliament or other elected bodies. I would welcome the Minister making an absolute commitment that the powers being granted to his Department are not to be used in the course of ongoing airspace management. I hope that things instead will move forward on a consensual basis alongside the industry.

As I said on Second Reading, I welcome the powers being granted to the police and prison authorities to tackle drone flights specifically aimed at breaking prison regulations. We know about the use of drones in delivering contraband, particularly illegal drugs, into prisons, enriching those in control of the supply. Although it is a smaller problem in Scotland, it is a growing one.

Until now, the power of the police and prison officers to investigate and take action against drone flights has been limited by legislation that predates the technological advances that have resulted in cheap, easy-to-obtain drones. For just a couple of hundred pounds, someone intending to transport drugs into prison can make many multiples of that with just one run. We all know how much damage drugs can do in prison, so stopping supply at source is fundamental.

Despite some high-profile cases over recent years, I do not in any way want to tag drones in a negative light—quite the opposite, in fact. The overwhelming majority of drone users and owners use them responsibly and perfectly legally. Ensuring that the use of these devices is appropriately regulated can only help ensure that the benefits of unmanned vehicles continue for users and consumers alike, including the great pilot initiative to support Scotland's NHS being carried out at the moment.

To conclude, my caveats about the Secretary of State's powers aside, the majority of the Bill is progress in the right direction at a time when the aviation industry is in the midst of its biggest challenge since the war—a challenge not helped by the Government's year-long vow of silence on the Chancellor's pledge this time last year of sector-specific help for the industry. Bringing our airspace into the modern era and showing our skies are used efficiently and with minimal impact on the environment is to be welcomed, and we will support the Bill's passage this evening.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): The benefits and disbenefits of the proximity to Heathrow airport are two sides of the same coin for my constituency. The issues of air space management and, crucially, noise pollution are of great importance, but this Government—and, I have to say, most previous Governments—have been slow and not done enough. I do not want airspace modernisation being used as an excuse to enable yet more flights into Heathrow, resulting in more hours and days with continuous noise, and yet more traffic congestion and air pollution.

The Civil Aviation Authority is the key statutory authority governing aviation, but it has few powers to control noise, or, for that matter, any other environmental objectives such as the climate crisis and the impact of

emissions, all of which are subsumed beneath the objective of safety. I have worked for many years—long before I was elected to this place—with my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), and I support his amendment to the Bill to include in the CAA's remit a duty

“to reduce, minimise or mitigate...noise”.

I regret that it has not been accepted by the Government.

There is a growing body of evidence—referred to in the recent report by the Independent Commission on Civil Aviation Noise—which cites the health and other impacts of aviation noise, from hypertension to cognitive impairment in children. To clarify, in normal times 70% of flights arriving at Heathrow come over my constituency. They are locked into a gradually descending final arrival path. Roughly two thirds of my constituents live within the area of significant noise disturbance, and the other third would do if runway three were to go ahead, or, for that matter, if the CAA approved additional flights by allowing planes to join the final approach late, from the north or south.

In the last 12 months, my constituents and I have noticed a difference to our daily lives, with a 90% cut in arrival flights over our homes. We know that for Heathrow to go back to anything like normal operation, the current noise-free days cannot last, but when it comes to airspace changes, communities affected by aircraft noise should at least be treated with respect, be consulted and have their views treated seriously.

The pandemic has exposed not only how much our noise environment is dominated by aircraft noise, but also how much our local economy has been dependent on the airport. Unemployment in communities around Heathrow has risen by 150% on average, and that is while many people are still furloughed and not yet adding to the unemployment figures. This shows the urgent need for support for our aviation communities, as previous speakers have mentioned. We have been promised an aviation recovery strategy for nine months, but all we have had is silence; yet, aviation is the sector that will take the longest to recover.

To conclude, whether it is on noise or aviation jobs, this Government do not seem willing to listen and act to support airport communities.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD) [V]: It is a pleasure to be here, speaking in the Chamber remotely, at the Report stage of this very important Bill, which the Liberal Democrats have supported all the way through. The provisions it contains are long overdue, particularly those on airspace modernisation.

We welcome the opportunity for the Government to take powers to improve the use of airspace for the benefit, yes, of the aviation industry, but also for the communities who live around airports, as the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) just spelled out in her excellent speech. I, too, represent one of those communities—Richmond Park. We have long been plagued by excessive noise from aircraft. There has been some welcome respite during the pandemic and the lockdown, but my constituents are fearful of what may happen in the future, especially if the Government go ahead with their stated plans to allow expansion at Heathrow. I impress on them that they have the opportunity to put my constituents' fears at rest on that matter.

We support the airspace modernisation plans in the Bill. However, I reiterate what the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) said: if not through this Bill, then at some time in the future, the CAA ought to be given the power to consider the impact of noise on local communities when designating airspace. It is such an important issue because of the impact that it has on mental health, on physical health, on people's ability to sleep and on people's ability to go about their daily lives. That is highlighted to me so often by my constituents. Again, it was discussed very eloquently by the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth.

I also support what the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington said about the impact that climate change is having and the need to give powers in that regard to the CAA. That is a really important point. The Government are not yet being clear about how they expect the aviation industry to contribute to their drive towards net zero. It is absolutely essential that we get more clarity on how that will be achieved. Aviation obviously has an important role to play in our economy. It has had an exceptionally tough year, and we know from announcements made only today that the future of aviation continues to be very unsettled. We look forward to more direction from the Government about how they plan to build back better in aviation.

The Liberal Democrats support this Bill and will continue to support it through its remaining stages.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We will see if we are any luckier with Jim Shannon this time.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) [V]: I hope, Mr Deputy Speaker, you can hear my dulcet tones all the way from Northern Ireland. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this issue.

Of particular interest to me is new clause 12, which seeks to provide temporary powers to amend the retained EU law on airport slot allocation due to the coronavirus pandemic. The 80:20 or "use it or lose it" rule is used to monitor compliance and determine whether airlines can retain their legacy slots. The European Commission has waived the rule for the summer and winter seasons in 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic—exceptional times, without a doubt. I absolutely support the Government in their move to make a similar waiver through the use of these temporary powers. Our airline industry is in dire need of support and help—I know the Minister has been very responsive to that and I thank him for it—not only in the short term but in the long term. We need to look at how we can come alongside the industry to work with it.

Particularly for Northern Ireland, it is essential that our routes are protected—our domestic routes, that is, but we have some hopes for the future that we may even have some international routes, which is something we are encouraged by. We are also encouraged by the Government's commitment on air passenger duty, and we will see how that works for the benefit of all the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Connectivity is vital and must be protected at all costs for the foreseeable future.

I have spoken at length regarding drones, particularly their use in prisons. However, I also recognise the benefit of drones used in the right way. The Government have put in place legislation to prevent unmanned aircraft

being able to fly near airports, and technology is in place to neutralise any unmanned aircraft that could breach the quarantine distance around airports, so there are many good things to welcome. Unmanned aircraft must be regulated for many reasons, none being more important than security. I am very pleased that clauses 13 to 18, together with schedules 8 to 11, will give powers to police the misuse of unmanned aircraft. These include, first, the power to ground unmanned aircraft; secondly, the power to stop and search people and vehicles; and thirdly, the power to obtain a warrant to search property. There will be further provision for fixed penalties for certain offences relating to unmanned aircraft. I welcome this further tightening of the law. It is also welcome that those who are using a drone for a purpose that is legal and honourable will not have any issue with these powers or feel threatened in any way at all. However, can the Minister confirm that all necessary discussions have taken place with all regions in the United Kingdom, particularly Northern Ireland?

In this age of technical wonder, it is imperative that we make the best of advances such as drone technology and heat signatures to find lost animals, for example. As someone who lives in the countryside, I know that many of my farming friends, colleagues, partners and neighbours wish to see that. We must also regulate to prevent misuse, and the Bill sets that balance. That is why I support the Government's intentions and commitment, which I believe are honourable, honest and true.

10.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Robert Courts): I thank all Members for their contributions and the constructive way in which they have engaged with the Bill throughout and with the new clauses and amendments before the House. I will address each of the provisions.

New clause 1, tabled by the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and supported by the hon. Members for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) and for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury), seeks to ensure that the Civil Aviation Authority prioritises noise when considering airspace changes by making it a primary duty. The Government recognise the impact that aviation noise has on communities that are overflowed, including those in the right hon. Member's constituency, which may also be impacted when aircraft are on the ground. The Government have in place regulations and policies to mitigate and reduce aircraft noise but cannot, I am afraid, support the new clause.

Subsection (1) of the new clause puts a primary duty on the CAA to

"reduce, minimise or mitigate significant adverse noise impacts of aviation."

The CAA's duties include regulation of civil aviation safety, aviation security functions, licensing of airlines and more. Those are in addition to its duties around the use of UK airspace, to which the Bill is more closely linked. Specifically on its duties around air navigation functions, section 70(1) of the Transport Act 2000 states that safety is "to have priority" over the CAA's other functions. I would like to reassure the right hon. Gentleman and other Members that, in carrying out those air navigation functions, the CAA must take into account guidance on environmental objectives given to

[Robert Courts]

it by the Secretary of State. That guidance currently takes the form of the “Air Navigation Guidance 2017”. Altitude-based priorities are clear that the environmental priority in airspace below 7,000 feet is to minimise

“the impact of aviation noise in a manner consistent with the government’s overall policy on aviation noise”.

For the reason that safety must remain the primary duty of the CAA in its air navigation functions, the Government cannot accept subsection (1).

Subsection (2) of new clause 1 seeks to constrain the use of airspace with regard to number and type of aircraft. The frequency of overflight and the type of aircraft are clearly among the most important contributing factors to the noise experienced by communities. There is a wide variety of powers available to Government and airports to reduce noise at airports, including section 78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982, which the Government use to limit numbers and types of aircraft during the night period at Heathrow. I should add that, in the 2018 aviation strategy Green Paper, the Government consulted on a proposal to routinely set noise caps. We expect to look once again at these important issues and will consider whether current policy on noise reduction needs to be strengthened. The Government believe that it is right that any restrictions on noise should be imposed on the airport itself, and that it is not appropriate or practical to restrict the use of airspace around an airport for these purposes, because to do so would add great complexity to the day-to-day management of airspace.

New clause 2 seeks to ensure that the Government meet their target of net zero emissions by 2050 and that aircraft noise is mitigated, even reduced. I am sure the House will agree that those are noble objectives. The Government will consult over the coming months on a net zero aviation strategy, setting out the steps to reach net zero aviation emissions by 2050. However, we are unable to support the new clause because it would have some unintended consequences, which I will briefly explain.

In most airspace change proposals, there is a complex balance of trade-offs between the needs of airspace users, the airports, the military and the environment—it is the co-existence that my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt) addressed in his speech and that was mentioned by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). Those trade-offs can be further complicated by the competing needs of different types of airspace user, or, in the case of the environment, the desire to reduce emissions or aircraft noise at the expense of the other. It is far from easy for an airspace change proposal to meet everyone’s wishes, and the CAA has to make the best decision that it can based on the available evidence.

Under section 70 of the Transport Act 2000, the CAA is required to exercise its air navigation functions in a manner that it considers best calculated to achieve a number of objectives, which already include a requirement for the CAA to take into account the environmental objectives in guidance given by the Secretary of State. If the right hon. Gentleman’s new clause 2 were accepted, the requirement “to ensure” would make it very difficult for the CAA to accept any proposal that did not reduce emissions and aircraft noise, regardless of the overall benefits of the proposal or the other conditions under

section 70(2). That would act as a significant constraint on the Government’s airspace modernisation programme, and therefore the Government are unable to accept or support this new clause.

Amendment 1, tabled by the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington, is motivated by a desire to ensure that communities receive clarity on the emissions, health and noise impact of any airspace change process, and of course I agree that it is vital for communities to have clarity and to understand the implications of how any airspace change might impact them.

I wish to assure the House that the Department’s air navigation guidance to the CAA already requires airspace change sponsors to consider the emission, health and noise impacts of their proposal and to consult with communities on its impacts. The Government consider that there is therefore no need for this amendment, as mechanisms already exist to ensure that communities are suitably informed of the potential impact of airspace change proposals.

I turn to new clause 4, which has been tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller). He rightly wishes to reflect the recent airspace change experience of constituents in places such as Pottton, Sandy and Biggleswade, as well as others living in nearby constituency areas. He has spoken to me about them, and he has spoken powerfully again about them tonight. I appreciate that communities, wherever they live, are always going to be rightly concerned about any airspace change proposal that may affect them. I hope that he will be reassured by the fact that “Air Navigation Guidance 2017” was produced in response to many concerns that such communities have raised. That is embedded in the Civil Aviation Authority’s CAP1616 process for airspace change—a new process that is only just beginning to have effect. I assure my hon. Friend that the air navigation guidance and CAP1616 require the sponsor to actively engage and consult with key stakeholders, including communities, on their proposals.

I am mindful that my hon. Friend’s new clause would require sponsors to undertake a road traffic congestion assessment in their proposal. That is important, but the Government are not convinced that it is appropriate for a consultation on airspace change proposals to include road traffic congestion.

I am aware of a number of points that my hon. Friend has made with regard to Luton and its development consent order. I hope that he will understand that, as the final decision on that would rest with the Secretary of State for Transport, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on it at this stage. I hope that the House and my hon. Friend will agree that the long-established planning system is the right place for communities to have their say on such matters. As we consider aviation policy in the future, I will remember, of course, all the points that he has made.

I turn briefly to my hon. Friend’s amendments 3 and 4, which have the laudable intention of ensuring that air pollution and noise impacts of any airspace change proposal are identified and monetised. He will, I am sure, be relieved to hear that the Department for Transport’s transport analysis guidance assessment tool includes the need to monetise many of those aspects, as the specific location is already an important requirement under the CAP1616 process that I have referred to already.

I am grateful that the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) has indicated that he does not intend to press new clause 5 to a vote, but given that he had the courtesy to table it, I shall deal with it briefly. The Airspace Change Organisation Group is a ring-fenced team that sits within NATS, so is funded by the NATS charging scheme and would not be affected by the costs of airspace change in the way that I assume the hon. Gentleman fears.

The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North also tabled amendments 5 and 6, which would narrow the powers in the Bill so that they could be used only for controlled airspace. I remind the House that clauses 2 and 3 will be used only when the Secretary of State considers that their use will assist in the delivery of the CAA's airspace strategy. Airspace modernisation is not just about the masterplan or controlled airspace, as the hon. Member may feel; those are only two of the 15 initiatives in the CAA's airspace modernisation strategy. To restrict the powers only to the masterplan or controlled airspace would put at risk the delivery of those other initiatives.

The hon. Member also asked me to confirm the circumstances in which the powers can be used; they are intended to be used as a last resort if the airspace change proposal is not progressed voluntarily. The CAA's oversight team will work with sponsors to ensure, before it recommends to the Secretary of State that the direction powers be used, that they are not intended to be used if there are factors outside the airspace sponsor's control. In any event, there are a number of procedural safeguards, such as consultation with the proposed recipient, the direction being in writing and the Secretary of State being of the view that the direction will assist in delivering the airspace modernisation strategy. There is also a provision to allow the recipient to appeal to the Competition Appeal Tribunal if it is claimed that the decision was based on an error of fact, wrong in law or made in the exercise of a discretion.

I have addressed all the new clauses and amendments; I hope, Mr Deputy Speaker, that you will allow me one or two other words. I do not wish to detain Members any longer than is necessary, but while I am on my feet I thank all Members who have participated in the passage of this Bill. I thank the Committee Chairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Sir Charles Walker) and the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), for having expertly guided the Bill through Committee, and I thank the Opposition, and particularly the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), for their constructive criticism both here and in the other place. I thank the Bill team and all the team at the Department for Transport, the CAA and NATS, and the ministerial teams from the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Ministry of Defence, all of whom have played critical parts in bringing the Bill to the House.

The Bill is critical and, as we have already rehearsed, will bring airspace into the modern age and deal with the opportunities and challenges in respect of drones and a number of other critical aspects of aviation. It has taken us some time to get the Bill all the way through both Houses and to the position we are in today, but it is vital that we have done so. I thank all Members for their part in having brought the Bill to this point and I commend it to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I am not too sure how much more the Minister will say on Third Reading now, but we will wait to see.

John McDonnell [V]: He has confused me as well, Mr Deputy Speaker.

There has been an acknowledgement of the issues raised in the new clauses and amendments. It is clear that we all agree on the objectives, even if we do not agree on the path to achieve them. I am a great believer in the powers of conversion, so we will campaign on, but this evening I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Third Reading

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—(Robert Courts.)

10.44 pm

Mike Kane: I am proud to have Manchester airport in my constituency, as you well know, Mr Deputy Speaker; I am proud to be shadow aviation spokesman; and I am proud of this country's world-class aviation sector, which is the third largest on the planet. We want to protect the sector, grow it and make it better. We want to protect and grow the interlinked aerospace sector, in which the UK has world-leading engine and aircraft manufacturers. Rolls met Royce in the Midland hotel in Manchester—that is where it came from. We want to facilitate the study of science, technology, engineering and maths subjects for all our young people who are looking at careers in this highly skilled, highly paid sector. We want to get past this pandemic, and we will keep our eyes on the horizon. This legislation helps us to do that.

I have already discussed, today and previously, the passion that the Minister and I share for airspace modernisation, and what it brings: increased capacity in our skies. The noise and carbon reduction that it will bring will make aviation in our country better. For the benefit of Members who missed the procedures in the other place, and have not got around to watching the Committee stage in this place, I will repeat my noble Friend Lord Rosser's point that the provision for drone technology has not been updated since the Aviation and Maritime Security Act 1990. He pointed out that that is closer to Yuri Gagarin's first trip into space than it is to today; I will not regale the Minister again with Yuri Gagarin's trip to Manchester in 1961, as I did in Committee.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you admonished me for going off-piste a few moments ago by talking about the Government's lack of an aviation-specific deal. I was once given sage advice by the former Member for Buckingham and previous Speaker of the House of Commons about never allowing bureaucracy a chance to say "no" to us in this place, so on that basis, I thank my caseworker Al Franco, who retires on Wednesday after a lifetime of service to the people of Manchester and Salford. He has worked for the late, great Paul Goggins and me over the past 10 years. Al has been a remarkable support to me, my team, and the communities of Wythenshawe and Sale East. I take this opportunity to thank him, and to wish him a long, happy retirement.

It has been a pleasure to work on this Bill, and I thank all those who the Minister has mentioned who have worked on it. I also thank the Minister for his courtesies during the passage of this Bill, and I will be pleased to see it gain Royal Assent.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We all wish your caseworker well in his retirement.

10.47 pm

Gavin Newlands [V]: I will be mercifully brief as well. I echo the sentiments of the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane). I am proud to represent Glasgow airport and to be the Scottish National party transport spokesperson. We have been speaking a lot about aviation over this past year. The UK has the third largest aviation sector in the world, but it is very unlikely to come out of this pandemic with the third largest aviation sector in the world unless the Government make good on their year-long pledge of proper sectoral support. I will be keeping up the pressure on the Minister on that basis.

However, in the meantime and with regard to this Bill, I thank the Minister, the Bill team and the Clerks. In particular, I thank Sarah and her colleagues in the Public Bill Office for their help and patience on issues such as last-minute amendments submitted at the 11th hour on Thursdays. With that, I will say that we support this Bill, and I am glad to see some progress on airspace modernisation: it is about time. I agree that we need to look at the issue of drones in a bit more detail, as the shadow Minister has already outlined.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Third time and passed.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I will now suspend the House in order that arrangements can be made for the next item of business.

10.49 pm

Sitting suspended.

Electoral Commission

[Relevant document: Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, First Report of 2021, Appointment of the Chair of the Electoral Commission, HC 1276.]

10.53 pm

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Before I call the Leader of the House to move the motion, I inform the House that Mr Speaker has not selected the amendment in the name of Mr Peter Bone.

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that Her Majesty will appoint John Pullinger CB as the Chair of the Electoral Commission with effect from 1 May 2021 for the period ending on 30 April 2025.

The Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission has produced a report—its first report of 2021—in relation to the motion, which sets out in some detail the process by which Mr Pullinger was selected. It may help if I set out the key points for the record. Electoral commissioners, including the chairman of the commission, are appointed under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, as amended by the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009. Under the Act, the Speaker's Committee has a responsibility to put in place and oversee a procedure for the selection of candidates for appointment to the Electoral Commission.

On this occasion, the Committee asked Mr Speaker to appoint a panel to recommend a preferred candidate for the post. The panel consisted of Philippa Helme CB, independent chairman; Tony Hobman, a former electoral commissioner; Sarah Laessig, a former civil service commissioner; and two members of the Speaker's Committee: the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), the Chairman of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. Following an open competition and interviews with shortlisted candidates, the panel's unanimous view was that John Pullinger CB should be appointed as chairman of the Electoral Commission.

The Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission considered the panel's report and recommendation at its meeting on 26 January. It agreed to put John Pullinger's name forward for the statutory consultation with the leaders of each registered party to which two or more Members of the House of Commons belong. That consultation provides an opportunity for the party leaders to comment, but they are not required to do so. No objection to John Pullinger's appointment was received in response to the consultation.

