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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**
(HANSARD)

Thursday 24 June 2021

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr SPEAKER in the Chair]

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

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

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

QUEEN'S SPEECH (ANSWER TO ADDRESS)

The VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported to the House, That Her Majesty, having been attended with its Address of 19th May, was pleased to receive the same very graciously and give the following Answer:

I have received with great satisfaction the dutiful and loyal expression of your thanks for the speech with which I opened the present Session of Parliament.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Tactile Paving: Rail Network

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): If he will take steps to install full tactile paving installation across the entire rail network. [901782]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): Yes.

Sarah Olney: Network Rail is still working to a timetable of installing tactile paving at all train platforms by 2029, some eight years away. Given that 35% of platforms are seriously dangerous for blind and partially sighted people, will the Minister commit to ensuring that every station has the basic safety measure of tactile paving in place by 2025?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I very much hope so. I have asked Network Rail to develop a programme to install platform edge tactile strips on every platform in Great Britain as soon as possible; I have yet to receive that programme. I will make a further announcement in the very short term.

Cross-UK Transport Links

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve cross-UK transport links. [901726]

Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve cross-UK transport links. [901728]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean): Sir Peter Hendy is carrying out the independent Union connectivity review, which will report later this year.

Jack Brereton: Following only two days' notice, this week East Midlands Railway has halved the train services through Stoke-on-Trent on the Crewe-Derby-Newark line to a train only every two hours. The usual hourly service is barely acceptable, so to reduce it further is totally inadequate. Will my hon. Friend work with the Secretary of State to look urgently at what can be done to restore these vital rail services and further improve local rail in my constituency of Stoke-on-Trent South and all along this important cross-UK east-west rail link?

Rachel Maclean: I thank my hon. Friend for supporting those vital rail links. I know that he is doing a fantastic job of ensuring connectivity to his constituency; I know that he spoke to the Rail Minister about it yesterday. East Midlands Railway has introduced a new timetable, but I understand that a number of challenges arose because of a different fleet, train crew issues and sickness. This has resulted in the need to swiftly implement timetable changes, but it now needs to provide passengers with a robust and reliable service.

Simon Jupp: Confidence within the aviation industry and among passengers is at an all-time low—it is shattered. The travel industry will take longer than most industries to get back to business and will need further support to survive. Will my hon. Friend speed up the review of air passenger duty and explore extending business rates relief to regional airports to help the industry weather this terrible storm?

Rachel Maclean: I absolutely commend my hon. Friend for being a continued champion for Exeter airport in his constituency, which provides jobs and employment for many of his constituents. He will know that the airport and ground operations support scheme provides eligible commercial airports with support towards their fixed costs. In the March Budget, the Chancellor announced a six-month renewal of that scheme from April. Initial payments will be made towards the end of the summer.

My hon. Friend mentions aviation tax reform. The Treasury is currently reviewing responses and will update on timing in due course.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): To follow on from the question asked by the hon. Member for East Devon (Simon Jupp), regional airports play a critical role in connecting our regions and our Union. This month, Stobart Air collapsed, and easyJet is to close its bases at Newcastle International, London Stansted and London Southend airports; Teesside and Newquay have previously shut their doors. Without a sector-specific deal, our regional airports, the connectivity that they provide and the jobs and communities that they support are at risk. What assessment has the Department made of the long-term viability of this critical infrastructure to our nation?

Rachel Maclean: As the hon. Gentleman will know, we fully recognise and support the importance of the aviation industry to our country. That is why this

Government have stood behind the sector and provided up to £7 billion, in the round, of support for jobs through the furlough scheme and support for airports and the airline industry. It is vital that we get the travel industry back on its feet, which is why we are taking a public health approach to restarting travel. The Transport Secretary will say more on that this evening.

North of England: Transport Connections

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve transport connections in the north of England. [901727]

Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve transport connections in the north of England. [901734]

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve transport connections in the north of England. [901744]

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve transport connections in the north of England. [901747]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Andrew Stephenson): Building on the £29 billion invested in northern transport since 2010, this Government are delivering improved connectivity to level up the north.

Jason McCartney [V]: Does the Minister agree that we need a fully integrated transport network across the north, with smart ticketing? It is not a question of either/or; we need regular affordable bus services as well as the HS2 eastern leg, as well as Northern Powerhouse Rail, as well as electrification of TransPennine rail and as well as, finally, upgrades to the Huddersfield-Penistone-Sheffield line.

Andrew Stephenson: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Better transport is central to the Government's agenda to level up the north. The TransPennine route upgrade is already under way, our national bus strategy is being delivered and we will soon publish our integrated rail plan for the midlands and the north, ensuring that transformational rail improvements are delivered as quickly as possible.

Mr Speaker: It is just that we need the TransPennine trains to go through Chorley, not Wigan.

Miriam Cates [V]: The Penistone line in my constituency connects major Yorkshire towns and cities such as Sheffield, Barnsley and Huddersfield, as well as serving smaller communities such as Penistone and Dodworth, but with only one train per hour in each direction, it does not meet the needs of local people or businesses. I have just submitted a bid to the levelling-up fund, with my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mark Eastwood), to upgrade the Penistone line and improve the service, but does the Minister agree that we must invest in these secondary commuter lines in the north if we are to see the same benefits in our city regions that other parts of the country already enjoy?

Andrew Stephenson: I agree with my hon. Friend that we must improve connectivity to all our communities in the north—especially Chorley—and I welcome her commitment to improving services on the Penistone line. Bids to the £4.8 billion levelling-up fund are being assessed, and we expect to announce the outcome of that competition in the autumn.

Andy Carter: As the number of commuters travelling from Warrington gradually starts to increase again, does the Minister agree that east-west links from Warrington will really benefit from investment? Could I ask my hon. Friend to update the House on plans to extend Northern Powerhouse Rail from Manchester to Liverpool via Warrington Bank Quay, and does he agree with me that the £2 billion allocated for the Golborne spur could be better spent on helping local rail links across the north-west of England?

Andrew Stephenson: The Government remain absolutely committed to Northern Powerhouse Rail and, as ever, my hon. Friend makes a powerful case for Warrington. As he knows, decisions on the routes for NPR and consideration of the Golborne spur are matters for the integrated rail plan, so he will have to be patient just a little bit longer, but I can assure him that his representations have been heard.

Mary Robinson [V]: Connectivity is key to levelling up northern communities, so I welcome the Government's commitment to reversing Beeching cuts and restoring rail connections to towns across the region, including through the towns funding for a new railway station in Cheadle town centre. Delivering that connectivity is about timetabling and joined-up services, as well as the rail infrastructure itself. What is the Minister doing to work with Transport for Greater Manchester and other stakeholders to ensure that an integrated service is delivered and provides the regular connections that Cheadle and other communities in the region need?

Andrew Stephenson: Through the Manchester recovery taskforce, of which Transport for Greater Manchester is a member, we are working with organisations across the rail industry to develop the service and infrastructure options that will address the congestion and reliability issues across Greater Manchester and, I hope, improve the experience of all rail passengers across the region.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): This Government have a track record of over-promising and under-delivering. We know that if the north had received the same investment as London over the last decade, it would have seen £66 billion more. For all their bluff and bluster about levelling up in the north, what do we see? Services between Newcastle and Manchester to be halved, the proposed increase in the frequency of services between Teesside, Sunderland and Newcastle scrapped, Transport for the North's budget to be cut by 40%, and now Government sources saying that they plan to pull the plug on Northern Powerhouse Rail. Just to ensure that there is no further backtracking, will the Minister guarantee that Northern Powerhouse Rail will be delivered in full, on time and on budget?

Andrew Stephenson: Of course, the hon. Gentleman tempts me to prejudge the integrated rail plan, which I will not do, because no decisions have been taken yet.

However, I am happy to confirm that we are getting on with investing in Transport for the North; we are not waiting for the integrated rail plan to be delivered. On top of the billions of pounds that we have already invested in transport across the north, just on 26 May we announced two new stations outside Leeds—White Rose and Thorpe Park—and we announced an additional £317 million for the TransPennine route upgrade. Of course, over 60% of the region is now covered with metro Mayors, with historic devolution settlements. We are getting on with investing in the north of England.

Active Travel Pilots: Accessibility to Disabled People

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to ensure that all active travel pilots are fully accessible to disabled people. [901729]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): Local authorities are responsible for ensuring active travel schemes are accessible to all. Government guidance, which includes the “Cycle Infrastructure Design” publication, reflects best practice in safety and inclusivity for disabled pedestrians, cyclists and wheelchair and Motability scooter users.

Rachael Maskell: The Government are rolling out a number of pilots for e-scooters and also supporting with funding a number of schemes to expand active travel, yet those schemes do not need to have accessible formats of travel for disabled people and older people, further excluding them from the benefits of active travel and moving around in car-free environments. Will the Minister ensure that every pilot scheme is expanded so that it is fully accessible? Will he also challenge the sector to provide Motability scooters and other forms of e-travel that are fully accessible for everyone in our communities?

Chris Heaton-Harris: It is very important that local authorities consider the impacts of e-scooters on people with disabilities and allow them to access the trials as well. E-scooters have the potential to offer additional means of transport, and we allowed seated e-scooters within the scope of the trials to enable people with certain mobility issues to use them. Our guidance told local authorities to encourage groups representing the interests of disabled people in their areas to advise people with accessibility issues on how they can best use the schemes.

Rail Passenger Numbers

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): What steps the Government plan to take to increase the number of rail passengers. [901730]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): We are working with the rail industry to develop a number of recovery initiatives focused on restoring passenger confidence in rail travel.

Paul Maynard [V]: Given the importance of improving train passenger numbers once the nation has fully reopened, marketing rail travel will be crucial if only to keep the Treasury happy. What support will the Secretary of State give to community rail partnerships up and down

the country, which do so much to enhance the quality of local services, not just in planting out flowerbeds and making stations more attractive but in attracting the leisure passengers that we will need to travel on all our railway lines in ever greater numbers?

Grant Shapps: As a distinguished former Rail Minister, my hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that community rail is very much at the heart of the recent White Paper on rail reform. He can expect to see our commitment to rail community partnerships grow in the years to come, which will, I hope, fulfil the ambitions he set out during his time as Rail Minister.

Condition of Roads: England

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve the condition of England's roads. [901731]

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve the condition of England's roads. [901742]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean): In addition to investing £1.7 billion in '21-22 into local roads, the Department is working towards the creation of a common data standard for the monitoring of the road condition. That will aim to drive innovation and flexibility in monitoring local roads, which will enable local authorities to target defects in their networks more quickly.

Mark Menzies [V]: First, I thank my hon. Friend for her support and that of the Department in securing the Lytham St Annes M55 link road. After years of fighting for this project I was delighted to see work get under way on Monday. I have, however, been inundated by complaints from constituents regarding the poor quality of many of Fylde's road surfaces, so can my hon. Friend assure me that the Government are taking the resurfacing of roads seriously and not simply filling in the cracks and covering over potholes?

Rachel Maclean: May I start by paying tribute to my hon. Friend for his determined campaigning over a number of years to secure the start of work on this vital road? I am sure that his constituents will be reaping the benefits in the years to come, but he is right to say that they must be able to drive on roads that are pothole-free. That is why the Government have committed £2.5 billion through the potholes fund. The Department believes that local highway authorities should develop a risk-based approach to asset management plans; that means they need to have a long-term inspection regime and be proactively maintaining those roads to ensure that they are in good condition in the years to come.

Marco Longhi: The very light rail site in Dudley—of course, Chorley could have one as well, Mr Speaker—will be a world-class innovation centre, developing and testing prototypes, and very light rail is installed on roads with minimal disruption. Does the Minister agree that it could be a game changer for public transport for the UK, and will she join me in congratulating the team on pioneering it in the west midlands?

Rachel Maclean: I am delighted to hear about more pioneering innovations in the west midlands. That does not surprise me at all; I visited the west midlands just last week to see some of its groundbreaking work across a number of travel innovations. Of course, Mr Speaker, the west midlands leads the world—I am afraid it even leads Chorley—in these matters. I strongly congratulate all those involved in the project in Coventry and Dudley. We are always interested in building on these successes and seeing them benefit more areas in the future.

HS2 Compensation Payments

Dame Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure that all HS2 compensation payments are made promptly. [901732]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Andrew Stephenson): May I start by congratulating my right hon. Friend on her recognition in the birthday honours list? My HS2 land and property review, published in November 2020, set out a number of measures to speed up the payment of compensation, and we are making rapid progress in implementing the recommendations of that review.

Dame Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend has done a great job since taking over as HS2 Minister, but I am sure he will agree that there is so much evidence of appalling behaviour from HS2 in the way that it is treating individual households and businesses and its slowness to compensate even the outgoing legal costs of those who are simply trying to protect their own homes and businesses. What can he do to improve the compassion, quite frankly, as well as the efficiency of HS2?

Andrew Stephenson: My right hon. Friend makes a powerful case. HS2 Ltd can and must treat those affected by HS2 with consideration and respect. To that end, I am pleased to say that the root-and-branch review of land and property cases that I commissioned is now starting to bear fruit. I hold HS2 Ltd to direct account in a fortnightly review of the most complex cases, and I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for drawing my attention to several pressing constituency cases in her area.

Zero Emission Vehicles

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on incentivising the purchase of zero emission vehicles ahead of the 2030 ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles. [901733]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): Alongside the phase-out dates, we have pledged a £2.8 billion package of measures to support the industry and consumers to make the switch to cleaner vehicles. Discussions with my colleagues are ongoing.

Ellie Reeves [V]: The 2030 ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles is a necessary step to reach our net zero targets, but to enable mass adoption of electric vehicles, we need to fix the issues around charging points. Currently, many in service do not work—or they

charge inefficiently—and they are under-provided and excessively priced in some areas. Because they are run by independent providers, there is no joined-up national infrastructure. Given that we need to roll out widespread charging points across the UK and tackle these issues, does the Secretary of State agree that the Government need to invest much more and properly regulate the sector so that it is better joined-up, more reliable and more accessible?

Grant Shapps: As a driver of an electric vehicle, I have experienced the exact issues that the hon. Lady talks about. There are too many different membership cards, and people have to use too many different forms of payment and sign up to too many sites before they can even pay for the miles that they charge. We have a plan in place, which has included taking secondary legislation action that will require all chargers providing rapid charge to allow contactless payment, which I know the hon. Lady will appreciate.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): As a fellow electric car driver, I cannot wait for those regulations to come forward.

As the Climate Change Committee made clear this morning, the Government are not delivering on the policies needed to meet their climate targets. As well as incentivising EV purchases and improving EV charging infrastructure, we need EVs to be built in Britain. What conversations has the Secretary of State had with the Business Secretary about Government support for EV manufacturing at the Ford Halewood plant, which is crucial if we are to secure the future viability of the site, and about saving jobs making vehicle components at the GKN plant in Birmingham?

Grant Shapps: The hon. Lady will know that the Government have pledged half a billion pounds towards creating factories to produce batteries, which is a very important part of the development of electric cars. I often hear people say that we are somehow falling behind. In fact, we had the second highest sales of electric vehicles in Europe in the first quarter of this year; one in seven cars sold now has plug-in. I cannot comment directly on the discussions that my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary has had about those specific plants, but I can tell the hon. Lady that discussions are ongoing in order to achieve the infrastructure delivery in this country, including the manufacturing base, which will continue to ensure that we lead Europe when it comes to electric car provision.

East West Rail Consultation

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with transport authorities on the progress of the East West Rail consultation. [901735]

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the 2019 East West Rail route consultation. [901737]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): The East West Railway Company will consider the 2021 consultation responses. The 2019 consultation met open and fair consultation standards.

Mohammad Yasin [V]: The 2019 East West Rail consultation and the 2020 route announcement made no mention that six tracks would be needed at Bedford Midland station or of the consequential demolition in the Poets area of my constituency. I urge the Minister to please consider the many representations on this matter from members of the public, rail groups and local councillors, and Bedford Borough Council's SLC Rail report showing a credible four-track option that would avoid the loss of homes.

Chris Heaton-Harris: I assure the hon. Gentleman that this is a non-statutory consultation. It is a consultation where we really do want to listen to the opinions of people affected across the route of East West Rail, and we will most certainly take into account his representations here today.

Richard Fuller: Many of my constituents are appalled at the environmental damage that the East West Rail route will cause across Bedfordshire, and baffled that this 21st-century project will use a 19th-century fuel. Will my hon. Friend please look again at the environmental considerations that East West Rail has undertaken and bring them up to scratch?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank my hon. Friend for the pragmatic and dedicated campaign that he is running on behalf of his constituents and others on this issue. I know that he has encouraged his constituents to have their say in the recent consultation, and I thank him for that too. We are committed to decarbonising our railways, and East West Rail will continue to assess the potential environmental effects as part of the route alignment development work. An environmental impact assessment will be undertaken and an environmental statement submitted when the development consent order application is made to the Planning Inspectorate.

Transport Decarbonisation

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): What recent steps his Department has taken to help facilitate transport decarbonisation in line with the Government's commitments (a) to the Paris agreement and (b) for COP26. [901736]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean): The transport decarbonisation plan will set out a pathway to achieving net zero. We are delivering ambitious international COP26 campaigns, including a zero emission vehicles campaign that aims to at least double the pace of the global transition to zero emission vehicles so that all new cars and vans are zero emission by 2040 or sooner; an aviation campaign that will galvanise industry, state and civil society support for international action to reduce the climate impacts of aviation; and a maritime campaign, where we will deliver important cross-sectoral opportunities for significant emissions reductions nationally and internationally.

Peter Grant [V]: The Scottish Government have committed to cutting car use by 20% by 2030 and to providing an interest-free loan for first-time buyers of new and used electric vehicles. In contrast, the British Government are cutting the grant for electric vehicle purchases by 50%. Will the Minister explain how that 50% cut in support will help to facilitate the decarbonisation of transport?

Rachel Maclean: I remind the hon. Gentleman that his constituents in Scotland, like those across the UK, have benefited from up to £1.3 billion of support to help them transition to electric vehicles. Shall we look at the facts, Mr Speaker? The plug-in car grant, the home charge grant, the on-street chargers and the workplace chargers are all funded by the UK Government for the benefit of the hon. Gentleman's constituents and those across the United Kingdom.—[*Interruption*]

Mr Speaker: I do apologise for the noise. There is a helicopter somewhere overhead. I know it is Transport questions, but it is getting a bit much.

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): As someone who is regularly stuck in traffic on the A13, I think no one wants to return to the levels of pollution we saw before the pandemic began, particularly as emerging evidence indicates that exposure to air pollution increases the severity of coronavirus symptoms and other respiratory conditions. That is why I am so glad to see the work done by brilliant, publicly run light rail systems such as Tyne and Wear metro and Tramlink, led by fantastic local Labour administrations. Light rail networks are an effective means of reducing congestion and pollution given that they produce next to no pollution at the point of use. What assurances will the Minister give, therefore, to support projects that incorporate light rail, tram trains, and electric and hydrogen buses such as the mass transit system proposed by the new West Yorkshire Combined Authority Mayor?

Rachel Maclean: I hope the hon. Gentleman was listening earlier when I spoke at the Dispatch Box about the support that the Government have provided for the West Midlands Combined Authority, led by the Conservative Mayor Andy Street, for light rail and a number of other transport innovations. The point is, the Government are investing in zero-carbon green transport across the whole country. We intend to build back better and greener from the pandemic, and we will create hundreds of thousands of skilled green jobs across the country as we do so.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The consensus at the Transport Committee yesterday—I include the Minister in this—was that the EV market is immature. Quite why the Government would therefore reduce support when EVs are still a lot more expensive is beyond me. The fact is, they have cut the grant by 50%. In addition to what my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) said about interest-free loans, in Scotland we have doubled the home charge grant as well. On the decarbonisation plan, last week the Minister said:

“We have done a huge amount of work on the plan...I am not satisfied with the draft because it does not meet the ambition we need in order to reach those incredibly challenging targets.”—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2021; Vol. 697, c. 117WH.]

Quite how the DFT has done extensive work on it and yet still lacks ambition is beyond me. Will we see the plan before the summer recess—yes or no?

Rachel Maclean: Yes.

A27 Worthing to Shoreham: Congestion

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): What recent progress his Department has made on researching alternatives for alleviating traffic congestion on the A27 between Worthing and Shoreham. [901738]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean): We have committed to improvements on the A27, including the sections around Worthing and Lancing. Highways England is working to identify options to go to consultation next year.

Tim Loughton: As anyone setting out for Chorley from the south coast will know, Mr Speaker, the Worthing to Lancing section of the A27 is one of the most congested roads in the whole of the south-east. In 2014, we were allocated £70 million as part of road investment strategy 1. Seven years on, with several thousand additional houses nearby and with a new IKEA attracting 2 million customer journeys a year about to open, nothing has happened. Now, apparently we have just been allocated £20 million in the Budget for delivery of something between 2025 and 2030. Could we please have a bit of levelling up for infrastructure in Sussex urgently?

Rachel Maclean: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this vital issue. It is of course right and critical to get the right solution for the right place. Highways England is actively working on the project and, in particular, working closely with stakeholders, because this is a very sensitive area. I hope my hon. Friend will welcome the fact that Highways England is engaging and working closely with stakeholders on detailed options for the A27. There will be a consultation on all those next year.

Eurostar: Long-term Viability

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the long-term viability of Eurostar. [901748]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Robert Courts): The Department fully expects that Eurostar will continue to be a highly successful, profitable company carrying record numbers of passengers once international travel recovers.

Jeff Smith [V]: But the Minister knows that there has been a real threat to Eurostar's survival, and British business leaders and the Chair of the Transport Committee have all called for our Government to be part of the solution. Eurostar is not just a vital service; it contributes to our net zero agenda. When we are in a climate crisis as well as a covid crisis, does the Minister think it is right that the Government should be giving billions in loans and guarantees to air travel and risk Eurostar going under?

Robert Courts: The Government welcome the recent announcements from the company and its shareholders and lenders regarding a new financing package. We will continue to engage with Eurostar fully to understand the company's position, but we would expect shareholders, including the majority shareholder SNCF—the French state-owned railway—to exhaust all options fully and play their full part.

River Tyne: Transport Links

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): What plans he has to improve transport links across the River Tyne. [901740]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Andrew Stephenson): It is for local authorities in the area to promote any further improvements to local connectivity across the River Tyne.

Chi Onwurah [V]: I would like to thank the Minister for that response, but it is not really one, is it? As well as being a great icon of north-east people, culture and engineering, the Tyne bridge is an essential part of our transport infrastructure and it is in a dire state. Hon. Members from across the region, together with local authority leaders, the North of Tyne Mayor and the police and crime commissioner, have written to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Secretary of State for Transport in support of an £18.5 million bid to the levelling-up fund. Does the Minister agree that the Tyne bridge must be levelled up if it is going to be in a fit state to celebrate its 100th birthday in 2028 as a beautiful and functional symbol of the north?

Andrew Stephenson: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I am aware of the bid that has gone in as part of the levelling-up fund. Obviously, the Department for Transport and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will assess the bids submitted to that fund and we expect to announce the outcome of the competition in the autumn, but the Department for Transport is also aware of a proposal for the bridge including the bid for £36 million from the major road network funding developed by Transport for the North on behalf of north-east partners. DfT officials continue to work with Newcastle City Council on the business case for that proposal.

Flexible Rail Season Tickets

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): What progress his Department has made on introducing flexible rail season tickets. [901741]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): I am pleased to say that flexible season tickets went on sale on Monday and they will be available for use from next Monday.

James Sunderland: Back in 2018, South Western Railway undertook to conduct a review to ensure that we have earlier and later trains on the network. With many of my constituents working in the care sector, often with antisocial hours, and dependent on public transport, will my right hon. Friend agree to work with me and SWR to make the change?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the issue of flexibility with train travel, particularly as we return post covid, which is why the flexible season tickets are very important. I would be delighted to arrange for him to meet up with the rail Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), to discuss the specific issue that concerns him on SWR.

Rural Areas: Transport Connections

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve transport connections in rural areas. [901743]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Andrew Stephenson): Through schemes such as the restoring your railway fund and the national bus strategy, we are determined to ensure that rural areas have the transport links they need to grow and prosper.

Mark Fletcher: I thank the Minister for that answer. Next month, I will launch a bus survey across the Bolsover constituency, because many of my villages—particularly the rural villages—have either lost services or are completely isolated, such as Hilcote. Will he commit to coming to meet some of the residents who have been most eloquent in their arguments about what this loss of services has done to their communities?

Andrew Stephenson: I am sure that my hon. Friend's survey outputs will assist his local authority in the development of the bus service improvement plan over the coming months and help to ensure that we bus back better from covid-19. My noble Friend Baroness Vere, the Minister for roads, would be happy to meet my hon. Friend and his residents to coincide with the launch of his survey.

Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to implement the policies set out in the Williams-Shapps plan for rail. [901745]

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the potential effect of the Williams-Shapps plan for rail proposals on levels of investment in the rail network and infrastructure. [901752]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): The transformation of our railways has now started and passengers are already benefiting as we are investing billions in rail across the UK, including with the flexible tickets just announced.

Kevin Hollinrake: Given York's historic connections and its strategic location, does my right hon. Friend think that it would make the perfect location for a new headquarters for our Great British Railways?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: it is a stunning location. I launched the Williams-Shapps rail review at the York National Railway Museum. I commend it to everybody in this House and I think he is right that York could provide a very attractive location for Great British Railways, although that matter is some way down the line yet.

Andrew Gwynne [V]: The world's first passenger railway station is located on Liverpool Road in Manchester. As the Secretary of State knows, Greater Manchester has an objective to integrate rail stations and commuter rail services into a single joined-up public transport network alongside bus, Metrolink, walking and cycling. The best

way to do that is to devolve the necessary funding and powers for rail, so can the Secretary of State reassure me that Great British Railways, in partnership with places such as Greater Manchester, will not shut down the route to securing this?

Grant Shapps: Yesterday I was at what will become Great Britain's biggest ever railway station built in one go—Old Oak Common—so it is fantastic to hear about the railway station in the hon. Member's constituency, which was the first ever railway station. I think it is now a museum, if I am correct. I know that he has read and studied the Williams-Shapps rail reform and will have taken particular note of page 41, which contains information about that devolution plan. I do not think it will disappoint him when it comes to bringing together those services—a matter that I was speaking to the Greater Manchester Mayor about just this week.

Suburban Rail Services: London

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): What recent progress he has made on plans for the devolution of suburban rail services in London. [901746]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): Transport for London submitted a strategic outline business case for the devolution of these services in late 2019, and the Department considered the potential benefits and risks associated with the proposal to be finely balanced. We were doing further work with TfL when the pandemic struck. I have to admit that not much work has been going on since that time.

Matthew Pennycook: I thank the Minister for that answer. He knows that I am firmly of the view that the transfer of Southeastern services to TfL is the best long-term means of guaranteeing passengers in my constituency the fast, frequent and high-quality metro-style rail services that they desire. As we emerge from the coronavirus crisis, what plans does his Department have to pick up and take forward the conversations that took place with TfL about the matter early last year? Will he meet me in due course to discuss the future of the Southeastern franchise in more detail?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, and I know his passion in this area. As I say, since the pandemic struck, the Department has had to be very much focused on keeping services running while developing our passenger-focused reform. As the Secretary of State just said, Great British Railways will be organised around regional divisions so that decisions are made closer to the places that the railways serve. The White Paper also includes a commitment for strategic partnership with TfL and other local authorities to ensure that the rail sector is working best for passengers in London. I would be delighted to meet him to discuss these matters further.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the strength of industrial relations at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. [901755]

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): What steps he has taken to help protect workers at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency Swansea site from covid-19. [901765]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): Staff safety is a priority, which is evidenced by the very significant investment that has been made.

Tonia Antoniazzi [V]: Two weeks ago, representatives from the Public and Commercial Services Union and senior management, including the permanent secretary of the Department for Transport, had reached a deal to bring an end to the ongoing industrial dispute over covid safety, but in a development unprecedented in 20 years of civil service negotiations, the Department subsequently reneged on a deal, much of which it had written, with no word of explanation. Is PCS right in believing that the deal was scuppered at the last minute after direct intervention from the Secretary of State? Will he apologise to those members of the public who now face further backlogs as a result of this unnecessary, ideological refusal to find the resolution to this dispute?

Grant Shapps: With the greatest respect to the hon. Lady, the only thing that is unnecessary is for the PCS union to be continuing a strike that is purported to be about safety when, in fact, £4.2 million has been invested at the DVLA to make it covid-safe. An additional building has been rented. Air conditioning has been changed so that the air comes directly in from outside. Perspex screens have been put in place. Zones and bubbles have been created, and there is a very substantive cleaning regime. If this dispute is indeed about making sure that the building is covid-secure, then that has been achieved. What we need to know is why the demands then switched to demands about pay and demands about holiday, which have nothing to do with being covid-secure.

Carolyn Harris [V]: I wonder whether the Secretary of State would therefore be willing to accompany me and other colleagues who have constituents working at the DVLA to the site so that he can show us just how safe it is, because our constituents are telling us a completely different story.

Grant Shapps: It is probably important that we allow those who are experts in these things to follow through. Public Health Wales has signed this off. Swansea Council's environmental health team has signed this off. The Health and Safety Executive has signed this off. I think we should be listening to all those health experts as they decide what should happen in a site like this and are looking at the data and facts. We can then make the decision from there. I do not think there is any further excuse for preventing vulnerable people from being able to pick up the documentation that they require from the DVLA, which is the only thing this ongoing strike is now achieving.

Bus Services: Isolated Communities

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab): What recent steps the Government have taken to increase local authority powers to deliver regular bus services to isolated communities. [901761]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean): The national bus strategy, which draws on £3 billion of transformational funding, sets out the Government's vision for bus services across England, including in isolated communities, and we believe that those bus service improvement plans, delivered through enhanced partnerships and franchising arrangements, will deliver what is needed. Alongside this, we have announced 17 successful rural mobility fund bids, each receiving a share of £20 million funding to trial innovative bookable minibuses where demand is more dispersed.

Mary Kelly Foy [V]: Since 2010, 134 million miles of bus routes have been lost and bus coverage in Britain is the lowest it has been in 30 years. In villages such as Pitlington and Waterhouses in my constituency, bus services are virtually non-existent. Can the Minister confirm whether the national bus strategy's bus service improvement plan will give local authorities enough power and resources to deliver regular bus services to communities on routes that may not be commercially viable?

Rachel Maclean: The hon. Lady has put her finger on the entire purpose of the Bus Back Better strategy, which is about ensuring better, cleaner, safer and more reliable buses with simpler fares and ticketing. It is absolutely what communities such as hers and others all over the country want. The Government are supporting local authorities through funding and we have set aside £25 million to help to build the capacity and capabilities of local authorities. Every local transport authority has received £100,000 in capacity support to enable them to submit bids for the funding and get those bus services back.

Topical Questions

[901695] **Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): Following up on the conversations earlier, I am delighted to inform the House that in the next few weeks we expect a milestone in the number of rapid chargers being available, with 3,000 different locations and 25,000 public charging points. That means more charging point locations than petrol stations in this country. As mentioned, that is on top of £2.8 billion of Government support for the transition to zero emissions, with companies such as Gridserve, BP Pulse and Shell committing to significant investment in charging infrastructure and working together to back up the fact that in this country we now have more rapid chargers per 100 miles of major road network than any other location in Europe.

Layla Moran [V]: Last week, Oxfordshire County Council, the Vale of White Horse District Council and I applied to the levelling-up fund for the snappily titled B4044 strategic cycle link between Botley and Eynsham. This project would significantly boost sustainable travel between Oxford city centre and the new housing planned around Eynsham, linking through more deprived communities. Does the Minister agree that this is exactly the kind of active travel initiative that we need more of in areas of high housing and economic growth, especially given our desire to achieve a zero-carbon Oxfordshire by 2050?

Grant Shapps: I have not seen that particular application yet, but we do know that the Government have put in a record amount of more than £2 billion of active travel funding for walking and cycling. I know that the hon. Lady will be delighted that Oxfordshire investment has now reached £355 million in different transport environments, and that is on top of the £760 million for East West Rail, so when it comes to investing in her constituency in Oxfordshire, this Conservative Government are really going for it.

Mr Speaker: We now go to the Chair of the Select Committee.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con) [V]: Is the Secretary of State hearing, as I am, that our airports and Border Force are getting people through arrivals more quickly and therefore more safely? Is he confident that we will be in a position to get more people who have been double-jabbed through arrivals with digitisation and the NHS app delivering proof of a double jab?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The last few weeks have seen a remarkable digital transformation in the background, which means that people coming in from green-list countries have been going to e-gates that have been updated, both physically and with software, or going to see a Border Force officer and having their passports scanned in one way or the other. That has been automatically linked back to the passenger locator form that they filled out before they left their country of departure, which tells Border Force whether they have had a pre-departure test and whether they have future tests booked. This links the whole machinery together, so yes, the automation is really starting to get into place now.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): Yesterday, hundreds of workers in the aviation and tourism industry held a demonstration outside Parliament urging the Government to protect their jobs and those of 1.5 million people employed in aviation and the wider supply chain. On behalf of the countless staff and trade unions I spoke to, will the Secretary of State finally deliver on the sectoral deal that his Government promised but have so far failed to deliver? When he makes an announcement later on the traffic light system, which, it should be noted, is not being made to this House, will he publish the criteria, the country-by-country assessment and the direction of travel for each country, to give travellers confidence to plan for this summer?

Grant Shapps: I find the hon. Gentleman's policy confusing, only because, as I understand it, he has previously called for all countries to be put into the red category, meaning that there would be no travel at all. In addition, the former shadow Chancellor has said that Labour would never provide financial support to these companies, yet Labour is now saying that it wants more support to be provided and the hon. Gentleman is saying that he does not want to follow his own policy. Having a red, amber and green list enables people to see which countries are in which category, and the Joint Biosecurity Centre is publishing the data on the website to show why particular countries are in each category.

Jim McMahon: I can give you an assurance, Mr Speaker, that I have tried my hardest to get the Transport Secretary to fully understand our sectoral deal and the way we have laid it out, but I cannot help the confusion that continues to reign with this Transport Secretary.

Let us now move closer to home. We have had two questions today on the DVLA in Swansea, and the Transport Secretary did not give a convincing answer to either. It was reported last week that a deal had been reached with staff, trade unions and the Government to finally resolve the industrial dispute over health and safety failings at the DVLA in Swansea, but that it was pulled at the last minute by a Minister. Will the Secretary of State confirm whether he or senior members of the Department pulled the deal, and, if so, why? He and his Department are now squarely against the loyal workforce at DVLA Swansea. What will he now do to restore trust and confidence in those fantastic workers?

Grant Shapps: The Public and Commercial Services Union continues to take industrial action, which is targeting the services and having a negative impact on some of the most vulnerable people in society. The fact of the matter is that the safety concerns have been signed off by Public Health Wales, the Health and Safety Executive, the Welsh Government and the UK Government, yet this strike continues and now is apparently not about healthcare, but about demands over money instead. Will the hon. Gentleman actually ask people to go back to their work in order to help vulnerable people in this country? That is the question and this House needs to know.

Mr Speaker: Next question, Andrew Griffith. He is not here, so let us go to Scottish National party spokesperson, Gavin Newlands.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I have lost count of the number of times I have asked this Government about their long-abandoned commitment to specific support for the aviation sector. Despite the Secretary of State's tinkering with the traffic light system, it looks increasingly unlikely that there will be any summer season. It is clear to the dogs on the street that an aviation, travel and tourism recovery package and a targeted extension of furlough is now an imperative, so how does he plan to better support the sector and its workers, such as those who were at the travel day of action protest yesterday on College Green, as has been mentioned?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Robert Courts): The Department does recognise the severe impact that the covid-19 pandemic has had on regional air travel. We have supported critical routes through policies such as public service obligations and the airport and ground operations support scheme. The Government are working on a strategic framework for the sector, which will focus on building back better and ensuring a successful aviation sector for the future. What the sector will certainly be glad of is that it is this Government who are looking after its interests, not the Scottish Government, who have been accused of sacrificing the industry by the Scottish Passenger Agents' Association.

[901698] **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): I welcome the new flexible season ticket that was introduced this week. It will save someone

travelling from Stanford-le-Hope into London three days a week more than £120, and someone travelling from Basildon more than £100. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as more and more people move to hybrid working, it is important that we have flexibility in our public transport systems?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I saw some coverage of the flexible season tickets, and it is true to say that ticketing is complex across the network, but, compared with somebody who would otherwise buy a regular ticket, somebody travelling two or three days a week will always be at least 20% better off with a flexible season ticket.¹

[901696] **Janet Daby** (Lewisham East) (Lab) [V]: A constituent of mine who was blind tragically died last year when he fell in front of a train owing to a lack of safety measures, a lack of audio announcements and a lack of tactile paving on the platform. I know that the Government have plans for tactile paving, although they are unclear at the moment, but while we are waiting for this to happen, will the Minister commit to introducing audio announcements, which provide safety information at railway stations, as a matter of urgency to keep people safe and to prevent another person from losing their life?

Grant Shapps: I am familiar with that absolutely tragic case. Indeed, I know that my hon. Friend the Rail Minister met the partner of the deceased last week and discussed all of these matters, including the integration of audible announcements, which we consider to be very important indeed. We are speeding up the introduction of tactile pavements on railway stations and, in particular, close to the rail tracks.

[901699] **Nickie Aiken** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): Improving our air quality is a major priority for my constituents. Both they and I remain very concerned about the ongoing number of drivers who continue to idle their vehicles when parked at the kerbside. A single minute of idling an engine of a car creates 9 litres of CO₂. Unfortunately, regulation 98 of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 does not adequately equip local authorities with the power they need to deter repeat engine idlers, only with an £80 fine. With that in mind, does my hon. Friend agree that we should now be considering increasing fines for drivers who continue to idle their engines, making it a genuine effective deterrent?

Robert Courts: I know that my hon. Friend is a passionate campaigner on this issue and I completely agree that it is vital that we take action. Ultimately, it will be better technology, such as stop-start and zero-emission vehicles that will solve the issue. The UK is a global leader in the development and the manufacture of electric vehicles and we will continue to work to foster that position.

[901709] **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab) [V]: Experts have warned that the carbon impact of the Government's £27 billion roadbuilding programme could be around 100 times greater than the official Government estimates. Why will the Government not reassure us by committing to a comprehensive environmental impact assessment of the plans?

Robert Courts: In the same session, we have managed to hear the hon. Gentleman be, first, anti-air, and now anti-road. I have just explained to the House how we will ensure that this country stays well connected, that we serve the people we represent, and that we foster technology, because it will be technology that will give us the answer to the zero-carbon emissions challenge.

[901710] **Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Ending financial support before demand has returned could leave bus and light rail operators facing a cliff edge. What plans do the Government have to ensure a smooth recovery for operators, such as Blackpool Transport, so that they can expand their timetables on routes such as the 2C, which runs through to Knott End-on-Sea via many other villages?

Grant Shapps: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that bus transport has required a huge amount of support. We have put in hundreds of millions during this pandemic. We have also launched the Bus Back Better strategy, which puts a lot of money into buses—some £3 billion. In the meantime, I will ensure that we return to this House to talk about further ways that we can support our bus sector and ensure that those essential local links that she describes are maintained.

[901701] **Craig Whittaker** (Calder Valley) (Con): The Calder Valley line is a major strategic passenger and freight line, which was placed as the top priority in the 2015 Northern Sparks report, which highlights that the Calder Valley line is long overdue in playing its part in decarbonising the local transport network. Can my right hon. Friend update the House on when we may expect the publication of the Government's transport decarbonisation plan?

Grant Shapps: Yes, the transport decarbonisation plan is central to our lead-in to COP26 and it is absolutely essential that we get this right and that it is ambitious enough to match the scale of the problem that we face. My hon. Friend will not have to wait long, and I think he will be impressed by the ambition.

[901711] **Anum Qaisar-Javed** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I was recently contacted by the McKenna family in my constituency in regard to the availability of driving tests. Ross had to travel to Blackpool to sit his theory test, and is unable to sit his practical test in a timely manner because there is a backlog of tests. This issue is impacting many of my constituents, so will the Department speak to the relevant agencies to obtain additional funding in order to make available more localised testing?

Grant Shapps: First, I welcome the hon. Lady to the House and to her first question at Transport questions. Secondly, may I say that in my household I have two teenagers who literally ask me the same questions every day of the week. There is a very large backlog—about 440,000—due to the pandemic. The agency has a recovery plan to increase the number of tests carried out every day. I will personally be seeing that it keeps on track with that recovery plan because, as she says, young people need to be able to take their tests and pass

1. [Official Report, 29 June 2021, Vol. 698, c. 6MC.]

[901702] **Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con) [V]: Lorry drivers such as my constituent Stewart have kept the country going through the pandemic, but they face the threat of robbery and assault on a regular basis. He tells me that there are not enough facilities where drivers can take their legally required breaks, forcing many to park in lay-bys, and that even the facilities that exist can be inadequate and insecure. Will the Minister look at that issue and work with the industry to increase the number of secure truck stops for these drivers, who are a critical part of our economy?

Robert Courts: I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to hauliers such as Stewart, who have literally kept the country moving over the past 18 months. My Department will continue the work started last year to engage with stakeholders, including the freight associations, to encourage the development of more safe, secure and high-quality lorry parking.

Mr Speaker: I call Nick Smith. Not here.

[901703] **Sara Britcliffe** (Hyndburn) (Con) [V]: Improving our railway stations and improving connectivity across east Lancashire is key to levelling up and making sure that we spread opportunity, but we still have accessibility issues at some of our stations, such as Oswaldtwistle. Can the Minister outline whether there will be further support to improve accessibility across areas such as mine in Hyndburn and Haslingden?

Robert Courts: All the funding currently available to Access for All has been allocated to projects, including nearby Accrington station, with works due to be completed

by 2024 at the latest. When further funding is available, any station without an accessible route into the station and to all platforms will be a potential candidate.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con) [V]: Ministers are aware that E10 fuel, due to be introduced from September 2021, is not compatible with all motor vehicles, and that older vehicles in particular can suffer serious damage if they use it. What extra measures do the Government intend to take, therefore, to ensure that motorists are fully aware of these dangers, so that they do not in error fill their vehicles with the wrong fuel? Can the Minister also assure me that the information on the gov.uk website on whether a vehicle can run on E10 fuel or not is completely up to date, comprehensive and correct?

Grant Shapps: I can reassure my right hon. Friend that that website is already up to date and will be accurate. It is the case that some older vehicles and historic vehicles—the type of cars which I know he is very keen on—cannot run on E10 fuel. It will be clearly marked, and he will be pleased to hear that E5 will continue to be available, so that historic cars can continue to travel on our roads.

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

10.34 am

Sitting suspended.

Business of the House

10.36 am

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House please give us the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): The business for the week commencing 28 June will include:

MONDAY 28 JUNE—Second Reading of the Rating (Coronavirus) and Directors Disqualification (Dissolved Companies) Bill, followed by motion relating to the appointment of lay members to the Committee on Standards, followed by motion relating to the membership of the Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body.

TUESDAY 29 JUNE—Estimates day (1st allotted day). There will be debates on estimates relating to the Department for Education; and on the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

WEDNESDAY 30 JUNE—Estimates day (2nd allotted day). There will be a debate on an estimate relating to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. At 7 pm, the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates.

THURSDAY 1 JULY—Proceedings on the Supply and Appropriation (Main Estimates) Bill, followed by general debate on Windrush Day, followed by general debate on Pride Month. The subjects for these debates were recommended by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 2 JULY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 5 July will include:

MONDAY 5 JULY—Remaining stages of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

TUESDAY 6 JULY—Second Reading of the Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Bill.

WEDNESDAY 7 JULY—Opposition day (4th allotted day). There will be a debate on a motion in the name of the Scottish National party. Subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 8 JULY—General debate on fuel poverty, followed by debate on a motion relating to the implementation of the recommendations of the independent medicines and medical devices safety review. The subject for this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 9 JULY—The House will not be sitting.

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the business.

It is stretching the bounds of my football knowledge to know to send Scotland commiserations and to wish Wales and England good luck, but it is heartfelt. Meanwhile, in my own game of choice and on my own patch, Gloucestershire county cricket ground welcomed the Indian and English cricket teams last week, and the women really showed just how exciting the beautiful game can be.

I thank the Leader of the House for working constructively with me on repairing the inconsistency between the independent complaints and grievance process and the parliamentary Committee on Standards for triggering recall for MPs. I hope that the Member currently suspended recognises that these changes would

have applied to him. Given that his constituents cannot currently remove him, he should do the decent thing by staff, Members and the public and resign.

The Government are letting people down. They use covid as an excuse for problems that they promised to fix years ago. They cannot blame all this on the past 18 months. They have had four years since Grenfell to fix the cladding and fire safety crisis affecting millions of innocent residents, many with Tory MPs. Why are the Government letting them down? It is nearly two years since the Government announced their review on support for terminally ill people. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) said last week, thousands have died since then waiting for a decision. Why are the Government letting them down?

It is nearly two years since the Prime Minister said that he already had a plan to fix social care. Since then, thousands of people have had to sell their homes to pay for care, and millions have been turned down for support. Why are the Government letting them down? It is three years since the Windrush scandal broke; yet victims still wait for compensation and some have died waiting. Why are the Government letting them down? Then there is the harm facing the world's poorest people, with cuts to aid commitments made before the pandemic. Lives will be lost. Why are the Government letting them down?

The Government have blamed waiting times in the NHS on covid, but before the pandemic more than one in six patients were already waiting more than 18 weeks for a routine treatment. Why are the Government letting them down? Climate change has been around for a while; yet the Government are all mouth and no delivery. The Committee on Climate Change is sounding alarm bells. Why are the Government letting us all down?

The Government are letting down rape victims, with conviction rates plummeting for years before the pandemic. At Prime Minister's questions yesterday, the Prime Minister appeared not to understand the anger of rape victims such as those who have told me of appalling delays from before the pandemic, and the anger of those of us who represent them. Ministers mention £4 million for advocates for sexual violence victims, but that is just £15 per reported rape victim per year. They refer to police officers being recruited, but they have cut more than 20,000 experienced skilled officers over the past decade.

Recruiting new police now does not help rape victims who have already waited years, unable to move on with their lives. In the final insult, the Prime Minister flipped away from the subject and back to his scripted-for-clipping punchline, referring to the Opposition as jabbering while the Government jabs—after my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) had asked about rape. Why are the Government letting rape survivors down?

Here is a list of questions for the Leader of the House. Will the Government sort out the cladding crisis once and for all, and bring that plan to estimates day next Tuesday? Will the Leader ask the Prime Minister to find his plan for social care, wherever he has mislaid it? Will the Leader ask the Home Secretary to apologise to victims of the Windrush scandal who have still not received compensation?

Will the Leader ask the Health Secretary to come to the House with a plan to give the NHS the resources that it needs? Will he ask the Chancellor to present a

funded plan for the essential measures to tackle climate change? Will the Government give us a vote on aid cuts? Will the Leader ask the Cabinet to do the right thing by rape victims and support Labour's Bill on violence against women? Will the Government stop letting people down?

Finally, Ministers are fond of pivoting to "But the vaccine!" to divert attention. I have news for them: British people are not stupid. They know when the Government are pulling a fast one. They know that it was scientists who researched the vaccine, and it is the NHS that vaccinates. British people deserve better. They deserve the best. The Government, who should be getting on with learning the lessons of the covid crisis by launching an inquiry urgently, are instead shamefully using it as cover for all the ways that they are letting the British people down.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am, as always, very grateful to the hon. Lady for her list of questions, which she was kind enough to give to the House twice—once in her long list and then in a shorter list of much the same questions.

The hon. Lady mentioned the football. I am very sorry that Scotland is no longer in. As I said last week, I had a vested interest in that, but I wish England and Wales well. Let us hope that we have a final, if this is possible—I do not know how the draw will work—between England and Wales. Then we will all be on the edge of our seat, some of us not knowing which part of our heritage to back. There was a very interesting cricket match between New Zealand and India and I congratulate New Zealand on winning the first multinational Test series to make them world Test champions.

I agree with the hon. Lady about the hon. Member for Delyn (Rob Roberts), who is currently suspended. As I have said before, I think that a Member in such a situation should resign. I would not criticise his constituents for feeling that someone who had been found guilty of something so serious was not an ideal representative.

The hon. Lady accused the Government of pulling a fast one with the vaccine. I agree—it was remarkably fast: an incredibly fast delivery and service of a vaccine that means that millions of people have now received both doses. I think that that applies to over 60% of the country and all the highest risk categories have had the opportunity to get both jabs. That is a success of the NHS—indeed, the NHS that has been properly funded by the Conservatives since we have been in office, effectively since 2010. It is a great achievement, for which the British people, in their wisdom—as the hon. Lady rightly said—will thank Her Majesty's Government, under the inspired leadership of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

We come to the variety of issues that the hon. Lady raised. I think she is trying to show up the Leader of the Opposition for not asking such a range of questions and sticking rigorously to one subject on Wednesdays. On building safety and cladding, £5.1 billion of taxpayers' money has been provided to fund the cost of remediating unsafe cladding for leaseholders. The remediation works are either completed or under way on 96% of the high-risk residential buildings that were identified at the start of last year. That is important and continues to be rolled out. It is right that that is being done, and the Building Safety Bill will provide further details on how

we deal with the remaining problem. A great deal of work has already been done, and not all forms of cladding and not all high-rise buildings are dangerous.

The hon. Lady referred to climate change. The Government have a most remarkable and successful record on climate change. From 1990 to 2020, there has been a 43% cut in emissions with 75% economic growth. This is the key. We are not going to be Adullamites; we are not going to be cave dwellers. We are not going to make constituents have miserable lives. We are going to improve the standard of living of the people of this country, and make the country greener, too. That is why Her Majesty's Government is the first major economy to commit in law to net zero by 2050, with the target of cutting emissions by 2035 by 78% on their 1990 levels.

The Committee on Climate Change does not want us to eat meat. I disagree with them. I like eating meat and my constituents like eating meat, and I will not be told by fanatics not to eat meat. Let us be meat eaters. Let us support our agriculture. The Opposition always go on about the need to protect our farmers, then they join forces with the anti-meat brigade. There is a discontinuity in that approach.

As regards Windrush, 13,000 documents have been provided so far and £20 million out of £30 million of compensation has been paid. The Prime Minister apologised yesterday for the terrible situation that was created, but I thought what he said was inspiring: that we should think of Windrush as the Mayflower; as an occasion when something great happened to our nation—something really important when people came—that we should celebrate and rejoice, rather than its being something that is thought about in terms of failure.

On aid, the hon. Lady asks and I give. I do my best as Leader of the House, and on the second allotted estimates day:

"There will be a debate on an estimate relating to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office."

A vote will take place if people shout, "No." There are votes on estimates if people want them. It is a matter for the hon. Lady and the Opposition Whips to decide whether they wish to divide the House.

The Government introduced the end-to-end rape review because of the failures that had become apparent and the need to make things better. It is worth pointing out that the Leader of the Opposition was Director of Public Prosecutions for quite a time, so one would hope that the fact that there are problems in the Crown Prosecution Service does not come as news to him. It is clear that too many victims of rape and sexual violence have been denied the justice they deserve as a result of systemic failings. That is why an action plan has been set out with clear measures for police, prosecutors and courts in order to return the volume of rape cases going through the courts to at least 2016 levels by the end of this Parliament, with steps to improve the quality of investigations, improve the culture of joint working and, for the first time, make sure that each part of the criminal justice system will be held to account through performance scorecards.

This is what the Government are doing—it is real and genuine action—and then we get the cheap point about gibbering and jabbering and drooling Opposition. That is what the Opposition do: they gibber and jabber and drool, and they do this the whole time on all sorts of

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subjects. The Prime Minister gave full and comprehensive answers on rape yesterday—I heard him; I was listening to him—but then he made the general point about the vacuity of Opposition. The hon. Lady sometimes manages to prove my right hon. Friend's points.

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con): I am sure my right hon. Friend is aware that the town of Marlborough in my constituency has the widest high street of any town in England. This proved very helpful on Monday, when I boarded a coach at one end of the high street, which drove me down to the other end and then performed a, frankly hardly necessary, three-point turn before coming back and depositing me outside the iconic Polly Tea Rooms, where I presented the mayor with a certificate confirming Marlborough's status as a coach-friendly town. Will he join me in congratulating the town on this and particularly Belinda Richardson, the brilliant tourism officer for the area, and join me in urging the Government to support not just international tourism, which badly needs more help and sector-specific support, but our domestic tourism industry?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Very much so. I join my hon. Friend in congratulating Belinda Richardson on the work she does for tourism in Wiltshire. Dare I say it, but my general view of Wiltshire is that it is a very nice place to pass through before one gets to Somerset, but I would recommend that people take the opportunity to ask their charabancs to stop, and get out and use the tea rooms in Marlborough. It is of course on the old A4—the old coaching route through to Bath—and they can then go on to Bath, passing through my constituency into the constituency of the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), who I can see is in her usual place. The city she represents is one of the most beautiful in the world.

Mr Speaker: The Perthshire One has been released. Let us go to the SNP spokesperson, Pete Wishart.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Free at last, and it is good to be back. Can I thank the Leader of the House for his support and understanding during my long confinement, and my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) for standing in for me so stoutly, as he always does? Now I am back, I have of course one simple task: to secure something for the Scottish press by gently encouraging the Leader of the House to say something provocative and inflammatory about Scotland. Knowing the Leader of the House as I do, I know that he will oblige me in giving me the headline I seek.