The Speaker's Committee subsequently held a public hearing with John Pullinger on 1 March to test his suitability for the role. A transcript of the hearing has been appended to the Committee's report. Following the hearing, the Speaker's Committee agreed to recommend to the House that Mr Pullinger be appointed as chairman of the Electoral Commission for a four-year term.

John Pullinger was Librarian of the House of Commons from 2004 to 2014—he is remembered by many hon. and right hon. Members, and I hope that gives them confidence that a friend is being appointed—and he was the UK national statistician from 2014 to 2019.

He is currently a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, a visiting professor at Imperial College London, and a governor of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research. I hope that the House will support this appointment, and I wish Mr Pullinger every success in his important role.

10.56 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for moving the motion. May I start by thanking the outgoing chair of the Electoral Commission, Sir John Holmes, for his four years of service in what is a very important role? I am sure many hon. Members will remember that, before chairing the Electoral Commission, Sir John spent his career working in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and as a foreign affairs adviser to two Prime Ministers of two different parties. We thank Sir John for his leadership and his work to support our democratic process.

As the Leader of the House set out, the panel was appointed by Mr Speaker to oversee the selection process for Sir John's successor. I want to place on the record my thanks to all those who served on that panel: my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), Philippa Helme, Tony Hobman and Sarah Laessig.

The full transcript of the interview on 1 March 2021 with seven hon. Members and Mr Speaker is available, as the Leader of the House said, in the report of the Speaker's Committee. In recommending John Pullinger, the panel said:

"John gave full and wide-ranging answers that persuaded us that he had the knowledge and experience necessary to perform strongly in this role. He had a clear appreciation of the range of issues the Commission was facing and of the complexity of its stakeholder base."

We remember John fondly as the Librarian until 2014. He then became the UK national statistician between 2014 and 2019. He developed and delivered a strategy to enhance the trustworthiness, quality and value of official statistics to support political debate and decisions. He said that it is

"unacceptable for people to either not use evidence, or to misuse it."

He has also helped to strengthen democracies in places such as Myanmar and Iraq. That emphasis on transparency and evidence-based decision making means that he is suitable for the role, which safeguards the integrity of our electoral process.

The Electoral Commission, like the Office for National Statistics, is independent of Government. John Pullinger therefore has experience to lead this organisation in an independent, robust and accountable way. We in the Opposition thank the Committee of Selection. We are pleased that John Pullinger has agreed to take this position after a rigorous interview, and we wish him all the best in his new role.

10.58 pm

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): Realising the hour, I shall not detain the House long at all, which I know will come as a great relief to colleagues. Let me just say that, as a member of the panel appointed by Mr Speaker to conduct the interview process, I have no doubt whatsoever of the sterling abilities of

Mr John Pullinger and therefore recommend him wholeheartedly to Her Majesty for appointment as chair of the Electoral Commission for a four-year period. He will do that job with great ability without fear or favour. I was struck particularly by his understanding of the word "impartiality".

10.59 pm

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): I will also be very brief in welcoming the proposed appointment of Mr Pullinger. The extensive and vigorous process that has been gone through to reach the point we are at tonight is certainly telling. The public session of the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission at which he was questioned went a long way to giving confidence to Members who I know have had questions around the role of the chair of the Electoral Commission in the past. I add my thanks to the former chair, Sir John Holmes, and to the selection panel. They have clearly done an excellent job in meeting their remit.

The period ahead will be very interesting for the new chair. I hope it is one in which we can start to deal with how we properly monitor digital campaigning, digital issues around elections and the online activities of political parties. It is certainly a big task, but I am pretty sure from what I have seen that Mr Pullinger will be up to it.

11.1 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con) [V]: It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) and the speakers before him, who clearly made the point that the panel has done a very good job in the selection of Mr John Pullinger.

The chairman of the Electoral Commission is an extremely important appointment. This evening, we have to decide whether a humble address be presented to Her Majesty requesting her to appoint John Pullinger as chairman of the Electoral Commission, with effect from 1 May 2021 to 30 April 2025. In making this decision, we should consider two factors: first, whether Mr John Pullinger is a fit and proper person to chair the Electoral Commission; and, secondly, whether there will be an Electoral Commission for him to chair until 30 April 2025. In helping me to consider this issue, I met Bob Posner, the chief executive of the Electoral Commission, and Louise Edwards, the commission's director of regulation, on Monday 1 February. I also took the opportunity to watch the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission on Monday 1 March, which held an appointments hearing with Mr Pullinger.

I would first like to say that I have absolutely no criticism of Mr John Pullinger. I do not know him personally, but his experience speaks for itself. His time as the House of Commons Librarian will certainly stand him in good stead when it comes to building a rapport with Members from across the House. His role as national statistician shows that he can run an organisation that is in trouble. I therefore think the answer to my first question is that he is a fit and proper person to carry out the role.

However, I am seriously concerned that Mr Pullinger is joining an organisation that is in very serious trouble and that I do not believe will exist in its current format by the end of this year. How can we appoint someone to an organisation that will, in my opinion, disappear in a

[Mr Peter Bone]

few months? The Electoral Commission is politically corrupt, unfit for purpose and is damaging democracy in this country. The chairman of the Electoral Commission must set the overall strategic goals for the organisation and ensure public confidence in the institution and democracy. Unfortunately, I think this will be an impossible task for Mr Pullinger.

Given the state of affairs at the Electoral Commission, rebuilding public trust and respect among people from across all political persuasions will not be possible while it is in its current form. I am not seeking to block Mr Pullinger's appointment, but he is joining an organisation that is being investigated by two parliamentary Committees: the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. The previous chairman's request to extend his tenure was turned down by the Speaker's Committee, and the commission has been widely criticised across the political spectrum. How can Mr Pullinger truly change this failed organisation in its current form, when all trust and respect for it has been lost? The answer is that he cannot.

I have a great deal of personal experience of working with the Electoral Commission, and Members of this House will know that I have raised my concerns time and again through oral and written questions, including questions to the Member who speaks on behalf of the Speaker's Committee, to the Leader of the House, to the Prime Minister and to the Select Committee. My own close experience of the Electoral Commission goes back to the winter of 2015 when I founded Grassroots Out alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove). Grassroots Out—or GO—was a nationwide campaign whose aim was for us to leave the European Union. We worked with individuals of all political persuasions and none, and travelled the length and breadth of the United Kingdom spreading our message of a better life for the UK outside the European Union. The GO campaign was not a party political organisation.

From the very beginning of the campaign, before we even finalised the name, we were in discussions with the Electoral Commission. I held meetings with officials in Parliament and at the head office. We filled in its pre-poll reports, and we broke off campaigning to hold meetings with it. We went to extraordinary lengths to ensure that we were correctly observing the electoral regulations—which were often extremely unclear—even in relation to putting our imprint on ties, umbrellas and pens. Throughout the campaign, we kept up a dialogue with the commission to ensure that we were abiding by the rules, and at no point were we told of any wrongdoing or any concerns that the commission had with the campaign. So I have probably had more detailed experience of the Electoral Commission than any other Member in this House. When the people of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union on 23 June 2016, there was—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I am not stopping the hon. Gentleman; I am merely drawing his attention to the fact that this is a very narrow motion. It is specifically about the appointment of Mr John Pullinger as the chair of the Electoral Commission. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman

wishes to draw to the attention of the House his concerns about the Electoral Commission, but I do hope that he is not going to give us a history of the actions of the commission with which he personally has been engaged over these last several years. Everybody here present is nodding; we all remember these matters. It has also been made clear that the Committee that took the decision to appoint Mr John Pullinger was well aware of the matters that the hon. Gentleman is bringing before the House, so I hope that he is going to be brief in his description of his concerns, which have been noted by the Leader of the House and everyone else who is present.

Mr Bone: Of course, Madam Deputy Speaker; my remarks are in fact going to be brief, but I want to draw the House's attention to some things, and to one particular thing that Members may not be aware of, which my experience will lead to. I hope that this will help the House to make a decision on whether we are right to make this appointment for such a long period. That is my question; it is not about Mr Pullinger, but about whether we are right to make the appointment for such a long period—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is well aware that Mr Speaker did not select his amendment about the time. Therefore, the House is considering not the length of time of the appointment but merely whether the appointment should be made. We are not considering how long it should be made for, or any other circumstances surrounding it. This is a simple question of yes or no.

Mr Bone: Absolutely, Madam Deputy Speaker. I just want to point out my concerns before I decide how to vote on the motion, and before I listen to what the Leader of the House says in conclusion.

My challenge for Mr Pullinger is whether he will get the commission to apologise unreservedly for the wicked and bullying way in which it treated responsible people. Hon. Members may not know this, but each campaign group had to have a responsible person. They were not the political leaders or the politicians; they were not the David Camerons and the Nigel Farages; they were not the people on the television screens; they were not the people making political decisions. They were honest, hard-working people of great integrity who were making sure that the campaigns kept to the election rules.

I want to concentrate for a brief moment on four: Richard Murphy for Grassroots Out, Liz Bilney for Better for the Country, Darren Grimes for BeLeave and Alan Halsall for Vote Leave. I have worked with two of them, and I know one very well as a personal friend, but what linked them all was their great integrity—yet the Electoral Commission set out deliberately to destroy that integrity.

That is the challenge that I want Mr Pullinger to address. The individuals were threatened with criminal prosecution, their names were rubbished, their professional reputations were attacked and they had to endure the worst malicious treatment from a state-funded organisation that I have ever known. I do not say that lightly. In 50 years in politics, I have never known a state-funded regulator to act in such a way. Remember that these people were not guilty of any wrongdoing. Quite the contrary: they helped to facilitate the greatest democratic debate—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is giving us a long history that does not appear to be relevant to the very precise “yes or no” matter before us now, which—as on the Order Paper—is whether Mr John Pullinger should or should not be appointed. I cannot allow the hon. Gentleman to give us a history lesson at this point. I hope that he will bring his remarks to a conclusion.

Mr Bone: Madam Deputy Speaker, you are bringing me to the very crux of the matter. I have four points for Mr Pullinger to answer; I hope that the Leader of the House will be able to respond to them, since obviously Mr Pullinger is not here.

In my opinion, if Mr Pullinger is to be the next chairman of the Electoral Commission, he must accept that what happened in the past to responsible people was unacceptable. He must offer a personal apology to the responsible people—to Richard, Liz, Darren and Alan. He must accept that the Electoral Commission acted in a totally unacceptable way and that it must offer compensation. I hope he will.

I listened very carefully to what the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission put to Mr Pullinger at the public hearing. He answered its questions very well—my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) referred to his answer about impartiality—but we cannot forget the past when we decide the future. Mr Pullinger said that one of the Electoral Commission’s biggest mistakes over the past few years related to

“bureaucracy and timeliness—some things seem to take an inordinate length of time”.

I could not agree more. The Electoral Commission would demand answers from responsible people, but then take months and months to reply. Those delay tactics left the individuals with so much anxiety and concern, even though they did absolutely nothing wrong.

The question tonight is whether we can appoint a chairman to an organisation that has failed so badly and has treated people so badly. If I am right that the commission will be split in two later this year, which half will Mr Pullinger chair? Will it be the bit that is responsible for regulation and running elections, or will he be responsible for a separate organisation that does enforcement? At the moment, the Electoral Commission is investigator, judge, jury and executioner. That cannot continue. However, we are being asked to appoint somebody to that organisation, which is likely to be split. I ask the Leader of the House whether, in the contract that is being given to Mr Pullinger, this situation has been considered, because we cannot go on as we have.

In conclusion, we have a number of people who were bullied by the state. I take bullying very seriously, but this is the sort of thing that happens in totalitarian regimes, not in this United Kingdom. We pride ourselves on our democracy. I think Mr John Pullinger is an excellent choice of chairman, but as the chairman of a new Electoral Commission, so I am going to make my decision on how to vote at the end of this debate, after hearing from the Leader of the House.

11.15 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab) [V]: I will speak only briefly in support of the motion. I was honoured to be a member of the panel, along with my

good friend the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), that made the nomination before the House today. As the Leader of the House said, the process was long and detailed, with numerous stages, and the shortlist was very strong, with a variety of candidates offering different strengths. John Pullinger was the unanimous choice of the interview panel. He has had a varied career, but with lots of political experience in non-party political roles, including as the Leader of the House said, in this place as Librarian. It seems that hon. Members of a longer vintage than me clearly remember him well from that time. He demonstrated to the panel during the process a simultaneous grasp of detail and the big-picture strategic issues facing the Electoral Commission, which is perhaps not surprising in somebody who has also served as national statistician, so I strongly urge the House to support Mr Pullinger’s nomination today and send his name through to Her Majesty.

During the process, it is fair to say that he was clear—hon. Members will see this too in the transcript of the Speaker’s Committee meeting—that the commission is not firing on all cylinders and needs reform. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) said, I think that we need to give him a chance to do that job, to do that reform, to make an assessment of what is wrong and to institute a plan for improvement. He can start doing that very quickly—perhaps he is already giving it some serious thought—but making the implementation will last more than a year, although, I have to say, I was grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving a preannouncement of what he thinks the Government intend to do. Perhaps the Leader of the House will comment on those plans shortly.

I also want to be clear that there is criticism from both sides of the House about the Electoral Commission, because, frankly, nobody likes being regulated. For Government Members to make out that they are the only ones with a beef against the commission, that they are the only ones with a legitimate grievance, is a misrepresentation.

Every public body needs democratic accountability. We do that for the Electoral Commission through the Speaker’s Committee, the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee and debates in this House, including this short debate tonight. Obviously, we have areas where we want Mr Pullinger to get cracking to improve the performance of the Electoral Commission, but intimidation from some areas threatening the commission with being shut down within a year needs to stop. We need to give him a clear run to make right what he thinks is wrong in what we all know is not an organisation that is operating at full steam at the moment. Let us start tonight by confirming the nomination of somebody who I think is an excellent candidate and who, I am sure, will be listening to this debate. He will know what he has to do to start tightening the running of the good ship Electoral Commission. Let us give him time to do the job. He knows that he has a job on his hands and that he will be asked to demonstrate clear improvement in performance. Let us give him a chance to do just that.

11.19 pm

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson).

[Aaron Bell]

When I heard that we were appointing a new chair of the Electoral Commission, in the manner of Brenda from Bristol, I said, “Not another one!” But in truth another was needed, partly because of what my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) said, but also because of the other things that the previous chair of the Electoral Commission was doing, seeking to expand its empire and take on prosecution powers—things that were rejected by a majority of Members across this House. I trust that Mr Pullinger as chair will put voters first. Indeed, I am encouraged by the answer he gave my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) and the panel: that

“this is all about the voters”.

The reason I wanted to speak briefly in this evening’s debate is that I was a member of the Joint Committee on the Fixed-Term Parliaments Act, to which both the Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators gave evidence. I think Mr Pullinger would do well to reflect on that evidence. Without breaching any confidences of our private meeting or scooping our report, which is coming out in a little over 24 hours’ time I can say that most of the members really feel that the election period really needs to be shortened from 25 days, ideally back to the 17 it was before, but perhaps to 20 days. The Electoral Commission said in evidence to the Committee that there were

“a number of benefits for voters, candidates and political parties” from the 2011 legislation, which increased the period to 25 days, including:

“Allowing more time for voters to receive campaign material from candidates and political parties.”

I am not sure that that is necessarily an advantage. Perhaps we should have taken evidence from Brenda from Bristol and other ordinary voters, and perhaps also from campaigners.

I hope Mr Pullinger hears those words, reads our Joint Committee report and reflects on how his commission—assuming that we appoint him as chair this evening—might think about how to shorten the electoral period to the benefit of democracy, including perhaps by making recommendations to this place if necessary. However, he sounds like a fantastic candidate, with his service in this place and as national statistician, and I will be pleased to support him tonight.

11.22 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD) [V]: First, I pay tribute to Sir John Holmes for his time as chairman of the Electoral Commission and his work in support of our UK democratic process. It takes courage to challenge the operation of all political parties, particularly a governing party. I am grateful for Sir John’s courage and very much hope that it is not the reason why his chairmanship is not being renewed.

I welcome the appointment of John Pullinger after a robust process, and I am sure his knowledge of parliamentary processes will be a great asset as he takes up his new role. The Electoral Commission is answerable to Parliament, not to the Government or a single political party. The public must be able to have full confidence in its impartiality, and the principle of impartiality underpins the Electoral Commission’s role. It ensures that no party gains an unfair advantage.

The Electoral Commission guarantees our democracy and strengthens our democratic processes, and we must absolutely protect its independence. There have been a number of threats to its independence that should worry us. We Liberal Democrats are concerned that there is increasing pressure on the commission to cave in to the governing Conservative party. No party should have a disproportionate influence on the commission, but we now have a Conservative majority on the Speaker’s Committee. This is the first time in the commission’s 20-year history that the membership of the Speaker’s Committee has a majority from one single party, and it is wrong. Instead, the commission’s 20th anniversary should be marked by making it a more, not a less effective watchdog. Why does the commission have to rely on the police to pursue individual cases when the police have neither the commission’s expertise nor the resources to follow up cases effectively?

We Liberal Democrats want the Electoral Commission to have the power and resources to play its vital role effectively and impartially. It is for the good of our democracy that elections are free and fair. Independent checks and balances on all political parties are crucial and necessary to guarantee a political process that our citizens trust and value. Our democracy can never be taken for granted. Freedom and fairness need to be fought for again and again. We Liberal Democrats will keep fighting to protect these pillars of our democracy.

11.24 pm

Mr Rees-Mogg: May I begin by thanking the right hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) for her support and my neighbour the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) for the Lib Dems’ support? May I particularly thank the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson), who is currently the Sir Alec Guinness of the Scottish National party? If one remembers “Kind Hearts and Coronets”, one will recall that Sir Alec Guinness played every part, and the hon. Gentleman is currently playing every part for the SNP. If I may say so, he does it with panache similar to that of the late and most distinguished Sir Alec Guinness.

Let me come to the other contributions. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) for his support, but he is also known to be concerned about the Electoral Commission, as, obviously, is my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone). The hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) said that it was not only the governing party that had concerns and that there were grievances in all parties. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell) also hinted at that. This is important. I do not want to go into the theological questions of my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough about whether one could make an appointment to a body that might or might not exist at some point in future, because we could say that about almost any organisation. We might have a meteorite hit—we even had one in Somerset last week. You never know, one may hit people on the head and that may change things. These theological debates are not, however, really ones for the Chamber. We have to assume that things will continue as they are for the period in which they are expected to continue, otherwise we would get remarkably little business done.

However, from the Government's point of view it is clear that many believe the Electoral Commission's operations are in serious need of reform, particularly regarding its accountability to the House and how it may bring prosecutions. This appointment is perhaps an opportunity for the House to take renewed interest in the way the commission operates. I wish to refer right hon. and hon. Members to the inquiry being conducted into the commission by the Committee on Standards, to which the Conservative party has submitted its own evidence, which I might quote. It said:

"The Electoral Commission's primary function is an executive and administrative one, to oversee the compliance regime for national campaigning finance. In the performance of its functions, it should ensure that the prevailing laws are fairly and proportionately followed, allowing for an appropriate level of transparency on significant donations and significant spending..."

The Commission should not be a lobbying organisation, nor should it supplant the role of Government and Parliament in determining the broader legislative and regulatory policy framework...we would argue that the work of the Electoral Commission needs to be more focused and targeted, and there should be greater clarity over its governance and accountability."

That is the evidence we have put forward and we hope it will be taken into account by the new chairman, assuming this motion is accepted and this Humble Address is passed to Her Majesty and accepted by our sovereign, but those are going to be detailed debates for another day. Today's debate is simply: do we think that Mr Pullinger is a suitable candidate? I have certainly noticed from today's debate that there is a general feeling that he is basically a good egg, and on that basis I commend this Humble Address to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Health and Safety Regulations: Cranes

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Before we begin the Adjournment debate, I have to make a short statement about the sub judice resolution. I have been advised that there is an open and adjourned inquest for June Harvey, who died in July 2020. I am exercising the discretion given to the Chair in respect of the resolution on matters sub judice to allow reference to those proceedings in this debate by waiving sub judice in respect of that inquest. All hon. Members should, however, be mindful of matters which may be the subject of future legal proceedings, and should exercise caution in making reference to individual cases. I thank the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Apsana Begum) for her courtesy in consulting the Table Office in advance of this debate.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*David T. C. Davies.*)

11.29 pm

Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): The issue of health and safety with regard to cranes used in construction was brought into sharp focus in my constituency of Poplar and Limehouse by the collapse of one such crane on 8 July last year. It is with great sadness that I pay tribute to the friends and family of June Harvey, who died as a result. The collapse also destroyed the homes of those who lived around June, and temporarily displaced many other residents in the surrounding area. It is important that this trauma and pain is given the recognition it deserves.