Can I sincerely congratulate the England team on progressing to their historic place and getting beat by Germany on penalties? I also congratulate the Welsh team. It is of course a fantastic feat to get through to the last 16 again. I know the tartan army's most unlikely new recruit will be gutted at Scotland's departure. Apparently, he is to go to the Caledonia bar in Leicester Square, where he has left a "See You Jimmy" wig. It is known to be his because it is attached to a top hat, so I hope he will be dispatched soon to reclaim it.

Will the Leader of the House now bring forward the necessary changes to Standing Orders to rid this place once and for all of the total disaster and absolute waste of time that is English votes for English laws? This piece of uselessness has been in abeyance for over a year, and such is the impact that the quasi-English Parliament has made on this House that nobody even knows it is not in operation any more. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has said that EVEL is a hindrance to the Union, so what better incentive than that to get rid of it once and for all.

Lastly—and this is where I hope the Leader of the House helps me out and obliges me—we need a debate about strengthening the Union, because the Government are simply all over the place and seemingly doing everything possible to help our cause. In one week—this week—they tried to gerrymander the franchise before ruling out once again a vote in which they seek to cheat their way to victory, while the strains of "Strong Britain, great nation" bellow out from the children of England in a gesture that is not in the least bit creepy, ominous or embarrassing, so can I thank him for all his efforts in the course of the past week? As the red wall languishes in ruins and the blue wall is breached, the SNP tartan wall stands strong, impregnable and reinforced by the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is a pleasure to have the hon. Gentleman back, as he has shown with his stylish question. I am all in favour of strengthening the Union and I am glad he is too. I used to think there should be a special seat preserved invariably, as it is in law, for the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil), as he is such an ornament to the Union Parliament. I am beginning to think that something similar should be done for the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), because we have missed him and his style is very welcome in this House.

The Union has been fundamental to the success of the roll-out of the vaccine and, indeed, in dealing with the pandemic, as we have benefited from the furlough payments. It has shown that as one country we are genuinely better together. I think the hon. Gentleman is a little mean, uncharacteristically, about a children's song. He and I are both old enough to remember "There's No One Quite Like Grandma", which was No. 1 on the hit parade in 1980, when I was an 11-year-old. These charming, sweet-natured songs are a feature of public life which pop up every so often, and I think it should be welcomed and one should suffer the little children to come unto us, rather than being a bit miserable about it.

As regards EVEL, evil is to be opposed in favour of good as a general rule, but if we are to take the alternative spelling, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: it has been suspended for the past year and nobody has noticed. There is a fundamental principle, where I share his view, of the absolute equality of every Member of this House, be they Front Bench, Back Bench, Minister, non-Minister or even the Speaker. One of the great advantages of our system of not having a special Speaker's seat is that the Speaker is one of us, even though *primus inter pares*. That principle is of the greatest importance. I will be appearing before the Procedure Committee on Monday and I imagine this will be an important part of the discussion. I want to hear its views, but what was

reported about my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's views is not a million miles from my own.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con) [V]: May I, too, wish the Welsh team good luck on Saturday? I have a Welsh grandfather and a Welsh father, and my family will be cheering loudly. Does the Leader of the House agree that Wales desperately needs a freeport to boost jobs and investment, and that the Welsh Labour Government continue to stall, dither and delay, while opportunities to bring an economic renaissance to Wales and, I hope, to my constituency of Anglesey are squandered?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I agree with my hon. Friend that freeports are very important; the programme will be of great value to the whole UK. I am sorry that the Welsh Government, of course a socialist Government, are dragging their feet on the issue. One would have thought that they would want to encourage innovation, free trade, competition and the prosperity of the whole nation. As highlighted in our "Plan for Wales", published in May, the Government remain committed to establishing at least one freeport in Wales as soon as possible, to attract new businesses and investment, and create jobs and opportunity in areas that need them the most. I recall that she has raised this matter with me before and I will take up her concerns with my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Wales and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Mr Speaker: Let us go to the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, Ian Mearns.

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

May I welcome the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) back to his place? He is truly, in so many different ways, top of the Scots' pops.

I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business, and I hope he will use his best endeavours to give the Backbench Business Committee as much time as he can before the summer recess. We have a range of applications and they are still coming in. Subjects we would like to try to get debates on include: giving babies the best start in life; the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on personal and household debt; the Timpson review and the effect of school exclusions; the failures in the criminal justice system highlighted by the collapse of the trial regarding the Hillsborough disaster; COP26; and progress towards the national ambition to reduce baby loss. And there are many, many more.

May I also let the Leader of the House know that I am, among other things, chair of the all-party group on parental participation in education—Parentkind. I wonder whether he will join me in welcoming this week as the first National Parent Teacher Association Week, which seeks to promote and celebrate the hugely positive impact parents can make in assisting schools in the education of their community's children?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I hear the hon. Gentleman's request for time before the recess. I always try to do my best to facilitate Backbench Business and, indeed, Opposition days, but there is a lot of Government business as well. I

note that it will be Parent Teacher Associations Week. The work done between parents and teachers to improve schools is important, and I thank him for his work on that.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): I join other colleagues in saluting the work of children's hospices, such as Little Havens in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris). Will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the full resumption of face-to-face consultations with general practitioners? They have done magnificent work in challenging times. It is good that more than half of face-to-face consultations have been resumed but, judging by my constituents' emails and letters, they really miss seeing their GP in person.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the fact that it is Children's Hospice Week. The work that people do in children's hospices is truly remarkable. It must be such hard work for the carers to do.

To come to my hon. Friend's question, NHS England and NHS Improvement have regularly issued guidance on the importance of continuing to offer face-to-face appointments. All practices should offer face-to-face consultations where appropriate—I reiterate, all practices. There will be a role for telephone calls and virtual consultations, but face to face, if needed, must happen. The figures are more encouraging. In March 2021, an estimated 28.6 million appointments were booked in general practice in England, of which 15.8 million were face to face, so 55.7% of all appointments.

Mr Speaker: I will just put on the record Derian House Children's Hospice in Chorley, which provides a high-quality service to support families.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): The Leader of the House will be aware of the continued internment, persecution and torture of Chinese Muslims at the hands of the state in that country. This is not a criticism of the Foreign Secretary, because he has come to this House and made a number of statements on the situation there, but not for quite a while, and on the basis that the situation in China is not only not getting any better but certainly getting worse, from everything that we can gather, may we have a statement or even a debate before the summer recess?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point, as I think it is one of the greatest seriousness. The Government have announced measures to ensure that no British organisations are complicit in human rights violations in Xinjiang, including through supply chains. Alongside 44 countries, on 22 June the UK issued a joint statement at the UN General Assembly Human Rights Council expressing deep concern at the situation in Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Tibet. Unfortunately, the Chinese Government are behaving badly in all those areas.

The raid on *Apple Daily*, the independent newspaper in Hong Kong, is something we should be very concerned about, because of the guarantees that were given in the joint declaration to the people of Hong Kong. I will raise the hon. Gentleman's point with my right hon.

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Friend the Foreign Secretary. I cannot promise a statement, but the hon. Gentleman is right to keep the pressure up on this Government about our relations with China, which are of fundamental importance.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend is among the most forthright defenders of the rights of this House and an eloquent supporter—perhaps the most eloquent supporter in this House—of the democratic principle, so when will he respond positively to the statement that you, Mr Speaker, made from your Chair at 3.30 pm on 14 June, when you instructed the Government to bring forward a vote on the breaking of our promise on the 0.7% commitment?

My right hon. Friend knows perfectly well that the estimates are not the right route—the estimates have never been voted down—and, in that connection, I refer him to a speech made from that Dispatch Box on 24 July 1905 by the then Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour, which set out the position on estimates very clearly. In forthright defence of this House, will my right hon. Friend ensure that before the summer there is a vote on this terrible decision that was made by the Government, which has done such damage to our international reputation and which is leading to the avoidable death of more than 100,000 people?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The estimates are voteable. There will be a full day's debate on the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, which will be an opportunity for my right hon. Friend to raise any issues that he wishes to on that occasion. There can be votes on estimates, and there have been votes on estimates. It is a perfectly reasonable parliamentary procedure to use. So the Government are facilitating the debate that my right hon. Friend asks for, but we are also following the law that he will be aware of that was passed in relation to the 0.7% commitment, which requires that a statement be laid before this House if that target is not met in a particular calendar year. The Government are following and will follow—have every intention of following—the law that was passed by Parliament; that is what Her Majesty's Government do.

But in these financial circumstances it is absolutely right that we are reducing our overseas aid commitments. We have seen a significant decline in our national income. We have faced £407 billion being needed within this country to maintain the economy during the pandemic. We remain one of the most generous donors in the world, with a level of overseas aid higher than that which any socialist Government in this country's history have achieved—something that they carp about now but when in office did nothing about.

So we are delivering; we have delivered, we are right to do so, and there will be a debate, because it is always the right of this House to debate the subjects that it sees fit to debate. If the Opposition want other debates they can have them on Opposition days; there have been no such Opposition day debates, so clearly the Opposition do not want to be saying to the people in Batley and Spen that they want to spend their money abroad, do they? So they are running away from it, and the Backbench Business Committee has not had a debate either, but the Government are providing one in due course.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): May I add to the shadow Leader of the House's list of ways in which this Government are letting people down by saying that health and care workers in Wales were given a very well-deserved bonus by the Welsh Labour Government in recognition of their service and sacrifice during the pandemic, but this Government have chosen to take most of it away from those on the lowest incomes by reducing their universal credit? So may we have an opportunity to convey to Department for Work and Pensions Ministers just what a disgrace this is?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The pay rise in the NHS and the public sector generally is more generous for the lowest-paid workers, and that is obviously right, but as I was saying to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), there are limited resources and we have to be realistic about this. Our national debt has been growing at a very rapid rate because of the funding needed to pay for the pandemic, and this country—this nation—has to live within its means. I am afraid the socialists always forget that they eventually run out of other people's money.

Gareth Davies (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): In January the Foreign Secretary said that the Government intend to strengthen the Modern Slavery Act 2015; can the Leader of the House update the House as to when we might get the opportunity to debate that, and does he agree that one way in which we could strengthen the Act is by tackling inadvertent exposure to modern slavery in investment portfolios?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Government are committed to introducing financial penalties for organisations that fail to meet their legal obligations under section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act; that will require changes to primary legislation, which will be introduced when parliamentary time allows. In March 2021 the Government launched an online modern slavery statement registry, and we are now encouraging all organisations in the scope of the legislation to submit their statement to the registry, but in future we will mandate organisations in scope of section 54 of the Act to submit their statement to the registry as part of the planned changes to strengthen the legislation. I will of course pass on my hon. Friend's concerns to the Home Secretary.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The Leader of the House has accused the Opposition of moaning and complaining. Let us just call that opposition—and clearly he is not suggesting that a one-party state is a better system, although I sometimes wonder.

Because the Government have changed the pre-covid target for patient care volumes, many of my constituents have found it very hard to get NHS dentist treatments; they can get a check-up but they cannot get the treatment. What was a difficult situation has been made worse and lots of people go untreated. These changes have meant that many dentists are only able to offer treatment privately, which is simply unaffordable for many of my constituents. Can we have a statement from the relevant Minister on what the Government are doing to support dental practices that offer NHS services?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. The job of the Opposition to oppose, but that does not always mean that such opposition is well informed or

particularly enlightening. I think it is fair for the Government to point that out. For the record, no, I would not want a one-party state; I happen to think that good opposition leads to better government. If only we actually—no, I will not go into that. I would like to come to the hon. Lady's question, because it is of fundamental importance.

I think all of us, as constituency MPs, have been in touch with our local dentistry services, which have been finding things difficult. The Government are continuing to work closely with the NHS to increase access to dental services while protecting staff and patients from covid-19 infection.

The latest published annual figures show an increase in the number of dentists delivering NHS services. Nearly 7,000 NHS dental providers in England have received over 400 million free personal protective equipment items via a dedicated PPE portal, which is helping to ensure safe treatment. We are maintaining exemptions from NHS dental charges for the most vulnerable and nearly half of all dental treatments—over 17 million—were provided free of charge in the latest year. There is obviously more to be done, but, in these very difficult circumstances, headway is being made. I will however pass the hon. Lady's comments on to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) [V]: Canons Drive in my constituency is part of a conservation area with 300-year-old trees. There are unique examples of wellingtonia, redwood and cedar trees. Harrow Council is considering an application to remove the tree preservation orders on the trees, which would eventually lead to them being felled because insurance companies are claiming that they are causing damage to the neighbouring housing. May we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on protecting tree preservation orders and preventing the felling of these unique specimens that were part of the Duke of Chandos's historical estate?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. Is it not right for me to comment on individual cases, but as a general principle, trees are objects of great beauty and their antiquity tells us something. It reminds us of our nation's history and our island's story. It is obviously for councils to make such decisions, but damage being caused by a protected tree is not in itself a justification for felling that tree. In the first instance, my hon. Friend might want to apply for an Adjournment debate on these three particular trees.

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): The Trussell Trust's "State of Hunger" report has found that the pandemic has plunged people into even deeper forms of debt, with almost 95% of those referred to food banks experiencing destitution and unable to afford the essentials. May we have a statement or even a debate in Government time to consider what plan we have to prioritise and tackle this scandalous need for food in the 21st century rather than talking about more royal yachts?

Mr Rees-Mogg: May I thank the hon. Gentleman for continuing to come to business questions even when he is not formally representing his party? It was a great pleasure to cross swords with him in the last few weeks.

The Government are making great efforts and have made great efforts over the last decade to help families in poverty. Since 2010, a full-time living wage employee is now £5,400 better off. Just before the pandemic in 2019-20, household income saw its strongest annual growth for nearly 20 years. Inevitably, it has been set back by the pandemic, but the uplift in universal credit has been a help. The figures on total people in poverty, children in poverty and pensioners in poverty are all very significantly improved on 2010. I accept that there is more work to be done, but the picture is not all doom and gloom.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Last Saturday morning, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Lia Nici), I attended an event organised by the Grimsby and Cleethorpes Water Rats, who, along with other things, run a junior relay team who at this very moment—if all has gone to plan—are involved in a cross-channel swim. We were joined by Brenda Fisher BEM, one of Grimsby's famous daughters, who swam the channel in 1951. Will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate in Government time in which we can consider the work of such voluntary organisations that organise structured, disciplined routines for our young people and provide so much for our local communities?

Mr Rees-Mogg: First, I congratulate the Grimsby and Cleethorpes water rats on their brave and bold endeavour and Brenda Fisher on what she did 70 years ago. Of course, my hon. Friend will not be taking part personally, I believe, because it is widely known in Cleethorpes that he walks on water and therefore does not need to swim the channel. He is absolutely right to highlight the good work done by voluntary organisations and I am grateful to him for doing so at business questions.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): My constituent Alex recently received a letter from the Department for Work and Pensions with a personal independence payment review form requesting supporting evidence that is difficult to acquire under pandemic conditions due to a lack of regular GP appointments. This is not long after he received a PIP extension. According to the benefits advice service Benefits and Work, this has been a persistent issue in recent months, with many PIP claimants reporting similar problems across the UK. Will the Leader of the House schedule a debate or a statement in Government time on the execution of PIP reviews during the pandemic?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am always happy to facilitate right hon. and hon. Members' inquiries about individual constituents, so if the hon. Lady wants to send me the details of Alex, I will ensure that they go to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. The answer that I gave earlier about GP appointments applied to England, because this is obviously a devolved matter, but I reiterate that face-to-face appointments are available if needed and appointments more generally are available, so I do not think that that should be, at this stage in the pandemic, an obstacle to getting any information that is necessary. On the hon. Lady's general point on PIP reviews, I think that DWP has worked extraordinarily well during the pandemic to make sure that people who need money have got it in a timely fashion.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab) [V]: The Climate Change Committee's annual report published today is stark. It mentions serious gaps in policy and strategy, lack of detail around key areas such as planning, decarbonisation of homes, oil and gas and even failing to produce a net zero strategy in the year that we host COP. This is a Government who are quick to promise but fail at every turn to deliver, and the longer that they delay, the more severe and irreversible the damage becomes and the more likely it is that we suffer serious drought, heatwaves and floods, with the immense impact that has on people and livelihoods. To ensure that climate action is at the heart of all policies and all Departments, will the Leader of the House agree to allowing for far more time for this Parliament to debate the report and to scrutinise and properly hold this failing Government to account?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As I said earlier, I am not interested in eating less meat; I want to eat more meat and I want my constituents to be able to as well. The Government's record since 2010 is formidable. They have reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 26% between 2010 and 2019. Renewable electricity generation has more than quadrupled since 2010. The year 2019 was the cleanest on record with more than half of UK electricity coming from low-carbon technologies. As I said earlier, we have cut emissions by 43% since 1990, with 75% economic growth. We are targeting a reduction in emissions by 78% by 2035 compared with 1990 levels. We are on the right path to net zero by 2050, but we have to do this with economic growth. We are not fanatics; we are sensible and proportionate in what we are trying to do and we have been doing it with considerable success since 2010.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con) [V]: Some of us have noticed that the English votes for English laws provisions have been suspended and we regret that they still are, but will the Leader of the House at least commit to keeping his promise that the changes introduced to respond to the pandemic will be temporary and will be reversed, and, if he wishes to change the EVEL rules, that there will be a vote in this Parliament to do so?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Any change to EVEL Standing Orders—and it is worth bearing in mind that the EVEL Standing Orders take up slightly over 10% of all our Standing Orders. They are particularly impenetrable. The learned Clerks never struggle, but if it were not for the fact that the learned Clerks never struggle, even they might struggle with the intricacies of EVEL. But my hon. Friend is absolutely spot on: these changes could not take place without the support of the House.

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab) [V]: Yesterday, I met my constituent Anthony at the travel day of action. His business, like many others in the sector, has been extremely hard hit by the Government's failure to stand up for the travel sector. He told me that we urgently need greater clarity on how countries can be added to the green list, more information on the transatlantic taskforce and a proper package of financial support. Can we have a debate in Government time on what the Government will do to save the travel industry?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As I have said before, if the hon. Lady wishes to raise specific points about Anthony, her constituent, I will always try to facilitate those being taken up with the right Government Minister. The Opposition are slightly inconsistent on this, because on the one hand they complained bitterly that the border was not closed fast enough, and on the other hand, they want the travel industry to be supported. Those are two conflicting objectives. I point out that there has been very significant support for all industry, including £407 billion of taxpayers' money. We have protected 14 million jobs and people through the furlough and self-employment schemes at a cost of £88.5 billion, and the travel industry is obviously eligible for those. Everyone wants to get back to normal—to normal travel and normal routines—but the pandemic is still raging in many parts of the world, and it has to be done in a proportionate way.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): Current covid policy dictates that if a single child tests positive for coronavirus at school, the entire class is sent home and forced to isolate for 10 days. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is risk aversion gone mad and that we owe it to our children to get back to normal? Will he please raise this as a matter of urgency with No. 10 and the Department of Health and Social Care?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, because he was kind enough to warn me of his question and therefore I have had the opportunity to find out what the precise policy is and put it on the record. While in some cases a whole class might be required to isolate, we know that many settings are using seating plans and other means to identify close contacts and minimise the number of individuals who need to isolate, so it is not an absolute rule, but a matter of judgment. I hope people will use their judgment wisely.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Further to the question from the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), no one is taken in by the Leader of the House's sophistry on this subject. Everybody knows that he is seeking to avoid giving the House a meaningful vote on whether it agrees with the Government's decision temporarily to reduce the amount of aid being sent to the poorest countries in the world. There is no need for him to dilate widely on this; he used to occupy a semi-recumbent position over there and regularly criticised the Executive for exactly this kind of jiggery-pokery. Why does he not come clean with his own side and allow a proper vote—not one rolled up with all such other expenditure in the estimates, but one that would truly meet the test set for him by Mr Speaker?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I object to what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Trivialising the estimates does not understand their importance. One of the fundamental things that this House does is approve the expenditure proposed by the Government. It is lost in the mists of constitutional time. It is a debate on the whole of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's budget, and it is possible to vote against it. It is a full day's debate, but I challenge the Opposition again: if they want to debate this so much, we have given them lots of Opposition days, so why have they not used one on it? It is because they do not really want to get this message across to

their voters, because it is a policy that has enormous support with the electorate. Our ultimate bosses like this policy. They back this policy and they think it is proportionate under the economic circumstances. The law set out very clearly what the requirements were with the 0.7%: if the target is not met, a statement must be laid before this House. If the hon. Gentleman does not like the law, he should have put down an amendment when the Bill was passed.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): I had expected that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster would by now have come to the House to set out the balance of arguments over covid status certification and the ethics, practicality or necessity of such a project. Does my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House share my view that if terminus day is to live up to its name, there will be no need for this scheme to go ahead?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As I said last week, the terminus is Paddington, not Crewe. It is the end of the line, not an interchange, and that must be the key part of terminus day. Lots of evidence has been gathered in relation to covid status certificates. Final decisions have not been made, but the Government will update the House on the road map as it continues. My hon. Friend's point on terminus is right; it is an end point, and so it should be.

Anum Qaisar-Javed (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Yesterday in the news, we found out that this Government used taxpayers' money that should have been spent on covid recovery on polling on independence. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) had a two-year battle with the Government and they are now having to release information on secret polling. This Government are also attempting to change the franchise on who can vote in an independence referendum. Then, on Friday, we had the song, "One Britain One Nation" that young people across the country are supposed to be going to sing, but in fact many Scottish schoolkids will not even be at school. I request that my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) does not remove the Whip from me, but it is actually quite a catchy song, I must admit. I am sorry, but I do not actually have a question, only a request—that the Leader of the House comes to Scotland to visit my constituency of Airdrie and Shotts. I extend that invite to all Government Members, because it turns out that they are fantastic advocates for Scottish independence.

Mr Speaker: Can I just say it is business questions and it might be helpful to have a question? I think you did have one asking the Leader of the House to come and visit, so I am sure that will do fine.

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is an offer too good to refuse, Mr Speaker. I very much hope that I shall be able to visit the hon. Lady's constituency. The work undertaken on attitudes to the Union was a reasonable thing to poll on. It is really important when developing a communication strategy to work out how it will land most effectively. There was a great deal of work to be done to communicate the messages about staying at home, working from home, wearing facemasks, and so on and so forth. I think this was completely proper and justifiable and I imagine that other Governments in similar circumstances would have done much the same.

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): A couple of weeks ago, at my new constituency office in the heart of Bolsover town centre, I was delighted to launch the Bolsover high street taskforce. Along with local stakeholders, I look forward to helping to unleash Bolsover's tourism potential and delivering a town centre that all residents can be proud of for many decades to come. With that in mind, can we have a debate in Government time on the importance of supporting businesses in our high streets and making sure that we have sustainable high streets for many decades to come?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think the knowledge that my hon. Friend will be in Bolsover high street will have the crowds flocking there for selfies and autographs, and to deliver some election literature in due course. The high streets taskforce has meant that 70 local authorities will receive targeted, in-person support as they battle against changing consumer habits, and I am delighted that Bolsover is benefiting from this. In addition, 57 local areas have been confirmed as recipients of our £830 million future high streets fund, which will support local areas to prepare long-term strategies for their high streets and town centres. Generally speaking, if MPs are in their high streets, that does encourage people to visit them, and they can do little constituency surgeries there, Mr Speaker—I am sure that happens in Chorley all the time.

Mr Speaker: Of course it does.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab) [V]: Schools spend the pupil premium on things like extra teaching staff, breakfast clubs, laptops, and tailoring support to their most disadvantaged pupils. However, due to the Government's inexplicable decision to base pupil premium funding for the next financial year on data from October rather than using the up-to-date January figures as usual, north-east schools could lose out on up to £7.6 million for the 5,700 north-east pupils who became eligible for free school meals between October and January. The Education Secretary has ignored pleas from the North East Child Poverty Commission and others to put this right. May I urge the Leader of the House to make time for a debate in Government time on ensuring that schools in regions such as the north-east that have experienced some of worst learning loss do not lose out on even more funding?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady missed a chance to question the Secretary of State for Education, who was here on Monday. Obviously there always have to be cut-off dates to allow for figures to be run and for decisions to be made, and after those cut-off dates there will then be the next year's figures to work on for future years. All government depends on data on particular dates, and this is not unreasonable.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): At half-past 3 last Sunday morning, police officers responded to a call about a man vandalising a bus stop in Kettering town centre. Officers were surrounded by a gang as they arrived at the scene, and an unruly mob turned on them. A 22-year-old man was arrested for attempting to kick one of the officers; a 21-year-old man was also arrested on suspicion of assault. That sort of violence against police officers going about their duty in difficult

[Mr Philip Hollobone]

circumstances to protect the public is completely unacceptable, but sadly it is a growing problem. I know that the Government have recently increased the penalties for assaults on emergency workers, but may we have a statement from the Government that the courts will not shy away from applying those stiffer sentences when perpetrators are brought before them?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend raises a very serious and troubling matter. It is disgraceful that these attacks on the police should take place. As he knows, clause 2 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill will increase the maximum penalty for assaulting an emergency worker from 12 months' to two years' imprisonment. The aim is to ensure that the law provides emergency workers with sufficient protection to enable them to carry out their duties and that the options available to the courts to sentence offenders who assault emergency workers are proportionate, reflect the seriousness of the offences committed and provide the victims with a sense that justice has been done.

Naturally, the courts are independent, but it is right that my hon. Friend raises the matter in the House so that the general public concern is taken on board across the nation. He may want to raise the issue again at Justice questions on Monday, but I will certainly pass on his concerns to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): There is a crisis in the haulage industry, with a chronic driver shortage that the Government have been warned about time and again. Martin Reid, the Scottish director of the Road Haulage Association, has said:

"For a long time, we have been running short of the numbers required for haulage drivers, so throwing Covid-19, Brexit and recent tax procedures into the mix has created a perfect storm."

There is a very real concern that the sector will be unable to maintain integrated supply chains this summer and beyond, so can we have a debate on promoting careers in driving and on what contingency plans may be required in the short term?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman has just missed Transport questions, where he might have got a more comprehensive answer from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. [Interruption.] He was there, so he could have asked the Secretary of State.

Obviously it is important that we have the right training in place and that we have efficiency in driving tests. There is a backlog with driving tests for all motorists, and it is important that that is made up as soon as is practical.

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con): When my constituent Bas Breeze visited the National Memorial Arboretum, he was very disappointed that among the many monuments there was none to the territorial soldier. He rightly makes the point that these volunteers have made a huge contribution to the British Army's efforts, particularly in the world wars. Will my right hon. Friend please secure a statement on whether that might be rectified so that their contribution can be recognised?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the matter, especially in the same week as Armed Forces Day. The Territorial Force, as it was in the first world war, the Territorial Army, as it was in the second world war, and the reserves, as they are today, are commemorated at the National Memorial Arboretum. Territorial Force, Territorial Army and reserve units are integral to the same regiment or corps as their regular counterparts and are therefore commemorated equally with those individual regiments and corps memorials. For example, the Royal Artillery memorial garden at the NMA commemorates all those who have served with the Royal Regiment of Artillery, be they regular, territorial, conscript or reserve; no distinction is made. If my hon. Friend wishes to raise the matter further, Defence questions are on 5 July.

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): Since the Conservative party came into power in 2010, per-pupil school funding has been cut by nearly 10%, more than 750 youth centres have been closed, more than 800 public libraries have been closed, more than 1,000 Sure Start children's centres have been closed, the education maintenance allowance has been scrapped, university maintenance grants have been scrapped, tuition fees have trebled, a two-child welfare cap has been introduced and more than £34 billion has been cut from social security. It was not the phrase "white privilege" that did this; it was the Conservative party. Will the Leader of the House give Government time to discuss the real causes of working class kids—white, black and brown alike—being neglected, not the nonsense that his colleagues are spouting this week?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is worth reading paragraph 29 of the excellent report by the Education Committee. It says:

"Schools should consider whether the promotion of politically controversial terminology, including White Privilege, is consistent with their duties under the Equality Act 2010. The Department should take steps to ensure that young people are not inadvertently being inducted into political movements when what is required is balanced, age-appropriate discussion and a curriculum that equips young people to thrive in diverse and multi-cultural communities throughout their lives and work. The Department should issue clear guidance for schools and other Department-affiliated organisations receiving grants from the Department on how to deliver teaching on these complex issues in a balanced, impartial and age-appropriate way."

The Government's record is a remarkably successful one. We have committed more than £3 billion to education recovery. Some £1.4 billion has been announced recently, including £1 billion for tutoring and £400 million for teacher training. That is on top of a £14.4 billion three-year school funding settlement, which will see a rise of more than £840 per pupil by 2022-23, compared with 2019-20. The pupil premium will increase to more than £2.5 billion this year, which will enable schools to support pupils with extra teaching, academic support or activities such as breakfast clubs. This is a proud record. The work done by the Education Committee has been extremely helpful in highlighting the fact that those who have really been left behind have not been left behind because of racial consequences, and that they need more support. It is also worth noting that, since 2010, the number of children in absolute poverty has fallen by 100,000, so, overall, it is a way of seeing things forward and ensuring that children get the education and support that they need.

Robert Largan (High Peak) (Con): I recently spent a sunny Saturday afternoon at Charlesworth & Chisworth Cricket Club on verification duty for a world-record attempt, as James Butterworth ran the longest-ever bowling run-up: over 5 km, going through two different parliamentary constituencies. After all that, thankfully, he did not bowl a wide. This was all done in aid of raising funds for new practice nets for the club. With that in mind, can we have a debate on grassroots sports and support for them in this country, so that fantastic clubs such as Charlesworth & Chisworth can get the equipment they need to produce the next generation of first class test cricketers?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I believe that it is Yorkshire Tea National Cricket Week, so it is a good occasion on which to be raising this matter. The previous recordholder was Sameer Khan Yousufi, who ran two and a half miles before getting to bowl. I am a bit worried about the over rates—if they keep on bowling at that rate the dismal rates that we get in test matches will be even slower, though I do wonder quite how fast Wes Hall or Michael Holding might have bowled had their run-ups been even longer than they were. I am also quite intrigued by the commentary. How would even Henry Blofeld keep going for the quarter of an hour or so—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) heckles me to say that she is sure he would. She is probably right, but it would be quite a challenge to keep it up for all that time. It is absolutely brilliant that we should have this record. I am glad that a wide was not bowled and hope that it was not a no ball either. We should do everything we can to encourage grassroots cricket; it is part of our nation's story, something that we can be proud of and one of our great exports to the rest of the world.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): That is the most incomprehensible answer that I have ever heard the Lord President give, but I appreciate that that is my failing, not his, in an understanding of the subject. I will now suspend the House for three minutes, so that preparations can be made for the next item of business.

11.38 am

Sitting suspended.

Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership

11.42 am

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

I am delighted to open this debate on our future membership of the trans-Pacific partnership. Five years after the British people voted to leave the European Union, we are delivering on the promise of Brexit. After taking back control of our trade policy, we have been opening up the world's largest and fastest growing markets to the best of British exports by negotiating an unprecedented number of trade deals. We have struck deals covering 68 countries plus the EU, worth £744 billion. We have gone further and faster to champion our interests in deals with Japan and the European economic area.

This month, we are writing the biggest chapter yet of our trading story. We brought world leaders together at the G7 to promote free and fair trade. We reached agreement in principle with Australia—our first ever trade deal negotiated from scratch—and we are working to agreement in principle with New Zealand by August. We have drawn a line under the long-running 17-year Airbus-Boeing dispute. Now, the United Kingdom is making history as the first country to negotiate its accession to the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership. This group of nations covers half a billion people across 11 economies, worth £9 trillion in global GDP. On Tuesday, I presented our plans to Parliament, including our scoping analysis. We know that the richest opportunities lie in the Asia-Pacific region, where about two thirds of the middle class are expected to be in 2030, driving an appetite for high-quality goods and services that we produce here in the UK. We can see that in the fact that our exports to the CPTPP are expected to grow by 65%, or £37 billion, over this decade. That is in addition to the static comparative benefits of the deal, which are estimated at £1.8 billion of GDP.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): First, may I congratulate the Secretary of State on all she does to bring about these trade deals? She will be aware of the fact that CPTPP countries such as Australia, Canada, Japan and Singapore are the largest UK partners for some 80% of UK trade. It is important to get new deals, but it is also important to build on the deals with the countries we have. Can the Secretary of State assure us that that will be part of the Government's strategy for the future?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The CPTPP enables us to have much deeper trading relationships, particularly in areas of UK strength such as digital, data and services, where there are very strong chapters on those issues.

The fact is that the likely benefits of joining the CPTPP are much greater as the economic centre of gravity shifts towards Asia and as more countries join the agreement. Joining this partnership will position us at the heart of the action in global trade. The CPTPP is

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exactly the kind of free trade area the UK wants to be part of: it is liberalising on tariffs and other trade barriers; it has high standards on labour and the environment; it is ambitious in digital and services; and it is tailor-made to help us to cement the UK's status as a global hub for services, digital and advanced manufacturing. Our exporters will no longer have to pay tariffs on 99.9% of their goods, from Scotch whisky and Stoke-on-Trent ceramics to cars made in the north of England and the midlands. Our farmers will benefit from a strong appetite for beef and lamb in Asia, with CPTPP markets expected to account for a quarter of global meat demand by 2030. Our manufacturers will enjoy common standards and rules of origin, securing flexibility, reliability and lower prices on inputs.

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that if British business is to invest it needs confidence, and that that confidence will come by restating our commitment to free trade by diversifying our trade offer, generating new jobs and bringing more stability to the jobs we already have?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A key benefit of the CPTPP is increased resilience. It means that our exporters will not have all their eggs in one basket. They will have options about where they send their goods. It will also mean our importers are able to rely on strong relationships in countries which follow the rules and have good standards in areas such as the environment and worker protection.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. I have been crunching the numbers. If we look at our trade deficit, we see that this agreement will bring in just £300,000 a day in exports compared with the £11 million a day we are losing in our deal with the EU. Should her efforts not be put towards ensuring that the deal is comprehensive so that we can trade across the channel, in view of the carbon impact of trading across the world?

Elizabeth Truss: The logical position, if the hon. Lady does not believe in trading across the world, is that she only believes in having protectionism for the UK. The reality is that trade with the EU has bounced back. This is about positioning Britain for the future, and where the growing markets of the future are. We are expecting trade with CPTPP countries to increase by 65% by 2030. The hon. Lady is harking back to the past; we are looking at where the future opportunities are for Britain.

As the world's second largest services exporter, we will be perfectly placed to benefit from strong provisions securing the free flow of data and easier business travel to CPTPP countries. True to the British people's priorities, there are no strings attached to this deal that would force us to cede control over our laws, our borders or our money. Instead, the UK will join 11 fellow sovereign nations in one of the world's largest free trading areas. This House can be proud that the UK is at the front of the queue and set to be the CPTPP's first new member since it was established in 2018. This is a testament to the ties that we have forged with our Pacific partners

and to the UK's fierce commitment to high standards. It also shows that our independent trade policy is not just about the here and now, but about the long term. As part of the CPTPP, we can strengthen it as a bulwark against unfair trading practices. Together, we can bring home the benefits of free trade for all our people.

Our accession will have full parliamentary scrutiny. We committed to publishing our negotiating objectives, consultation response and scoping assessments at the outset of our negotiations, and we did that earlier this week. All of this will be fully scrutinised, including by the new Trade and Agriculture Commission. That puts us in a very strong position compared with comparable parliamentary democracies. Five years on from the referendum, we are demonstrating what global Britain is capable of. We are back as a major force for global trade, striking more trade deals than any other nation has been able to manage.

We have the world knocking on our door, eager to do business with Britain. That is why I am working with allies worldwide, from the United States to India and from the Gulf states to Japan, to break down barriers to trade, and we are now seizing the shimmering opportunity offered by this jewel of the Pacific, the CPTPP. Joining will do more than ever to realise our vision of global Britain as we embrace new markets while levelling up every region and nation of the UK. That is the bright future awaiting us as part of the CPTPP, and I commend these negotiations to the House.

11.52 am

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for holding this debate. I do, however, feel obliged to point out that she has brought us here today to discuss Britain's accession to an agreement which, as things stand, and according to the Government's own figures, will add a maximum of 0.017% to UK GDP, yet on Monday, when the House discussed the urgent threat to the British steel industry, which is worth six times that amount to our GDP and has 34,000 jobs directly at stake, the Secretary of State could not even be bothered to turn up. Let me just say, on behalf of all the Labour MPs who spoke in that debate and the steel communities they represent, that I hope the Secretary of State was watching and that in the six days we have left before our steel safeguards expire, she will listen to reason, accept that she has been wrong, and take emergency action to keep our steel safeguards before it is too late.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I wholeheartedly agree, on behalf of the steelworkers and steel industry in my constituency, with the point that my right hon. Friend makes. The Government are pretending that there is nothing they can do on steel safeguards, leaving our markets unprotected and undermining our whole industry. This is a real chance for the Government now, and at this point in time our UK steel industry cannot afford for it to fail.

Emily Thornberry: My hon. Friend is quite right. I recommend that the Secretary of State read the speeches of many Members in that last debate. I have to say that it reminds me of reading, in March, the Department for International Trade's report "Global Britain, local jobs", in which it purported to tell us how many jobs in each

region and constituency were dependent on trade. It did not mention any jobs in steel or agriculture. I thought at the time that that was a mistake, but I fear that actually it looks more like a forecast.

We ought, perhaps, to turn to the CPTPP. I have three key quotes to put to the Secretary of State from esteemed figures in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, all of which I hope will illuminate what is actually going on in the accession process—certainly rather more than the Government have to date.

The Secretary of State will recognise my first quote, because it was said directly to her last July when she was discussing the CPTPP with the former Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper. “The UK,” he told her,

“is going to have to identify what are its offensive interests and what are its defensive red flags... You can seek tailor-made provisions,” but

“the other countries are going to have a...take-it-or-leave-it approach...That is a big decision for the UK.”

It is indeed a big decision, but before the negotiations have even begun, the Secretary of State has apparently conceded defeat. Indeed, reading the Government’s so-called negotiating objectives, this appears to be the only negotiation in British history in which the objective is to accept everything the other side wants as quickly as possible, with not one single demand of our own. There is not one single clause in the thousands of pages that make up the agreement where the Government will seek any exemptions or amendments to reflect Britain’s interests. That is the literal definition of being rule takers and not rule makers.

Even when the Government make a veiled reference in their document to the prospect of China joining the CPTPP, the best they can offer in response is the assertion:

“We would only ever support applicants who meet CPTPP’s high standards on rules-based free and fair trade.”

In other words, they have no opinion of their own on whether a back-door deal with China is an acceptable prospect for Britain, and no concerns at all about the Uyghurs, slave labour or genocide. All they can say instead is that China will have to obey the same trade rules as us. That weak acceptance from the Government that we cannot change the CPTPP rules is deeply worrying when it comes to protecting our NHS, our food standards and other defensive concerns.

It is also deeply frustrating when it comes to promoting the interests of British business and the adoption of British standards in the trans-Pacific region. Why are the Government not using the accession process to press for improvements to the current provisions on financial services, small businesses and mutual recognition of qualifications? Why is the Secretary of State not arguing for new chapters to cover educational exports, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, and co-operation on new technology? Why are the Government not seeking to strengthen the agreement when it comes to protection of labour rights, animal welfare and the environment? The Government are doing none of those things.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): The right hon. Lady must know that the CPTPP preserves the member states’ right to regulate for themselves. Will she not accept that that is one of the attractions of these arrangements compared with the EU, which we have just left precisely to recover control of our own regulation?

Emily Thornberry: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but it is palpable nonsense. We can have whatever standards we want in our own country, but if we are allowing those standards to be undermined by cheap imports that are made to different standards, we are essentially saying to our producers or our farmers, “You can keep our standards and you can go out of business.” Frankly, every other country in the world negotiates trade agreements in the interests of that country, but at the moment this country seems to be negotiating trade agreements in order to prove a political point, and that political point is that Brexit works. Frankly, I think that we should be putting our country’s interests first and foremost, rather than petty point-scoring. This is very dangerous behaviour.

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con): Will the right hon. Lady give way on the petty point-scoring point?

Emily Thornberry: The hon. Gentleman is an expert at it, and I will of course give way.

Craig Williams: I defer to the right hon. Lady’s knowledge of that. May I ask her directly whether she will go further, beyond the petty point-scoring, and tell us whether the Labour party supports joining this partnership or not?

Emily Thornberry: I will of course get to that in the later part of my speech and I hope that the hon. Gentleman listens carefully.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): Earlier, the Secretary of State said that people are knocking down the door to do business with Britain, but is not it time we were a bit fussier about who we let through our door, especially when it comes to genocide, forced labour, and people who want to trade with us who we should morally object to?

Emily Thornberry: My hon. Friend makes a good point that Ministers should remember a little more actively.

The Government are joining the agreement with no ambition to improve its deficiencies, no attempt to deal with its threats and no effort to make it work in Britain’s interests. The trouble is that, when someone goes into a negotiation looking as if they are willing to accept anything in the deal, they come across to the other party as if they will do anything to get it. That brings me to the second quote, by the Secretary of State’s Australian counterpart, Dan Tehan. He said of the recent negotiations:

“We’ve been very clear with the UK that... they’ll need a gold standard FTA with us if they’re going to have a realistic chance of joining the CPTPP” because

“We have a very large say in what accession looks like”.

There it is: the man the Secretary of State threatened with an uncomfortable chair ended up holding her over a barrel.

Let us look at the consequences. As the price for UK access to the CPTPP and the 0.017% that will be added to GDP, the Secretary of State was willing to accept

[Emily Thornberry]

every single demand from Australia when it came to tariff-free, quota-free access for their cheap and cruelly produced meat.

The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands): Oh!

Emily Thornberry: The Minister says, “Oh! Oh!” Does he know what mulesing is? I suggest that he finds out, then looks us in the eye and tells us whether there are cruel practices in Australia.

No wonder Dan Tehan said that the Australian National Farmers Federation was “over the moon” when he told them about the deal he had struck, while farmers up and down Britain curse it as a betrayal. Kit Papworth is the director of a farm business in Norfolk—perhaps he is a constituent of the Secretary of State’s. He said:

“The deal is an absolute dereliction of everything that farmers have been promised... It is farmers being sold down the river once again... while agriculture... is being left... to die.”

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I thought it was surprising that we did not hear more from Secretary of State, as a former EFRA Secretary, about farming standards. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the concerns that she has so eloquently expressed make it all the more important that we have proper scrutiny of the deal and not something that just rubber-stamps it at the last minute?

Emily Thornberry: That is absolutely right. I saw an article in *The Daily Telegraph* this week by Jeremy Warner, which said, “It is vitally important that FTAs are pursued in a transparent and accountable manner that takes fully on board the interests, fears and concerns of domestic constituencies and affected sectors. The battle for free trade needs to be won as much at home as abroad.” That is why we need to know whether we will get a proper debate and votes in this place. The Secretary of State has said nothing about whether Parliament will get a vote either on the negotiating objectives or on a deal at the end of the day.

Marco Longhi: The shadow Secretary of State quotes articles. Does she agree with the article in the *Socialist Worker* that states that protectionism will not protect workers’ jobs?

Emily Thornberry: No.

Let us move on to New Zealand and Canada. Having seen what has happened with Australia, they will surely demand the same deal for their farmers as the price of support for UK accession to CPTPP. Handshake by handshake, the future of British farming will be sold.

The threat to our country’s interests lies not just in what the Secretary of State is willing to do, or in the interests that she is willing to sacrifice as the price of admission to the agreement, but in what will happen once we are in the door. That brings me to my next quote, which is typically pithy and to the point, from New Zealand’s Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. She said that investor-state dispute settlement “is a dog”.

When she inherited the CPTPP negotiations at the last minute in 2017, the new New Zealand Prime Minister was willing to jeopardise the entire process to demand that New Zealand be exempted from the provisions on investor-state dispute settlement. She did not want the

threat of lawsuits in the name of wealthy foreign corporations restricting her ability to introduce policies for the protection of consumers, workers, the environment and public health policy. For the same reason, we have had no IDS—or, rather, ISDS—[*Interruption.*] Well, it was a Freudian slip. That is why we have had no ISDS provisions in any of the post-Brexit trade agreements signed by the Government with 67 non-EU countries, with the European Union and with Australia. So when it comes to CPTPP, why are the Government not simply following New Zealand’s lead and demanding an exemption from the provisions on ISDS? Again, it goes back to the big decision taken by the Secretary of State that what matters most is not minimising the risks of this deal, maximising the opportunities and making it right for Britain, but simply getting it done as quickly as possible, even if that means selling out our farming industry and exposing our country to the risks of ISDS.

It is apparently okay, though, because in respect of all of those risks the Government simply assert that we have nothing to fear. We have the same assurances with respect to food safety, online harms, patent laws, procurement rules, data protection, medicine prices, intellectual property and our NHS, and that is all without mentioning the 22 suspended provisions in the agreement, which the strategy document simply ignores. We are simply told that none of those provisions will be a problem for the UK and that we should trust the Government—we should trust the Government to protect our interests, even though they cannot tell us how. Instead of exemptions, we are reliant on assertions. Instead of amendments they offer us assurances. I respectfully say to the Secretary of State that we have had enough of the Government’s assurances when it comes to negotiations on trade, the Northern Ireland protocol, non-tariff barriers with Europe, and the betrayal of our fishing industry, our farming industry and our steel industry. We have had enough of being told by them just to take their word for it and everything will turn out fine and all our interests will be protected.

The reason this matters so much is because it is this Secretary of State who stands personally accused of saying one thing to the British farming industry and another for the sake of CPTPP. If she is willing to break her promises to the farming community that she represents, why would not she do the same to the health service on which we all depend? That is why, while the Labour party remains committed to the possibilities that joining the CPTPP offers, we will continue to demand a fresh approach to the accession process, starting with proper protection for our farmers and food standards, total exemption from the provisions on ISDS, and a complete carve-out for our national health service, patient data included.

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con) *rose—*

Emily Thornberry: I am about to finish so I will not give way again.

I was talking about the importance of negotiating a deal where there would be specific demands and where there would be carve-outs. All those things may take more time than the Secretary of State would like and it may be a harder negotiation than those she is used to, but none of that should matter when what we are trying to do is get what is best for Britain.

12.8 pm

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): It seems a long time since 18 July 2018, when I first announced to the House that we were beginning the public consultation phase that would inevitably lead to where we are today, so I congratulate the Secretary of State and her Ministers on getting us to this point so expeditiously, and I thank all those at the DIT who have done so much to get us into this position, particularly Crawford Falconer and John Alty, who is to stand down as permanent secretary. I wish him all the best and give him my very grateful thanks for all the work he has done.

Especially in the light of the speech by the shadow Secretary of State against international trade, it is right to say why we believe in free trade. We believe in free trade because it allows countries to use comparative advantage within an international rules-based system for the benefit of their own people and those outside their own borders. It is essential for developing countries to be able to trade their way out of poverty in the long term, and the rise of non-tariff barriers among the world's richest countries over the past decade is a disgrace that we should hear a lot more about.

As I have said before, in Q1 of 2009, only 0.7% of all the G20's imports were covered by restrictive measures; it is now 10.3%. That is putting an almost insurmountable barrier particularly to small and medium-sized enterprises in developing countries. We need to get a grip on that because whatever we talk about in the aid debate we are counterbalancing in the restrictions that we are putting on in the trade debate. If we want to have a morally consistent policy on development, we need to deal with both sides of the equation.

Free trade is also about consumers. I want the incomes of working families in Britain to go further. I want them to have greater choice, and for them to be given greater information about the products that they buy so that they can decide for themselves how to spend their money, not so that the Government can determine what choices they can and cannot make. It is essential that we say that, because some people even in my own party seem to have forgotten why free trade is so important.

Marco Longhi: Does my right hon. Friend agree that consumers will therefore have cheaper access to white vans and St George's flags, which particularly our self-employed make use of in the construction industry?

Dr Fox: I cannot think what my hon. Friend is alluding to, but it is certainly true that consumers will have access to far greater choice. Look at the range of consumer goods that we have—all sorts of white goods, not just vans. Look at the quality of what we have in terms of household appliances. They are cheaper and better quality, and they have a greater technology than they would otherwise. That is what free trade means. The trouble with free trade is that its benefits are very widely spread to consumers, whereas any difficulties to producers tend to fall on very narrow sectors and are therefore used politically by the Opposition to promote their anti-trade policies.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr Fox: I will in a moment. Five years ago this morning, those of us who campaigned to leave the European Union were awakening on that great historic day to realise that we had won the referendum and that Britain would have a very different future. The free trade policy that it allowed us was very specific in terms of the benefits that we could have: it would allow us to shape a policy in the interests of not only the United Kingdom but free trade, in which we as a country profoundly believe, or at least used to all believe, in the political consensus in this country.

It is a freedom to shape global policy that leads to greater liberalisation in all its forms. I am glad to see the Chair of the International Trade Committee present. He has heard me say this before, so I apologise to him for repeating myself, but there is a clear hierarchy in liberalisation. The greatest liberalisation comes from multilateral global agreements, which is where we should all be going; it is the gold standard. The next level down is the level of plurilateral agreements; if we cannot get multilateral agreement, we can at least make progress towards it with those who are willing to see liberalisation take place. The next level down is the geographical grouping, where countries can come together to create a more open market. Finally, there are the bilateral free trade agreements, which, although they are easier to get, tend to produce less in terms of liberalisation. It is important that we understand that there is a hierarchy in all of that.

John Spellar: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr Fox: I will, as I said I would; my memory is not yet that short. It is important that we understand what the opportunities are in a free trade policy outside the European Union in relation to those four categories in that free trade hierarchy.

John Spellar: The right hon. Gentleman knows that I am very supportive of trade and trade agreements. Equally, I was rather surprised by his response to the hon. Member for Dudley North (Marco Longhi). Should we not be encouraging people to buy white vans made in Luton, and trying to ensure that St George's flags are made and sold in the United Kingdom?

Dr Fox: The right hon. Gentleman is quite right that we should ensure that as much is made in the United Kingdom as possible. The point is that consumers should be free to choose what they buy with their own money. If we can manufacture goods and services in the United Kingdom of the appropriate quality, and at the appropriate price, I am quite sure that British consumers would choose to buy those, but I do not believe in restricting the choice for British consumers because we are unable in certain sectors to produce those things.

Another important element of policy outside the European Union is our ability to help rebalance the global trading economy. That is why CPTPP is so important. The CPTPP, were the United Kingdom to join it, has about the same proportion of global GDP as the European Union minus the UK. It will provide us with an ability to rebalance within that. Why does that matter? It might help us get momentum in some of the areas that matter, where we were unable to get traction

[Dr Fox]

inside the European Union. We might get traction on a global agreement on e-commerce, for example, or an agreement on environmentally friendly goods—the environmental goods agreement—which is barely in existence or has any life at the moment. In this era, if we cannot agree to take tariffs off solar panels or wind turbines, what can we agree at a multilateral level? Putting our energies into groupings that may drive that forward is extremely important, not just for the UK, but beyond.

The final point that I want to make is that the real advantage of CPTPP is not what proportion of GDP it adds in value; it is strategic. CPTPP is primarily, in my view, a strategic alliance, and it relates to how we think about the issue of China. China promotes its agenda of state capitalism—though “state capitalism” is an oxymoron; capitalism has to be independent of state control—but, at present, sits inside the World Trade Organisation without having made the adjustments to market mechanisms that are required for the proper functioning of members inside the organisation. The measures that we have tried have not been successful in bringing China into a more acceptable position. The WTO has been unable to cope effectively with the abuse of state subsidies. The OECD has done a lot of work studying the data available across borders and looking at measurements of production, which offer some help, but the WTO seems incapable at present of dealing with the China question.

The United States was unable to deal with the China question through tariffs. All that President Trump’s tariffs on China did was reduce the trade deficit with China, but it did not reduce America’s trade deficit overall, because when consumers did not buy Chinese goods because they were too expensive in the United States, they bought them from elsewhere. The use of tariff policy to drive global trade in a particular way only results in trade distortion and diversion, exactly as we discovered.

If we were able to join CPTPP, there would be another prize, which the Secretary of State did not mention but I am sure she believes in: the ability to attract the United States back to the partnership. The decision by the Trump Administration to leave the trans-Pacific partnership was, in my view, a completely wrong decision. If we are able to get United Kingdom membership, the United States joining CPTPP becomes a lot more attractive to Members across the parties in Congress. The UK plus the United States joining CPTPP would take us to about 40% to 43% of global GDP, which is a much better counterbalancing measure to China than anything that we have seen so far.

I am therefore 100% behind my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister for Trade Policy in taking this policy forward. Five years ago, we were on different sides of the debate in the European Union referendum, but there is nothing like the zeal of converts to take us forward. I congratulate the Secretary of State and the Minister of State—one of the finest Ministers I ever worked with—on taking this agenda forward. It is the right thing for the United Kingdom and, much more importantly, it is the right thing for global trade

and to ensure that the developing world has a chance of finding a sustainable way out of poverty in the long term.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): After the spokesman for the SNP, I will come directly to the Chairman of the Select Committee. At that point, there will be a time limit of five minutes, but that will then reduce to three minutes.

12.19 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): What a pleasure it is to follow the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox). I feel that he overstretched himself by describing SNP Members as anti-trade, given that his Government and his party have overseen the first four months of Brexit and a 33% slump in exports to the EU from the UK. However, let me try to start on a point of agreement with the Secretary of State, who has now left her place. It is good to see the US tariffs on Scotch whisky dropped—that is welcome—but Scotch whisky should never have been put in such a position in the first place.