On the night of 8 July around 100 residents had to evacuate their homes after a nearby crane collapsed and were temporarily housed in two hotels. One of the hotels was relatively close to the site and situated among amenities in Whitechapel. The other was much further away, in Canning Town, and with almost no such amenities near it. Clearly neither of these temporary housing situations were ideal, and all those constituents were uprooted from their lives. They were unable to return to their homes, some for weeks, only having the possessions that they grabbed on their way out with them. This meant that some could not go to work; for example, a constituent who worked for Transport for London was unable to access his uniform. Families who were already having to educate their children from home were subsequently forced to do so in cramped hotel conditions. All of this, against the backdrop of the covid-19 pandemic, has continued to cause great disruption. However, none of this compares to the loss experienced by the family of June Harvey, and of course many more could have lost their lives or been seriously injured in Bow that day.

The crane was operating in a built-up residential area, as evidenced by the number of constituents who had to leave their homes that night and go to alternative accommodation. I am in no position to draw conclusions on who is to blame for the collapse in Bow or assert causation; it would be simply wrong for me to do so. Rather, I wish to bring attention to the human stories around this issue and raise concerns more generally about the ongoing practices within the construction industry, especially in regard to the use of large cranes in residential areas.

[Apsana Begum]

Indeed, there continue to be a number of incidents and accidents involving cranes. In Battersea in 2006 two people were killed in a crane collapse, a crane operator and a member of the public; 10 years later Falcon Crane Hire was fined £750,000. The same company was also responsible for a similar collapse in Liverpool in 2007, resulting in one death. Closer to home, there was a collapse in Canary Wharf during work on the HSBC tower, with three workmen killed. It was found at the time that there had been three further crane scares in the previous six weeks and that safety paperwork had gone missing. These incidents must therefore be set in the context of campaigners and trade unions raising concerns about the under-regulation of health and safety in the construction industry amidst a drop in inspections and cuts to the Health and Safety Executive, particularly since 2010.

Trends of deregulation are widespread, most notably with regard to the safety of cladding, which has also affected many of my constituents and was pulled into sharp focus by the Grenfell Tower fire. The latter has rightly been pointed to by many as a warning of what could continue to happen should health and safety regulations not be tightened. Evidence upon evidence makes it clear that the regulatory framework needs to be looked at again to ensure the safe usage of safe cranes as part of safe construction of safe buildings. We need robust legislation and robust enforcement.

Crane safety relies in part on adherence to the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998, which place duties on people and companies that own, operate or have control of work equipment. The Health and Safety Executive, in laying out how to comply with this protocol, writes that equipment must be

“safe for use, maintained in a safe condition and inspected to ensure it is correctly installed and does not subsequently deteriorate”.

This provision does not, however, contain any legal requirement for certification of those operating cranes, only stating that such equipment is to be

“used only by people who have received adequate information, instruction and training”.

The Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 also apply to cranes. These regulations set out that crane operations must be

“planned by a competent person;...appropriately supervised; and...carried out in a safe manner.”

The approved code of practice for this piece of legislation defines such a person, who can also be responsible for assessing such equipment, as someone with

“appropriate practical and theoretical knowledge and experience of the lifting equipment to be thoroughly examined”.

These two regulations do not strike me as being sufficiently robust. The definition of a competent person able to test equipment and plan a crane operation is worryingly vague, and as is often the case with this Government, it takes responsibility from their hands. I therefore urge the Minister to tighten up regulations around crane usage and the construction industry more generally.

The Grenfell fire tragedy is also a warning to us all in relation to how such incidents as I have dealt with are responded to by Government. When we look beneath the rhetoric, the endless legal complexities and the

passing of the proverbial buck, the truth is that years have passed since the Grenfell tragedy, yet still no one has been called to account. One of the many frustrating battles the Grenfell community has been obliged to fight was simply to be rehoused, with some of the most vulnerable survivors still not rehoused years later, due to the severe lack of investment in affordable housing.

I am conscious that the investigation into culpability for the aforementioned Battersea crane incident took 10 years—10 years—to discover that 24 bolts were faulty in the crane that collapsed. I believe it would be unjust for my constituents to have to wait that long, and I ask the Minister today what steps her Department will be making for this investigation to be concluded in a much swifter manner. The verdict on Battersea was reached only roughly four years before the incident in my constituency. If the same time were taken in relation to this latest incident, we would be waiting until 2030.

With investigations taking so long, it is really hard to imagine any sufficient action being taken as such collapses are forgotten. In the meantime, while no organisation has been found legally liable for the negligence or criminal health and safety offences that may have caused this incident, my constituents, who have done nothing wrong and who have been bereaved, are suffering great distress, grief and post-traumatic stress disorder, and they face uncertainty and hardship.

To conclude, the incident that took place in my constituency last year has had a lasting impact on many of those constituents and residents who have had to leave their homes. Many have contacted me even recently due to worries that there may be further works at the location that might lead to further crane usage. When I was visiting residents at the two hotels in the weeks following the incident, someone who had witnessed the accident at first hand described to me that they still feared the crane collapsing when they were going to sleep at night in the hotel room. We must have swift answers about what happened locally, including how the tragedy was, and indeed is being, handled, so that those affected can achieve a sense of justice and closure, and we can be assured that something like this can never happen again.

11.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): I thank the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Apsana Begum) for securing this debate on such an important issue. Before I respond, I must pause to pay tribute to her constituent June Harvey, who tragically died in the incident involving a tower crane in the hon. Member's constituency in July last year. Her family and friends have my heartfelt condolences.

I have been informed that the investigation into the tragedy is ongoing. The Metropolitan police is leading on this, with the support of the Health and Safety Executive, in line with the work-related death protocol. That agreement sets out how the police and regulators will work together in such sad circumstances. Both will continue in their efforts to bring the investigation to a conclusion as quickly as possible. As the investigation is sub judice, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further, other than to say that it can be very challenging for all concerned to wait for the conclusion of a complex investigation process, especially when it concerns the

loss of a loved one. The hon. Member has rightly taken the opportunity to raise in the Chamber the wider issue of tower crane safety, and while I am unable to discuss the incident that has prompted the debate, I will endeavour to respond to the wider points raised.

Tower cranes are complex structures found across the country. At any given time, there are 800 to 1,000 estimated to be in operation. People need to feel that there is an effective legislative framework in place to ensure the suitable and safe operation of tower cranes. The statutory framework regulated by HSE for tower cranes consists of several pieces of health and safety legislation. The Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998, known as LOLER, contain most of the measures in place to ensure tower crane safety. That includes ensuring that careful consideration is given to where cranes are sited, that all lifting equipment is periodically thoroughly examined and that lifting operations are properly planned according to a written safe system of work.

Thorough examination of cranes under LOLER should take place each time a crane is installed and before it is put into service, and inspection should take place at least once every 12 months while it is in service and after exceptional circumstances have occurred—for example, if the crane has struck another structure. Examiners must be competent and have sufficient authority and independence to ensure that any examination recommendations are fully and properly acted upon. That can be achieved through membership of the Safety Assessment Federation or appropriate approved accreditation. There is a statutory duty for examiners to report serious defects identified during any examination to HSE.

Also of relevance are the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998, or PUWER, which require tower cranes to be properly maintained, suitable for the work and conditions and only operated by properly trained people. Cranes should have a comprehensive maintenance record kept, and information on safety should be available to all crane users.

Apsana Begum: On that point, after the Battersea incident, a group of campaigners gave evidence to various Committees of the House, which resulted in a crane register being developed. The register was scrapped after 2010. Does the Minister have any views on whether that should be brought back? In my view, it should.

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Lady for raising the existence of the former tower crane register. The tower crane register was a short-lived statutory scheme requiring duty holders to send the HSE information about any tower cranes they were erecting. It was intended to provide reassurance to the public. There was, however, no demonstrable improvement to tower crane safety, and the regulations and register were revoked in 2015 as a result, but I do take her point.¹

Other pieces of legislation relating to the working of tower cranes, including working at height, do require work to be properly risk-assessed. Cranes supplied for use should meet essential health and safety regulations. Construction work that requires the use of a tower crane should have a suitable safety management system in place. Under section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, all duty holders need to reduce the

risk to people not employed by them—for example, members of the public—that arise from the use of tower cranes, so far as is reasonably practicable.

To summarise, over time this comprehensive legal framework has been developed so that it suitably covers all aspects of tower crane operation in the work context. The information and clarity on how duty holders must comply with the legislation is also set out in a range of freely available publications by both the HSE and the industry.

Apsana Begum: I do not want to pre-empt anything that the Minister is going to say, but the HSE is clearly underfunded and it is not able to undertake inspections proactively, as it should. The UK's record is quite bad when it comes to having enough inspections. Does she agree that the HSE needs to be funded properly so that it can be proactive, as opposed to reactive, in dealing with such matters?

Mims Davies: This Government have taken steps—particularly in relation to covid—to ensure that the HSE has been able to secure the extra funding that it has needed. For example, it has been able to assist further in response to the covid-19 pandemic, with an extra £14 million from the Government this year. The HSE remains a widely respected regulator because it delivers high-quality regulatory outcomes in workplace health and safety. I understand the hon. Lady raising this point, but I reassure her in that regard.

Duty holders must comply with the legislation set out in the range of publications by the HSE and industry. The HSE publishes the approved codes of practice for LOLER and PUWER on its website. That website provides a wide range of explanatory guidance for businesses and workers, and has had more than 10 million views. It also provides explanatory guidance on the safety of tower cranes, including full information about planning, safe systems of work, supervision and thorough examination. The HSE supports industry bodies, particularly the Tower Crane Interest Group, TCIG, which has also published extensive guidance and technical notes on its website. The HSE works with the British Standards Institution on the production of tower crane safety standards, particularly on BS 7121, which is a suite of guidance on lifting operations.

As I have mentioned before, at any given time there are over 800 tower cranes in use across Great Britain. Since 2011, there have been 91 reported separate incidents involving tower cranes recorded by the HSE, including 11 tower crane collapses. Tragically, six people have lost their lives during these incidents, including, sadly, in the case that has given rise to tonight's debate. The HSE, as the regulator of tower crane safety, investigates all reported incidents involving a tower crane collapse on construction sites. These are rightfully treated as very serious, though they are infrequent incidents.

Investigations and research conducted by the HSE and industry have shown that several causal factors can contribute to failures and dangerous occurrences relating to tower cranes, including adverse weather conditions; human or operator error, both in the erection and operation of the crane; poor communication of instructions; and failure to have in place effective maintenance and examination arrangements. When the cause of a tower crane collapse involves a serious breach of law, the HSE

1. [Official Report, 13 April 2021, Vol. 692, c. 2MC.]

[Mims Davies]

takes appropriate enforcement action. Since 2011, the HSE has served eight enforcement notices and taken eight prosecutions in relation to tower crane incidents. It works with trade associations, standards bodies and industry groups post incidents to share any lessons learned to assist in improving crane safety in the future.

In conclusion, tower cranes are covered by a comprehensive legislative framework. The HSE uses the powers that it has been given to regulate tower crane safety effectively, including by taking strong enforcement action. It also works with industry to continually improve tower crane safety standards. Although infrequent, incidents with tower cranes are carefully investigated because of their high consequences, to ensure that any lessons learned can be captured and, of course, that appropriate enforcement action is taken.

Once again, I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for bringing this debate to the House, and for her thoughtful and passionate contribution in the Chamber this evening.

It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the ongoing investigation into the tragic death of June Harvey, as it is sub judice. As the investigation is being led by the Metropolitan police, I think it would be more appropriate for me to ask the Minister for Crime and Policing to provide the hon. Lady with an update on the progress of the investigation.

On the points raised in relation to the HSE's work on the regulation of cranes, and any areas that I have not been able to address, I will ask the HSE to respond to the hon. Lady where appropriate. The tragic incident prompting tonight's debate has highlighted to us all the importance of tower crane safety. I can assure the hon. Lady that the Government continue to support the regulatory regime for tower cranes, as well as the work of the HSE and industry in ensuring their safe use.

Question put and agreed to.

11.52 pm

House adjourned.

Members Eligible for a Proxy Vote

The following is the list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy:

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con)	Robbie Moore
Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
James Brokenshire (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudon) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP)	Ian Paisley
Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Courts (Witney) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jon Cruddas (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
James Daly (Bury North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Davies (Grantham and Stamford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mims Davies (Mid Sussex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con)	Ben Everitt
Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP)	Ian Paisley
Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ms Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP)	Ben Lake
Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance)	Wendy Chamberlain
Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew
Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP)	Ian Paisley
John Glen (Salisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Green (Ashford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Kate Griffiths (Burton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Grundy (Leigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP)	Ben Lake
Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Rebecca Harris (Castle Point) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
James Heappey (Wells) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Darren Henry (Broxtowe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
John Howell (Henley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con)	Anthony Mangnall
Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
David Johnston (Wantage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Largan (High Peak) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con)	Mr William Wragg
Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brandon Lewis (Great Yarmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP)	Ian Paisley
Mark Logan (Bolton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Alan Mak (Havant) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West)	Owen Thompson
Damien Moore (Southport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley regis) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con)	Robbie Moore
Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Priti Patel (Witham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con)	Antony Higginbotham
Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Will Quince (Colchester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP)	Ian Paisley
Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dean Russell (Watford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC)	Ben Lake
Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Grant Shapps (Welwyn Hatfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Rishi Sunak (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con)	Mr William Wragg
Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Elizabeth Truss (South West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Vickers (Stockton South) (Con)	Robbie Moore
Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ben Wallace (Wyre and Preston North)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Warburton (Somerset and Frome) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Whittingdale (Malden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC)	Ben Lake
Gavin Williamson (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP)	Ian Paisley
Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell

Westminster Hall

Monday 22 March 2021

[CAROLINE NOKES *in the Chair*]

Scottish Independence Referendum

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Order, 25 February).

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

4.30 pm

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice in order to support the new hybrid arrangements. Timings of debates have been amended to allow technical arrangements to be made for the next debate. There will also be suspensions between debates.

I remind Members participating both physically and virtually that they must arrive for the start of debates in Westminster Hall and are expected to remain for the entire debate, and that they are visible at all times, both to one another and to us in the Boothroyd Room. If Members attending virtually have any technical problems, can they please email the Westminster Hall Clerk's email address? Members attending physically should clean their spaces before they use them and before they leave the room.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 570779, relating to consent for a referendum on Scottish independence.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. The petition calls for consent not to be given to another referendum on Scottish independence and has received 109,929 signatures. It says:

"The independence referendum was called a once in a generation vote—so let it be."

I thank the petitioner for creating the petition. In preparation for this speech, I spoke to the petitioner, who wishes to remain anonymous because they fear the abuse they will receive for creating a petition on this subject. They know that the independence debate has become extremely divisive; unfortunately, a lot of the political discussion around independence is not constructive or measured, but deeply emotive and all-consuming.

The creator of the petition believes that the focus of political debate in Scotland has been too centred on independence, at the expense of other, extremely important issues; they feel that political time and resources have been funnelled into debates on independence instead of being used to address pressing issues in Scotland. Instead of resources being spent on independence in the hope that, once independence is gained, all problems will be solved, the petitioner would like Scottish politicians to look to local problems now. They mention the need to tackle the rise in the use of food banks and the problems Scottish hospitals face—all with powers they feel the Scottish Government already hold.

One other issue the petitioner would like the Scottish Government to focus on is education, which is already a devolved matter. The long-term costs of the pandemic will fall disproportionately on today's children, whose education has also been impacted this year through lost learning. It is vital that education is prioritised to ensure

the economic recovery and growth of Scotland after the pandemic. The number of full-time or equivalent teachers in Scotland's schools has fallen by 1,700 since 2007, while the ratio of pupils to teachers in Scottish secondary schools is at its highest since 2013. Only 14% of pupils in primary 1 through 3 are in a class with fewer than 18 pupils, despite promises to cap class sizes at 18 in 2007. That is seriously worrying. The Scottish Government have these powers; they cannot blame Westminster for these problems. The Scottish Government should focus on delivering promises made 14 years ago, rather than re-running a referendum from 2014. I fail to see how a divisive second referendum will help children in Scottish schools.

Ultimately, the problem is this: it always seems to be jam tomorrow. What is the point in more powers if the powers already held by the Scottish Government are not being used properly? Even when the Scottish Government are offered more powers, they defer and delay taking them—Scottish National party Ministers have twice asked the Department for Work and Pensions to delay the devolution of the benefits system, in 2016 and again in 2018. Last year, Scottish Ministers revealed that full devolution of benefits would be completed only in 2024. In June, they pushed that back further, to 2025. If the Scottish Government's progress on disability benefits is anything to go by, some of Scotland's most vulnerable people will have to wait a decade for benefits to be up and running in a separate Scotland.

Frankly, claims that it would take only 18 months from an independence vote to set up an independent state are laughable. On the one hand, SNP politicians say publicly that they simply cannot deliver the Scotland they envision without more powers. Yet, quietly, when they are due to get more powers, they say, "Not yet. We're not ready." It is too simple to just blame everything on Westminster. I know it is tempting—I know the frustration of opposition—but we should try to find solutions, rather than taking powers for power's sake.

The Scottish Government today published draft legislation on holding a second independence referendum. It is all well and good saying that the immediate priority is

"dealing with the pandemic and keeping the country safe",

but why publish this Bill now? It is quite clear what the Scottish Government's focus is. Even after the worst effects of the pandemic are over, recovery will take a considerable time, and the Scottish Government should be focused on that. Given the current emphasis on Scottish independence in political discussion within the SNP, people could be forgiven for querying the headlines that we are in one of the largest health and economic crises since world war two.

Each hour of political debate given over to independence is an hour not spent discussing how Scottish businesses and tourism will recover from covid or how to tackle unemployment and poverty or waiting times in Scottish hospitals. Hospitals around the UK have been put under enormous pressure during the pandemic, and all those who have staffed them have done incredible work. They have taken extra shifts, put their psychological and physical health at risk, and gone above and beyond to save lives during the pandemic. As we begin to look at how and where hospitals will need support to recover and grow in the future, Scotland needs to look at its hospitals and realise that a lot of work needs to be done to support them fully.

[Chris Evans]

Rather than having all political energies focused on independence, discussion should be focused urgently on the mental health crisis that the pandemic has highlighted, the waiting times in Scottish hospitals, and the health of the population. Right now, politicians should be concentrating on the health and economic crisis that the pandemic has brought about. The provision of food parcels and food aid has grown significantly in Scotland in the last 10 years. In 2009, there was one Trussell Trust food bank operating in Scotland. By April 2017 that had increased to 52, with 119 centres, as some operate satellite centres in various locations in the surrounding area, the better to serve those who cannot easily travel to them or who cannot afford to. The number of families who have had to rely on food banks has risen during the pandemic.

I understand that those problems are not unique to Scotland, but I do not think they are helped by the obsession with independence. I know that those who shout the loudest often get the attention, but I do not think most people want their Government to focus on constitutional matters in the middle of a crisis. Rather than spending political energy on independence, should not the SNP be ensuring that every family can put food on the table and that the Scottish Parliament does everything it can to ensure that the economic effects of the pandemic do not result in a further increase in the number of people relying on food banks?

Even before the pandemic, around 1 million people in Scotland were living in poverty, and that figure is set to rise. In 2019 an estimated 24.6% of all Scottish households were in fuel poverty. That is almost a quarter of all families. Let us not beat around the bush: that shows an urgent problem of fuel poverty among Scottish families. Now is not the time to discuss constitutional change. Now is the time to look at what can be done to prevent poverty and to aid those who face unemployment or homelessness.

This year has seen the UK's exit from the European Union, alongside the changes that the pandemic has brought. The petitioner has voiced the wish for politicians to allow some time for the dust to settle on those two issues before more political unrest is contemplated. It is surely not the answer to Brexit to do exactly the same with Scottish independence. It does not make sense to cut off your nose to spite your face. If a second referendum is deemed necessary, now is certainly not the time. We need to focus on recovering from the pandemic and to allow for the results of Brexit to become clearer and more settled before any constitutional change can even be considered. The SNP has consistently said that there could be a referendum this year. Thankfully, the Scottish public are rejecting that, in large numbers. Can it really be appropriate even to consider such a divisive and destructive referendum this year?

In 2014 the Scottish First Minister said she hoped people would seize the

“once in a lifetime opportunity for Scotland”

in the independence vote. The people of Scotland voted—they voted to remain a part of the United Kingdom. I was on the losing side of the Brexit referendum two years later. Never once did I call for a second referendum. I knew that we had to accept the democratic will of the people and make the best of it. We cannot simply rerun referendums until we get the answer we are looking for.

Quite frankly, if the past five years have shown us anything, it is how divisive referendums can be. The SNP should be leading the people of Scotland, not misleading them by saying that there are simple solutions to Scottish problems and telling them tales of an imaginary utopia with Scotland outside the UK. Rather than picking at old wounds, the SNP should focus on using the powers it has to help the Scottish people.

Ultimately, the obsession with an independent Scotland is driving a wedge between families, friends, neighbours and communities. The petitioner shared with me fears about the abuse aimed their way for wanting Scotland to remain part of the United Kingdom. The petitioner's family was so nervous about the abuse that they asked the petitioner to remove their name from the petition. That is not a healthy discourse, but it is one that results from offering simple solutions to complex problems. Even as I agreed to lead the debate for the Petitions Committee, I was warned to expect abuse online. It is not surprising that people are angry when they have been told that there is a simple solution to all of Scotland's problems and that the rest of the UK is standing in the way. If I thought that that was true—that the rest of the UK was standing in the way of a great education system, an end to poverty and a fairer society for Scottish people within an independent Scotland—I would be happy to fight alongside the Scottish Government. However, nothing is ever as simple as that. It takes hard work to solve any problem.