While any, even tiny, opportunity to make up some ground on Brexit losses should be explored, it is clear that no deal this Government can strike will make up for what Brexit has already taken away from us. It is clear that the potential positives of this proposal are minuscule and the risks are much larger. The Government’s very own figures—buried deep in the environmental notes—point to growth in their long-term forecast of just 0.08% to 0.09% of GDP over 15 years. That is scant reward for the trade-offs on control over regulations and standards required, and it is a drop in the Pacific compared with not only the lost trade for Scottish and other UK companies, but the massive increases in the cost of goods that they have incurred. The simple fact is that here we have a Government desperate to get free trade agreements for their own sake, while ignoring industry and the advice of trade experts.

Emily Thornberry: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, who is making a very interesting speech. Can I just ask him to look again at page 65 of the document? He cited the figure as 0.08%, but it is much lower, because the 0.08% includes Malaysia joining, and Malaysia has made it perfectly clear that it is very much having cold feet because of the ISDS provisions.

Drew Hendry: I thank the shadow Secretary of State for that clarification, and she is indeed right. There I was being generous to the Government about the effects; I will certainly try to learn the lesson there.

The Government have ignored industry and the advice of trade experts just to prove their own self-harming political point. They were warned that the precedents of the Australia deal would inevitably lead to other countries demanding the same capitulations, but they said that that would not happen. Now the New Zealand Trade Minister is on record demanding zero-tariff access to UK markets as a result, and of course others are following. In negotiations on the CPTPP, the UK cannot decline to align on too many areas, such as ISDS, agrifoods, consumer standards and more, and still expect to become a member.

In short, if the UK joins, the consequences are very likely to be disastrous. In all of the nations of the UK, the farming unions have stressed the importance of protecting the UK's current high food and farming standards. After a calamitous few months for the food and drink sector across the UK, almost every organisation representing Scottish agrifood interests has written to the UK Government calling on them finally to take Scottish interests into account over negotiations with the CPTPP's Australia.

Having failed in their duty over consultation with industry, devolved Administrations and regulators, the Government have of course failed to give this Parliament a meaningful vote, so let us ask the Government: will they bring forward a meaningful vote on the CPTPP? I will give the Minister the opportunity to respond if he would like to do so.

The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands): I will respond at the end.

Drew Hendry: Okay.

Emily Thornberry: The Minister says no.

Drew Hendry: It is a no.

What assessment has been made of the failed TTIP deal, on which the CPTPP is based? It contains a TTIP-style regulatory co-operation chapter, risking the abandonment of standards through forums that were notoriously devoid of any scrutiny. The Tories have had plenty of opportunity to enshrine current standards of consumer protections—including for agricultural produce, pesticides and animal rights, and also for digital rights, workers' rights, environmental standards and the independence of public services such as the NHS—yet they have failed to do so at every turn. The Home Secretary herself is on record as saying that Brexit was an opportunity for widespread deregulation, and of course she was not alone. It is easy to see why the Scottish public do not trust them over the warm words they put forward.

An investor-state dispute mechanism is a key provision within the CPTPP. It allows firms to sue Governments for measures that harm their profits. This can result in very negative impacts on the environment and regulation designed to combat climate change. There is also evidence of ISDS being used to challenge health provision and labour rights. Will the Minister confirm that the UK will not agree to ISDS as part of the CPTPP? It is likely that CPTPP membership would see a rise in the amount of pesticides and antibiotics in food imports. Thousands of times the amount of carcinogens such as iprodione are allowed in produce from CPTPP members as they are in current UK equivalent foodstuffs. One hundred and nineteen pesticides currently banned in the UK are allowed for use by certain CPTPP members. How can the UK Government exclude those products and guarantee that they will never appear on our supermarket shelves if they sign up? Of course, they cannot. Malaysia, a CPTPP member, is actively manoeuvring to reverse the ban on palm oil extracts, which are notorious for causing deforestation, leading to increases in greenhouse gas emissions.

John Spellar: Can the hon. Member tell us which countries he thinks Britain can do trade deals with?

Drew Hendry: There is an entire continent in Europe that we could be doing trade with. This is the thing: we have had a 33% drop in trade with the EU in the first four months since Brexit was implemented in January, and CPTPP membership would be a literal drop in the ocean in trying to replace that trade.

As I was saying, palm oil is notorious for causing deforestation, leading to increases in greenhouse gas emissions. Will the Minister therefore confirm for the House that the UK will enforce a ban on palm oil? What climate change assessments have been made of the impacts of the deal on the UK's climate change commitments?

Currently, 85% of the UK's exports to CPTPP members are to Australia, Canada, Japan and Singapore, and the UK already has free trade agreements with seven of the 11 members through agreements made while the UK was a member of the EU. The only real driving force for Brexit Britain to join a trade alliance on the other side of the world is political. It is not economic. Scotland has been dragged out of the EU against its wishes and, as I have said—I will repeat it again—in the first four months of leaving that single market, UK trade exports to the EU have plummeted by 33%, trade for businesses has been hammered, and the costs of goods for industries, including distilleries, have shot up by 20%.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): My hon. Friend made the point earlier about welcoming—it would be churlish not to do so—the dropping of tariffs on Scotch whisky. He will be aware that I am the chair of the Scotch whisky all-party parliamentary group. Will he join me in calling on the Government to respond to the alcohol duty review that they have been sitting on for six months? The Scotch whisky sector will need as much support as possible to get back on its feet, so will he join me in calling on the Treasury Bench to get on with it and give the sector more support?

Drew Hendry: I absolutely concur with my hon. Friend the chair of the Scotch whisky all-party parliamentary group. The past four months have been devastating. In that same period, Scottish fishermen have been sold out, Scottish farmers have been betrayed, and powers to protect our regulations and standards—and even our NHS—have been steamrollered by this Government. The agreement does nothing to rectify that. That is why more people every day are realising that Scotland needs to be an independent country to make the right choices to protect our food and drink industry, our farmers, our crofters, our NHS and our people.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): With a time limit of five minutes, I call Angus Brendan MacNeil.

12.28 pm

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Tapadh leibh, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I also thank the Secretary of State for the debate. It is good to see the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), the former Secretary of State, in his place. The International Trade Committee had many interactions with him in his old role.

Dominic Cummings was right, or at least partially right, in some of his utterances this week. In particular, he was correct when he said that politicians have been

[Angus Brendan MacNeil]

obsessed with trade deals that are not that significant when it comes to economic growth and drawing lines on maps. I am not sure what other howitzers he will be sending the way of the UK Government, but I do not think that will be the last.

When we come to trade deals, trade, the issue of Brexit and the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership, the important things are numbers. When we look beyond the flowery language, we see that even the Government's own figures show we are talking about 0.08% of GDP—that is £1.8 billion. We have to take that in the context of Brexit, which is a 4.9% damage event to the UK economy. It is like saying, “I had £4.90 and I threw it over my shoulder, and now I'm scrabbling around on the other side of the world for 8p”. That is the ratio difference we are talking about. The Australian deal is worth 2p, and an American deal would be worth 20p. A New Zealand deal might give us another penny and the Canadian deal is worth about 3p, so all in all, we have thrown away about £4.90 and are hoping to get back, with what I have talked about there, 30-odd pence.

Emily Thornberry: The points that the hon. Gentleman is making are very important, and Government Members ought to listen to them carefully. Quite a lot has been made of the statistic of a 65% increase in trade projected for this region by 2030, but on close examination of the document, is it not right that that projected increase in trade is one that Government figures show would happen irrespective of whether the UK joins the CPTPP?

Angus Brendan MacNeil: The right hon. Lady makes that point in her own way, and I do not want to go into it too much given that the clock is still ticking.

The comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership is not actually as comprehensive as it seems. Only seven out of the 11 countries have actually ratified it. Malaysia, Chile, Peru and Brunei have not. When we take out their GDP contributions, the figure goes down to 0.5% of GDP, or 5p that is available from the CPTPP to recover the £4.90 that has been lost by Brexit.

That is as far as we can go with the good news. I am now going to have to give the House some bad news. This morning, Neale Richmond, the Irish TD, who is never off our screens and is a fantastic representative of Ireland, brought to my attention in a tweet that the Republic of Ireland now has, for the first time ever, a trade surplus with the UK, as UK exports to the Republic of Ireland are down 47.6%. That is £2 billion of trade gone. Remember that the UK was talking about a £1.8 billion increase from the CPTPP. With Ireland alone, the damage of Brexit has wiped out what could be gained from the CPTPP.

There may be some good news in Ireland, depending on people's constitutional stance. North-south exports are certainly up and are making for a far more integrated economy, with a 22.4% increase in exports to Northern Ireland from the Republic and a 44.2% increase in imports to the Republic from the north. That is against the background that my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) pointed out of the 33% fall in trade that has been truly

damaging the economy. The Secretary of State said earlier that we were putting our eggs in one trade basket. It looks as though we do not have any eggs in any trade basket, the way it is going at the moment. Certainly, from my talks with the British Egg Industry Council and the British Poultry Council, it is very much a real-life chicken-and-egg situation as to which way this is going.

I also want to point out some privacy issues. I have had correspondence from constituents that I want to bring to the Government's attention, and I am sure that they know what I am talking about—making sure that people's data is actually safe and is not traded around to second, third and fourth parties in a global context.

I also want to raise the issue of patent attorneys. UK patent attorneys are a fifth of the number of patent attorneys in the European patent convention, and they do a third of the work at a value of about £746 million. Let us take that away from what is left of the CPTPP—the 0.5%, or £1.1 billion. If this damages the UK patent attorneys' relationship with the European patent convention, it would just about negate everything from the CPTPP, and there is a very real possibility that this could happen. UK patent attorneys are flagging this up constantly. The Government should be well aware that we are now talking about not a 0.8% or a 0.5% gain from GDP, but perhaps only a 0.2% gain. So we are down to 2p after throwing away the £4.90 that I referred to earlier.

What are we left with? We have thrown away £2 billion with Ireland, and might gain a few hundred million with the CPTPP. We are risking our farming and crofting trade with Australia and much else. We have walked away from our partners next door, as my hon. Friend pointed out. It might be strategic, but what do we say to people who are losing their jobs and to the businesses that do not grow because of this economic damage? I do not think the Government have an answer. This appears to be a Government wanting to come back waving bits of paper, much like Neville Chamberlain, and shouting “Trade deals in our time”. It is not good enough for anybody who is trying to make a living up and down the nations of the current UK.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): With a time limit of three minutes, I call Craig Williams.

12.34 pm

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con): I shall speak ever quicker, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It is a great pleasure to follow the Chairman of the International Trade Committee, the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil). I serve on that Committee and I look forward to scrutinising the detail of this, both in private and in public sessions, with him. It is also a great pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), who set out his vision and made some important points, which Members on both sides of this Chamber should reflect on, about the developing world and how we can help it through trade and liberalisation. His point struck home about how hollow the international aid debate is when we do not help our partners and fellow democracies around the world on the back of trade.

It is important again to look at the strategic context for this CPTPP. I am proud to have got that out in one go, as I have been practising—the International Trade

Committee helps with that. The context is a £9 trillion market. In 2030, it will represent 65% of the middle-class consumers of the world, in places where meat consumption and meat imports are going up, which is important for a rural constituency such as mine. The demand for the fifth quarter—I will not go into details about that part of the carcass, which we do not consume and do not want in this country—is over there.

I am struck by the fact that this partnership will be good for the premium products that the farmers in my constituency produce—the dairy, Welsh lamb and beef. The demand and consumption is increasing in the part of the world we are talking about, not decreasing as it is in the European markets, and that is where we need this country to be. This is where I would like Ministers, including my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade Policy, who will be responding to this debate, to be focusing for our agricultural communities. It is worth again stressing the strategic context of this deal; these are the growing markets where we want to be sat around the table. This is where I want Welsh lamb to be promoted very vigorously by Her Majesty's Government. This is where we want Scottish whisky to be promoted and sold. This is the access we want.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Scottish lamb.

Craig Williams: I will discuss that with the Chairman in many debates, no doubt. However, my last 30 seconds are coming to an end, so all I will do is wish the Front-Bench team well in progressing this partnership. My Welsh farmers want access to this market. I wish him well in scrutinising it as it goes forward.

12.37 pm

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): I am a strong believer in free trade—I think it is a very good idea. However, the priority has to be the terms of the deal, not just the fact of doing a deal. It is the same as in business: too often, for the advisers, the lawyers and often even the chief executives, it is doing the deal that matters, but for the business and its workers it is the terms of the deal that matter. This is also about Government managing the follow-through. Let us be clear: one reason why free trade has a bad name in this country and in the United States, but particularly here, is that it has become a free-for-all. For the British Government, we buy trains, boats, military planes, ambulances, police cars and so on from anywhere in the world. No other country behaves like that. That is about decisions of Ministers. Frankly, unless Ministers develop some backbone and start to instruct their civil servants to support British industry, trade will continue to be mired in controversy in this country.

That is a great shame, because trade has made a transformation in the lives of hundreds of million—probably billions—of people around the world, particularly in China and Asia. It has raised living standards and aspirations. Barriers to trade, financial, physical or administrative, reduce living standards, as we are finding out and as a number of colleagues have mentioned. When talking about trade, we should remember that we have a massive trade deficit with the EU, which is why it should be negotiating more realistically with us—our Ministers should not be grandstanding, and should also be negotiating realistically with the EU.

We also have to recognise that all change comes with associated costs and disruption. Look at the industrial revolution, the agricultural revolution and the corn laws in this country, which caused massive issues. We should learn the lessons of history and look at how we manage the transition, but that will require an active role for the Government; I know that is against their ideology, but it is absolutely necessary in order to deal with this fast-changing world.

Finally, there are a lot of problems all around the world with the unequal distribution of income arising from change, and particularly from the current technological revolution. The best way to deal with it is to support workers' rights in these agreements and support trade union rights and free trade unions. Joe Biden has said that very clearly, but the message has to get through to our Government. There is a new sheriff in town in Washington, and we ought to be supporting him in backing workers' rights around the world.

12.40 pm

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con) [V]: The UK is one of the world's greatest centres for digital trade, a sector that is vital to the future success of our economy. We want to attract investment and talent from across the globe and open up markets to the services that British companies provide.

Data is the fuel of the digital economy, driving everything that people and businesses see and do online. We need to work towards common standards among nations in how data is gathered, stored and processed, which can give citizens certainty about the security of their personal data when they share information with businesses online, as well as when they use apps on smart devices and cloud storage systems. We know that people care about these issues: over 90% of iPhone users who have been given the choice have opted out of allowing apps such as Facebook to access data from non-Facebook apps on their devices.

At the recent G7 summit, the Government led successful negotiations between nations to create a business tax regime that is fit for the digital world. Trade agreements can also be used to help to establish common standards for data protection and processing. Laws affecting digital regulation and data protection should be set by Parliament rather than in trade agreements, which is why I spoke against the proposal by President Trump's Government to include in trade agreements American legislation limiting the liability of tech platforms for the content posted on their sites—a measure that would restrict our ability to legislate to improve online safety, for example. That had formed part of the US's agreements with Canada, Japan and Mexico, but I was pleased to receive assurances from the Secretary of State that it was something that we would not accept.

The CPTPP agreement seeks not to impose new digital and data policy, but to create certainty for citizens and businesses alike about the safety of their data and the interoperability of systems. I know that the Department for International Trade has closely consulted the Information Commissioner's Office on the CPTPP's terms and the obligations that it creates; in the ICO's opinion, it is compatible with UK data protection law. It has also noted that a number of CPTPP member countries have already been granted data adequacy decisions under the EU's GDPR, including Canada,

[*Damian Collins*]

Japan and New Zealand. The CPTPP also contains provisions similar to those in the UK-Japan agreement recognising the importance of data protection to electronic commerce and committing all parties to implementing a data protection framework that takes relevant international standards into consideration.

The ICO believes that it is possible to have separate but complementary data adequacy processes with international trade agreements. In Asia-Pacific, such agreements tend towards greater reference to international data transfers and the free flow of data in agreements, particularly to address risks of data localisation. It is important, however, to properly consider and understand the implications of any provisions in trade deals that cover privacy and data protection, particularly with regard to the processing of UK citizens' data in a third country.

12.43 pm

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): The UK's application to join the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership is founded mostly on its diplomatic advantages rather than on its advantages for international trade. Strengthening our ties with established and developing free market economies and liberal democracies is a positive goal in itself, and it is right that we should think about how we can leverage our international trade power to build those partnerships, but we need to balance our diplomatic interests with our economic ones.

Joining an existing economic partnership whose rules have already been developed and cannot be changed for our benefit is fraught with risk. Before accession, there should be a full consultation, debate and vote in Parliament so that every part of this country and every economic sector can review the risks and benefits and contribute to the decision. Greater scrutiny leads to better decision making. A better and more informed awareness of the risks will surely help us to better leverage any advantages.

The principal risk and, as I understand it, the reason that the Biden Administration are reluctant to sign up to the CPTPP is that the rules governing membership inhibit national Governments from pursuing their public policy objectives. That inhibition is primarily through the use of investor-state dispute settlements, which the CPTPP allows. ISDS allows private companies to sue national Governments if public policy limits their ability to make profits. ISDS has been used to challenge important environmental regulations, including water pollution controls in Germany, a ban on fracking in Canada and various regulations on mining in east Africa and South America. There is also evidence of ISDS being used to challenge health provision, labour rights and other important regulations. ISDS was used in Egypt to challenge an increase in the minimum wage. Philip Morris sued Australia for attempting to introduce plain-packaged cigarettes and Slovakia was sued for attempting to nationalise part of the health service.

The risk to the UK is clear. The need for us to take urgent action to tackle climate change has been spelled out for us once more this morning by the Climate Change Committee in its new report. This country is not on track to meet our net zero commitments without urgent further action. There is public pressure and

political consensus on the need for that action and we should not put ourselves in a position where action can be undermined by carbon-emitting companies looking to make profits. There is too much at stake.

The CPTPP places obligations on members to recognise each other's standards as equivalent. This is a huge concern for those who value the UK's high standards of agriculture and food safety. Enabling the import of agricultural and food products into this country that do not meet our existing thresholds or welfare and quality will weaken our domestic producers.

I was going to make some observations about data, but the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (*Damian Collins*) who spoke just before me covered that really well, and I merely endorse his comments.

If we were firmly focused on our diplomatic and trade interests, we would not have left the single market or the customs union. As we try to mitigate the various impacts of those Government decisions, we need to be honest about the trade-offs required from different courses of action. Are the risks of entering into this partnership worth the 0.017% uplift in GDP? The public deserves a proper scrutiny of these plans, so that we can make the best decision in the national interest.

12.47 pm

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con) [V]: It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, and, as the Member of Parliament representing Ynys Môn, a rural constituency with a large farming community, I am keen to see the UK develop its trade partnerships across the globe outside of the constraints of the EU.

Recently, I held a meeting in English and in Welsh between the Minister of State for Trade Policy and local farmers here on Anglesey specifically to discuss our new trade partnerships. Questions had been raised by individual farmers, as well as local representatives of the young farmers, the National Farmers' Union and the Farmers Union of Wales about the impact of trade deals on their business. My farmers welcomed the opportunity to discuss the CPTPP, what trade partnerships can offer them, and the opportunities to build the British brand overseas, to market our produce as being of exceptional quality and, of course, to export more British food overseas. Beef, sheep and dairy are the mainstay of many farmers here on Anglesey and the CPTPP will open up a wealth of opportunity for them across the Asian, American and Australasian continents, with potentially lucrative markets for our produce, including dairy products—in particular, cheeses to Canada and Australia, pork and poultry to Vietnam, beef to Japan, and mutton to Malaysia.

Peter Williams, one of my local sheep farmers, has extensive experience of working in the middle east, and he shared how our lamb and mutton can be differentiated to make it more attractive to that market. Our meeting highlighted the value that is placed on the quality of British produce overseas, particularly in markets where food safety is a key consumer concern. The UK's food is safe, traceable, and audited. Our animals are well cared for, and our meat and dairy produce is handled with care.

My farmers questioned the Minister about branding for British and Welsh produce and are keen to ensure that agreements such as the CPTPP are aligned with the Government's proposed campaign to raise awareness of

brand Britain. However, they also had concerns about the potential opening of the UK market to cheaper, lower-quality imports from overseas, and the Minister was keen to reassure us on this point. When the Agriculture and Trade Bills passed through the House, the Government made a commitment to upholding our standards and not opening the floodgates to substandard products, and the Minister reiterated that commitment. The Government have already stated that animal welfare and food production standards for imports will be at least equivalent to those that we enforce in the UK. For the avoidance of doubt, this means that we will not be accepting chlorinated chicken or growth hormone-fed meats.

By protecting our high standards and highlighting all that is unique and special about UK produce, we can use agreements such as the CPTPP to support and grow our farming communities on the domestic and global stages.

12.49 pm

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP) [V]: It is right that we in the UK seek to bolster our trade relationships across the world to boost our economy, create jobs, promote growth and benefit from exit from the European Union and the freedom that offers. That said, we should ensure the standards that we enjoy and value are not lessened because of such arrangements. In my constituency, I have many small family farms that spend each and every day working hard but are weighed down financially and by the time commitment needed to produce food to the highest standards.

Our farmers can truly boast of the safest food, with world-leading environmental standards, animal welfare standards and traceability from farm to fork. It would be wrong if trade deals and accession to the trans-Pacific partnership brought with them a lowering of those standards through the opening of our markets to cheaper products produced to lesser standards and with a negative impact on our environment. There is much focus now in the UK on the carbon footprint of farming. It would be terrible to impose targets on our farmers while we ship lesser product from the other side of the world.

These arguments are well rehearsed, and my colleagues and I have made them before in this House as we debated the Agriculture Bill and the Trade Bill. We need the Government to live up to their commitments that our farmers would not be sacrificed in the quest for free trade deals and that the standards we enjoy in the UK at considerable cost to our agriculture industry will not be diluted by new trade agreements. I recognise the opportunities—opportunities that a range of industries, including agriculture, wish to seize upon—but the Government must honour the commitment to farming families across the United Kingdom.

12.52 pm

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Carla Lockhart). Five years ago yesterday, I voted to leave the European Union. Newcastle-under-Lyme voted to leave the European Union, and so did the whole of Britain, so eventually we did, no thanks to some Opposition Members. It was never about retreating into an island fortress, as some people like to suggest, and it was never

about retreating from free trade. In fact, as the famous *Spectator* cover had it, for many of us it was about getting out and then into the world.

CPTPP is the sort of organisation that British people thought they were joining in 1973 and that they voted to join in 1975: the common market, as it was back then, where countries enforced their own laws, but there was not enforced harmonisation. Unlike the EU, by joining the CPTPP—I hope we will do, and I welcome what the Secretary of State said in her speech about the progress we are making—we will retain control of our borders, our money and our laws, and we will secure the growing opportunities, including: increased trade and investment opportunities; the opportunity to diversify our trading links and our supply chains to increase our domestic security, especially in the wake of what we have seen with the pandemic and other threats around the world; and, the opportunity to turn the UK into a global hub for free trade. That is a vision I hope we can all get behind.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: The hon. Gentleman is talking about free trade. I mentioned in my speech the damage to trade with neighbours in Ireland, for instance, but we used to trade very freely—with no paperwork, no hurdles and no hassle—with the 27 other member states of the European Union. How many countries across the world can we now trade with in the same way?

Aaron Bell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point. I think he would accept the point that I have made that exiting the EU was not about wanting to retreat from free trade. I would rather we had been able to get a better deal with the European Union, but it was not interested. A lot of the time, it seemed that the EU wanted to punish us for Brexit to put other people off from doing the same. I am afraid it was aided and abetted by Opposition Members who met the EU when we were negotiating, so I will not take any lessons from the Opposition today about negotiating this agreement.

As the Secretary of State said, some of the richest opportunities will come from the Asia-Pacific area, with £9 trillion-worth of a growing middle class for our exporters. These include exporters in Staffordshire and Newcastle-under-Lyme such as global British icons like JCB, companies in my constituency like Doulton, which sells water filters to the growing markets in developing countries, and niche smaller start-up companies like the Staffordshire Gin Company. We have heard a lot about whisky today; let us talk about gin. The Staffordshire Gin Company is already exporting to Singapore, and this trade deal will reduce its tariffs. I invite the Minister and the Secretary of State to come up with me for some quality assurance of the Staffordshire Gin Company's products. I am sure we could have a very good session there.

But I do not just want to talk about the benefits for our exporters and our producers, because, as my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) said so eloquently, free trade is a win-win, but the true benefit is to consumers. Companies and producers are not there for consumers to service; they are there to service the consumers. It should be up to people to make their own choices to have lower prices, whether the goods are supplied from Newcastle or New Zealand.

[Aaron Bell]

That is the true prize of free trade—the true sense of comparison of markets and also the benefits for developing countries that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams) spoke about. We must not lose sight of the benefits to consumers. They may be more diffuse—perhaps a few pence off the weekly shop—but that adds up in a community like Newcastle-under-Lyme. That is the real, true benefit of this. We should obviously focus on the benefits for our exporters and the potential jobs that will be supported, but whenever we talk about free trade we must not lose sight of the real reason for it, and that is to make people's lives better—consumers both at home and abroad.

12.56 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): UK membership of the CPTPP would be a significant achievement for post-Brexit trade and open up a major export market for exporters in Scotland and across the UK, presuming that it does not lead to a decline in the high standards for goods and services that we currently possess and does not undercut our industries with lower-quality goods. In 2019, UK exports of goods and services to the signatory nations of the agreement amounted to £58 billion, or 8.4% of all UK exports. In the light of the ongoing Brexit-related trade disruption, engagement with this market is especially crucial in opening up new markets and diversifying our trade.

However, it is essential not to forget some of the possible costs of entry into the agreement and to ensure that as we sign these important trade deals we do not compromise our high standards of food safety, animal welfare and environmental protection. The farming industry has been keen to emphasise that unshackled trade with countries that have lower standards on agricultural produce poses a real threat to the industry unless rules on standards are clearly enforced on imports. In February, Mark Williams, chief exec of the British Egg Industry Council, emphasised that a significant percentage of the cost of egg production in the UK comes from the high food standards expected of domestic producers via existing legislation. Without these standards being enforced on imports from countries that the UK has free trade agreements with, we could see our farmers substantially undercut by low-standard produce. Mexico, one of the signatories, is one of the world's most significant egg producers, with some 160 million egg-layer birds kept mostly in cages, with no significant national hen welfare legislation.

Another matter the Government must consider carefully is the investor-state dispute settlement mechanism. In accordance with chapter 9, section B of the agreement, the UK Government would be required to accept an ISDS arbitration mechanism. Although some signatories of the agreement have won derogations from this rule via bilateral side instruments, the UK, according to many trade experts, including the UK Trade Policy Observatory at the University of Sussex, is unlikely to be able to secure for itself such a derogation as existing members are keen to ensure compliance with existing CPTPP rules.