Rather than focusing on jam today, let us work together as four nations to achieve the best for all our people. Let devolved Governments use the powers that they have effectively, rather than focusing on what powers they could take next.

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): Before I call the next speaker, I have to tell Members that I am instigating a three-and-a-half-minute time limit. I call Douglas Ross.

4.40 pm

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. I thank the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) for introducing today's debate.

We have had many of these arguments. Last week in the Chamber, the SNP used its party business time to debate a similar topic, but on that occasion it was about holding another independence referendum. As we heard from the hon. Member for Islwyn, today we are debating opposition to another independence referendum. The petition was signed by well over the 100,000 threshold needed to have the matter debated in Parliament.

Given the decision that millions of Scots took back in 2014, they must be looking at the SNP Scottish Government's news today and wondering why Nicola Sturgeon and her party just turned two fingers up at them and said, “We don't care what you think. We're forging ahead with another Independence Referendum Bill in the next Parliament”. The draft Bill was launched today, taking us back to the divisions of the past, rather than focusing on our recovery from covid-19 and rebuilding Scotland after this most damaging pandemic.

It hit home to me when the hon. Member for Islwyn said that the lead petitioner wished to remain anonymous because of the state of the debate in Scottish politics

right now. Today I found out from the police that someone has been charged with making a very graphic death threat against me and another Scottish politician. That is the state of politics in Scotland right now. That is what the SNP wants to take us back to, and it is what the SNP wants us to debate in the days, weeks and months ahead. We do not need the division that separates families and workplaces and that divides communities all over again. What we need is a laser-like focus in the next Scottish Parliament on ensuring that we can recover from covid-19 and rebuild from this pandemic. That should be all politicians' and all parties' No. 1 priority, but again today we have heard that that is not a priority for the SNP, which believes in separation over securing a recovery for Scotland.

I hope that what we get today from the SNP spokesperson and the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (John Nicolson), who is speaking straight after me, is some answers to some very basic questions that people across Scotland will be asking right now. If the SNP's desire is to take us back into that divisive debate, will its Members answer some basic questions that I put to the SNP shadow Chancellor on numerous occasions in the debate last week? Can any SNP Members in today's debate tell us what currency an independent Scotland would have? Can any SNP Members in today's debate tell us what independence would mean for a border between Scotland and England? Can any SNP Members in today's debate tell us what it would mean for our armed forces here in Moray, at Kinloss barracks, at RAF Lossiemouth and across Scotland? As long as those questions go unanswered, the SNP will continue to seek separation without telling the people of Scotland what it will mean for individuals, families and communities up and down the country.

We can move beyond such division. We can say to people that we do not need another independence referendum, and we can focus on rebuilding Scotland. People can give their votes to the Scottish Conservatives at the election in a few weeks' time to ensure that our focus is on recovery and rebuilding, not on more referendums.

4.44 pm

John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP) [V]: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross). He has clearly not heard that the Hamilton report has found no breach of the ministerial code. I know he would want to be gracious and to congratulate the First Minister.

I understand people who once opposed Scottish independence. My dad saw himself as a proud Scottish patriot, but a youth forged in war and then the values of a shared welfare state made him feel Scottish, British and, because of his wartime experiences, passionately pro-European. The brutality of Thatcherism in the 1980s and the imposition of Brexit have removed that triple status from many Scots who thought that they could have overlapping identities protected by a benign state, which recognised that, although we were smaller, we were equal. The Conservatives have disabused them of that notion.

The Union could have survived. A more nimble Westminster establishment might have read the runes in 2014 and determined that the Union had a narrow escape and that equality was the way forward. Instead,

drunk on victory, they crashed on into a Brexit campaign and imposed the hardest of Brexits on a country that did not want it. Brexit represents the triumph of the English nationalists over the Unionists in the Conservative party. A Scot who voted no in 2014 because they believed the Unionist promises then will have been deeply disillusioned. They were told unambiguously that the way to preserve Scotland's membership of the European Union was to vote no to independence. They now know that the opposite was true. The choice now is to either stay in the Prime Minister's narrow, insular Brexit Britain or for Scotland to become like Denmark—a medium-sized, prosperous, socially progressive independent member of the European Union.

For me, independence has never been about the destination, but rather the gateway. It has been about getting the Governments we vote for and holding them to account. It is about making Scotland the most liberal, socially progressive country in Europe. It is about honouring our old people and giving the best start in life to the young. It is about being a beacon of democracy and freedom to countries yearning for both. An independent Scotland would not have gone to war in Iraq. It would not have bombed the Syrians or supplied weapons to the Saudis. An independent Scotland would not have nuclear weapons.

Tory Members sometimes tell me privately that they know independence is inevitable, and I agree with them. However, Canute-like, they think that waves of policy-free, angry election leaflets will stem the tide. They will not. So what should we make of the campaign to stop a referendum? Please, no more of the "once in a generation" baloney. The Prime Minister said that the last general election was a "once in a generation" election. I doubt he meant that there will be no more general elections. Young people who missed out on voting in 2014 are now in their 20s and are hungry to shape their future. Attempting to stifle their voices shows nothing but fear.

I understand people who feel Unionist. I do not, however, understand those who want to impose their Unionism in defiance of Scotland's Parliament. The Scottish people are sovereign. We will decide our future, and no one else.

4.47 pm

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): I am particularly pleased to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. I thank the 1,352 of my constituents who signed the petition. I also thank the Member who preceded me—not so much the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (John Nicolson), but the Member for an alternative universe. I was a Member of the Scottish Parliament during the Iraq war, and the Scottish Parliament voted to support that war, contrary to one of the many myths that the SNP perpetrates. I may or may not have agreed with that decision, but these wild statements that an independent Scotland would not have gone into the Iraq war are nonsense, just like the statement in relation to the EU in the Scottish referendum in 2014—it was known at the time of the Scottish referendum that there was going to be an EU referendum in the United Kingdom, and any pretence otherwise is complete nonsense.

This debate is timely, even though it is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) mentioned, a rerun of many of the issues that were discussed last Wednesday. In that debate, we learned that the nationalists'

[David Mundell]

statement that the 2014 referendum was a “once in a generation” event was in fact a complete and deliberate con—a trick to persuade their supporters to go out and vote. It is clear that there was never any intention to stick to that promise, and the suspicion at the time that the SNP would keep pursuing a referendum until it got the answer it wanted was correct. So much for the Edinburgh agreement, which was described as a gold standard by Alex Salmond. Of course, the same people who are decrying Alex Salmond today were, at that time, describing him as the father of our nation and somebody whose word could be relied on.

The Edinburgh agreement contained that important provision that we would respect the result, but as from 19 September 2014, that result has not been respected. The SNP has disrespected it from that moment onwards. This is not about something happening around the Brexit referendum, nor about Governments and general elections after that. It was disrespected from 19 September 2014, and the constant call since then has been for another referendum, and even another referendum in the middle of a pandemic or in the recovery period that we will essentially need.

We were told that we could have a referendum by the end of this year. That is the last thing Scotland needs. We need a focus on jobs, on education and on our NHS as we rebuild after this pandemic. Contrary to claims that that has been the focus of the SNP Government, we see the incredible sight of an independence referendum Bill being launched today. It does not need to be like this. On 6 May, people can use both their votes for the Scottish Conservatives, and ensure that we focus on rebuilding Scotland and not on another divisive independence referendum.

4.51 pm

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship once again, Ms Nokes. Seven years ago in the run-up to that Scottish independence referendum, those who advocated independence pitched it not just as a once-in-a-generation vote and opportunity; they effectively said to the Scottish people, “This is your chance—grasp it or lose it.” That is effectively what they said, and the people of Scotland gave their response in the outcome, which was that they were better off together within the United Kingdom.

Nationalism, whether in Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales, thrives where there is perceived disadvantage. I know from friends to whom I have spoken over many years that Scottish people feel that they have been disadvantaged by successive Governments. That is why the levelling-up approach by the Prime Minister is absolutely essential in delivering a better United Kingdom. That is why the vaccination programme and the success of the national health service vaccination programme across the United Kingdom demonstrates that we are indeed better off together.

For all of the Members here today who are from Scotland and all of their constituents, their Scottishness and their Britishness are not exclusive. They are complementary. It is not very often that I quote with affirmation a former Labour Prime Minister, but to

paraphrase Gordon Brown speaking just before the referendum seven years ago, the people of Scotland have been born together in the United Kingdom, they have lived together, they have fought in wars together, and they have died together in the United Kingdom.

That is a plea I would put out to all of the people of Scotland. We are much better off together. Let us build a truly United Kingdom, where all of us win, where all of us are levelled up, and where progress and prosperity can be achieved and obtained by everyone across the United Kingdom.

4.53 pm

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): It is a pleasure to see you in the chair today, Ms Nokes. I am pleased to be taking part in the debate on this petition, which has attracted so much support across Scotland. I am particularly pleased to see that 1,894 of my constituents of Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk have signed this petition—the 11th highest number of any constituency in the UK. However, if I went around door-to-door in my Borders constituency and asked people to sign a petition calling on the SNP to drop their obsession with another independence referendum, I suspect the figure would be significantly higher. Members might say that that is no surprise, given that the Scottish Borders voted by a margin of two to one in 2014 for Scotland to remain part of the United Kingdom.

I certainly do not have any sense that people have changed their minds since that referendum vote in 2014—since that act of self-determination back in 2014; since that once-in-a-generation vote, when Scotland voted by a margin of more than 10% to reject the case for separation—quite the opposite.

Scots are worried about the coronavirus pandemic; people are worried about the economy and their jobs; people are worried about our young people and their education; families are worried about the health and wellbeing of loved ones; we are worried about whether our NHS will cope. They are certainly not thinking that now is the right time for another divisive referendum on Scotland’s future. People want Scotland’s two Governments to be working to navigate our way through the pandemic and implement the economic recovery plan.

That is reflected in the fact that this petition was set up in the first place, but also that so many people felt the need to sign it. They do not want to see the SNP Government in Edinburgh prioritising another referendum when there are so many other things that the SNP in Holyrood should be doing.

“But why,” we ask, “is the SNP doing this?” It does not want Scotland’s voters to look at its record in government over the last 14 years. Scotland’s education standards are in decline; Scotland’s NHS is in crisis; Scotland’s rural broadband delivery is in chaos; Scotland’s economy is lagging behind; Scotland has missed climate change targets, I could go on and on.

Of course, there is trouble in the SNP’s nest too—another reason to try to distract voters—ripped apart by an internal civil war the likes of which we have never seen before. Nicola Sturgeon, the First Minister, is seemingly unable to tell the truth, leads the SNP Government, who are corrupt, sleazy, tired, and certainly past their use-by date.

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): Order. Can we maintain parliamentary language, Mr Lamont?

John Lamont: I am grateful, Ms Nokes. I know that others, even in the Scottish Parliament, have questioned whether the First Minister has been able to tell the truth.

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): Order.

John Lamont: I apologise, Ms Nokes.

We need to rebuild Scotland, end the division of the past, and stop the constant talk of another independence referendum. There is one way to do that, and that is for people to use both votes in May for the Scottish Conservatives.

4.57 pm

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes, and to have the opportunity to take part in this debate.

The views of the petition, expressed by the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) earlier, reflect many of the frustrations that I hear daily in Scotland, particularly from my constituents in Edinburgh West, which has the third highest number of signatories to the petition that triggered this debate.

What I am about to say is not a party political point, nor a free potshot at the SNP, but an appeal. Everyone in the House is painfully aware of the impact of the pandemic on our economy and on the daily lives of our constituents, small businesses and families. They are struggling and are tired; they want reassurance that their politicians and their Government will put their recovery first.

Surely no reasonable person, at a time when the country is going through the biggest crisis of this—or any other—generation, can think that we should be focused on anything else. Surely no reasonable politician would say to people, “We know you’re worried about your job and your family’s future, and we know it’s going to be an expensive business to rebuild. First, however we’d like you to take the time and the money to talk about a constitutional question you have already answered.”

I believe that the people of Scotland have answered that question more than once. At the most recent general election, only 45% of the electorate voted for the Scottish National party, whose very *raison d’être* is separation, and which takes every available moment in the Chamber, every speaking opportunity here, every soundbite or quote in the Scottish media, to talk about how independence would be the solution to every imaginable problem.

The SNP gained precisely the same proportion as voted for separatism in the referendum in 2014. It seems happy, in doing that, to put aside education, health and the economy to argue for independence. It is clear that the majority of the people in Scotland have other priorities than that argument. They do not want to talk about independence.

I share the priorities of the majority of the people of Scotland. I am tired of the SNP’s failure to listen to the people of Scotland and their constant claims about what an independent Scotland would have done. How does the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (John Nicolson) know what an independent Scotland would have done? Perhaps he has a crystal ball that we

are not privy to. None of us knows. I am tired of these myths and wild, baseless statements, and I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) for putting the record straight. I am tired of the SNP’s blame and grievance strategy, which is at its worst at a time when we need our politicians and our Governments to pull together to steer us out of a crisis.

I mentioned at the beginning of my speech that Edinburgh had the third highest number of signatories to the petition. The two seats above it in Scotland are both held by the Scottish National party. Perhaps the SNP would do well to ponder that and think that perhaps the time has come when the people of Scotland want it to put its endless grievances aside, think about the people of Scotland and put their recovery first.

5 pm

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con) [V]: It is a pleasure, Ms Nokes, to serve with you in the Chair for this important debate on an incredibly divisive and emotive topic: the future of our Union. It is clear that, like all nationalists, the Scottish National party has an unhealthy obsession with stoking division rather than celebrating the centuries of shared history, culture and values that all nations in the UK have with one another. As I recently heard, we are, after all, a family of nations and a nation of families. Like all families, different components will sometimes have different priorities or views, yet with our family Union of Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland, I believe that we share, and will always share, more in common than less.

Let us face it: this debate and talk of yet another referendum is about far more than facts and figures. The potential separation of our Union is about how we, as four nations in the UK, view our identity and purpose in the world. For over 300 years, the people of Britain have been banded in a common union in which all have benefited. Our being in this Union has ensured that this island has been a beacon of liberty and enterprise. The Union enabled this small island of ours to lead the way in the industrial revolution, stand against tyranny twice—in 1914 and in 1939—and play a key role in the worlds of the 20th and 21st centuries. At each turn in our island’s story, Scotland has benefited from being part of this family of nations. Indeed, many Scots, from Prime Ministers to economists and sportsmen and women, have rightly led and continue to lead this family.

In 2014, the Scottish people rejected outright the SNP’s narrow nationalism, which would have had this wonderful and prosperous family of nations split apart. However, yet again, the party is pushing for another divisive referendum, stoking division and causing uncertainty among businesses and families during the worst economic downturn that the country has faced in living memory. If the SNP truly cared about the people of Scotland, it would respect their wishes to remain part of the UK and not call for a referendum for at least 20 years. It was, after all, a once-in-a-generation decision. However, it is more apparent than ever that the SNP hold nothing sacred—not the Union and not the wishes of the Scottish people. I say: enough. The SNP should focus on governing Scotland for the benefit of all its people, not solely its own supporters. I therefore agree wholeheartedly with the petition and hope that SNP Members hear the voices of the petitioners loud and clear.

5.3 pm

Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP) [V]: I am delighted to take part in the debate under your stewardship, Ms Nokes. In reality, many people could accept being part of the UK; having our rights and privileges as EU citizens ripped from us in such a fashion, many more simply could not. But “Brexit means Brexit” came the cry from London. It is irrefutable that Brexit has decimated Scotland’s trade with the European Union. Last week, Business for Scotland reported that January saw the worst collapse of Scottish trading with the European Union since comparable records began over two decades ago. The Office for National Statistics figures show precisely how harsh it has been. There has been a staggering 83% drop in fish exports, a 59% drop in meat exports and a 50% drop in dairy exports. Overall, total EU exports from Scotland are down 63%.

Brexit has pushed many businesses in my constituency to the brink of bankruptcy and collapse. Warehouses lie empty, products are not getting to their EU market on time and transportation leaving Lanarkshire—a logistically critical distribution network—is delayed time and time again. All of that is a direct consequence of the red tape and unnecessary paperwork that the UK Government have created. It is a mess that Scotland neither wished nor voted for.

Covid has been used time and again as a convenient scapegoat for these issues. However, as James Withers, chief executive of Scotland Food and Drink, stated, Brexit is “at the heart” of the EU trade collapse. After all, non-EU markets have not seen a crash, despite being affected by the same global pandemic. Indeed, many economists have forecast that delays at the EU border and growth stagnation will continue for months, if not years, to come. Brexit is a disaster of the UK Government’s own doing. Scotland can do better. With these harsh figures laid bare, the people of Scotland surely know that too. Twenty-two consecutive polls have shown support for Scottish independence, and today a new poll once again confirms that Scottish independence is now seen as a necessity, rather than a wish, by most Scots.

The Prime Minister is fond of an excuse, and in recent days he has resorted to using covid yet again. This time, it is the main reason why an independence referendum cannot take place. No one is suggesting that our referendum be held during a pandemic—no one has ever suggested such a thing. However, the Prime Minister cannot continue to deny democracy. He cannot continue to deny and ignore democratic mandates, and he cannot deny a second independence referendum.

I enjoy taking part in petition debates. They are, to my mind, the truest form of democracy in action. This one has given us a chance to remind all across the UK that their opinions are valued and respected in relation to Scotland’s place in the world. It is also a good time to remind the same people that when a referendum takes place is for the people of Scotland to determine through our democratically elected Parliament.

5.7 pm

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. I am getting a sense of déjà vu. We basically had the

same debate on Thursday, but having the same debate twice in a row is an apt metaphor for the nationalists’ approach to referendums.

I was going to launch into a polemic about the sanctity of the settled will of the Scottish people and the importance of consent in our democracy, but it would be entirely wasted on the SNP. The party is so out of touch and arrogant that it claims to speak for an entire nation, and is venal enough to claim that any criticism of its knavish regime—I am mindful of your call for parliamentary language, Ms Nokes—in Holyrood is talking Scotland down. It is certainly not going to respect the outcome of a once-in-a-generation referendum.

Ad nauseam, we hear from nationalist Members that the panacea for all the world’s ills is separation. If only we can ignore the myriad details they forgot to work out, Scotland will be off and up into the sunlit uplands. Then of course we get the other logical fallacy: that an independent Scotland handing over control of its laws and economy to an unelected Commission in Brussels will somehow make Scotland more prosperous and free.

SNP Members have set themselves up as pound-shop Bravehearts—I say “pound shop”, but we do not actually know what currency they would be using in an independent Scotland—peddling the fantasy that a major constitutional issue can simply be passed. Meanwhile, support for the SNP is on the slide, as the murky goings-on at Holyrood become more public, and support for independence slides with it. No doubt the goalposts will be shifted again after May’s poll to suit the realpolitik of whatever the outcome is.

The same self-important, peevish nationalism that underpins the SNP’s vision for Scotland, creating an inward-looking, less tolerant country, is still writ large. After three years of hard graft to get Brexit done, we are moving back out into the world, which has always been the United Kingdom’s true place. We are a trading nation, and nowhere is that clearer than here at home, where trade between Scotland and the home nations is three times greater than with the EU27. Public spending in Scotland is more than £1,600 per person higher than the UK average, which means that every person in Scotland benefits from levels of public spending substantially above those of the rest of the UK. The SNP wants to take that away. The SNP’s perspective on separation would make Scotland poorer, less democratic and less outward-looking.

I fully accept that some people wanted a different future for the UK in 2016, but we have a responsibility to one another to take the opportunities of our new reality and to make it work for everyone, not constantly stoke division and acrimony in pursuit of an ill-conceived separatism. The only way to ensure that Scotland can move forward as a full partner in our national recovery from covid and in our shared prosperity post Brexit is for those who have a vote in May’s Holyrood elections to cast both votes for the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party, the only party that has a clear and consistent position in our support for the Union and our desire to get on with the day job of looking after the interests of the people of Scotland.

5.10 pm

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes.

This debate being called rather sums up the dysfunction of this so-called United Kingdom—a hopelessly asymmetric construct from the outset, and one that now substantially exceeds the limits of what Scotland can continue to endure. In 2014, the Smith commission report noted that

“nothing in this report prevents Scotland becoming an independent country in the future should the people of Scotland so choose.”

That report included signatories from all political parties represented in Scotland: the Greens, the SNP and the vow signatories, Labour, Liberal and Tory. The Better Together amalgam still clearly exists, and as usual they speak with one voice to deny Scotland the credit of her abilities, subscribing to a Tory “Union first” ideology.

The petition that we are debating today received almost one fifth of its signatures from people not resident in Scotland, so this Westminster Hall debate on whether people in Scotland should decide Scotland’s future is therefore taking place because people not resident in Scotland have decided that we should not allow Scotland self-determination. Democratic values cast aside, here in the “mother of all Parliaments”.

Indeed, of the 13 hon. Members lining up today to downplay the harm of London rule in Scotland while talking down Scotland’s right to self-determination, only five represent Scottish constituencies. That perhaps explains why a consistent majority of people who actually live in Scotland now support independence. I do not doubt that outwith Scotland there are those who oppose Scottish independence, and do so for what they may consider very good reasons, but it is Scotland’s future, so it is Scotland’s choice, and the people of Scotland know it.