Due to the catastrophe of Brexit, our exporters are being denied the unfettered access to the EU's single market that they long enjoyed. For the Scottish and UK

economy to prosper, we must continue to act to secure new markets for their trade, as I know the Secretary of State has been doing. However, the Government must take on board these serious concerns about our regulatory autonomy and food standards when seeking to gain access to these markets. Our industry and environment alike depend on it.

12.59 pm

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): We live in interesting times, and I do not doubt that, whether it is in 100 or 1,000 years, historians will look back and record that these were times of great tumult—from the global financial crisis, through the unseating of a number of leaders around the world and Brexit, through to what I fear will be the next financial crisis, as inflation comes in and causes problems for bond markets, at which point we will have a great moment of decision. I believe that in that decision we will crystallise a great and long-standing crisis of political economy—how we are governed and how power is constructed so that we can deliver free trade and prosperity for all and raise the standard of living for everyone.

Whether people like it or not, the UK rejected the idea of political integration to deliver free trade within customs unions and harmonised regulations. The British public rejected it, not only in the referendum but in subsequent elections. This is where the CPTPP comes in and is so important. Yes, it is about trade, but it is about more than that; it is about strategy. It shows how we can be more prosperous, more free-trading, in a way that retains that crucial right to regulate.

I spoke for 15 minutes in a debate on 21 April, and I am very grateful to the Minister for Trade Policy, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands), for responding. I do not propose to repeat all of what I said, but I said in particular:

“CPTPP can provide a better standard of living for people in the UK and across the original member countries. It can deliver free trade plus self-government in this great age of interventionism.”—[*Official Report*, 21 April 2020; Vol. 692, c. 260WH.]

That is what I am looking to the Government to deliver.

I mentioned Taiwan in my speech. I would like to see Taiwan accede to the CPTPP along with us, together with the USA. If a number of accession countries joined, we could end up creating a new free-trading platform containing over half of global GDP. That would create a great force for good in the world.

Having recently met the Taiwanese ambassador, I am inclined to suggest to my right hon. Friend the Minister that he supports Taiwan's accession to the CPTPP. Would he also look into proposals that Taiwan has made to the Government to deepen our trading and investment relations specifically? Given Taiwan's very important semiconductor industry, it seems to me in the national interest that we should deepen and strengthen that friendship.

Finally, let us look at what a country as progressive as, presumably, any Opposition Member could wish—New Zealand—says in summarising CPTPP and the environment. One of its websites points out:

“The Environment chapter includes two key general commitments that underpin mutually supportive trade and environmental policies.” It explains that CPTPP parties will effectively enforce their environmental laws.

As I run out of time, I recommend the website. It shows just how high-standards this agreement is.

1.2 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con) [V]: It is great to be the tail-end Charlie of this debate on the CPTPP. In this year of the Indo-Pacific pivot, the Government have already made huge steps forward to strengthen our partnerships across one of the world's most exciting areas. We have a new trade deal with India, which by the way, is our second-largest investor over the last 12 months, with inward investment up 25%, and a significant knock-on impact on our jobs. There is the joint economic trade committees with Thailand and Indonesia, the agreement to have dialogue partner status with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the first ever completely new independent free trade agreement with Australia, and one coming up with New Zealand, and now agreement for the CPTPP trade negotiations to start.

Some will—and indeed have—poured scorn on the differences that each of those steps will make individually, but collectively it is very hard to dismiss the fact that the overall impact of the Indo-Pacific pivot is already considerable and the opportunities ahead even greater. The CPTPP with 11 countries is already a large market, with supply chain diversification benefits from its rules of origin, but the potential is there for more than four ASEAN members to join, and South Korea as well; and of course the biggest of all would be the US, which would bring an area of huge importance to the free-trading world.

Yes, of course, as we go forward, the Government will need to address the investor-state dispute resolution and agricultural concerns of this House and our constituents, but I hope that Her Majesty's loyal Opposition will not continue to peddle the myth that the NHS will somehow be auctioned to a fictional Pacific region buyer. Let us instead recognise that trade is good, that it will benefit our exporters and our consumers, that the trans-Pacific partnership is a huge step forward in our strategic direction, and that the potential is absolutely the right one for the benefit of all parts of the United Kingdom.

1.4 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): If all the existing members of the CPTPP ratify the agreement, we will increase our total trade by £3.3 billion. That is quite a lot less than £9 trillion. To put it in context, that total estimate of £3.3 billion equates to about a third of our annual trade with Luxembourg, and £1.7 billion of exports is about 15% less than we export to Kazakhstan each year. Joining the trans-Pacific partnership will produce an increase in GDP over 15 years of just 0.08%, and if Malaysia maintains its refusal to ratify the agreement, as it is threatening to do, that will fall to 0.017%. In real money, that is £400 million, so I suppose the Secretary of State could cover the cost of two new royal yachts instead of one. The reason that the projected increase in trade is so small is, of course, that we already have trade deals with seven of the 11 CPTPP countries, with two more on the way with Australia and New Zealand. The truth is that the extra benefits from joining were always going to be very small. Before the Minister repeats the projected figure of a 65% increase in trade by 2030, he would do well to remember that the increase projected by his Department is regardless of whether we join the CPTPP or not.

The Secretary of State puts the CPTPP at the top of her list of priorities, but where, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar) said, is the action on standing up for British industry and jobs? We have a steel industry that faces an existential threat because of her inaction. It contributes £2.1 billion directly to GDP and another £2.7 billion indirectly, as well as providing 34,000 well-paid skilled jobs in our regions and a further 42,000 jobs in supply chains. That represents a £4.8 billion contribution to the UK economy, as against a possible maximum benefit from joining CPTPP of just £1.8 billion after 15 years.

The impact on our economy and our steel communities of losing the British steel industry dwarfs the impact of joining the CPTPP, yet the Secretary of State continues to give all her priority to the latter agenda while resolutely ignoring the former and voting against Labour measures to defend the industry from total ruin. There is still nothing from the Secretary of State on the catastrophic threat to the steel industry from ending the safeguards, which run out next Wednesday. What a disgrace that the International Trade Secretary chose not to use today's parliamentary time to introduce the emergency legislation needed to save the steel industry. Think of the 76,000 people who work in the steel industry and their families, for crying out loud!

There is a more direct connection between CPTPP and steel, so when the Minister responds to the debate, can he tell us how the Government will ensure that our membership of CPTPP is not used by China as a back-door route to dump steel on the UK market through Vietnam? What specific provisions will the UK Government negotiate—if they are going to negotiate anything—to prevent CPTPP from enabling the dumping of steel in the UK? Finally, will the Government take the action needed by next Wednesday and save our steel industry?

1.8 pm

The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands): We have had a good debate, if a little short. Joining the great global partnership of CPTPP promises to unleash a wave of trade-led growth in our country, generating jobs and delivering prosperity to every part of the UK. The launch of negotiations for our accession is an important moment for Britain as an independent trading nation. It shows that, once again, major economies want to do more business with the UK and that it is possible to strike ambitious trade deals that go further than those negotiated by the EU. The CPTPP is a free trade area comprising 11 nations that account for 13% of global GDP, worth £9 trillion, with a combined population of 500 million across four continents. By welcoming the UK into its fold, the CPTPP will become even stronger, its share of GDP rising to 16% and gaining an even louder collective voice on the world stage in pursuit of its shared priorities. The strategic case for this was well made by my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) and others as being important for the UK not just in trade but also in terms of wider strategy.

As the Secretary of State said earlier, it shifts the UK's economic centre of gravity towards faster growing parts of the world such as Asia, where 65% of global middle-class consumers are expected to live by 2030,

[Greg Hands]

and the Americas, and there are great opportunities in this for UK agrifood, a point well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie)—I was delighted to meet her farmers a couple of weeks ago—and for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams) and the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Carla Lockhart). It is also a great opportunity for Staffordshire gin, a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell).

Britain would become the first new member of CPTPP since it was established in 2018, and other significant economies such as the Philippines, Thailand, Taiwan and South Korea are looking to follow suit. My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) mentioned Taiwan, and he will know that I am a 30-year-long enthusiast for Taiwan; we have Joint Economic and Trade Committee talks later this year, but I am always open to better trading links with Taiwan. This is a high-standards agreement between sovereign nations—a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme—and a business-focused deal that removes tariffs on 99.9% of the goods we export to CPTPP members and reduces other barriers, particularly for our vital services industry.

Turning to the content of the debate, the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), spoke for twice as long as the Secretary of State but it was all the usual doomsaying and talking the country down. As my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset said, she is the shadow Secretary of State against international trade. She has had three years to consider whether Labour supports this deal—three years—and she still has not made up her mind. Perhaps, however, we should not be surprised, because Labour could not make up its mind on deals with the component countries—the members. Labour abstained on Japan, is opposed to the Australia deal and against Singapore, and split three ways on the Canada deal. The right hon. Lady talked about the NHS, food safety and animal welfare; nothing in the CPTPP threatens our standards and it is clear that there will be no compromise on our standards from our manifesto.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) again went on endlessly about Brexit—as did his party colleague the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil)—but he and the SNP have never supported any trade deal ever so I do not think that whatever I say to him today is going to make him support it. He said that the UK had not agreed to join the investor-state dispute settlement. First, the UK has never lost an ISDS case and, secondly, I recommend having a look at the details. Labour put out a press release a few weeks ago saying that it decries the ISDS provisions in the Australia deal, but there are no ISDS provisions in the Australia trade deal. We heard a very considered contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins); he spoke in favour of the deal, and I agree with him that we would not sign up to the provisions that are included in the United States-Mexico-Canada agreement. Turning to the Lib Dems, Vince Cable was all in favour of these deals when he was in the coalition Government and the Minister for Trade, and he was actually in favour of ISDS proposals as well.

There are specific benefits for the cutting-edge sectors that are shaping the world of tomorrow such as AI, services and technology, and the deal will allow us to work closely with CPTPP members on modern digital trade rules, business travellers, slashing red tape, agrifood and more. When negotiations conclude, the UK's accession will be subject to the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 scrutiny process alongside the statutory Trade and Agriculture Commission report and I commend UK accession to CPTPP to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I will now suspend the House for three minutes in order to make arrangements for the next item of business.

1.14 pm

Sitting suspended.

Backbench Business

UK Defence Spending

1.18 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered UK defence spending.

I begin by thanking the Backbench Business Committee and those colleagues who supported the application by my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) for the debate. It would be remiss of me not to recognise the members of our armed forces this week. Armed Forces Day is coming up this weekend when we will think about the work they do on our behalf, but we should, as I said yesterday, think about it every single day of the year.

Yesterday's events in the Black sea showed how fragile is the world in which we live, with the threat from Russia and developments and increasing threats in China. The domain of defence has changed in terms of, for example, cyber, space, information technology, the asymmetric threats from hostile states, and the determination of some to tear up the international rules-based order which we have come to accept since the second world war.

On 19 November, the Prime Minister announced that the defence budget would increase by £16.5 billion over the next four years. Anyone who knows me will know that, for my part, any increase in defence expenditure is welcome. The Government committed to that increase over and above the 0.5% that the Conservatives had agreed to in their election manifesto. However, the 2020 spending review funding settlement described it as an increase in defence spending of £24 billion in cash over the next four years—something that has been repeated often by the Prime Minister.

I thank the Institute for Fiscal Studies for pointing out that that is rather misleading. It believes that it would be more accurate to say that by 2024-25 the defence budget will have risen in real terms from 2019-20 by £7.5 billion. It seems that the Government have got the £24 billion figure by taking the cumulative increase each year. I do not think that helps the debate on defence expenditure, because clearly that methodology is not one that most people recognise. What clearly is the case is that, by the conventional method by which it is measured, by 2024-25 the defence budget will be £47.4 billion in real terms, which is a 7.5% increase.

Another thing that seems very strange—this was very helpfully pointed out by the House of Commons Library—is that if we look at the way the Government have profiled expenditure, we see that most of it is in the first three years, from 2020-21 to 2022-23. No doubt a general election has been pencilled in for somewhere around then, because after that it drops from 5.6% in 2022-23 to 0.4% in 2023-24 and 2024-25, so in terms of the way in which this has been explained, some of the claims that have been made should come with a health warning.

I would also point out, thanks again to the House of Commons Library, that the defence budget will still be smaller in real terms than it was in 2019. As people know, I am a little bit of an anorak about following the defence budget and reading National Audit Office reports.

If we look at what happened, we see that from 2010 the defence budget dropped in real terms by £9 billion. It is worth exploring the history of the defence budget over the last 10 years as a comparison with what we have today. We all remember that in 2010 the Conservative coalition Government took office saying that the Labour party had left the defence budget with a £38 billion black hole. I tried on numerous occasions to find out where that figure came from. The only way I could get it was from the NAO's 2009 major projects report, which said that on the equipment side there would be a gap in the defence budget of £6 billion over 10 years if the defence budget only rose by 2.7%. It then went on to say, strangely, that if there was no increase over the next 10 years it would be £36 billion. Clearly, the spin doctors in the Conservative party added an extra £2 billion for good measure.

Over the period of the last Labour Government, there was a real increase in the defence budget of 5.5%. If we want to question whether the £38 billion was just rhetoric we can, because within two years of the coalition Government coming in it had been completely wiped out. Clearly, the individuals who were Defence Secretaries then should be brought back to field the fiscal crisis we face today. However, the reality is that that covered up what the Government were actually doing, which was slashing the defence budget from 2010 onwards. For six of those 10 years, we had a reduction in the defence budget, including an actual reduction of 9.7% in 2012-13. When the Government were arguing that they were standing up for defence, they were doing exactly the opposite, slashing it throughout that period by over £8 billion, and we all know the consequences of that. We cannot start today's debate with the idea that this is somehow new money; it is not even catch-up for what was cut throughout that period.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Was not one of the really detrimental outcomes of that that the services and the Ministry of Defence were pushing programmes to the right and therefore extending them out, adding to costs and disrupting those programmes, and that our troops then did not have the equipment that they needed?

Mr Jones: My right hon. Friend is right, and those chickens are now coming home to roost with some of those programmes. That adds cost, but the main effect was that we saw a 45,000 cut to the Army. Despite the fact that the Conservative party in opposition, when I was a Defence Minister, called for an increase in the Army and an increase in the defence budget—an increase in everything—the first thing it did in government, under the smokescreen of this fictitious £38 billion black hole, was to cut the defence budget. Now we have a situation in which the Army is going to be reduced by another 10,000. Alongside that, we had compulsory redundancies, in-year budgets cut at short notice, and ridiculous decisions taken, for example on Nimrod and Harrier, which were scrapped at a moment's notice. That had a real effect on the capabilities of our armed forces, as my right hon. Friend has just outlined.

Then we come to the equipment plan. Again, I suggest that anyone who wants to understand the defence budget should always read the NAO reports. The NAO is very clear that the equipment plan, as outlined at the moment, is unaffordable. It has been like that for the last four

[Mr Kevan Jones]

years, and there is no sign that it is going to improve. According to the last report—these are the MOD's figures, I hasten to add; I am not adding to the fiction—there is a £13 billion black hole in the current equipment plan. The security and defence review—the integrated review—was supposed to look at that. The one thing I was calling for from that, as I think a lot of people were, was some reality: “What are you going to cancel out of the budget to get it back in balance? Will you actually say what you will do?” It did not take the opportunity to do that. The other startling thing from the most recent report is that the efficiencies that were supposedly built in to make the equipment plan affordable have been completely ignored by the Ministry of Defence.

How did we get to this place? Again, we have to look at the history of what the Government have done over the last 10 years. They introduced the Levene review, which pushed the top-level budget holders back to the military and reduced control at the centre. The latest report shows that nearly a third of the accountancy positions in the top-level budgets in the RAF, Army and Royal Navy are vacant, so there is not that control. I said at the time that I thought the Levene review was misguided. It has left the centre with very little control over some of these issues.

We then had the ludicrous decision, thanks to the Liberal Democrats in the coalition Government, to delay the ordering of the Successor class for the nuclear deterrent, which has led to our existing deterrent having to be extended, at huge cost. Without the ability to look in detail at driving down some of these costs, even with the increase that has been made, I do not think that the equipment budget will be affordable. The way the MOD does its budgets needs fundamental reform.

Why does this matter at the end of the day? It matters for two reasons. First, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar) has just said, it leads to a situation in which the men and women of our armed forces do not have the right equipment. It is also inefficient, because it pushes things to the right, and we end up with those of us who argue for more money for defence facing people who say, “Why should we give it, if you have this chaotic system?”

However, it is even worse than that. This relates to the equipment we are ordering. A very good report was written by the right hon. Member for Ludlow (Philip Dunne) on prosperity. I am a believer. The Prime Minister thinks that now in this golden age after Brexit we should buy British—but the MOD is doing completely the opposite. It seems to buy American. Recently, we have had Wedgetail, the maritime patrol aircraft and Apache helicopters all purchased from the United States in a Government-to-Government contract.

People ask, “Why does that matter?” It does matter. First, because we are not supporting British jobs. Unlike other nations that insist on a work share, as the Indians did with their P-8s, we do nothing at all, so we are left completely wide open not just to our industrial base being denuded, but to foreign exchange fluctuations. That is of huge interest in terms of the defence budget. If we look at it as a whole, US content is 31% now—it was 10% in 2006—and we are opening ourselves up to the fluctuations of the currency markets. That is money that should be going into our frontline services, but it will not be.

No explanation has been given to me as to why we have suddenly gone down that path, and why we have not insisted that the US companies we buy from have to work in the UK. That is inexcusable, but it is a clear decision taken by the MOD that exports British jobs to the United States but also makes our defence budget very vulnerable to currency fluctuations.

John Spellar: Is it not worse than that? Whereas the United States air force wanted to buy Brimstone and was prevented by congressional pressure—they knew it was a superior product—the MOD has now dumped Brimstone and is buying Hellfire from the United States.

Mr Jones: My right hon. Friend must be reading over my shoulder because I was about to come on to the latest decision by the Ministry of Defence.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The right hon. Gentleman is making a most interesting speech. Is not the situation even worse? When we buy from other countries, we will never own all the intellectual knowledge that applies to that kit and that could be a disadvantage when it comes to its use.

Mr Jones: I will answer the hon. Gentleman first, because he makes a good point. When we purchased the C-130, the package came with the intellectual property, so that we could do the maintenance in the UK. With Wedgetail and the P-8, it did not, which means that they must fly back to the United States; in the case of the P-8, I think maintenance can be done at Birmingham airport by US staff but UK staff will not be allowed to do it. I cannot understand why, if we have a Prime Minister who wants to champion the best of British, we now have a Department that seems content to buy off the shelf from the United States.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Warley mentioned Hellfire, the latest scandal. This relates to the new missiles for the Apache helicopters. There were two competitions: the joint air-to-ground and Hellfire missiles; and the Brimstone weapon, to which he referred. Brimstone is an effective weapon which the Americans wanted to purchase, but they were stopped by Congress. So what do you think the MOD did? Did it buy British and ensure this proven technology for our Apaches? No—it has just awarded the contract for Hellfire and JAGM to the United States, which again is exporting UK jobs. The issue with JAGM, and I have raised this with the MOD, is that it is not even at the moment, I understand, fully IM—insensitive munition—compliant, unlike Brimstone.

Why is it that the Government and the MOD are content not only to export jobs, but not to hold these companies' feet to the fire and say, “Can we at least do things here?” Can we do it? Yes, we can. The Indians did it with their P-8s. There is a lack of understanding about that.

The Prime Minister talks things up, and we have the prosperity agenda and, as I said, the great report by the right hon. Member for Ludlow, but they are not being put into practice. That needs to happen because the danger is that we get to a situation whereby our industrial base is eroded further. It has been eroded by this Government's policy and that has got to stop.

On the threats we face, we have a problem with the equipment, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley said. In 2027, we will have 17 ships—not even enough to escort the carrier. We have had dilly-dallying on procuring the fleet solid support ships for the Royal Navy, which are needed for the carrier battle group. Ships are being ordered, for example the Type 32, and no one knows what they are or what they will do. It seems that the Prime Minister has suddenly decided that the MOD should pick up the tab for—I was going to call it the royal yacht, but I understand it will not be that—the Prime Minister's personal yacht, or whatever it will be. However, the decision has been made to spend £200 million, and it is not just the capital costs of building that ship. Where does it fit into the overall naval strategy? Who will run it and at what cost? There is a disjuncture in the way in which decisions are made.

The Government can spin their new increase how they like, but it does not make up for the cuts of the past 10 years and certainly does not fill the black hole. If we look at the next few years, capital budgets might be going up, but revenue budgets are being cut. That means wages, and terms and conditions in our armed forces will be reduced.

I cannot sum up the position any better than the National Audit Office report, which said:

“The Department faces the fundamental problem that its ambition has far exceeded available resources.”

I would say the same of the Prime Minister. His rhetoric far outweighs the abilities and resources we need to meet his ambition.

1.37 pm

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), my colleague on the Defence Committee. I am pleased to see not one, but two Defence Ministers on the Front Bench who have come to listen to our thoughts today.

The debate is particularly relevant because this is Armed Forces Week. I hope that both Ministers will join me in using it as an opportunity to recognise and celebrate what our services do for the nation. It is a chance to give thanks to all our forces for what they do in keeping our nation safe and working with allies to protect our interests and defend our values.

When we speak of the armed forces, we mean not just our regular and reserve forces, but the cadets, our veterans and, importantly, the families and loved ones who support those who wear the uniform. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

This week is important because the bond between the armed forces and society is critical. Our volunteer forces are drawn from society. If the general public are less aware of what our forces do and the role they play in keeping us safe, fewer people will step forward and consider joining the services. As we have discussed today, we are more likely to get an increase in defence spending if the nation understands the threats. People will support our call for increased spending if we take the nation with us.

It has been said many times in this Chamber that we have arguably the most professional armed forces in the world—highly trained, well equipped, extremely professional and, consequently, revered by our allies and feared by our adversaries. As a former regular soldier and now a

reservist, I have no hesitation in recommending to any school leaver a career in the armed forces. To them, I say: “You will learn things about yourself you never knew, go places you never expected, and develop skills and build confidence that will help you for the rest of your life. The first time you march off the parade square, having completed your training, you will make your mum and dad so proud.” We thank all those in the armed forces who serve and continue to serve.

Today's debate is about defence spending. I think the Government's integrated review paints the changing threat picture very fairly. By anybody's calculation, the world is becoming more insecure. Authoritarianism is on the rise; extremism is active not just in the middle east, but increasingly in Africa; both Russia and China are presenting fresh security challenges that we have yet to fully address; and our international organisations are less able to uphold international standards. I would argue that our threat picture, collectively, is greater than during the cold war when defence spending was at 4%, yet today it remains at just above 2%.

Quite rightly, the integrated review calls for new capabilities to counter emerging threats, particularly from cyber and space, but it is clear that without extra funding, that has come at the expense of our conventional forces. The emergence of new threats does not mean that the old ones have disappeared, yet here we are, cutting back the Army by 10,000 troops and reducing the number of tanks and armoured fighting vehicles, as well as our Typhoon and F-35 fleets and our Hercules heavy-lift aircraft.

We will also lose two Type 23 frigates. We have frigates and destroyers in the surface fleet that are global leaders in their class, but we simply do not have enough of them. Our Royal Navy is now overstretched and we need to increase its size. I certainly praise the efforts of HMS Defender in ignoring the intimidation of the Russians in the Black sea yesterday, but if we are to step forward with our allies as we should to defend and protect international waters and show a presence in the Caribbean, the Gulf, east Africa, the Mediterranean, the North sea and now the Arctic, as well as a tilt to the Indo-Pacific, as commanded in the integrated review, we will need a bigger Navy.

The Government put forward the counter-argument that we can lean on autonomous and unmanned assets. New technologies can certainly help, but they should be seen as enablers rather than as replacing manpower. We cannot replace boots on the ground.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman makes a good point about leaning further into autonomous weapons. As that happens more and more, does he share my concern that we are not as far advanced on the rules surrounding their use? Do we not need greater collaboration with allied countries to set the standards and rules globally?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman is correct in the sense that we are advancing into new terrain: even when it comes to a cyber-attack, it is unclear whether or not it is an article 5 breach. We are building resilience and capabilities, but the rules-based order, international institutions and legislation have yet to keep up. That should not prevent us from making sure—as the MOD

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is rightly doing—that our mission is protected as we become increasingly vulnerable and ever more reliant on the movement of data.

To go back to the point about reducing our armed forces and the footprint of our manpower, the ability to seize and hold ground, separate warring factions, deliver humanitarian aid, assist civil authorities with tasks such as tackling covid-19, win over hearts and minds, restore law and order, respond to natural disasters and carry out countless other diverse tasks—that requires people. It requires professionals—it requires our soldiers, sailors and air personnel. It is wrong to reduce those numbers.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I entirely agree with what my right hon. Friend has said. We have not fought a high-intensity war since the second world war—maybe we did in Korea—but we have operation after operation, and what we need is manpower. We have just cut it by 10,000, and I can tell hon. Members that, having commanded soldiers on the ground in peacekeeping or peacemaking, we have cut off our nose to spite our face. We require our boots on the ground. We require soldiers. I entirely endorse what my right hon. Friend has said. We are cutting our Army by 10,000, and that is a mistake.

Mr Ellwood: My right hon. and gallant Friend makes a very powerful point. I know that the Ministers on the Front Bench are conscious of this issue. One day, I would like to learn of the algorithm—what it was—that determined the cut of 9,500. Perhaps one day we will read the memoirs of the Ministers on the Front Bench and learn and be better aware.

For the moment, the cuts have another significance, because they affect our upstream engagement: our ability to strengthen our security bonds with allies and partners. I know that the Armed Forces Minister is conscious of the value of the bond that we develop with nations—Commonwealth partners and so forth—because of the professionalism of our armed forces. Being able to share ideas, training and so forth is absolutely critical. However, the integrated review fails to address the biggest strategic threat posed by China. It does not recognise how China is using its soft power—its one belt, one road programme—to gift military and telecoms equipment to countries across the world and effectively nudge us out of favoured nation status. That is happening with Commonwealth countries in Africa and the Caribbean. We lose our soft power and prosperity links.

China is ensnaring more and more countries in its sphere of influence. We are seeing a bipolar world emerge. For me, that is the face of the next cold war, and that is what we need to address. That is exactly why we should be increasing our global presence, not decreasing it or limiting our ability to increase it by reducing our numbers.

Jamie Stone: The right hon. Gentleman is making a most interesting contribution. Does he agree with the point I made in this place yesterday that reducing the Army by 10,000 people reduces the career options for young people who might join, and that that in itself could make still greater the problem of recruitment?

Mr Ellwood: Yes, the hon. Gentleman makes an important point. The burden placed on the existing armed forces when their numbers are reduced overstretches them. That means that the harmony guidelines will not be followed as they should be or welfare programmes adhered to. It is a valid point, particularly in the advent of global Britain. We saw, thanks to the successful G7 summit, recognition that the world is changing fast and we need to do something about it. I would argue that what we choose to do over the next few years in recalibrating, defending and reinvigorating our global order will determine what happens over the next few decades, given the rise of China. It is therefore absolutely important that our armed forces—our hard power—are able to play their role.

In that light, I encourage the MOD to continue in the spirit of what happened in the Black sea yesterday when it chose to send HMS Defender from Odessa to Georgia. I am picking up that perhaps not everybody in Whitehall was of the view that HMS Defender should have taken that path. May I congratulate the MOD on being firm with its commitment to say, “This is how we uphold the international freedom of the seas”? We must not kowtow to adversaries that choose to push forward and demand that other nations are unable to enter these seas. We thought that actually the Black sea would be pretty benign and that it would be the South China sea where things would get a little spicy. What happened yesterday has been a good warm-up. I absolutely encourage the MOD to continue in that vein and not to shy away because of any other voices in Government that might want us to take a more subservient route.

In ending—I am conscious in raising this subject that the Minister was kind in responding to my urgent question yesterday—I reiterate my request for the vaccination of our deployed troops. I am grateful to the Minister for coming to the House yesterday. He made it very clear that the MOD must abide by the national standards of vaccination roll-out.

John Spellar: Why? Why can we not make an exemption and show preference for our troops who we are sending on deployment overseas, rather than just sticking to the rigid, dogmatic guidelines or strictures of the Department of Health and Social Care officials and, frankly, their hopeless Ministers?

Mr Ellwood: I partially agree with my Committee colleague. The point that is being made, though—the MOD and, indeed, the Ministers understand it—is that there is a very powerful case for giving keyworker status to our overseas deployed personnel. Quite simply, that is what we are asking Ministers to consider. They should take this issue away. They should heed the tone of yesterday’s debate, which has been echoed today. We owe those personnel a huge debt of gratitude for what they did in this country to tackle covid: driving ambulances, building the Nightingales, and running testing stations and vaccination centres. When we ask them to do their day job, we must honour the armed forces covenant. We have a duty of care. I know from my experience in Bosnia, Kuwait, and even Cyprus and Kenya: I got vaccinated again and again to protect me from the diseases that I might encounter. We have the ability to vaccinate here. Please Minister, can we make sure that that happens? Let us give our deployed troops keyworker status.

1.51 pm

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the Chair of the Defence Committee with the knowledgeable insight that he brings to these debates.

Defence expenditure brings with it an opportunity to extend fairness into every corner of the country. There is nothing quite like the ability to invest in manufacturers and contractors in all parts of the United Kingdom, and the Ministry of Defence should take this role and opportunity very seriously. However, it does not take it as seriously as it should. Scotland and the south-west of England have almost the same population, yet MOD statistics released in January this year show that, when compared with the south-west of England, Scotland receives only approximately one third of the MOD expenditure—one third of the spend per person and one third of the direct MOD jobs per 100,000. Actually, it is worse than that. When we add the MOD spending in Wales and Northern Ireland to Scotland's, we still arrive at a figure that is below that of the south-west of England. I do not understand how the Government can justify a single region of England, with half the population, benefiting from receiving more MOD expenditure than three quarters of this so-called Union.

Defence expenditure can be a complex issue, and that is set out very clearly by the Public Accounts Committee, which deemed that the 2019 to 2029 equipment plan is too expensive by between an estimated £3 billion and £13 billion. Plans for efficiency remain rose-tinted and optimistic. For example, £4.7 billion of savings are assumed without the remotest indication of how they will be delivered. Of 32 of the top priority programmes, a third are at serious risk of not being delivered on time, with capabilities reaching full operational standards two years late. It is not too hard to see where the money is going: the money is going on waste, and, on that, I will touch on the Type 45.

The oldest Type 45 in service has been in service since only 2011. The order was cut from 12 to six, with the price rocketing, like a sea-skimming missile, beyond the £1 billion per ship mark. There were more than 5,000 operational defects in five years, with a bill of more than £50 million to rectify them. They were brought into service too early, with untested propulsion systems and now have to be retrofitted with different engines at a very early stage in their lifecycle, costing £160 million that could have been invested elsewhere. It is just as well that the Type 45 is an exceptional fighting warship, given its propensity to find itself stuck. The MOD has a habit of hiding behind the complexity of that extremely advanced warship, but inconveniently for the MOD it is not the highly advanced air defence, anti-ship or anti-submarine systems that are falling over; it is the ship's basic ability to move. Royal Navy sailors deserve far better than that.

On fleet solid support, the entirety of the order should be fulfilled in domestic yards in the UK. Does the MOD believe that by offshoring large elements of the manufacturing supply chain stimulus it is somehow teaching English and Scottish yards a lesson? If so, what is that lesson? I think it might be not to trust the MOD with future workstreams. The notion that a £1.6 billion order for defence equipment could be manufactured in foreign yards to the benefit of their apprentices, supply chain and steel industry shows a Department apparently all over the place in its procurement priorities. It

demonstrates that the Government, as currently set up, are blind in many cases to the value of a potential tender, and fixated rather on the price.

Mr Kevan Jones: Is it not worse than that? Everyone agrees that the Type 26 frigate will be a fantastic addition to the Royal Navy, but HMS Glasgow is taking 10 years to procure, and that is because, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar) suggested, of what the Government do on all such contracts: they push it to the right to fit the in-year budgets, which leads to costs. That short-termism also means that other projects cannot be funded.

Dave Doogan: I thank the right hon. Gentleman, if for no other reason than raising the Type 26, which will allow me to highlight that, despite the MOD, we at last have a tremendous ship with very significant exportability, as we have seen with our allies in Australia and Canada. All credit to BAE Systems for the outcome of what has been a less than ideal procurement process, as tends to be the way. Type 31, the steel for which will be cut shortly at Rosyth, is another tremendously exportable frigate for the Royal Navy, and will demonstrate the first-class nature of manufacturing in Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, to the benefit of people working here.

I move to the air. While final assembly of foreign-made ship blocks in the UK is patent nonsense, final assembly and component manufacture of aircraft makes much more sense. To that end, I move to the new medium lift helicopter programme to replace Puma, and so on. The competition between Leonardo with its AW149 and Airbus with its H175 means that they will not be British-designed aircraft, but they will require manufacturing in the UK. Can the Minister assure the House that the contract award need not necessarily follow traditional rotary-wing procurement routes, but will instead place a very stringent pre-qualification on maximising UK content, workforce and suppliers, together with a cast-iron commitment on apprenticeships—the type of value added over and above the asset delivery that the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) set out so clearly? To do so would allow the MOD to best deploy defence expenditure resources for the benefit of communities, as well as air service personnel and operators. That scoring of societal benefit in tenders is vital going forward. It maximises return on investments and minimises waste.

I do not have time to go into the Challenger 3 upgrade, which is not an optimistic proposition, or the royal yacht that is not a royal yacht but might be a flagship but is not a real flagship. We are still trying to figure out what exactly it will be. I will move on instead to the broader consequences of waste.

Waste in defence spending comes with a political cost that I am not much concerned with; I am far more concerned by the operational and opportunity costs of haphazard defence expenditure. The effects of that may be seen in the poverty of our defence housing. Earlier this week, the National Audit Office said that many barracks were in very poor condition. Issues with heating and hot water were the most common complaints. The NAO also highlighted a £1.5 billion backlog in repairs to military accommodation, with only 49% of people residing in that accommodation saying that they were

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satisfied, which is a decrease from 58% in 2015. So a really bad situation is getting even worse. The NAO found that nearly 80,000 people were occupying single living accommodation blocks either full-time or part-time, and 2,400 of those were in housing so bad that they were not even being charged rent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) tabled amendment 41 to the Armed Forces Bill, which was dealt with just yesterday, to demand that defence housing standards are at least as good as, if not better than, the relevant local housing standard, wherever the accommodation is in the UK. That will not be going forward, much to my disappointment. I do not see why our armed forces personnel should be living in accommodation that is worse than anywhere else in the surrounding community. It should not be an either/or, but if this Government could get a grip on defence procurement spending, they might find the capital required to invest in the dreadful accommodation that many of our service personnel are currently enduring. Whether it is defence expenditure or anything else, spending is about choices, and I am very clear that we are not currently making the right choices in the UK.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I have to inform the House of a correction to the result of the deferred Division held yesterday on the motion on the conference, November and Christmas Adjournments. The number of Members voting Aye was 568, not 567. The number of Members voting No remains three. There is no change to the outcome of the Division.

2.1 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Oh, Madam Deputy Speaker, the disparity in that vote is almost as great as in the results when we voted to renew the nuclear deterrent—where we had very large majorities—on a cross-party basis, in agreement with that step. On a generous interpretation of the terms of this debate, and if I am not prevented by the Chair, I hope to say a little more about one aspect of the nuclear deterrent under the scope of subjects of a defence nature on which we are going to spend a considerable amount of money.

However, let me start by expressing some sympathy with Defence Ministers, because they have fought long, hard and valiantly to get a significant increase, in real terms, in the defence budget, and they have done that and deserve credit for it. The problem with which they have to contend is that, set in the context of defence expenditure over a very long period, defence still remains far too far down—way down—the scale of our national priorities.

Not for the first time, I should like to paint this picture, with the aid of a prop that I am not allowed to use but which I am, I trust, allowed to consult. It shows the falling percentage of GDP spent on defence over a very long period and the rising percentage of GDP spent on three other costly Departments: those dealing with education, health and welfare. I paint this picture just to give people the idea of the long-term trend. In the mid-1950s, an age ago, we were spending 7% of GDP on defence. In 1963, the falling graph on defence crosses over the rising graph on welfare and benefits,

at 6%. We now spend six times on welfare and benefits what we spend on defence, but then of course 1963 was also a very long time ago. In the mid-1980s, which is not such a long time ago, we were still spending similar sums on education, on health and on defence. We were then investing roughly 5% of GDP in each, but now we spend two and a half times as much on education and nearly four times as much on health as we spend on defence. The mid-1980s was the last time until recently that we faced a threat from both a strongly assertive Russia and a major terrorist campaign. Then, it was Irish republicanism; now, it is Islamist fundamentalism.

I said that I wanted to talk about one area of defence spending because it had attracted attention from the references to it in the integrated review, and I see to my great pleasure that the next speaker on the list is the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). I should be very surprised indeed if he did not have certain observations to make about the change in the maximum number of warheads that it is envisaged might be held in stockpile for the future nuclear deterrent.

Ever since NATO's September 2014 Wales summit, which restated its 2% guideline for defence spending as a proportion of gross domestic product, it has become necessary tediously to repeat that that figure is a floor, not a ceiling. For example, although it is sometimes proudly proclaimed that we meet the NATO guideline, historically, as I have shown, we used to spend way above that. Even as late as the mid-1990s, half a dozen years after the fall of the Berlin wall, we were not spending 2.1% or what is now going to be 2.2% of GDP on defence; we were spending fully 3% of GDP on defence. It was the view of the previous Defence Committee, and I understand that it is still the view of the Chairman of the present Defence Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), that 3% would be a realistic and sensible target for a country with our worldwide interests to seek to hit.

Mr Ellwood indicated assent.

Dr Lewis: I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend nodding his assent. Therefore, when we talk about the 2% guideline, we should bear in mind that it is not a ceiling nor a target; it is merely a floor or a minimum. Now we face a similar task regarding the increase in the cap on the size of our nuclear stockpile recently announced in the integrated review. That should be described as a ceiling, not a floor. In other words, it is a maximum and not a target for the number of warheads we will retain.

The integrated review states:

"In 2010 the Government stated an intent to reduce our overall nuclear warhead stockpile ceiling from not more than 225 to not more than 180 by the mid-2020s. However, in recognition of the evolving security environment, including the developing range of technological and doctrinal threats, this is no longer possible, and the UK will move to an overall nuclear weapon stockpile of no more than 260 warheads."

Predictably, this is being denounced as a more than 40% increase in the stockpile, on the basis that increasing a total of 180 to 260 would be an uplift of 44.4%. However, the cancellation of a reduction that has not yet been completed—if indeed it ever began—means that, at most, the total might rise from the previously declared maximum of 225 to a new maximum of 260. Were those the actual present and future totals, the increase would be only about 15.5%, a perfectly reasonable

increment to ensure that advances in anti-ballistic missile technology over the 40-plus years of our next generation of Trident warheads cannot undermine our policy of minimum strategic deterrence.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: The right hon. Gentleman does not have to wait for the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). He knows that we disagree on this—he mentioned at the start of his speech the last vote on the nuclear deterrent, and I seem to recall that we were in agreement that there should be a vote on the nuclear deterrent. However, when the integrated review was published—he has just mentioned the change in threat and doctrines as a reason for the expansion of the new nuclear policy—it was said that this was somehow to do with things such as cyber-threats, so which computer are we aiming these nuclear weapons at? Does he agree that to say that we would use nuclear weapons in response to a cyber-attack or threat is wholly absurd?

Dr Lewis: If the hon. Gentleman, whom I regard as a friend, waits for the next part of my analysis, I hope that all will become clear. However, it is absolutely the case that nuclear weapons, as a deterrent, do not deter every sort of threat that could be ranged against us. If they did, we could abolish all the other armed forces. The truth of the matter is that they deter other weapons of mass destruction. Unless there were a development in the cyber world that could inflict destruction on a mass level comparable with a nuclear exchange, it is entirely incredible to think that nuclear weapons would be used in retaliation to an attack of that sort. I hope that satisfies him on the main point that he was making.

Minimum deterrence relies on the fact that possession of a last-resort strategic nuclear system that can be guaranteed to inflict unacceptable and unavoidable devastation in response to nuclear aggression does not require any ability to match the aggressor missile for missile or warhead for warhead. Nuclear superpowers have huge overkill capabilities that offer zero extra protection against countries with much smaller weapons of mass destruction arsenals, as long as the latter can retaliate with an unstoppable and unbearable counter-strike against any nuclear aggressor who is seeking to wipe them out. Overkill capabilities may have symbolic political value, but in the dread event of a nuclear exchange, all they can do, as was famously said, is to “make the rubble bounce”.

There may exist more up-to-date estimates, but the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute’s inventory totals for world nuclear stockpiles, published at the beginning of last year, are sufficiently instructive. China, France and the UK, with estimated totals of 320, 290 and 215 respectively, fall into the camp of minimum strategic nuclear deterrence. By contrast, the estimated totals of 5,800 for the United States and 6,375 for Russia go way beyond anything needed to pursue such a policy. The notion that, at some stage in the future, the United Kingdom might end up with 35 more warheads than its previously declared theoretical maximum does not change the fact that we are currently, and shall probably remain, fifth out of five in the size of the nuclear stockpiles held by the permanent member states of the UN Security Council. So why have the Government chosen to take the controversial step of

cancelling the reduction in the ceiling of our warhead total from 225 to 180 and raising it to a new ceiling of 260 instead?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Can I answer?

Dr Lewis: I was just going to say that this is the analysis that the hon. Gentleman was waiting for, but if he really wishes to come in, he can.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: It is a shame that the Chair of the Defence Committee, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), is no longer here, but I was with him when he said that it is to cover for the fact that we are cutting the Army by 10,000 as a sweetener to the Americans. That is what it is.

Dr Lewis: Let us see if the hon. Gentleman was right in anticipating what I have to say.

In the absence, at present at any rate, of any briefing on the issue, classified or otherwise, from my parliamentary colleagues on the Defence ministerial team, here are the four possible explanations that occur to me. Explanation 1—most probably, as already stated—is that it is an insurance policy to prevent a potential aggressor from calculating that advances in anti-ballistic missile systems have reduced our retaliatory capability to a point where our response to an attack becomes bearable or even avoidable. Explanation 2—quite probably—is that it is to give more headroom for the time, in the late 2030s or early 2040s, when we are due to exchange our current stockpile of warheads for next-generation nuclear warheads, while at the same time preventing disruption of our continuous at-sea deterrent patrols. Explanation 3—possibly—is that it is to send a signal internationally that the UK is determined to keep nuclear weapons as long as other countries have them and remains committed to doing whatever is required to maintain their invulnerability. And—here it comes—explanation 4, conceivably, is that it is also tailored for a domestic audience worried about cuts in the size of the Army, in order to offer reassurance, or at least to divert some attention from those reductions.

What seems most unlikely is an intention to invest in additional warheads of the existing design. We are certainly cancelling their reduction from a theoretical maximum of 225 to one of only 180 for any or all of the four reasons listed, particularly the first explanation. Raising the maximum from 225 to 260 to provide extra headroom for the eventual transition from current warheads to their replacements is a sensible explanation, though not a conclusive one, given that the changeover is not due to happen for well over a decade.

Despite the imposition of a dedicated supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament as the Leader of the Opposition in 2015, hon. and right hon. Labour Members ensured that their party’s policy remained multilateralist. Previously, on 14 March 2007, Parliament had voted by 409 to 161 in favour of proceeding with the initial gate for renewal of the Trident submarine fleet. Even that huge majority was eclipsed on 18 July 2016, when it rose to 355 after MPs voted for the decisive main gate stage to proceed by 472 to only 117.

There is nothing in article VI of the non-proliferation treaty that requires any country already in possession of a recognised nuclear arsenal to get rid of it and to

[Dr Julian Lewis]

achieve a nuclear-free world prior to a state of grace when general and complete conventional disarmament—also referred to in the non-proliferation treaty, but seldom cited by those who quote it selectively—can be guaranteed. There is a very good reason for this, because if we were to abandon all nuclear weapons in an unreformed world, that would be a recipe for disaster. In a conventional war taking place in a nuclear-free world, the former nuclear powers would immediately race to reacquire the bomb. The first to succeed would then use its monopoly, as occurred in 1945. If the treaty's vision of general and complete conventional disarmament ever becomes reality, then nuclear weapons can indeed also safely be declared redundant; but, until that day dawns, the United Kingdom is perfectly capable of changing the size of its warhead stockpile without breaching the non-proliferation treaty in order to maintain indefinitely the credibility of its strategic minimum deterrence policy.

2.19 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, but I have to say, with all due respect to the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), that it is deeply depressing to follow him when he seems to be contemplating with equanimity the idea of further nuclear arms and a global nuclear war. Surely this debate, of all debates, ought to be concentrating on issues of peace, issues of security and issues of hope for the future, but very little that I have heard so far offers any hope to anybody for the future other than a preparedness for more conflicts and more wars.

The Government's White Paper on security was very interesting, and I read it with interest and care, yet I felt that it had missed the fundamental point. What is real security? Is real security the ability to kill somebody else, to destroy something else or to go to war with somebody else, or is it the ability to feed your population and to ensure that they have good healthcare and good education and breathe clean air, and that their young people can look forward to a future with some degree of hope? For many around the world, that is not a possibility and they suffer grievously. Looking at the causes of wars that have happened over recent years in Afghanistan, in Iraq and in Libya, they have all been followed by non-state actors getting more and more active and thus more and more dangerous. There are consequences to every military conflict that we involve ourselves in, and we would do well to think about that.

The Government's proposals in all this, in a post-covid world where wealth has been transferred from the poorest to the richest at an unprecedented rate over the past year to 18 months, are to spend £24 billion more on our defence budget over the next four years and to cut our overseas aid budget from 0.7% of GDP to 0.5%. What kind of message to the world is that? It says that post-covid, recognising all these issues around the world, we are increasing expenditure on arms and preparedness for war and decreasing that which we invest in clean air, clean water, education, health, housing and all the other things that are so important in many parts of the world that are significantly poorer than we are.

The White Paper also makes real a decision that the Government have been inching towards, perhaps galloping towards, for quite a while, and that is to, as they see it,

restore Britain's global role. In the 1960s, the Labour Government led by Harold Wilson, while giving political support to the Americans in Vietnam—which I profoundly disagreed with at the time, as did many others in my party—nevertheless recognised that Britain's role of imperial grandeur around the world had to come to an end, and so ended the east of Suez policy on deployment of the Navy and of significant numbers of troops. That was a significant, important and quite seminal moment.

This Government seem to have abandoned all those ideas and now talk grandly of a global role for this country. We should just pause and think about this for a moment. We are a country of 65 million people in one part of the world. We are not a global power. We are not an imperial power. We should not be having pretensions of being an imperial or global power but play our part in the family of nations, through the United Nations, to try to improve the lot and living standards of people all around the world.

In that context, I ask myself what we are doing sending an aircraft carrier to patrol the South China seas to encourage a build-up of military hardware between India, Australia, the United States and ourselves all around the South China sea and towards China. It seems to me that this is a recreation of the whole idea of a cold war philosophy, which will not serve us well any more than building up to further conflict with Russia by the deployment of the Navy in the Black sea. Before anybody shouts at me about human rights abuses in China, Russia or anywhere else—Saudi Arabia, Yemen, or any country you care to name—I will just say this: I would challenge any country or any leader on their human rights record if I thought they should be challenged, and I do think they should be challenged, because human rights are a universal concept, based on the universal declaration of 1948. Would it not be so much better if we put our energies into engagement with all those countries to try to ensure that the ideals of the universal declaration were actually met in a proper way and if we supported the United Nations in what it is trying to achieve?

In this post-covid world, let us recognise that we need to spend a great deal of money on healthcare around the world. The World Health Organisation frequently points out that the greatest risk to the health of us all is another novel virus that will come from goodness knows where and goodness knows what source. It will not be dealt with by military means; it will only be dealt with by healthcare and health means. When Prime Minister talks of sharing our vaccine surplus, I hope it happens. I hope he is right in doing that and I hope those vaccines get to all the people and all the countries that need them.

I want to say something more on the issues of nuclear weapons. The General Assembly of the United Nations and the vast majority of nations in the United Nations have supported the idea of a global ban on nuclear weapons. They have signed up for it. A number of countries have already ratified that particular treaty. We are in a minority of countries that does not support the principle of a global ban. We are in a very small minority of countries that, contrary to what the right hon. Member for New Forest East says, are, in my view, in breach of the principles of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

The nuclear non-proliferation treaty was set up with the idea of preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and it has had some successes in that through nuclear weapons-free zones in Africa, central Asia, Latin America and others that are proposed, but it has not been so successful in persuading the declared nuclear weapons states or the non-declared, but “no nuclear weapons” states such as India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel to take part fully in the principles of the NPT.

The NPT review conference is coming up later this year. How on earth will Britain go to the NPT review conference and say, “We support the nuclear non-proliferation treaty”, while at the same time expanding our nuclear warheads from a maximum of 180 to 225 or 250—the figure is unclear from the White Paper and statements from the Ministry of Defence? Or, will we be able to say something more positive: that we will adopt a “no first use” policy, that we will not further increase the number of nuclear warheads, that we will take steps on greater mutual verification and on reducing the number of warheads and that we will seriously engage with the idea of a global ban on nuclear weapons?

Nuclear weapons usage is inconceivable and unthinkable for anyone who wants to see the world survive. Any one nuclear weapon used anywhere would cause massive and intense damage. What happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 was a firework compared with the power of the current nuclear weapons held by China, Russia, France, the United States and ourselves, so we have to think about what that means.

There was an article yesterday in the *i* about some of the survivors of the nuclear tests on Bikini Atoll in 1954. Many died from cancers as a result of those tests, as indeed did many British nuclear test veterans as a result of being forced to observe those particular tests. Can we not instead start looking towards a future where we play our part in trying to bring about a more peaceful world? We as a country want to live in a peaceful world. The people of this country want to live in a peaceful world. The people of this country do not want to see soldiers underpaid, badly treated, suffering mental health stress when they come out of the armed forces and getting inadequate support for it, nor do they want to see the privatisation of their facilities. They are proud when our armed forces help to deal with Ebola or save people, desperate refugees, drowning in seas around the world. They are proud of that. Can we not move in a slightly different direction and start looking not just at our own defence policy and the need to diversify so much of our defence industry while protecting jobs that are so important in different parts of the country, but also recognise that when we sell arms to others, they get used? They get used by Saudi Arabia to kill people in Yemen. They were used by Israel in the recent bombing of the Gaza strip. We need to think a bit more carefully and a bit more seriously about that.

The study of history is always important: the way in which the world went from the complacency of Edwardian England to the horrors of the first world war by a series of semi-secret mutual defence treaties all around Europe and the borders of Europe; and the way in which the rise of fascism was for a long time ignored in Germany and we ended up with the holocaust and the genocide of the second world war. Let us not go back to those days. Let us instead look to a world where we are actually

making our contribution to peace around the world, and our contribution to supporting people who are going through human rights abuses and oppression. I hope that our debate will consider what I started my contribution with: real security in a very difficult and very dangerous world. That, surely, is something we could all, I hope, agree with and sign up to.

2.31 pm

Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con) [V]: It is a great pleasure to take part in this fascinating debate and a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), who made a very eloquent plea for his version of what peace looks like around the world. I would not disagree with him at all, in that I think the UK does have a big role to play in trying to establish it and maintain it. I think we may disagree on some of the particular details on how to get there, but I think the whole House could agree that that is what we are trying to do.

I have always thought that a proper commitment to defence and defence spending is an essential part of that. I have been a champion of the Government's commitment to the 2% minimum of GDP spending on defence, but I also agree with Members who made the point that that has to be the minimum and, in fact, we could do with spending more. The fact is that we face many threats around the world. There are lots of nations with lots of nuclear weapons and designs on their neighbour's territory. We have a role to play—absolutely not as an imperial power, but as a concerned global citizen—in trying to make sure those strategies and weapons are never used. That means we have to be part of the balance in the world that others respect.

When it comes to world security and the ability to work with partners and insert ourselves into places to help with humanitarian missions for example, many people are rightly very proud of the great role our armed forces play in disaster situations around the world. These are things we simply cannot do to the extent we do now unless we have a fully functional and capable armed forces that is able to be flexible and have the capacity to act in multiple areas at the same time. That is how we can help our partners in need, whether it is with their security or with their response. I would love to see us spending 3% of GDP on defence—maybe that is something to work on for the future.

I want to talk about a couple of ways in which our defence spending is integral to our strategy for shared prosperity, both in the UK and abroad, and about how the budget needs to be used wisely. We have heard about the problems in procurement that have existed over many years, with budgets moving to the right and being delayed, which can end up costing more. I agree that we need to focus much more on how we get the best bang for our buck out of procurement spending. Some very big procurement items are moving through the budget at the moment, such as the nuclear deterrent. How they are paid for is a massively important part of the overall picture, but we need to make sure that procurement focuses properly on prosperity for British industry and British jobs here in the UK and that it helps to develop skills and opportunities for young people and support the technologies of the future. With reference to my constituency of Yeovil, there are two critical things that illustrate that very well.

[Mr Marcus Fysh]

The first is the unmanned aerial vehicle programme that Leonardo has been working on in conjunction with the MOD. It is very important that that goes to the next stage, because the military very much see it as the medium to longer-term replacement for existing vertical lift programmes such as the Wildcat and the AW101 Merlin, which our commandos operate out of. However, my understanding is that the MOD does not yet have the next stage of the programme budgeted and funded. I would like Ministers to please look at that, because it is also essential to the perpetuation of engineering skills in the UK for vertical lift, which Leonardo really embodies—a key sovereign capability that we should preserve and enhance.