That is consistent with the latest poll by BMG for *The Herald*, which again showed a majority in support of independence. The UK is splitting up in slow motion before our eyes, but we will change into top gear following an SNP majority in May’s Scottish Parliament elections, if the people of Scotland vote for the SNP’s ambition for another referendum. The UK cannot refuse that in those circumstances.

In Scotland, we largely dispensed with the irrelevance of the Labour party in 2015, and now Wales and the north of England are pursuing the same enterprise with enthusiasm. Since 2016, England has, it seems, embraced a populist, right-wing, Tory anti-EU agenda, which is its democratic right so to do, but Scotland has pursued social inclusion, fairness and opportunity, and it is positive about Europe. Those values and ambitions of either nation for its people are mutually exclusive.

Earlier in the debate, defence jobs were mentioned. Let me expand on that. When, in 1989, I was employed by the Navy as an apprentice aircraft engineer, I joined a workforce of more than 32,000 Ministry of Defence employees in Scotland. Last year, that number was less than 14,000. What Union dividend is that?

Six weeks on Thursday, I trust the people of Scotland to exercise their vote in such a way as to send a very clear instruction to Westminster, demanding another referendum—not a demand from the SNP or any political party, but a demand from the sovereign people of Scotland, to which the UK will accede.

5.13 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes.

In reality, the petition reflects the views of a minority of people in Scotland. Only today, an opinion poll reconfirmed previous polls indicating that people are in favour of a referendum in the next five years if the SNP gets a majority. A small minority believe in the Union so strongly that their contention is that there should not be another referendum, no matter the will of the people.

The petition is fundamentally flawed for a couple of reasons. First, it puts Westminster’s sovereignty above the will and democratic votes of the Scottish people, which should be unacceptable for any democrat. In common with nine Opposition MPs last week and several today, the petition references the “once in a generation” comment, as if somehow one referendum is all we get. It is conveniently ignored that constitutionally Northern Ireland can hold a referendum every seven years, so why should democracy be blocked in Scotland?

In 2014, the UK was still a member of the European Union. It was acknowledged then that an SNP majority paved the way for a referendum and the Edinburgh agreement was put in place. Now, it seems the British state will do anything to obstruct Scottish parliamentary democracy. So 2014 actually was a unique opportunity. Sadly, too many people believed that voting no would keep us in the EU. Contrary to what the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) said earlier, Baroness Davidson tried to assure us that there was no way there would be an EU referendum, so that information was not given to the Scottish people.

We are told the myth that we are part of the most successful political union in the world—so successful that it is now frightened to give the people another verdict on it. We are told that we have the most powerful devolved Parliament in the world, yet Northern Ireland has powers over welfare, pensions and the civil service that we do not have. Wallonia was able to veto the comprehensive economic and trade agreement deal, but Westminster would not even look at Scottish Government compromise proposals on Brexit, instead taking us out of Europe against our will and imposing a bad deal. Now for good measure we have the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill, which undermines devolution altogether.

The Scottish Parliament has limited borrowing powers, not enough tax powers and control over only about 15% of welfare. Westminster cuts the budget and Scottish Tories demand more is done with less money. It is an impossible circle to square. Meanwhile Labour agrees that the Scottish Parliament does not have enough powers only when support for the SNP increases. For them, it is a means to an end. A con like the vow will not work next time.

Too many people in Scotland now realise that Westminster is broken and is headed by an anti-Scottish and anti-devolution Prime Minister, who stated that a pound spent in Croydon is of more value to the country than a pound spent in Strathclyde, and that a Scottish MP should never be Prime Minister, who wanted the Barnett formula to be scrapped and who, as editor of *The Spectator*, published an anti-Scottish poem.

[Alan Brown]

Some 62 countries have exercised their democratic right to leave the UK. Westminster needs to recognise that it is for the electorate in Scotland to choose if we are to be the 63rd. Now is the time for real change.

5.17 pm

Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con) [V]: This debate is a fantastic opportunity to demonstrate exactly why Scottish independence would be catastrophic for the people of Scotland. Our United Kingdom continues to fight against covid-19, employing the power of the Union and its Government to deliver life-saving vaccinations across the United Kingdom, providing us all with a route out of lockdown. As this critical fight continues, the SNP has prioritised another independence referendum, launching its independence taskforce on 17 January this year.

While we are at the pivotal moment in the battle against the virus and taking our first steps towards recovery, pulling our United Kingdom apart will damage our chances of recovery. In indulging their obsession with independence, including planning an independence road map, the SNP has failed to respond properly to the pandemic. In August last year, the SNP promised to expand testing capacity to 65,000 people per day, but the largest number of tests carried out in a single day in Scotland is 34,932.

All the while, Her Majesty's Government have been supporting the Scottish people. Around 780,000 Scottish jobs and the incomes of 157,000 self-employed Scots have been protected by the power of Her Majesty's Treasury's interventions. In rebuilding our United Kingdom after the pandemic, every effort has been made to ensure that no part is left behind. The £4.8 billion levelling-up fund embodies this commitment, with £800 million available across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, to help investment in communities, high streets and local transport.

The SNP's abysmal track record in Government is only a taste of what would happen if the SNP were left completely in charge of Scotland. The SNP has presided over the lowest rate of job creation in the UK, watched Scottish schools drop to the lowest international scores in science and maths, and reduced the number of frontline officers protecting Scottish communities. Being dragged out of the United Kingdom will be hugely damaging to Scotland's recovery, and is against the will of the Scottish people. Polls indicate that an overwhelming majority of people support the Union, and the petitioners responsible for today's debate underline that.

Importantly, another independence referendum would make worthless the SNP's promise that the 2014 referendum would be a once-in-a-generation event. At this critical moment, our collective focus ought to be on rebuilding the entire UK and paving the way to greater prosperity, not on damaging independence referendums. Scotland deserves better. Thank God the Union stands to support Scotland from the deficiencies of the Scottish National party.

5.20 pm

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. May I offer my sincere apologies for my dress at the outset of the debate? It is also a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Imran Ahmad Khan).

Like many citizens, I have a heritage from Scotland and England, and in my case Ireland too. I am a proud Unionist and believe in our United Kingdom. Our United Kingdom is one of the most successful political unions in history. In my constituency of Darlington, some 33 people have signed e-petition 570779—a small number of those who I am sure would not want to see our United Kingdom broken up by the separatists.

The continued refrain of the SNP on independence, despite the once-in-a-generation decision, is used to distract from the failings of its Government in Holyrood, its internal party conflicts, its failure on education, its failure on health, and its worsening polling data. The debate presents a great opportunity to shine a spotlight on the phenomenal level of support that this Conservative and Unionist Government have provided during the pandemic to the people of Scotland, as indeed they have throughout the whole United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom Government have protected jobs and businesses, giving tangible proof of the argument that, working together and supporting each and every country of our United Kingdom, we are better together—facing the challenge of the pandemic and its aftermath together. Across the UK, employers have been able to take advantage of the unprecedented levels of support, such as the coronavirus job retention scheme, the self-employed income scheme and UK-backed business loans. In June last year, almost 800,000 Scottish jobs were being supported through the furlough scheme, and statistics from January show that more than 360,000 Scottish workers were still on furlough. More than 431,000 self-employed people have been supported through the self-employed income scheme, and more than 90,000 Scottish businesses have been supported by UK Government-backed loans worth almost £3.4 billion. At the same time, the Scottish Government struggled to distribute support to the businesses that needed it.

Our vaccination programme across the UK—a programme that underpins our precious Union—has shown the strength that we gain from working together. If the SNP had its way and was part of the European Union's vaccination programme, it is likely that Scotland would not have achieved the number of vaccination first doses that we have achieved so far. Despite the unprecedented situation that we have faced this past year, and despite the constant negativity of the SNP, this one nation Conservative and Unionist Government have delivered for the people of the entire UK, and will continue to do so.

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): Before I move to the Front-Bench spokesmen, I remind them that they have 10 minutes each, which will allow a few minutes for the mover of the motion to wind up at the end.

5.24 pm

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP) [V]: It is a pleasure to speak in the debate. I know it might be hard for others to believe, but I genuinely try my best to understand where Unionists are coming from in their defence of the UK as a Union. Although I disagree with them more often than not, I always respect and accept what their position is. That is what keeps a democracy healthy: genuine thoughtful debate.

Today's debate is not about the merits of independence or the problems with independence, but about whether Scotland should have another independence referendum.

Although the two issues are intrinsically linked, it is important to keep that distinction in mind. The basic principle on which all democracies are built is that it is for people to exercise their democratic rights in free, fair and regular elections to determine what the future of their country should be. To an extent, this is a hypothetical debate. We are weeks away from the upcoming Scottish elections, when people in Scotland will again exercise their democratic right to choose the future direction of the country. If the people in Scotland elect a majority of Members on an explicit pledge to have another independence referendum, this debate will no longer be hypothetical. In that scenario, there should be another independence referendum—there is no democratic or moral argument to state otherwise. Ultimately, time will tell. We are all politicians; we know how elections work. It is for us to present the future we want to pursue and for the people to democratically endorse which plan they want put into action. No one has the right to stand in the way of that. It is as simple as that.

Scotland held a referendum on independence, and a majority in Scotland voted to give this Union another chance. A lot has happened since then—I will touch on some of that later—but it is important to remember that there was nothing in the Edinburgh agreement stating that there would never be another independence referendum. In fact, there was cross-party agreement that nothing contained in the Smith commission report “prevents Scotland from becoming independent in the future”.

I remember watching the debates back then, when the idea of Boris Johnson as Prime Minister was laughed off and the possibility that Scotland would be dragged out of the EU against its will was dismissed as scaremongering. Any attempt to say that there has not been a material change since then is wishful thinking at best.

I was elected to my current role on a manifesto pledge to hold Westminster to account for the promises that were made. Any suggestion that we are not respecting the outcome of that referendum is a futile attempt to rewrite history. Supporting independence does not equate to disrespecting the outcome of the referendum. We would not be in the position we are in if we had not respected that outcome. It means that we know we need to work to convince others. That is why I find it quite curious that the only people who seem vehemently opposed to a second referendum are those who are passionately in favour of the Union.

I will specifically address some of the arguments made today. We heard that Alex Salmond said that the referendum was a “once-in-a-generation” vote. The last general election was described by the current Prime Minister as a

“critical once-in-a-generation”

vote. Does that mean that there will not be a general election for a generation? I assume not. Although he might not like it, Alex Salmond does not hold the authority on Scotland’s future anyway.

The second main criticism—that we should be debating health, social security and the economy—for me shows a complete failure to meaningfully engage with the arguments being made. The reason most people support independence is not nationalism or flags, but rather because they see the actions and attitudes of Westminster. Our Scottish Parliament spends millions every year mitigating policies of the UK Government, which more

often than not Scotland did not vote for. People are recognising that only by having the powers of a normal independent country can we actually have the power to deliver that radical change that we need, particularly in the context of our post-covid recovery, because we are certainly not getting that thinking from Westminster.

The Scottish Government disagreed with Brexit, but they still produced a framework for how to make it work. That was rejected by Westminster. In the situation that Scotland ever does vote for independence, the SNP does not and should not dictate what that future looks like, but Unionist parties are depriving people of what their own vision would be and then decrying the SNP for being the only ones talking about it. Like I said, we want independence because we think it will give us the means to provide a lot of the responses we think people need. As I said at the beginning, the issue of timing is undoubtedly interlinked with our constitutional preferences, and I do not think anyone would disagree with that. But it got me thinking; if Scotland was already independent, and we were debating whether to join the UK, particularly in the aftermath of covid, what would the merits of this Union be? Power would be moved to a Parliament miles away, where we would be in the minority, we would rarely get the Governments we vote for, and those Governments would have the ultimate control over our economy, our borders, and our social security. They would dictate how much money we could spend and what we could spend it on, and we would have nuclear weapons in our waters, like it or not. In that context, the fear of another referendum becomes much more understandable.

The events of the last six to seven years have shown that the case for the Union is paper-thin. I sincerely respect and welcome the fact that people disagree with independence, but it takes an epic leap to then say that the matter should never be discussed again, especially when a sizeable amount of people in Scotland consistently disagree. Ultimately, it is for the people of Scotland to decide if and when a referendum should happen, and it is our job to listen.

5.31 pm

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Nokes. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) who opened the debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee. I thought he gave an excellent and measured speech. He had spoken to the petitioners and expressed what they were trying to achieve by this debate, which just shows the breadth of what they were trying to do. I was quite shocked—really shocked—when he said that the petitioners wish to remain anonymous because they fear the consequences of speaking out. That is one of the main reasons we should not have another independence referendum. It is hugely divisive; businesses, charities and third-sector organisations feel they cannot speak out and make their voices heard. Members of the public cannot speak out. There is division in families and division in workplaces. It is really shocking that the petitioners feel as if they cannot put their name publicly to this kind of petition.

We have just had another debate in the House that is all about process with none of the answers. Last Wednesday in the House of Commons Chamber, we had seven hours of debate and no answers about the proposition being made. That is one of the major reasons why the debate

[*Ian Murray*]

has turned into a debate about process, rather than the actual issues. The SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black), talked about “meaningfully engaging”. There is no meaningful engagement at all in this debate, because none of the big questions are answered.

Let me give an example, which will be recorded in *Hansard* from last Wednesday. The hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), who opened the debate, was challenged about some big questions on currency, the EU, borders, debts and the deficit—the list is pretty endless. He said there was no need to answer those questions at the moment, because they would all be addressed when an independence referendum is actually held. However, just two speakers from the SNP Benches later, we had a detailed analysis of how an independent Scotland’s asylum policy would operate. On the one hand, we have answers. On the other hand, we do not. I suspect that that is because the answers to the big questions are not forthcoming.

We have heard a number of times today, including from the petitioners and from my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn, that the Scottish Government could be not only answering a whole number of questions but looking at a whole number of really important policies for the Scottish people. My hon. Friend talked about food poverty, about energy poverty and about the education system catching up—is it not strange that for the first time in its history the Scottish education system is plummeting down the international rankings and we have heard nothing about that?

That is all at a time when the Scottish Government are using precious Scottish Government time in Parliament—just 24 hours before Parliament’s last full day—to introduce another referendum Bill. Not a Bill on educational attainment or food poverty. Not a Bill to ensure that the 220 people who were queued up in the snow and sub-zero temperatures in George Square are fed and given a home. It is not a Bill on poverty, or on how we grow businesses. It is not a Bill on any of those things, but a Bill to have another referendum. That is the only priority that the Scottish National party has and it is paralysing our politics. It is paralysing our Parliament and, as we have heard from the petitioners, it is poisoning our national discourse. Where is the debate about a fairer society? Where is the debate about some of these big questions?

The hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (John Nicolson) spoke inaccurately, I think, when he tried to muddy the line between patriotism and nationalism. It is as if someone who is not a nationalist is not a patriot. That surely cannot be the case. We are all patriotic about our country, but it is possible to be a patriot and celebrate everything that is Scottish—I certainly do—without being a nationalist. Blurring that line is incredibly dangerous. The hon. Gentleman also talked eloquently, and he was right, about the damage that leaving the EU is doing to Scotland and the rest of the country. However, he did not spend any time telling us what the SNP’s plan would be for getting back into the EU. It is contradictory and impossible to deliver, and that is not being honest with the Scottish people.

The right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) rightly challenged the SNP on the rewriting of history, which is really the only

tool in its box at the moment: speaking about things that did not happen, making assertions about what other people have said and what the Scottish Parliament is for, and making the huge assertion that the SNP’s voice is the voice of the Scottish people. It is not. The Scottish people is much wider than that. I certainly would not suggest that I could speak on behalf of all the Scottish people. The SNP should not do so either.

The hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Steven Bonnar) said no one was talking about a referendum at any time soon. Well, no one apart from the First Minister—and the Cabinet Secretary responsible for it, Mike Russell, and the SNP leader at Westminster, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford). They have all talked about a potential independence referendum this year. Can you imagine, when most Scots are thinking about their jobs, worried about their livelihoods and concerned about their health and that of their family, friends and colleagues as we come out of probably the most serious economic and health crisis the country has seen in peacetime, going straight into an independence referendum? Here is a little bit of a conundrum for the Members who have said, “We are not talking about having it this year; we will wait until covid is over, because it would be too difficult at this time to have this big debate and get people to the polls while there is a pandemic on”—apart from the fact that there is a Scottish election on 6 May, with people going to the polls. That is more contradictory stuff from the Scottish National party.

We heard from the hon. Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson). It is wonderful to see the screens in the new hybrid situation, because while he was talking about his Scottish heritage, and his pride in it, there were SNP Members shaking their heads. The hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan) shook his head as if that point could not legitimately be allowed to be made, because the hon. Gentleman is not living in Scotland and represents Darlington. He has every right to celebrate his Scottish heritage. We should all celebrate it with him. He is very welcome to tell us that he wants Scotland to stay in the United Kingdom because it is part of him, and of his family’s history. It is wonderful to see people’s reactions on the screen when such points are made, because it is clear that the issue is very much about being anti the rest of the United Kingdom, rather than about a proper argument. The hon. Member for Angus also said that the debate shows the worst of Westminster. The debate was called by the public. There is a Petitions Committee, and if a petition gets the relevant number of signatures a debate can be held. That is why the debate is happening.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) talked of sovereignty. He talked very much about the Smith commission and other issues like that. He is right to assert that the Scottish Parliament is not one of the most powerful devolved Parliaments in the world. Why not? Because the powers it has are not being used. It has the potential to be the most powerful devolved Parliament in the world. It could use the social security powers that SNP Members seem to think it does not have. Sections 25 to 27 of the Scotland Act 2016, which came out of the cross-party Smith commission, mean that Scotland can essentially design its own social security system. What did the SNP Scottish Government do? They handed all the powers back to Westminster until at least 2024—eight years after the commission

document was signed. Using the powers of the Scottish Parliament would make it one of the most powerful devolved Parliaments in the world. Not using them means it is possible to sit back and say, “We have no powers, and it is everyone else’s fault.”

We need to concentrate now on a national covid recovery plan. We need an NHS recovery. All those people who have missed out on treatments for cancer and other illnesses need to get their treatments and diagnoses. We need that to be at the forefront of everything we do post the next election. We need an education catch-up for all the kids that have been left behind. The education system, and the NHS, were in a poor place before the pandemic and are in an even worse place now. We need a jobs and business recovery. Scotland’s economy was in a bad place before the pandemic and is in an even worse place now. We need a climate recovery. All those wonderful climate targets that the Scottish Government set—it is great to set targets—will not be met. We were in a dreadful place with regard to climate targets before the pandemic, and we are in an even worse place now. We need a community recovery; we have a housing crisis and local services starved of cash, with billions taken from local council budgets. That was in a bad place before the pandemic, so we need a recovery now.

On what the Scottish Labour party wants to do, I can read from the speech of the leader of the Labour party, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). He talked about Scotland in a modern United Kingdom and the process of devolution going forward. There does not have to be a binary choice between the broken status quo and separation. There is another way that it can be done. This is about looking at the United Kingdom, at a post-Brexit Britain and at how it manages itself. On the consequences of independence and another referendum, he said that that is why the First Minister’s

“call for an independence referendum in the...next Scottish Parliament—perhaps even next year”—

this was in December—

“is so misguided. Given the damage and division this would cause”, particularly during a pandemic,

“no responsible First Minister should contemplate it—and no responsible Prime Minister would grant it.”

Those are the words of the leader of the Labour party, and the new leader of the Scottish Labour party, Anas Sarwar, has been pretty clear that we will go into the 6 May election saying that we are setting aside every single bit of constitutional division to unite our country and put forward a national covid recovery plan to ensure that people do not need to worry about their health, their jobs or their livelihoods. Post the election in May their Scottish Government will have that as their sole focus.

5.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Iain Stewart): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) on introducing the debate so effectively, with great measure and care for what the petitioners were asking us to consider today. I am grateful for the contributions from right hon. and hon. Members on a subject that arouses considerable passions.

It is worth restating why we are here today. More than 110,000 people put their names to a petition against a second separation referendum in Scotland. I think that view chimes with views right across Scotland and the whole United Kingdom. There is no evident pressing demand that we should put this at the top of our list in our debates. SNP Members are always happy to cite opinion polls that back up their case. They do not mention the recent ones with a majority view against separation. The most recent batch of polls show that for less than 10% of people, constitutional issues are the primary focus that will drive their voting behaviour.

As many Members have pointed out today, this is absolutely not the time to obsess about process and constitutional measures when we are recovering from one of the worst public health crises and economic challenges in our history. People in all parts of the country want to see us working in partnership to tackle the pandemic and drive the recovery that we want to see. The contribution from the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) was absolutely spot on. People want to know what we are going to do if their mental health or their child’s education has suffered, or they are worried about their job or a range of other pressing issues, and that is what they want us to talk about.

I was also deeply troubled by the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) raised about this already starting to arouse some deeply unpleasant behaviour; he referenced a death threat. The hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) rightly highlighted how appalling it is that the organiser of the petition felt they had to remain anonymous for fear of reprisals.

We would set that in train again if we went down the path of another divisive referendum, but it is quite clear that the SNP wants to drive that as fast as they can. The hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan) said that in as many words: it will go into overdrive, and once the Scottish Parliament elections are out of the way, that is what the SNP will focus on. The hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) said in last week’s debate that he does not really mind whether it is later this year or early next year when we go into the divisiveness of another referendum, but that is what is going to be. That is not what Scotland needs or wants. My right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) hit the nail on the head: since the 2014 referendum, the SNP has never stopped agitating and bringing up every sense of grievance to chip away, to nip away, to have another vote—it is a neverendum. It will keep going, but that is not what the people of Scotland need or want.

We heard it last week. Given a rare chance, as an Opposition party, to set the subject for debate in Parliament, SNP Members could have looked at what lessons we are learning from the current pandemic so that we can avoid future ones, or they could have debated the economic challenges. They could have focused on what measures we will take to get the 100,000 Scottish people who have sadly lost their jobs due to covid back into work. They could have debated how they were going to tackle waiting lists, the catch-up education for three quarters of a million Scottish schoolchildren who have not had their full educational development this year, or how to clear the backlog of some 40,000 criminal and civil legal cases. There are so many issues they could have talked about, including the vaccination programme—of course, the SNP wanted the UK to be part of the EU’s vaccination

[*Iain Stewart*]

programme and procurement, so perhaps that is why they did not want to talk about that. But no, they wanted to talk about the division and divisiveness of another separation referendum. I think that is the wrong focus.

We have seen how much we can achieve together—all spheres of government, be it local, Scottish or UK—by working together to help us get through the pandemic and rebuild. For example, the British armed forces are helping to establish new vaccine centres right across Scotland and are helping to vaccinate people, a programme that is delivering huge strides forward to getting us back together. We are promoting our green industrial revolution, investing in the technologies and industries of the future, a programme that will support levelling up and up to 250,000 new jobs, while Glasgow will of course host COP26 later this year—a golden opportunity to showcase the best of what we can offer and to demonstrate our global leadership on this vital issue. Just at the time that the world's eyes would be on us, the SNP would have us fighting one another, family against family, community against community. That is not what we want.

Let me pick up on some of the other points that Members made during the course of the debate. The hon. Member for Edinburgh South was on the money when he criticised SNP Members for confusing patriotism and nationalism. How insulting to suggest that if someone does not buy into the divisive programme of the nationalists they are somehow less Scottish. They do not speak for all of Scotland; they speak for those who are obsessed with smashing up the world's most successful economic and social partnership.

Brexit was raised a number of times, and I want to challenge the point often made that so much has changed since the 2014 referendum. Perhaps SNP Members would like to revisit their prospectus for separation, “Scotland's Future” which contained the warning that Scotland should vote for independence to stop

“Scotland being taken out of the EU”

against its will. It was there. It was a once-in-a-generation vote, although, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale said, apparently that was just a get-out-the-vote strategy and we were not meant to believe it. I am afraid they are making it up as they go along. It was a decisive vote; it was once in a generation.

I have two other points to make about Brexit. First, if, as SNP Members have referenced, Brexit has been so damaging to Scotland's exports and trade, what on earth do they think would happen if we broke up the UK single market? Is that what businesses are really looking for as they rebuild after the pandemic—to add in another risk and uncertainty, with all the costs and division that would cause? Is that what they are asking for? I do not think so.

The UK Government continue to drive forward their ambitious programme of economic growth to support people and businesses across Scotland and the UK.

That includes programmes such as city deals, the new trade deals and export support. That is the concrete work going on to help rebuild Scotland's economy and invest in the future. The Budget earlier this month demonstrated the Government's commitment to operating on a truly UK-wide basis, with extensions to furlough, the self-employed scheme and the levelling-up fund benefiting businesses and citizens right across the UK.

We do not need another divisive referendum. We had the vote. People want us to focus on rebuilding, catching up and investing in the future. That is what the coming election in Scotland is about. That is how people will decide which party they will support. I look forward to a lively debate between my hon. Friend the Member for Moray and the party of the hon. Member for Edinburgh South, the party of the hon. Member for Edinburgh West and others on those key issues of jobs, education, health, transport, clean energy and the many other areas that people are concerned about.

We do not need another referendum on separation. The UK Government are focused on rebuilding, and I very much agree with the petitioners, whom I congratulate again on securing this important debate. I also congratulate once again the hon. Member for Islwyn on introducing it so effectively.

5.53 pm

Chris Evans [V]: This has been a very measured and good debate. There have been passions on both sides as we would expect on something that stirs up such passion. However, I hope that those in the wider public who want to indulge in personal abuse because someone has a different view from them learn from the debate. It is my genuine belief that, as we have seen with the Brexit referendum and previously with the Scottish referendum, we will get nowhere in our political discourse if all we do is shout at each other. We will not be able to hear what others are saying.

Many in the debate have liked to compare Wales to Scotland. From a Welsh perspective, the warning I have for Scottish politicians is that the truth is that we are in danger of disappearing down a constitutional rabbit hole. It is no good talking about the constitution all the time. As I said in my earlier speech, the idea of jam tomorrow will not cut it anymore. These are desperate times. We live in a pandemic that has never been seen before, and we face an economic downturn like never before. Constitutional arguments will become secondary to that. Therefore, we can set the debate either as independence versus Unionism, or about how we want our country—our United Kingdom—to look in the coming years.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 570779, relating to consent for a referendum on Scottish independence.

5.55 pm

Sitting suspended.

Spring 2021 Covid-19 Road Map

[DAVID MUNDELL *in the Chair*]

6.15 pm

David Mundell (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice in order to support the new hybrid arrangements. Timings of debates have been amended to allow technical arrangements to be made for the next debate. There will be suspensions between each debate.

I remind Members participating physically and virtually that they must arrive for the start of debates in Westminster Hall. Members are expected to remain for the entire debate. I also remind Members participating virtually that they are visible at all times, both to each other and to us here in the Boothroyd Room.

If Members attending virtually have any technical problems, they should email the Westminster Hall Clerk's email address. Members attending physically should clean their spaces before they use them and as they leave the room.

We anticipate that there might be a vote in the main Chamber during this debate. If so, I will suspend proceedings for 15 minutes, to allow that vote to take place.

6.16 pm

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con) [V]: I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petitions 313310, 557167, 563904, 566718 and 567492, relating to the Government's Spring 2021 Covid-19 roadmap.

It is a pleasure to serve under you today, Mr Mundell. I am pleased to lead my first petitions debate on an incredibly important issue: the easing of lockdown in the country. Collectively, the five petitions that we are debating gathered approximately 750,000 signatures, with more than 600 of those from my constituency.

Before I start, I thank the individuals who started the petitions: Paul Marton, James Roberts and Liz Terry. It was a pleasure to speak with both James and Liz last week. They told me of their frustration with gyms being closed in this current lockdown. As I reassured both of them, however, we have since seen a publicised road map out of lockdown in England.

I understand that the petitions have taken some time to be considered, so I apologise to the petitioners and signatories for speaking somewhat retrospectively. That said, it is important to highlight why the petitions were signed and what we should all take into consideration as we move forward and recover from this dreadful pandemic.

Let me speak first of where we are now with regards to the lifting of restrictions. The vaccination programme in the UK continues to make great progress: more than 50% of adults have received at least one dose of the vaccine, and hospitalisations are down to their lowest level since September. We all have an enormous sense of gratitude to our NHS and other health workers, who have been on the frontline of this fight for more than a year now.

The speed of the vaccine roll-out must relieve some of the fears of individuals who created and signed the petitions we are debating. Golf courses will reopen on 29 March. Many people will be relieved to know that

gyms will reopen on 12 April. Most importantly, however, the Government plan to end all restrictions by 21 June. Equally, the signatories of the petition regarding gymnasiums being open in tier 4 should also be reassured, as the easing of the lockdown does not include a return to the tier system. While developments that we have witnessed since the setting up of the petitions are perhaps unhelpful in this particular debate, they are great news for the many thousands of individuals and businesses to have suffered from economic hardship, unemployment, loneliness and poor physical and mental health over the past 12 months. Despite developments, it is important that these petitioners have their voices heard. When the petitions were first established, these issues were extremely relevant and pressing to affected parties.

Although the lockdown measures were clearly necessary to save lives and prevent our health service from being overwhelmed, we must not ignore the fact that the restrictions were infuriating to many people. The general public are, after all, used to having the freedom to do what they want. It is important that Members of Parliament who voted for the restrictions understand that frustration. I certainly understand it, and over the past 12 months, I have seen many social media posts and emails from constituents expressing quite a lot of anger.

I must inform the Minister that many pointed out that they thought the restrictions were at times illogical, yet I personally understand that the Government had to work quickly in response to the challenges posed by the pandemic. That meant that any restrictions were bound to leave certain people feeling wronged. As with all legislation that has to be rushed through, loopholes and peculiarities inevitably emerged. However, I commend the Government for continuing to listen to the concerns of the public and Parliament. As a Back-Bench MP, I can safely say that my concerns and those of my constituents have been heard and often addressed.

Frustration with the restrictions was acutely felt by golfers, who at times wrote to me to state that it was unfair that they could go for a walk with a friend, yet not have a game of golf on a golf course. To some, such complaints may seem trivial, but for many people, activities such as golf or going to the gym are daily hobbies that give joy and respite from the everyday stresses of life.

I have spoken to many people about the need for gyms to be reopened. I again thank Liz Terry, who began one of the petitions, for taking the time to speak to me. Like many of my constituents, Liz made the very truthful point that, along with underlying conditions and age, one of the biggest causes of covid hospitalisation is having an inactive, unhealthy lifestyle. There is no hiding from that fact. The Prime Minister himself said that his hospitalisation was due somewhat to his lifestyle choices. For that reason, I sympathise with the view of Liz and other gym owners that the Government should support gyms and help this country to build back fitter.

As covid-19 has reminded us of the importance of having a healthy lifestyle, would it not be a good idea for the Government to establish a programme similar to the eat out to help out scheme? There could also be a temporary reduction in VAT to 5% across the physical activity sector. That would massively help the industry, and it would help our NHS by ensuring the population is much healthier.

[Nick Fletcher]

Let me go back to what the Government were trying to achieve and continue to strive to achieve. We all heard the lines: stay home, protect the NHS and save lives. As I have said, the Government's whole strategy focused on saving lives. This disease could spread only with human contact, and could spread especially quickly in indoor venues, so if we did not come into contact, it could not spread.

Trying to enforce minimal contact is not simple in a society and an economy as complex as ours. Even in a pandemic, some people have to go to work, such as NHS staff, our 999 services, our supermarket workers and their suppliers, the dustbin men, the postal workers, the bus drivers, the electricians, the plumbers and the social workers—the list goes on. In other words, our essential workers—the ones who keep this country running and churning away—could not stay at home. We needed them, so those of us who were lucky enough to stay at home were rightly told to do so.

Petition 566718 demanded that nurseries be shut. I understand that some members of staff in nurseries may be frightened of covid, but the evidence is clear: children aged five and under are much less likely to pass on the virus, and are not adversely affected by it. Equally, nurseries played a crucial role in enabling our key workers to carry on doing their vital work. Closing the nurseries would have forced many parents to make childcare arrangements or reduce their hours. That, I am afraid, would be wrong and unnecessary, especially as it is clear that nurseries are low-risk environments.

Throughout this pandemic I have had many meetings with the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State and Ministers. They have stated that their strategy was to suppress the virus until we get a vaccine. While I sympathise that the petitioners will have different opinions on how this strategy went forward, having an opinion without ultimate responsibility is a luxury. The Prime Minister does not have that luxury, but unfortunately has all the responsibility. We must not forget that.

Over 130,000 people have died. That is not just a statistic; these are people's mums, dads, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters. Meanwhile, businesses have gone bust. Before being an MP, I ran my own business and I know what it is like for people to put everything they have into a business. I can only sympathise with those who have built up something themselves, only to witness it fail due to circumstances outside their control.

I am pleased that over the weekend the Government announced that they will provide £100 million to 266 local authorities to support the recovery of publicly owned leisure centres and museums. However, as that covers only publicly owned venues, I would like to ask the Minister whether the Government have any plans to help gymnasiums through the reduction of VAT, to say 5%, or through a work out to help out scheme. As ukactive pointed out, such simple measures could stimulate growth in the sector, which was in a position of strength prior to the pandemic, and create a number of sustainable jobs to aid the country's health and economic recovery from covid-19. Let us help our country not only level up, but physically get up and build back fitter.

6.26 pm

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship for the very first time, Mr Mundell. I thank the hon. Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) for securing this debate at a crucial time for our country, as we look to emerge from this latest lockdown.

As we have heard, the covid pandemic has taken its toll, economically as well as on our nation's health. Alongside the harm caused by the virus itself, there has been a knock-on impact on people of being confined to their homes for months at a time, unable to exercise in the way they were previously accustomed to. That has led to a rise in obesity and mental health issues, which has placed further strain on our NHS, as well as an increase in the challenging circumstances that millions of people across the country face during the latest lockdown.

There has also been an impact on the leisure and fitness industry, which, like many sectors, has been left in a perilous position after suffering a sharp drop in revenue over the past 12 months. Gyms and fitness clubs should be recognised as wellbeing hubs and given the support they need to survive and to help revive our nation's flagging physical and mental health.

The demand for this is clear; almost a quarter of a million people signed a petition on the UK Parliament website that calls for gyms to be opened as we come out of lockdown and for a work out to help out scheme to be funded. Such a scheme would see gym memberships, group exercise and personal training subsidised, to give people greater access to health and fitness services. That would give a timely economic boost to the leisure industry, potentially have a positive impact on the NHS in terms of reducing further strain in future, and help lift many gyms and fitness clubs across the country off their knees.

I have met gym, sports and other leisure fitness club owners in my Ilford South constituency, including Louis Lattuca, a franchisee of Anytime Fitness. They were all clear that this could be a huge boost to help them keep their heads well above water in the long term and to protect workers' jobs when the furlough scheme comes to an end later this year.

This petition closely followed another, which called for gyms to remain open during the tier 4 lockdown, and was signed by a further 180,000 people. It is clear that people are desperate for an outlet to channel their frustration at being confined to their home or workplace, and to improve their physical and mental wellbeing in the process. That is why at ukactive's national summit last November, Professor Chris Whitty himself stated that exercise and physical activity should play a key role in the UK's recovery from the pandemic, as well as shape the way our future healthcare plans work going forwards.

Improved physical health not only has a positive impact on mental health, but considerable research, such as from Loughborough University in 2014, also shows that healthier people require fewer days off sick than those who do not keep fit. That can only benefit businesses around the country as we look get the economy moving again.

I know the benefit that exercise can have on the physical and mental wellbeing of an individual from my days in spit-and-sawdust gyms in east London, such as Wag Bennett's in Forest Gate, where I first started lifting weights and where Arnold Schwarzenegger lived and trained while he was in the UK, and from helping to run a gym in Seven Kings in my east London constituency called Warrens Gym, when I was a young man. Now as a Member of Parliament, I play sport in my capacity as the vice-chair of the Commons and Lords Rugby Union Football Club, and am personally looking forward to getting back into the gyms this summer, and getting my bench press back up 120 kg as soon as I can.

Many sports clubs are at the heart of our communities and have continued to provide a crucial service during the pandemic. For example, Frenford Clubs in my constituency, which does so much for young and disadvantaged people when its doors are open, is now operating as the hub for Redbridge Covid Mutual Aid, which delivers food and vital supplies to some of the most vulnerable people in our borough. However, one of the gyms in my constituency has lost over half its membership over the past 12 months.

In my conversations with not just local gym owners but the chief executives of large leisure chains, I have heard some incredibly sad stories of people even committing suicide because they are so depressed that they cannot get back in and get their health back on track. Despite the Government's announcing one-off grants worth up to £9,000 per property for the months of January and February, many gyms have not been able to apply because their revenue exceeded £50,000. Two in my constituency missed out by just £1,000 to £2,000, unfortunately. They should be rewarded rather than left without support. The sector is losing £90 million every single week, putting more than 100,000 jobs at risk.

Of further concern is the fact that many fitness businesses do not now expect to make a profit before 2023, with almost 40% of sports facilities surveyed by ukactive at risk of permanent closure. That is why I wrote to the Chancellor last month to request further financial support for the sector, as well as adjustments to business rates. Businesses invested to be covid safe. Although they may not initially have been able to let people through their doors in the same number as prior to the pandemic, having at least a controlled number will be beneficial in the future to a degree.

I echo the calls of many of my constituents in Ilford South to develop a national strategy to encourage people to exercise more and to promote physical and mental health, as called for in the petitions. Exercise will be at the heart of our nation's recovery from covid, and key to restoring our nation back to fighting fitness.

David Mundell (in the Chair): Thank you, Mr Tarry. I am sure that we all wish you well with your bench presses. I call Greg Smith.

6.33 pm

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): Thank you, Mr Mundell. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) on securing and opening the debate. I wish to speak particularly on the petitions

before us that relate to gyms and fitness. It may be obvious to most that, unlike the hon. Member for Ilford South (Sam Tarry), I am not regularly found in a gym myself, but I know that they are very important to millions of Brits, not least the entrepreneurs who run them and the staff whose jobs depend on them.

All of us have appreciated the need for measures to control this virus and to save lives, not least our local gyms and fitness centres themselves. Across the board, they introduced comprehensive and robust covid-secure measures very early. Last October, I had the pleasure of visiting Intent 2 Improve, a gym in the town of Buckingham in my constituency, where I saw at first hand the measures that have been put in place to secure its members' safety: hygiene, ventilation and social distancing measures.

However, as we all know, as part of the national lockdown restrictions that gym, and all other gyms and indoor and outdoor leisure facilities across our country, closed. Given their excellent track record on hygiene and safety, and the corresponding extremely low incidence of transmission of the virus in such settings, it was, I fear we must acknowledge, a bitter pill that such severe limitations were placed on opportunities for exercise in a safe environment.

I am sure that I am not alone in this House in saying that the consequences for the physical and mental health of my constituents of those closures has been significant. It has never been more important for the nation to take responsibility for its own health, thereby protecting the NHS. There is a clear correlation between covid complications, hospitalisations, the tragedy of losing life to the virus and obesity-related conditions. Even more concerning, Office for National Statistics data shows that suicides have increased by some 20% since the first lockdown. It is indeed a tragedy that, alongside the pandemic, there is likely to be a mental health pandemic that, if left unaddressed, will have a long-term impact that is much more far-reaching and difficult to recover from.

It may once have been true that exercise was a leisure activity, but with covid and the mental health crisis this country now faces, gyms and leisure centres have become a lifeline for many people, including many constituents who have written to me to make that point and who have, equally, signed the petitions we debate this evening. The industry is one of the only sectors scientifically proven to be able to support our nation with underlying health conditions, mental health conditions and other physical conditions. It is and must be part of the covid solution. As such, I very much welcome the Government's decision to prioritise the reopening of gyms on 12 April. However, I have become increasingly concerned that fitness studios are not being classified in the same band as gyms.

That has particularly impacted a small fitness studio in my constituency, The Energy Effect. Dozens of constituents have contacted me about their disappointment that this business will not be able to reopen on 12 April. Exercising together as a group brings immeasurable benefits to everyone—fun, laughter, friendship and health. I saw for myself last year the studio's approach to mitigating the risk of covid transmission, with enhanced cleaning regimes, restricted numbers, clearly marked and spaced positions in which people do their exercises, and only ever personal equipment being used. Its model kept people as far apart, and as socially distanced and safe,

[Greg Smith]

as any other regular gym. In the time it was operating in person, there was not one confirmed case of covid transmission. The owner, Kirsty, has given everything to keep her clients going in these dark times. Day in, day out she has delivered online classes, with 24 a week to choose from. Her business has undoubtedly been a lifesaver for so many of her customers, but an online future is sadly not a sustainable future for that business. I put it to my hon. Friend the Minister that it surely cannot be fair that this fitness studio has to stay closed while a gym less than a mile away can reopen.

There has to be an equality of opportunity, and every small business must be given the opportunity to rebuild. The UK's 7,000 gyms and leisure centres have been open only for very limited periods since the first lockdown. For that reason, I would also support a work out to help out scheme, as called for in one of the other petitions we debate today. A financial incentive would encourage people to renew long-lapsed gym memberships and to support their local gym and fitness centre. It could be via a tax incentive, a VAT cut or holiday, or something similar to the eat out to help out scheme that was so successful last summer. Some sort of grant on a pay per use basis would be good for those businesses as they make every effort to bounce back and good for our nation's health. The alternative, I fear, would be swathes of gyms and fitness centres closing, thousands of jobs disappearing and more empty spaces in our towns and cities.

In the light of the petitions before us today, I urge the Minister to do all he can to champion further our local gyms and fitness centres and to ensure that there is a level playing field and a fair playing field for all. If we can get this right, it will undoubtedly save lives and livelihoods.

6.39 pm

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Mundell. I thank the hon. Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) for opening this important and timely debate. Over 1,000 of my constituents signed the e-petition to open gyms first as we come out of lockdown. Our gyms and leisure centres make it possible for people to exercise in a variety of ways all year round, regardless of the weather. Here in my constituency, we have facilities to meet everyone's needs, from swimming or spin classes, to treadmills and indoor climbing walls. Like many other parents and carers, I am very much looking forward to when the soft play centres across many of our leisure centres open up again.

These facilities provide the physical space for people to exercise. Most of us here in central London live in small flats shared with many others. We do not have room to jump around or install a smart bike or rowing machine, let alone have the money to afford one. And not everyone feels comfortable or safe exercising outside, especially during the long winter months.

As businesses, our gyms have been hit hard financially. I was contacted by a small independent gym in Clapham that was struggling to get the financial support it needed. It came to me for help in accessing the bounce back loan scheme, having lost income from cancelled memberships

and classes. It did manage to get the loan eventually, but that is typical of how many local gyms have struggled this past year.

I was able to visit another small independent gym, F45, in Brixton, in the run-up to Small Business Saturday on 5 December last year. The owner highlighted to me the challenges he was facing with rental payments due to the loss of income from membership fees and cancelled classes. He also highlighted the success in moving some of the more popular classes online to keep in touch with regular members.

Everyone knows that exercise is essential for our mental and physical health. We know that covid is more serious for people who are overweight and unfit. In my constituency, air quality is a big issue, and with covid being a respiratory disease it is even more important that we get people out and about exercising. So I urge the Minister to recognise the important role that these facilities play in helping people to stay fit and healthy, and to look at all additional support to help them as we come out of this lockdown.

6.42 pm

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Mundell. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) for securing this important debate. I would like to use my time to focus on the two petitions that relate to gyms. As I have said before in this place, gyms are incredibly important to people's health and wellbeing. Therefore, their reopening is vital as we recover from this pandemic.

In July last year, as much of the country was reopening, my constituency was placed under enhanced local restrictions after the first lockdown. That meant that local gyms, such as NRGym and Hi-Energy in Keighley, were unable to reopen at the same time as gyms in the rest of the country. Of course, it was the same for all fitness and dance studios, such as the excellent AW School of Dance run by Andrea Wortley in Keighley and Pure Pilates in Ilkley, which is also an excellent business, run by Kirstin Ferrie. I have visited all those businesses to see how lockdown has impacted them.

Instead of these businesses being able to reopen on 25 July last year, they had to wait until the following September to welcome back their members. That was despite gyms and studios being proven to be some of the safest places to visit. I saw that at first hand when I met Julie Cardus-Anderson, the owner of Hi-Energy, last October. That fitness studio, like many others, had gone to great lengths, and at cost, to make itself covid-secure. Each exercise area had its own sanitation station, specialist fans were installed to improve ventilation, and the maximum capacity had been halved from 20 to 10—all to try to make the environment more covid-secure. Despite that, Hi-Energy and all fitness studios across Keighley, Ilkley, Silsden and the Worth valley faced months of forced closures. That makes Government support for those businesses absolutely crucial.

Initiatives such as the furlough scheme have provided vital support to gyms that have been forced to close over the past year. I am pleased to hear of the Government's announcement of the restart grants in this month's Budget, which will provide an extra £18,000 for leisure and gym businesses. That will bring much certainty to those businesses so that all can eventually open safely,

but there is never any substitute for being open. I am delighted, therefore, that gyms will be able to start opening in step 2 of the Government's road map to easing the restrictions. The road map states that gyms will open no later than 12 April, but it is vital to ensure that that happens. I share the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith) about other fitness environments and fitness studios being able to reopen on 12 July. I want all fitness studios, dance studios and gym environments to open on the same day. We cannot overestimate the importance of going to the gym and the impact that that has on our constituents' mental health and wellbeing.

This pandemic has made us all think differently about the importance of good physical and mental health. The reopening of gyms and dance and fitness studios is crucial in our recovery. I very much look forward to that happening across my constituency and the rest of Britain.

6.46 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) [V]: Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak on this issue, Mr Mundell. I thank the hon. Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) for setting the scene so well. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Keighley (Robbie Moore), and I thank him for his contribution.

The delicate balance of withdrawing from lockdown is never easy to find. The Prime Minister has outlined a very specific road map for England, but in Northern Ireland we are finding it very difficult to provide steps out, and that is beyond frustrating for very many people. We have spent much of the last year under restrictions that do not sit well in a community that treasures freedom, yet we have done so because we were asked to do so.

We have all sacrificed to protect those we love. However, there is no doubt that it has taken a huge toll on relationships within the home, relationships outside the home, working relationships and, worryingly, mental health. Mental health issues are important for everyone, and wellbeing is critical. I am fortunate to live on a farm, which means that whenever I go home, I can go for a walk every day. I have had the opportunity to do that, but many people are stuck in a house or a flat with family living on top of each other. It must be extremely difficult to try to make do.

One hon. Member referred to suicide, which has been unfortunately prevalent in my constituency. There was a story in *The Mail on Sunday* yesterday about suicides among young men in particular. We express great concern about that, and we look for what must be done to try to make things better.

Today, I am speaking out on behalf of those who own gyms and boxing clubs, and I particularly want to mention dance classes. One of my constituents, a young lady called Hannah McKillen, started her dance class about six months before the lockdown came in. It was quite a move for her. I understand very clearly the issues for her and what we need to do. I hope and believe that we will come out of this very soon—the sooner, the better.

A constituent who is a dance instructor wrote to me today. She is surviving on universal credit. She just bought her house before lockdown, and she finds herself financially restricted in what she is able to do. We really need to have those things back in place.

I received an email from a 77-year-old constituent, about golf. He says he cannot understand why he is unable to take part in a sport that is socially distanced and essential for his mental as well as physical health. He writes: "I am a 77-year-old golfer. I am really disbelieving when golf courses can open on 1 April, but only allowing for two-balls. Four-balls from two families is really, in 99% of cases, a two-ball. On the golf course we are keeping social distancing. Only one person to a golf buggy. Flags stay in the hole and no one handles them. Bunkers are in play but there are no rakes for players to touch. Only one person at a time allowed to the pro shop. The clubhouse is closed. Players arrive 10 minutes before their tee time, so there are not a number of players queueing up, and at the end of the game they touch elbows, fully clothed. We do not exercise, and I believe the golf gives me (a) exercise and (b) something to look forward to."

That came from a very fit 77-year-old who clearly understands what it means to get exercise. It is difficult for me to explain the situation to such constituents—there are many others like him—who credit their great health in their later years to their games of golf. They also say there is a benefit to their mental health, in terms of preventing isolation. I believe that a reasoned approach such as the road map needs to be utilised more fully, and consideration should be given to such sports as outdoor swimming that provide benefits with little risk of transmission.

I am incredibly grateful for the wonderful job that has been done on the roll-out of covid vaccines throughout the UK. I thank the Prime Minister and the Government for taking good steps at the right time, unlike other nations. Now we are reaping the benefits, and the economy will shortly reap them as well. We may be in a unique position, coming out of all the lockdowns. We have vaccinated our most vulnerable and, indeed, the roll-out for 50-year-olds is fairly well advanced. Success is seen with the decrease in deaths. While the goal remains nationwide vaccination, I believe that the completion of vaccination of the vulnerable gives us the freedom to allow sensible steps. I think that people want them, and I hope that they come sooner rather than later, to allow all children back into schools, golfers back on the course with safety measures, and sea swimmers the safety of swimming close to others.

We need to look towards telling shopkeepers they can open, with strict number guidelines. The economy needs that, and it can be done as safely in a shoe shop as in Tesco. We can take those steps because of the success of the roll-out. Now is the time, as we come into the milder weather, to map out carefully how we can safely go forward. People are waiting for direction and for the return of normality. Sweeping generalisations are not enough. They need the detail, and I believe we and the Government must provide that for them. They all need to understand the logic behind all the decisions and the timescale for the much-awaited return.

6.53 pm

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP) [V]: It is a pleasure to take part in the debate and to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Mundell. I am happy to participate today, and I thank the hon. Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) for opening this wide-ranging debate.

[*Martyn Day*]

It is important to acknowledge the various concerns and frustrations of all the signatories to the five petitions that we are considering. The extent of what we are debating, from repealing the coronavirus legislation—because the Coronavirus Act 2020 is seen as an existential threat to our rights and freedoms—to closing all early years environments as a way of protecting staff during lockdown, demonstrates the breadth of the worries and uncertainty that the pandemic has created in our lives. The concerns in the petitions reflect the complexities that must be considered as a way out of lockdown is plotted, because we know we cannot continue in lockdown indefinitely or until the vaccination programme is completed.

Conversely, we also know that easing restrictions too fast could mean a rise in transmission of the disease and going back to significant mortality and morbidity and the risk of overwhelming our NHS. Therefore, while acknowledging the petitioners' concerns during the debate, we should recognise that Governments globally have had to make some difficult choices over the past year. Unfortunately, the difficult choices endure because the virus is not yet gone. As it mutates into potentially more harmful variants—we have witnessed countries entering a third wave—current decisions continue to require a consideration of competing challenges.

The SNP Scottish Government's covid-19 strategy intends to suppress the virus to the lowest possible level and keep it there while striving to return to a more normal life for as many people as possible. Additionally, the Scottish Government have made clear their prioritisation of education and a phased return for early learning, childcare and schools. I mention that in relation to e-petition 566718: "Shut all nurseries and early years settings during lockdown". In Scotland, as in other countries, that was impossible as some had to remain open for childcare provision for our key workers at the forefront of our covid-19 response.

In their phased return of all children to nurseries and early years settings, the Scottish Government took advice from the advisory sub-group on education and children's issues, which examined the occupational risks of covid-19 infection, hospitalisation and death. The available studies found no evidence of any difference between school staff and the wider workforce in terms of the risk of infection from covid-19. None the less, in order to help educational settings remain as safe as possible and implement safety mitigations, the Scottish Government are providing local authorities and schools with an additional £40 million as part of a wider £100 million package to accelerate school recovery, and will work with local authorities to support young people's wellbeing in other ways, for example by providing more opportunities for outdoor learning.

Many councils are using some of the funding to monitor and improve ventilation in schools. Additionally, the Scottish Government offer twice-weekly lateral flow testing for all school staff in primary, secondary and special schools. Recent developments with the vaccine roll-out and the increased contagion of covid-19 led the Scottish Government to update their strategic framework, which sets out how they plan to restore in a phased way greater normality to our everyday lives.

Normality for many is playing golf regularly. I refer here to e-petition 557167: "Allow golf to be played with appropriate safety measures". In Scotland, golf is permitted as an outdoor informal exercise as long as safety restrictions are adhered to. For example, although everyone should stay as close to home as possible, from 12 March four players from two households can travel up to five miles from their local authority boundary to play golf in a physically distanced way. Also, if a course has a designated covid officer, up to 15 adults can participate in organised golf if they live within the local authority area. This decision took the nature of golf into account, recognising the benefits of outdoor activity and consistent evidence that the risks of the virus transmitting outdoors are low.

Similarly, outdoor gyms can be open in Scotland, which goes some way to addressing e-petition 563904: "Keep gyms open during Tier 4 lockdown". However, I can understand why outdoor gyms might not always be appealing, given our weather conditions. The Scottish Government know that indoor gyms and fitness facilities provide important services that help improve the physical fitness and mental wellbeing of those who attend, but it was impossible to keep them open while areas were facing high infection rates. Related to that is e-petition 567492: "Open gyms first as we come out of lockdown & fund a Work Out to Help Out scheme". I am sure the petitioners will be pleased to know that the Scottish Government have not prioritised the opening of pubs ahead of gyms and swimming pools, and have made grants available to help businesses reopen progressively.

On e-petition 313310—"Repeal the Coronavirus Act 2020"—Scottish National party MPs have serious concerns about the lack of parliamentary scrutiny of the powers in the UK's Coronavirus Act, and we raised them on Second Reading. That is why the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 contains a range of measures to ensure scrutiny of Scottish Government decisions. Also, where possible, provisions in the Scottish coronavirus legislation have been suspended or have expired when they have either fulfilled their purpose or the Scottish Government have listened to compelling views supporting change.

This has been a wide-ranging debate. I think it is fair to say that we are on the road out of lockdown. Perhaps it is not as fast as some would like, but there is a delicate balance to be struck and we must get it right. To that end, for continued suppression of the virus in the UK as we come out of lockdown, I urge the UK Government to follow the Scottish Government's example on hotel quarantines. The recent Public Health England study showing that quarantine-free travel corridors contributed to the spread of coronavirus in the UK last year highlights the need for the change. Travel from those European countries accounted for 86% of imported cases between May and September, so I sincerely hope that the Minister and the UK Government will think again on that.

Businesses and individuals must continue to be helped through the remainder of the restrictions. With health measures and covid restrictions being devolved matters, I stress that while restrictions continue in any part of the UK, support must continue as well. While we welcome the extension of furlough at the spring Budget, it should continue for as long as it is needed. There must also be sector-specific support for aviation, hospitality and tourism.

Due to the highly infectious nature of coronavirus, general anti-coronavirus measures may be needed until a sufficient proportion of the population is vaccinated, and unlocking must be driven by data, not dates. In terms of vaccinations, that may mean about 70% of the population and, moving forward, many restrictions remaining in place for both vaccinated and unvaccinated people. With the recent news of disruption to supplies of vaccines in the UK, it is possible that the roll-out may be delayed. If that is the case, the dates for unlocking the last steps of lockdown may need to be postponed. The UK Government should, like the Scottish Government, endorse a data-driven approach to the end of lockdown and not persist with set dates, because they previously over-promised.

7.1 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship virtually, Mr Mundell. I also thank the hon. Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher), who introduced the debate so well on behalf of all of those who signed the five petitions. It is a tribute to the parliamentary petitions system that triggered the debate that people do participate. They want to sign petitions and draw issues to our attention, and he captured the importance of that well. It is a good thing that we in the House of Commons develop the system so that, even under these extremely challenging and different circumstances, the public can be heard and have their say. As was just said, even if people's instincts are different, everyone can be heard and everyone can participate, and that is a good thing.

My hon. Friends the Members for Ilford South (Sam Tarry) and for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi) gave good descriptions of one of the petitions and the frustration that many of us have felt about being unable to be physically active during the lockdowns in the past year. It has been the most frustrating time and we all want that to change. Though many of these measures have been necessary, there is no doubt that they have been deeply frustrating for many people, as the hon. Member for Keighley (Robbie Moore) also explained well.

I will take a few moments to talk through the Opposition's priorities and to acknowledge the frustration that people have felt, whether that is about gyms or going for a round of golf, with their normal lives having been massively interrupted. We all understand that it has been necessary because it is a matter of life and death, but we should not underplay the cost that has been borne. I have a few questions for the Minister as to how we will help the country recover.

No one understands this more than me. The football team that I play with here in the Wirral, the Wirral Valkyries, are regularly counting down the days until we can get back out on the pitch again. All of us know that being physically active in our lives is extraordinarily important.

With regard to the restrictions, the Opposition have set out the approach that we felt the Government ought to take. First, we should follow the science. This has been a challenging period in which all of us have had to get our heads around reading the epidemiology and what that might lead us to need to do. We were slow to act twice in our response to the epidemiology, and that should be a lesson learnt. No doubt when we get to the

eventual inquiry, I am sure the science will be pored over, and at what point decisions could have been taken for better impact.

I pay tribute to all gym owners and those operating leisure facilities up and down the country who have been right on top of the need to keep their facilities safe, when they have been able to open. To help them open quickly, they have left no issue unturned when it comes to making sure that gyms and other leisure services are safe—as much as they can be—even in spite of complications with things like the way in which gyms are ventilated. I know that they have all worked really hard.

For that reason, the second priority is that we should all be honest with people. As politicians, we all know that there are hard choices to make. In previous debates in Westminster Hall, we have discussed such issues and where some of the choices lie. Whatever a person's political feelings, we want everyone in the country to understand that none of this is easy. I do not think that anyone thinks that the choices are simple or straightforward. In order to help people understand why the decisions are being or have been taken, we need a level of transparency.

This is where I want to talk about the future. One thing that we have learnt from the covid crisis is that some of our public health data is not as good as it could be. I do not think that we understand the state of physical and mental wellbeing in the country as well as we might. We have lots of survey information, but understanding the health picture of the country and how people want to help themselves be fitter will help us make a plan for the future, to deal with the consequences of some of the lockdowns, which people have mentioned, such as the knock-on impact on physical and mental health.

Our fourth priority is families. In earlier debates, again, we have spoken about the importance of participation in sport and physical activity, particularly for our children. Over the past year there has been a level of frustration as we have tried to ensure that children have been able to participate in sport as soon as possible. That is an important priority.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South spoke of gyms as wellbeing hubs, and this is where we need to move the discussion on. Some of the people who signed the petitions want to see our country have a better state of health and wellbeing. Members have mentioned "lifestyle choices." I do not know about others, but I would question that language. We are learning more and more about the connection between mental and physical health, and about some of the facilities around us being able to help us have a better level of physical health, which gives us better mental health, as well as having good mental health in a way to support our physical health. We are learning more and more about the interconnection of the two.

In order to improve the health of the nation, we need a national plan as we come out of the lockdown, to address many of the concerns that have been expressed. I therefore want to finish with a few questions for the Minister, to start that conversation. First, what steps are the Government taking, particularly in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, to properly understand the underlying state of public health, particularly around the connection between physical and mental health?

[Alison McGovern]

Obesity strategy after obesity strategy do not seem to have got us very far. How are we really going to understand the underlying issues?

Secondly, in doing that, will we be able to join up our fractured mental health system? Too many people get into a crisis because they do not get the early support to make sure that their mental health is as good as it can be. We previously experimented with physical fitness by prescription, but that seems to have dropped off the agenda. Will the Minister say where he thinks we are headed, in policy terms, on that front?

Thirdly, what steps are the Government taking to boost participation? The Sport England strategy released at the beginning of this year prioritises participation and dealing with some of the issues that lockdown has created, but will the Minister say what the Government want to prioritise now, particularly around social and economic disadvantage, which we know has a significant impact on people's health? We still find challenges in women's participation, particularly black women and those from other diverse backgrounds, and also for people with disabilities, who face significant challenges in making sure that they are able to be physically fit and healthy in the way that other people are.

Finally, Members mentioned people's housing having an impact on their physical fitness. As some petitioners mentioned, that ability to be outside and enjoy open green space is highly important. Whether it involves understanding what the data tells us about public health and the role of physical activity in that, or whether it involves exercise by prescription or some of those planning issues, we need that joined-up plan for public wellbeing. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

7.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Nigel Huddleston): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Mundell. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) for bringing this debate on a range of important subjects that cross multiple Government Departments. I really appreciated the way he eloquently articulated the concerns of the petitioners, as well as those of his constituents. Each petition has been signed by at least 100,000 people—some by many more—which speaks volumes about the importance of these industries and sectors to people right across the country, and it is therefore an honour to respond.

These petitions have been grouped but, as I said, they cover multiple Government Departments. Although I am representing DCMS here today, I assure hon. Members that Ministers and officials in other Departments are listening too. It is also worth noting at the outset that, since these petitions were initiated, the Prime Minister has announced a road map that will lead us out of the current lockdown in England—subject, of course, to the latest data and scientific advice. I mention that because the road map is relevant to each of these petitions. It seeks to balance our key social and economic priorities while preserving the health and safety of the country. It gives us a prudent and pragmatic pathway out of national restrictions, and it also supersedes the tier system to which some of the petitions debated this evening refer. May I also say that I appreciate the tone

of today's debate? I think that our constituents appreciate it when we take the party politics out of things. There is a great deal of agreement across parties on the issues raised, and I think we all share similar goals in these matters.

The first petition calls for the repeal of the Coronavirus Act 2020. It is no exaggeration to say that the pandemic has had a profound impact on the lives of everyone in the UK. The Act, passed in March 2020, is vital because it provides the legislative framework for managing the pandemic. It also introduced emergency powers to support individuals and businesses and enabled critical public services to function during the pandemic. For example, the Act successfully removed unnecessary barriers to allow suitably experienced people, such as recently retired NHS staff and social workers, to rejoin the workforce during the pandemic. It also provided financial support to individuals and businesses, and it enabled essential public services to function.

The Government made a commitment that powers will be in place only as long as is necessary and proportionate for managing the current pandemic. Where measures have been put in place, they are often subject to additional checks and balances, such as sunset clauses or fixed review points. Petitioners will be interested to know that debates will take place in both Houses of Parliament this week, on 25 March, on the non-devolved aspects of the Coronavirus Act, and votes will be taken on their renewal.

I turn now to the second e-petition, which calls for all nurseries and early years settings to be shut during lockdown. It was with great reluctance that we restricted attendance at early years settings during the first national lockdown in March last year. However, the restrictions put in place as part of the most recent national lockdown enable us to continue to prioritise keeping nurseries and childminders open, supporting parents and delivering the crucial care and education needed for our children. Early years settings have therefore been open to all children since 1 June 2020, and there is no evidence that the early years sector has contributed to a significant rise in virus cases within the community. Current evidence suggests that pre-school children are less susceptible to infection and unlikely to be playing a driving role in transmission.

The petition specifically raises concerns about the risk to nursery and early years staff. The Department for Education has worked extremely closely with the Department of Health and Social Care, and with Public Health England, to develop guidance, including a system of controls, for early years settings to follow. This aims to create an environment for children and staff where the risk of transmission of infection is substantially reduced.

The guidance includes, for example, enhanced cleaning, regular hand-washing, staff wearing face coverings in communal areas, minimising mixing within settings, and the isolation of the close contacts of positive cases. Rapid testing is also a key part of the controls, and all years staff can now access lateral flow home testing. We continue to listen carefully to the latest scientific and medical advice, and we keep our guidance under review to make sure the right controls are in place.

I turn to the three remaining petitions, which dominated today's debate and are more relevant to my role as sport Minister. The first calls for golf to be allowed under

appropriate safety measures, the second calls for gyms to reopen now and the third calls for a work out to help out scheme.

The importance of sport and physical activity to the nation's physical and mental health has never been more apparent. That was mentioned in the speeches given today by the hon. Members for Ilford South (Sam Tarry), for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi), and for Strangford (Jim Shannon), by my hon. Friends the Members for Buckingham (Greg Smith) and for Keighley (Robbie Moore), and by all the Opposition spokespeople, so everybody recognises it.

Sport and physical activity are a powerful defence against the covid-19 pandemic, and that has been reflected in the Government's approach in each of the lockdowns, with the importance of regular exercise being recognised and highlighted. Grassroots sport has been prioritised in the Prime Minister's road map above the return of every other part of the economy, as was recognised by my hon. Friends the Members for Buckingham and for Keighley. Our national life is going to come back stronger and healthier as a result of this focus.

The road map introduces a step approach to the return of outdoor and indoor sports areas across England, including the reopening of golf courses, gyms and exercise studios. Most immediately, and subject to the latest data, sport returns from 29 March, which is when outdoor sports facilities can reopen. That will broaden the options for outdoor exercise and recreation for us all. I know that all who signed the petition to allow golf to reopen will be pleased to know that they can take to the greens and fairways again in England in a week's time—including in four-balls.

The SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day), spoke about the importance of sport in helping with our physical and mental health, and he mentioned the economic importance of sport, including golf. We had a similar debate recently in Westminster Hall, highlighting the hundreds of millions of pounds that sport brings into the economy. Golf tourism alone is worth well over £400 million, and I assure hon. Members that in my combined role as Minister for sport and tourism, I am very aware of that.

Formally organised outdoor sports for all ages can also restart from 29 March, including team sports, individual sports and organised sports participation events. These will not be subject to the gathering limits, but should be compliant with guidance issued by national governing bodies. We appreciate the work that national governing bodies have conducted over the last year to create that guidance, while working very closely with Government.

Step 2 will commence no earlier than 12 April, when we will see the reopening of some sections of our indoor economy, including gyms and fitness centres for individual use. Exercise classes will be able to resume as part of step 3 of the road map, no earlier than 17 May. Unfortunately, we cannot open everything at once, although I hear the appeals of hon. Members who wish exercise classes to reopen as soon as possible. I believe this is a reasonable step forward. Of course, the intention of all in Government is to try and get as much open as possible as soon as possible, but in a safe way.

On that note, I would also like to express my appreciation for and applaud the work done by the gyms and leisure sector, as mentioned by many hon. Members today.

The sector has put considerable time, effort and expense into making sure that facilities are safe, and that is hugely important in building members' confidence as well as showing that it wishes to protect staff. I welcome the return, in a secure manner, of the many hundreds of thousands of people who are absolutely passionate about going back to their gyms. I cannot wish to compete with the hon. Member for Ilford South in his bench pressing, but I think we all share his passion to see gyms open again as soon as possible.

I understand why so many have supported the petition to introduce a work out to help out scheme—in a similar vein to the Chancellor's eat out to help out scheme, which was launched last summer—to support the fitness and leisure sectors through this time. People are, understandably, very keen to do their bit to help struggling gyms and fitness centres, as well as keeping fit themselves. I understand the sentiments behind the proposal, but the Government have provided support in other ways, including through tax reliefs, cash grants, employee wage support and loans, to ensure that these facilities survive and can open again as part of step 2 of the road map.

Hon. Members have suggested other measures, and we have had conversations with ukactive and others about whether the current VAT cut for tourism and hospitality could be extended to the leisure sector. I could never make commitments or promises on behalf of the Treasury, as you well know, Mr Mundell, but I can say that conversations are taking place. Such things are, of course, always subject to Treasury decisions. This is a challenging area, but I hear the appeals made today by hon. Members, ukactive and others, as I am sure do the Treasury.

The Government have provided more than £100 million to support 266 local authority leisure centres, and Sport England has provided more than £220 million to community sports clubs to promote them and ensure that these facilities can open. The Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), who I have a great deal of respect for, raised several questions about priority. We have seen throughout the last few weeks the Government's emphasis on sport and physical activity. I assure her that that is a focus of mine, too, as would be expected of a sport Minister.

The hon. Member was right to mention the work of Sport England, the arm's length body for grassroots sport, which promotes sport and activity levels across the country. Sport England plays a pivotal role in the Government's sport and activity strategy, and it will continue to do so. It has articulated its 10-year plan, which we completely support, and the Government will be articulating their strategy. Today, for example, I spoke to a Minister in the Department for Education about the importance of sport and physical activity at school. We will also be refreshing the school sport and activity action plan. There will be lots of work and focus from Government, across Departments, as we continue to focus on the importance of physical and mental health and the benefits of sport and physical activity.

I am delighted that sport and recreation are at the forefront of hon. Members' minds as we begin to open up our society and economy after the devastation and destruction of coronavirus, which has impacted all our lives. The pandemic has also been an opportunity to

[*Nigel Huddleston*]

reflect on the sort of country that we want to build in the future—the sort of Britain that we wish to rebuild. As sport Minister, I will work hard to make us as healthy and fit a nation as possible so that we come back stronger than ever. I look forward to working with colleagues on both sides of the Chamber to achieve just that.

7.24 pm

Nick Fletcher [V]: I thank all hon. Members who have taken the time to speak in this important debate, and I thank the Minister for taking the time to address the concerns of the petitioners and signatories. It has been a pleasure to lead my first Westminster Hall debate.

I particularly thank the hon. Member for Ilford South (Sam Tarry), who rightly pointed out that, as healthier people take fewer days off sick, a national strategy that promotes exercise will benefit businesses and individuals as we come out of the economic downturn. Furthermore, I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith), who spoke of the positive impact of

exercise on mental health. I am delighted that he agrees that the Government should strive to set up a work out to help out scheme.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) was right to commend the Prime Minister. We have now vaccinated over half the adult population of the UK and continue to make great strides in the fight against coronavirus. I know that the Government's road map will come as welcome news to all who started and signed the petitions; it confirms that the Government are committed to removing restrictions as soon as it is safe to do so. I thank all the petitioners and signatories once again for all their hard work in keeping themselves and others as healthy as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petitions 313310, 557167, 563904, 566718 and 567492, relating to the Government's Spring 2021 Covid-19 roadmap.

7.26 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 22 March 2021

TREASURY

NatWest Group: Disposal of Government-owned Shares

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): I can today inform the House of the disposal of approximately £1.1 billion-worth of Government-owned NatWest Group (NWG, formerly Royal Bank of Scotland, RBS) shares, representing 4.86% of the company, by way of a directed buyback transaction.

Approximately £1.1 billion-worth of shares were sold to NWG in a single bilateral transaction on 19 March 2021.

Rationale

It is Government policy that where a Government asset no longer serves a public policy purpose, or that purpose may be more efficiently realised with the asset in private ownership, the Government may choose to sell that asset, subject to being able to achieve value for money. This frees up public resource tied up in the asset which can be deployed to achieve other public policy objectives.

The Government are committed to returning NWG to full private ownership, now that the original policy objective for the intervention in NWG—to preserve financial and economic stability at a time of crisis—has been achieved. The Government only conduct sales of NWG shares when it represents value for money to do so and market conditions allow. This sale represents a further step forward for Government in exiting the assets acquired as a result of the 2007 to 2008 financial crisis.

Format and Timing

The Government, supported by advice from UK Government Investments (UKGI), concluded that selling shares to NWG, in a single bilateral transaction, represented value for money.

Share buybacks are a common practice undertaken by companies looking to efficiently deploy their excess capital. On 6 February 2019, NWG obtained shareholder authority to purchase shares held by Government at market price. This authority was renewed at subsequent NWG annual general meetings in April 2019 and April 2020.

This is the third sale of NWG shares undertaken by the Government, following previous disposals in August 2015 and June 2018. This is the first sale of shares via an off-market share sale directly to the company.

The sale concluded on 19 March 2021, with NWG purchasing a limited number of its Government-owned shares. A total of c. 591 million shares—4.86% of the bank—were sold at the 18 March 2021 closing price of 190.5 p per share. The reduction in the Government's shareholding is less than the percentage sold following the cancellation of shares by NatWest. Following this transaction the Government's shareholding will stand at 59.8%.

Details of the sale are summarised below:

Government stake in NWG pre-sale	61.7%
Total shares sold to NWG	590,730,325 million (4.86%)
Sale price per share	190.5p
Share price at market close on 18/03/2021	190.5p
Total proceeds from the sale	£1,125,341,269 billion
Government stake in NWG post-sale	59.8%

Fiscal impacts

The net impacts of the sale on a selection of fiscal metrics are summarised as follows:

Metric	Impact
Net sale proceeds	£1,125,341,269 billion
Retention value range	Within the valuation range Nil
Public sector net borrowing	There may be future indirect impacts as a result of the sale. The sale proceeds reduce public sector debt. All else being equal, the sale will reduce future debt interest costs for Government. The reduction in Government's shareholding means it will not receive future dividend income it may otherwise have been entitled to through these shares.
Public sector net debt	Reduced by £1,125,341,269 billion
Public sector net debt	Reduced by £1,125,341,269 billion
Public sector net financial liabilities	Nil
Public sector net liabilities	Nil

[HCWS865]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Project Gigabit

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Warman): Gigabit broadband is being rolled out rapidly, from one in 10 households in 2019 to almost two in five today. The UK is on track for one of the fastest rollouts in Europe and for half the country to have access to gigabit speeds by the end of this year.

Gigabit broadband will accelerate our recovery from covid-19, stimulate high-growth sectors like tech and the creative industries and level up the country, spreading wealth and creating jobs across the UK.

The Government want to deliver nationwide coverage of gigabit-capable broadband as soon as possible and are confident that the private sector will deliver to the most commercial 80% of the country by 2025.

To support this, the Government are implementing an ambitious programme of work to remove barriers to broadband deployment.

The Government want to see regulation that promotes investment and competition in new networks.

We want to drive commercial investment and stimulate suppliers to go further into harder-to-reach areas, by using subsidies to stretch commercial activity even further.

We are targeting a minimum of 85% gigabit-capable coverage by 2025 but will seek to accelerate rollout further to get as close to 100% as possible.

In December 2020, we published a consultation, “Planning for Gigabit Delivery in 2021”, asking for input from local and devolved Government and telecoms providers to help inform how best to use public subsidy to deliver these objectives.

Ninety six organisations across the telecoms industry and local government responded. Their feedback has been instrumental in developing our delivery plan.

Last week we launched Project Gigabit Phase One Delivery Plan outlining our delivery approach that recognises this environment and provides space for commercial investment, but also drives subsidised deployment in harder to reach areas.

More than 1 million hard-to-reach homes and businesses will have next generation gigabit broadband built to them in the first phase of our £5 billion Government infrastructure project.

Up to 510,000 homes and businesses in Cambridgeshire, Cornwall, Cumbria, Dorset, Durham, Essex, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Tees Valley will be the first to benefit as part of Project Gigabit.

Contracts for these first areas will go to procurement in the spring with delivery in the first half of 2022.

In June the Government expect to announce the next procurements to connect up to 640,000 premises in Norfolk, Shropshire, Suffolk, Worcestershire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

The successful gigabit broadband voucher scheme is also being relaunched with up to £210 million to give people and communities in eligible rural areas the opportunity to work with registered suppliers to get gigabit speeds.

In addition, Project Gigabit is making up to £110 million available to connect public sector buildings—such as GP surgeries, libraries and schools—to lay vital infrastructure to these hard-to-reach communities and stimulate further commercial investment.

The UK has some very remote locations that may be too expensive to build a gigabit-capable broadband network to, even with substantial public subsidy.

Thanks to completed or pending Government-funded projects, less than 0.3% of the country or less than 100,000 premises are likely to fall into this category.

For these premises, which are mainly located in remote and isolated locations in Scotland and Wales, and some national parks in England, a call for evidence has been launched to explore the barriers to improving their broadband and how innovative new technologies might help change this.

This could lead to the Government encouraging industry to use new wireless equipment, low-orbit satellites or high-altitude platforms to beam faster connections to far-flung homes and businesses.

The Government have already made investments in wireless, satellite and hybrid-fibre technologies, and continues to explore emerging technologies in this area. Some of these technologies are also gigabit-capable and eligible for Project Gigabit funding today.

Finally, in support of the whole gigabit ambition, the Government have also provided an update from the Barrier Busting Task Force. Set up in 2017, the task force has been identifying and addressing the barriers preventing the fast, efficient and cost-effective deployment of gigabit-capable broadband and improved mobile coverage, including next generation 5G technology.

The Barrier Busting team will be taking forward, with other Government Departments, a number of legislative and non-legislative measures in the coming months. This includes addressing issues around permitted development rights, gigabit broadband for new build homes, and flexible street works permits in England.

We are also consulting on whether further amendments to the Electronic Communications Code are necessary to support deployment. This ambitious programme of works builds on the numerous successes since the team was formed including passing the Telecommunications Infrastructure (Leasehold Property) Act, which recently received Royal Assent.

We welcome last week’s announcement from Ofcom, which provides the telecoms sector with regulatory certainty for the next five years and clear direction for the longer term, encouraging competitive build in the majority of the UK while securing a commitment from Openreach to connect 3.2 million premises in the least competitive 30% of the country.

Ofcom are, in line with the Government’s Statement of Strategic Priorities, regulating to promote competition and giving clear incentives for investment in new gigabit-capable networks. This framework will allow network builders to make a fair return on their investments and provide the long-term certainty they need as they roll out gigabit networks across the country, while continued price controls on superfast anchor products will ensure consumers are protected from excessive prices.

I will place a copy of the Project Gigabit Phase One Delivery Plan, the Very Hard to Reach Call For Evidence and the Barrier Busting Task Force: Next Steps in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS866]

Technical Issues in Charity Law

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Warman): My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Baroness Barran, has made the following statement:

Today the Government have published their response to the recommendations made by the Law Commission in its report “Technical Issues in Charity Law” published in September 2017. The report addresses a number of technical issues in charity law which were first raised by Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts in his 2012 review of the Charities Act.

I thank the Law Commission for their hard work on this topic and welcome their well-considered and detailed report. The Government have carefully considered the recommendations and are accepting the vast majority. The Law Commission’s report is, at first sight, highly technical; however the recommendations which the Government are accepting will make it simpler for charities to achieve their charitable purposes in an effective, sustainable and impactful way. The recommendations also maintain important safeguards to ensure the best use of charities’ resources.

The recommendations will include measures to improve:

Simplifying the processes by which charities can amend their governing documents.

Reducing the costs and simplifying the rules governing disposals of land by charities.

Enabling charities to use their permanent endowment for social investments helping charity incorporations and mergers.

Providing trustees with certainty about costs before the Charity Tribunal.

I am pleased that the Law Commission's recommendations also have support within the sector, and from the Charity Commission, the independent registrar and regulator for charities in England and Wales.

The Government will look to bring forward legislation to implement these recommendations when parliamentary time allows.

The Government's response has been published on:

<https://www.gov.uk/aovernment/publications/government-response-to-law-commission-report-on-technical-issues-in-charity-law>.

Copies of the response will also be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS864]

TRANSPORT

Transport for London Funding Deal

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps):

The Government and Mayor of London have agreed to extend the current Transport for London funding deal. The deal was due to run out on 31 March 2021. However, things have changed since we set the end of March for the next review of support to TfL. The extended deal will continue to support the capital and the transport network until 18 May 2021, when a new funding deal will be put in place.

The roadmap set out by the Prime Minister to cautiously and safely reopen society and our economy means we can better understand the potential recovery in passenger

demand, ensuring we deliver a sensible and appropriate deal in the future. As a result, and given the mayoral election timetable, we have therefore agreed to roll over the existing funding deal until 18 May on the same terms as now, providing certainty over the pre-election period.

Together, the Government and the newly elected Mayor will agree a new funding deal after the elections in May 2021. By this point non-essential retail and other parts of the economy should be open and transport demand on the network will be considered when formulating a future settlement.

The extension comprises two additional funding payments totalling £260 million with a top-up grant available based on actual passenger revenues. This will take total Government support for TfL to more than £3 billion since March 2020.

Support to TfL has always been under the condition that the network must make efficiency savings so it can reach financial sustainability as soon as possible. Those conditions will also form a part of the additional funding payments announced today.

The Government are committed to supporting London and the transport network on which it depends, and will commence discussions for a further funding deal as soon as the mayoral elections are concluded. Support for London needs to be balanced with the national recovery and supporting the national transport network as a whole. Since March 2020 the Government have spent £11 billion supporting the running of the national transport network apart from that directly provided to TfL, while continuing to spend money on vital infrastructure projects to level up the national transport network outside of London.

[HCWS863]

Petition

Monday 22 March 2021

OBSERVATIONS

CABINET OFFICE

Inquiry into Government COVID-19 contracts

The petition of residents of the constituency of Glasgow North,

Declares that contracts awarded by the UK Government during the covid-19 pandemic have avoided proper scrutiny which has resulted in billions of pounds of taxpayer money being handed to companies without due process or competition; further that many contracts have been awarded to companies with no direct experience in providing the contracted services, such as the manufacturing of Personal Protective Equipment; further that this has given rise to concerns around potential conflicts of interest as contracts worth £1.5 billion have been awarded to individuals and companies with links to the Conservative Party; and notes that an investigation by the National Audit Office into UK Government procurement during the covid-19 pandemic has found a lack of transparency and inadequate documentation on why suppliers were chosen and how the UK Government identified and managed potential conflicts of interest.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to commit to an immediate public inquiry into all Government contracts awarded under emergency covid-19 powers since March.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Patrick Grady, *Official Report*, 15 December 2020; Vol. 686, c. 228.]

[P002640]

Observations from the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Julia Lopez):

The UK Government have worked closely with the devolved Administrations throughout the covid-19 response to keep every citizen safe and supported no matter where they live in the UK. A system of mutual aid and co-operation between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations has been a key part of ensuring that PPE gets to where it is needed. Public health, including the procurement of personal protective equipment (PPE), is devolved in Scotland.

The National Audit Office has published its report relating to Government procurement during the covid-19 pandemic covering the period up to 31 July 2020. This includes, among other things, an examination of procurement activity during the pandemic and the Government's management of procurement risks. The report will be subject to parliamentary scrutiny by the Public Accounts Committee in the usual way. The Government published a statement available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-on-government-procurement-following-this-weeks-nao-report>.

Working with the private sector has been a vital part of the Government's response to tackling the covid-19 pandemic, with private sector workers standing alongside those from the public sector on the frontline. Indeed, the private sector has assisted us to deliver over 15,000 ventilators in under four months to support the NHS; procure almost 32 billion items of PPE for frontline workers across the UK; and we now have the capacity to process over 530,000 tests a day.

Indeed, being able to procure at speed has been critical in the Government's response to covid-19 and at the outset of the coronavirus outbreak, we made it clear to all public authorities that they may need to procure new services with extreme urgency. This is not a change to the public procurement regulations; there are already well-established procedures in the Public Contracts Regulations for handling extremely urgent procurements and they have been used by a variety of public authorities including the UK Government, and devolved Administrations.

Governments around the world faced unprecedented demand for essential goods, services and works due to the covid-19 pandemic. All public authorities in the UK, including the UK Government and devolved Administrations, had to move quickly. Other countries, including Japan, Finland and New Zealand, followed similar urgent procurement processes.

More generally, the Government have always been clear that there will be opportunities to look back, analyse and reflect on all aspects of covid-19. This will include an independent inquiry at the appropriate time. For now the Government are focused entirely on responding to the pandemic and saving lives, particularly as the country is experiencing a second wave of the virus. That being the case, it would be premature at this stage to attempt to define the inquiry's eventual terms of reference.

We also made it clear that authorities must continue to achieve value for money for taxpayers, use good commercial judgement and publish the details of any awards made, in line with Government transparency guidelines.

The Government are committed to adopting and encouraging greater transparency in its commercial activity. There are existing rigorous central controls in place to challenge spend robustly and to ensure that the actions of Government contracting authorities are open, fair and transparent.

The Department has also conducted some internal audit work to examine procurements during covid-19. We do not as a matter of course publish internal audit reports. An independent expert review, the Boardman Review, has been undertaken in relation to certain communications services contracts and the report and recommendations have been published on: www.gov.uk. The Government also published the Green Paper on Public Procurement Rules Reform 15 December, a Green Paper consultation on radical reform of the UK's public procurement regulations. The Green Paper proposals will make public procurement even more transparent by making more open data available on public contracts.

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**not later than
Monday 29 March 2021**

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