The second big opportunity, as the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) mentioned, is the potential identified in the integrated review for a medium-lift helicopter to be built in the UK. There is a Leonardo product called the AW149, which is an extremely capable vehicle. I must briefly correct the hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan): he said that it was not a British design, but actually it was originally. The helicopter was designed in Yeovil, but as it was not being used militarily, it was given as a civil idea to the Italians, who have been making it as the AW189.

The AW149 could deliver our capability in a very cost-effective manner, because it is off-the-shelf—it is an existing civil product. It can be made very cost-effectively and can deliver a very manpower-centric type of capability. It has all of the automation suite that is so well loved on the AW101 and that makes that product such a success in search and rescue, because it gives the pilots much more ability to focus on the mission and on supporting the men under their charge without having to fly the aircraft. That makes it a very modern capability, which I believe is much better than anything else potentially on the market. Also, from an industrial point of view, it would unlock a big opportunity for foreign direct investment from the Italian parent, to invest in the UK, to really make Yeovil and Leonardo the centre of its military excellence when it comes to vertical lift. That is a real prize worth having. It can also make an important contribution to the UK's export performance, because medium-lift helicopter requirements around the world could amount to as many as 500 aircraft of that type. That is a massive opportunity for the south-west and the entire supply chain in the south-west to participate in economic recovery and exports for the whole of the UK and really sustain the prosperity.

The hon. Member for Angus mentioned a disparity in his mind between Scotland and the south-west, but actually Leonardo is a living example of a Scotland and south-west co-operation, because Leonardo has massive operations in Edinburgh and is very proud of them, so it is an ideal example of how these slightly parochial, shall we say, interests can be bridged and are not what they might first seem.

These are crucial programmes to the sustainability of the workforce and the sovereign capability in vertical lift in the UK, and it would be a huge missed opportunity not to take advantage of that for recovery and exports. I consider that in the UK we suffer from not having direct Government involvement in export, as the US does, for example, through its foreign military sales programme.

I agree with the right hon. Member for North Durham that companies such as Boeing have done very well out of the UK in recent years. They have just had a massive procurement of Chinook to add to the Wedgetail, the P-8 and so on. Chinook was done on a sole-source basis, so there was not a competition. Leonardo could not bid for any of that work—not even any of the maintenance.

Given that the medium-lift requirement for the MOD is for 2024 and 2025, there is a very strong case for saying that, as that is such a short timeframe, it makes eminent sense for that to be a sole-source procurement process, and for Leonardo to be chosen to work with the Government on that. Those machines will need to be in the factory in 2022 and 2023 to make the timetable, so the decision must be made pretty much immediately. I hope that Ministers will look at that.

To conclude, defence spending is admirably supported by this Government and is a key pillar of the outward-looking global Britain that we seek to build, but we need to ensure that it delivers for hard-working people at home. We need to buy British and support our industries and their world-leading products.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I know it seems like we have a lot of time for this debate, but I need colleagues to speak for about 10 minutes maximum to get everybody in without a time limit.

2.43 pm

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think the previous speech, by the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh), reveals why we need to get back into this Chamber, where we could have made a few interventions on how the Government are letting down Yeovil, as they are letting down so much of the rest of the country.

I was going to start by asking what defence is for, and I was helpfully pre-empted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), who talked about a study of history. A study of history would show that after the second world war NATO had to be founded, by a Labour Government and by the Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, in response to Soviet aggression and also to subversion of the countries of eastern Europe. We had to respond to that, and to subversion at home as well. In the same way, Ernest Bevin also played a prominent part in framing not just Labour policy but national policy before the second world war. Although, to his credit, George Lansbury, the Jeremy Corbyn of his time, had run a London borough, at that conference Ernest Bevin demolished the Lansbury argument for appeasement and pacifism and made it absolutely clear that authoritarianism—totalitarianism—had to be confronted, and confronted robustly.

Interestingly enough, that was emphasised very strongly only last month by President Biden in a speech at the National Memorial Day observance, which I commend to colleagues. He said very clearly that

“democracy must be defended at all costs, for democracy makes all this possible.”

He was talking about equal rights, respect and decency in the way countries treat their citizens and the way they treat other countries and their citizens. That is why we

need collective defence. Rather than just talking about the League of Nations or the United Nations, important roles though the United Nations plays, we need collective defence.

Pat Moynihan, the famous American politician and diplomat, wrote a book arguing that the world is “A Dangerous Place”, the strapline of which was, “But a lot of people don’t understand that”. The world is a considerably more dangerous place now than it has been for a while. We have a revisionist China, a revanchist Russia, a subversive Iran, a terror-ridden Sahel—and those are just the main headlines. That is why we need defence, and that is why we need defence spending. A critical part of that for the United Kingdom and, indeed, the countries of western Europe is our transatlantic alliance with the United States, protecting democracy and freedom in Europe and keeping the Atlantic open as the great connecting sea lane between us. We ought to face up to that and support it.

That, of course, has consequences. Having decided that fundamental purpose, what is the structure that we put on top of it, and what role do we play in that? Are we going to play a leading and prominent role, or a very supportive but maybe less prominent role? We have to have—this is where a number of Members, including the right hon. Member for Islington North, are right—a national debate on that.

If we decide that Britain is going to play a significant and prominent role in the defence of freedom around the world, the resources have to follow—not short-changing the armed forces, not cutting the Army’s numbers, not shifting procurement requirements continuously to the right, greatly adding to the expense of each unit and gradually under-capitalising the armed forces; we need to make sure that they are properly funded. The Government talk the talk, often for political purposes—that was quite easy in the last general election against the right hon. Member for Islington North—but they must do more than that. They actually have to walk the walk and make the resources available.

Let us just have a look at the figures for spending on defence. Under the last Labour Government, in 2007-08, it increased by 6.8%. In 2008-09, which of course was a rather difficult year, as people remember, with the global financial crisis, it still increased by 0.5%. It recovered a bit in 2009-10, to plus 2.7%. Then in came the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition and, sadly, the figures were—I will just read the first years—minus 3.7% in 2010, minus 7.2% in 2011, and minus 9.7% in 2012. It went on, some years going down, some years going up slightly. That has always been the history, by the way; we remember “Options for Change” at the end of the cold war.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I greatly respect the right hon. Member for his expertise in and passion for defence matters, but he has conveniently left out the context in which we had to attack and deal with the financial mess we inherited in 2010. We cannot defend our country if we are broke. The right hon. Member talked about history and I enjoyed the beginning of his speech, but every Labour Government in history have left a mess to be cleared up.

John Spellar: Interestingly, in 2008, when the global financial crisis hit, the ratio of debt to national product was less than it was when we came to office in 1997, and

in the meantime we built the schools, the hospitals and the infrastructure that the Conservative Government had lamentably failed to build.

Mr Kevan Jones: Does my right hon. Friend also remember that during those years, up until the crash of 2008, the then Conservative Opposition not only argued for matching our spending targets, but called for more expenditure on defence?

John Spellar: I hope the Whips have taken note and that the hon. Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) will get a job after his intervention. By the way, what was the debt to national product ratio when we left office and what is it now? Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could tell us that, but he should not bother to interrupt at this moment to do so.

It is not just what we spend but where we spend it. We have had that argument continually in the Chamber. Why are we buying ships from Korea? Why, even when we are going to have the fleet solid support ships armed, does the Secretary of State still talk about only joining them up, not building and procuring all their equipment, here? Why are we buying so many planes from the United States? My right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) pointed out to me that our dollar purchases in 2016 accounted for 10% of equipment. That has now increased to 31%. The hon. Member for Yeovil pointed out that the Yeovil factory is under threat basically because contracts have been given to Boeing, as they have for several other projects. Even when we have a superior product such as Brimstone, the Ministry of Defence cravenly gives in, keeps handing out those contracts and gets nothing in return.

As I said in the earlier debate on trade, no other country in the world behaves like that. I do not understand why Ministers do not stand up for Britain and for defence and get a grip. Otherwise, what is the point of them?

2.52 pm

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): The debate has been animated and enjoyable. It is a great pleasure to speak from the Back Benches from a position of unequivocal strength. As someone who would ordinarily have been critical of defence spending at any time over the past three decades, I admit that today I cannot be. Why? This year, the Government announced an unprecedented multi-year settlement for defence.

Mr Kevan Jones: It is not.

James Sunderland: Yes, it is. It offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to modernise our armed forces.

Throughout my 27-year career in uniform, I lost count of the times I was told that I could not do something, whether it was going on an exercise, organising adventure training, buying trucks or getting the latest equipment. I was always told by the bean counters that it could not be done. It was all doom and gloom, but now it is different. If anything, part of me wishes I were still in uniform because I believe that defence is well placed to take advantage of the excellent settlement.

Let us look at the facts. First, the deal for defence is worth an extra £24.1 billion over the next four years. It is a huge increase, unlike anything we have seen in recent history.

Mr Jones: No, it isn't.

James Sunderland: Yes, it is. It will exceed not only the manifesto commitment—

Mr Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman not keep repeating that Front-Bench or central party pump-out? He should look at the Library note. I explained the increase. He says he would like to be there now, but I am not sure he would get the opportunity were he a young man wanting to join the armed forces now, because there are nearly 55,000 fewer people because of the Conservative Government. The budget today is still lower than it was in 2009. Even with the increase, the £13 billion black hole in the equipment budget will not be filled. The idea of painting this rosily might get him on the Front Bench, but he should look at the facts and be independent—which he usually is on a lot of the issues.

James Sunderland: I thank the right hon. Gentleman, but of course he is wrong. I will explain why—because the figures speak for themselves. Have a look at the maths! He is also wrong, because I believe that the offer right now for our armed forces is better than ever before. If I were 21 or 22 years old, I would want to do exactly the same thing that I did almost 30 years ago. I am proud of my service and of the fact that the Government support defence. So, £6.6 million has been invested in research and development, generating £25.3 billion a year for the UK economy and directly employing 133,000 people across the country. Defence spending is critical to levelling up, and we are doing it—fact.

The recent Command Paper “Defence in a Competitive Age” reflects a balanced budget. The MOD now has a fantastic opportunity to balance its red line, to get above the line—

Mr Jones: It doesn't!

James Sunderland: Yes, it does. The UK armed forces will become a threat-focused integrated force with a continued shift in thinking across land, sea, air, space and cyber, while also being financially sustainable for the first time in decades. If I may say so, the Conservative Government over the past 10 years have spent much of their time putting right the mess that Labour left this country in 2010.

Defence will spend £85 billion on equipment over the next four years. Shipbuilding investment will double over the life of this Parliament, rising to more than £1.7 billion a year. This will support the MOD in its commitment to grow the Royal Navy surface fleet to 24 frigates and destroyers by 2030. Admittedly, we need more, but of course we have to balance the budget as well.

Recently, too, the Procurement Minister launched the new defence and security industrial strategy, which benefits British industry to a superb degree. It is about jobs, livelihoods and, above all, export markets. The new strategy allows us to mandate UK content in all our defence contracts in a way that we could not do under the auspices of the European Union.

Mr Jones: Nonsense!

James Sunderland: It is a fact.

Mr Jones: The hon. Gentleman is just wrong on that. Military contracts were excluded from any EU law. The only individuals who chose to put a military contract out to international tender, hiding behind the EU, were this Government, when they were arguing to put FSS out to international competition, even though they could have designated a warship, as did every other country in Europe—France, Spain, Italy and everyone else—and built it at home.

James Sunderland: Again, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. My clear understanding as someone who has spent time working in Defence Equipment and Support and in the MOD is that European Union legislation prevented this country from preferring UK industry. We are now not beholden to the European Union. We can place contracts with whom we want, and we are seeing it right now with our new strategy.

John Spellar: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

James Sunderland: I will not give way, sorry.

John Spellar: Go on, give way.

James Sunderland: Go on then, if the right hon. Gentleman insists.

John Spellar: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, because he said something very significant—about his understanding when working at DE&S. He was saying that the culture there was to embody in their thinking the idea that they could not do it. In fact, that was totally untrue, and every other European country looked after its own industry. He has, very helpfully, exposed the deeply rotten culture inside the Ministry of Defence.

James Sunderland: My clear view is that the Ministry of Defence has the ability in law to extend contracts to whom it wants. We are no longer beholden to the European Union.

John Spellar: We never were.

James Sunderland: Yes, we were. I rest my case.

Let us look at what we have right now. We have Lightning II.

Jack Lopresti: Does my hon. Friend agree that, now that we have left the European Union, we have a great opportunity, because we do not have to adhere to state aid rules or to European Union procurement rules, and that most defence contracts were bilateral anyway?

James Sunderland: I reiterate my previous points on this. The Opposition can make as much noise as they want from the Back Benches, but the fact is this: under the new defence industrial strategy, it is absolutely clear that the MOD can purchase equipment from whom it wants in a way that has not been possible over the past 10 to 40 years.

Mr Kevan Jones: Yeah, American.

James Sunderland: Perhaps. But it is also about balancing the need for the right equipment against the need to make sure that we look after our nascent defence manufacturing industry. I believe that the balance is right today in a way that has not been possible before.

Mr Jones: I am not precious about this. I agree with the hon. Gentleman in terms of wanting to buy the best kit for our armed forces. May I ask him why, in all those Government-to Government contracts—on Wedgetail, on Apache and now on Brimstone—there is no work share, not even in terms of allowing ongoing maintenance for those things? Why have we just given that out and exported UK jobs to the United States, if this Government are so committed to ensuring that we have a vibrant UK defence policy?

James Sunderland: It is my clear understanding that the MOD's responsibility is to purchase the best kit. This is about supporting our soldiers, airmen, sailors and so on. This is about a balanced decision made by the MOD, on advice from DE&S, about buying the right kit. In my humble view, we are in a new era. This is post Brexit and post EU. This is a new era where the Government have the autonomy, as never before, to make the decisions that they want to make. The post-Brexit era gives us that opportunity—that incentive—to look after British industry, which, in my view, is what we must do right now. In terms of what has gone before, that has happened. As of now, under this Government, from 2021, I am absolutely clear that our new strategy gives us the opportunity to do the right thing with the kit that we buy.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

James Sunderland: I am not giving way again.

Time is marching on. What have we got? We have Lightning II, an advanced fifth generation aircraft, procured to operate alongside the RAF Typhoon. We have Dreadnought, which will replace the Vanguard-class submarine. It will be the largest ever submarine operated by the Royal Navy. We have the Astute-class nuclear submarines, the largest and, again, most powerful attack submarines ever procured. We have our fantastic carriers: the Queen Elizabeth and the Prince of Wales, again, the largest and most powerful warships ever built for the Royal Navy.

We have Ajax, which, I know, has been the subject of debate in this House, but it is a purpose-built platform and, like many other state of the art protected mobility platforms, it will be the best on the market. We have Type 26 frigates, Type 31 frigates, the fleet solid support ships and so much more.

These are not vanity projects. These platforms allow us to project force, deter, fight and win. Our forces might be small in comparison with yesteryear, but they are perfectly formed, battle ready, potent and anything but cuddly. They are poised at readiness to be deployed anywhere in the world and our adversaries know that, which is why so much mischief is being caused by them in other domains, but we are ready there, too, as the review has proven.

For those in any doubt, and I address my remarks to those on the Opposition Benches, defence spending is a necessary evil to keep us safe. Today, we do face a multitude of threats in multiple domains. Some are known to us and some are not. We are living in an era of constant competition, with persistent engagement against our foes. Sub-threshold conflict pervades all around us. It is a dichotomy perhaps that, in this age of relative peace and prosperity, our future has rarely been less

certain or predictable, not least in the battlegrounds of space and cyber. As a fan of the integrated review, it seems obvious to me that the proverbial golf bag of military capability will need to carry ever more clubs and that is happening under this Government. For a start, the golden thread that links hard power with soft power through worldwide free trade exports, balance of payments and creating national wealth is persuasive. We must therefore protect our ability to project force anywhere in the world by being able to call upon the additional, if needed. It is about platforms, ro-ro ferries and long-range aircraft such as the C-17 and the A400—the list goes on.

I am being urged to finish by Madam Deputy Speaker, but, before I do, I want to quickly cover a few points. Given that we now have more money to spend on defence—fact—the MOD should be placed under even greater pressure to ensure that it is spent wisely. That is about integration of British kit and integration in the UK of overseas equipment if we have to buy overseas equipment. This is about UK content in our defence contracts.

In finishing, I will raise three quick points. We have fantastic kit in the UK and I am confident in the main that our forces have what they need. I say that after three decades in the armed forces. I am also proud to serve under a supportive Government who really get defence, and we must spend responsibly and flexibly both to secure what we need for defence and to keep our British defence industry at the forefront of what we do. It is also about producing competitive exports that allow us to benefit our balance of payments, prosperity and reputation. Global Britain is here to stay.

3.6 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP) [V]: I never thought I would hear the UK armed forces being called “small but perfectly formed”. I look forward to that being on a Conservative party leaflet at the next general election—I do not think it will be a vote winner.

It has been a while since we have had one of these debates and I thank two friends, the right hon. Members for North Durham (Mr Jones) and for New Forest East (Dr Lewis)—one current and one former member of the Defence Committee—for securing it. As we saw from their speeches, we certainly do not agree on everything, but I know and understand where those Members are coming from and they are open to discussing and debating all sorts of ideas. That should be the goal of a liberal democracy. We need to have more of these debates and not only in Backbench Business time.

Let me begin with the recent publication of the integrated review and defence Command Paper. I do not think it is useful just to talk about defence spending as an inherent good. First, we must ensure it is being spent correctly. My friend, the Chair of the Defence Committee, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), chaired a session yesterday in which we heard from the Secretary of State, who was quite clear that those were the key documents for understanding where this political state was going. I happen to agree with the Secretary of State that there is a level of coherence within and between the documents that we have not seen in a while.

[*Martin Docherty-Hughes*]

As a member of the Defence Committee, I have been lucky enough to be briefed by the Prime Minister's foreign policy adviser, who has been responsible for synthesising the many disparate strands of foreign, defence and trade policy that we saw—no mean feat when concepts of global Britain have been so notoriously akin to nailing jelly to a wall. In achieving that feat, you are required to move on to a second-order problem: putting those abstract policy ambitions into concrete national security commitments. That is where we begin to encounter some turbulence.

There is a wonderful example of that on page 66 of the integrated review:

“Our goal:”—

the review thunders; the UK

“will be the European partner with the broadest and most integrated presence in the Indo-Pacific”.

I wish I had had the time to ask the Secretary of State about that yesterday. The consequences of that statement are potentially huge. I have one example—a current one—which makes me wonder about it.

This week, French air force Rafales, to simulate their long-range power projection capabilities, flew 40 hours in one go from France to Tahiti. That is French Polynesia, of course: that French part of the Indo-Pacific that allows that European partner to have a pretty broad, integrated and, given recent developments, sustained presence in the region. Is the UK seriously seeking to go further than that? How long has the carrier strike group tour of the Indo-Pacific been in the planning? This is the only type of thing that could replicate the French capability, and it is certainly not permanent. Do a couple of forward-deployed offshore patrol vessels equal a sustained presence, or a commercial opportunity to have them in the shop window? I am not sure. I have heard about RAF Typhoons planning to deploy into the Indo-Pacific, and the F-35B is famously the model with the shortest range.

Much as I would love to go into a longer debate on that commitment, behind my point lies a larger one: the Government are making national security commitments that are really understood only by a narrow range of policy makers in Whitehall, and not by the public at large, whose taxes will pay for them. Have we had a wider public debate about the UK Government's commitments to the region and what the Indo-Pacific tilt means? I suspect that the up-and-coming trade negotiations will bring it to wider attention, but can any of us truly say that our constituents know what implications it will have?

This is the key point: the UK is stuck with a winner-takes-all political system where the formulation of foreign and security policy is done by the governing party. While all of us in this debate know that the commitments to the region are paper thin and likely to remain that way, the Government continue to use it as a means of pretending that we have moved on from the very concrete security challenges in our home region here in northern Europe. That is why my Scottish National party colleagues and I continue to bang the drum on multi-year defence agreements, such as the ones across Scandinavia, bringing together all parties interested in making a contribution and agreeing on general principles, and bringing debates to a wider audience so that the public can have confidence

on what basis defence spending decisions are being taken, and why their hard-earned tax contributions are being spent in that way.

As we get to notions about an acceptable level of spend—something that I know my friend the right hon. Member for New Forest East has been at the forefront of—I must confess to being left a little cold. Whether we get 2%, 3% or even 8% of GDP, can we be confident that there is broad agreement on the aims and outcomes of that spending, and are we sure that the public would not rather the money be spent elsewhere? The two of course are linked.

Scottish National party MPs are here—it may come as a bit of a shock—to deliver independence for our nation, and I hope that by the time the next integrated review rolls around we will not be part of this conversation, but the affairs of the rest of the United Kingdom will never be abstract to us. It shall remain our most important security partner, so I dearly hope that it can learn to make security policy that is understood and supported by the general public who pay for it.

If we have learned one thing from the pandemic, it is that what we have previously taken for granted in security terms has been washed away. This state and so many others around the world have seen economies and national morale affected in a way that military planners could scarcely have imagined. It has finally brought the idea of the broad concept of security into the mainstream. Health spending is a national security issue. Education spending is a national security issue. Local government spending is a national security issue, and public services and cohesive societies are a national security issue and, rather inconveniently for some, I suppose—in terms of this debate at least—one that voters and taxpayers find easier to understand.

I hope that colleagues can understand that this is not some abstract, possibly peacenik nonsense. Defence spending has no automatic right to be raised just because we say that it should. The right hon. Member for New Forest East is right to characterise it in terms of priorities, and it is our job to demonstrate why defence should be further up the list. Much as I agree with my friend from the Defence Committee, the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar), that the world is becoming a more dangerous place, our constituents need to understand that. I therefore hope that we have more of these debates, that they are covered more widely, and that they are used in a way that we can discuss the vital issues at hand. It is the very least that our constituents deserve.

3.14 pm

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): May I begin by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary on his notable victory in securing the support of the Treasury for a £24 billion multi-year increase in defence expenditure? This demonstrates our commitment to safeguarding our country and working credibly with our allies at a time of, as others have said, increasing international instability. It also represents an £85 billion investment in equipment over the next four years, and that is what I will focus on.

The Government are not only honouring their manifesto pledge on defence spending but are exceeding it by £16 billion. Through the choices they have made they are using taxpayers' money wisely to invest in the capabilities

we will need for the future, and clearly every pound spent with a UK industry benefits the Exchequer by supporting local economies such as that in my constituency. According to the Royal United Services Institute, the Exchequer recovers at least 35% of the value of domestically sourced contracts, so I hugely welcome also the Government's decision to invest in future technology; £6.6 billion will be spent on R&D over the next four years, which we need to confront the challenges of the grey zone and disinformation activities by states that are clearly hostile to the sort of society we have and the values, way of life and essential freedoms that we and our allies seek to protect. In this new age the term "military capability" takes on a more enhanced meaning, as it now embraces Britain's cyber-domain and space activities, which is why it is great news that there will be a new agency dedicated to artificial intelligence and a new space command.

I am proud to represent and serve an area that plays a major role in the defence of our country; there are 8,000 dedicated public servants at MOD Abbey Wood; Defence Equipment and Support does a great job in ensuring that our forces have the equipment they need. My constituency is also at the heart of one of the largest aerospace clusters in Europe; defence contractors such as Airbus, BAE Systems, Boeing, MBDA, Rolls-Royce and Thales to name just a few provide highly skilled jobs in my constituency and throughout the wider south-west region and support a large number of jobs in the supply chain. At least 30,000 jobs are supported by defence spend alone in the south-west region. The MOD already spends £20 billion with industry and commerce, and defence directly or indirectly supports 207,000 jobs. This additional funding from the Government will also benefit the wider economy throughout our country.

I also welcome the Government's defence and security industrial strategy and the certainty it will offer industry to do its share of investing in the jobs and technology of tomorrow. That will help bring into reality the Prime Minister's ambition for the UK to be a science superpower in the 21st century. As chairman of the all-party group on sovereign defence manufacturing capability, I am pleased by the Government's recognition in the defence and security industrial strategy that the country needs

"a sustainable defence industrial base to ensure that the UK has access to the most sensitive and operationally critical areas of capability for our national security, and that we maximise the economic potential of one of the most successful and innovative sectors of British industry."

As co-chairman of the all-party group on apprenticeships I welcome the opportunities that this additional investment will create for our highly skilled science, technology, engineering and mathematics apprenticeships into the future. It is essential for our country and our strategic viability in the future that we bring on and inspire the next generation of scientists, engineers and technicians who will be designing and building our future capabilities. The all-party group is currently conducting an inquiry into the MOD apprenticeship programme. The MOD is the largest provider of apprenticeships in the UK; there are currently 20,000 apprentices undergoing training, and 53% of the UK's defence companies of all sizes now provide apprenticeships, which is great.

Over the next four years we will be investing £2 billion in the Tempest programme for the next generation of combat aircraft, and jobs are already being created because of the programme. Industry is investing

£800 million in the programme, which is a sign of great confidence. Some 1,800 jobs have been created so far and PwC has estimated that 5,000 jobs will be directly created by this programme and 21,000 indirectly in the wider supply chain. However, the programme is not just about aircraft; it is also about embracing the possibilities of technology and artificial intelligence, as the programme comprises both manned and future unmanned capability. The future of combat air is a bit like the old tanks versus horses moment, in that we need to choose to invest in the future and what modern technology can offer us rather than continue with outdated capability. The fact that other countries, such as Italy and Sweden, are keen to participate in the Tempest programme shows that we can forge, and are forging, new partnerships with like-minded nations and allies who want to invest in the next generation of combat air systems.

As we continue to invest and increase our investment in our own industry, we should also remember that, as other Members have said, the opportunity for exports not only supports jobs in the UK, which will deliver on the Government's prosperity agenda, but, crucially, enables us to build partnerships with allies and friends around the world. Like many other Members, I was honoured to attend the Armed Forces Day flag raising on Monday, and it is appropriate that we should be discussing these matters today. Yesterday, we were discussing the Armed Forces Bill, and this is all taking place during Armed Forces Week. I hope that our proceedings, conversations and some of our debates will send out an important message to our armed forces and their families that we value them, and thank them for their service and sacrifice, and that we all, in all parts of this House, want to do as much we can to properly equip the men and women who serve our country.

Global Britain will mean nothing if we do not partner with our allies and friends across the world. The increasingly competitive nature, on many fronts, of the modern world looks set to and will increase. Just this week, aircraft flying from HMS Queen Elizabeth have struck targets in Iraq, as part of the ongoing campaign against Daesh, and obviously our "friends" the Russians in the region have been watching our deployments and how we undertake some of our missions. The incident in the Black sea yesterday, whatever it was, shows that the UK will continue to stand up for international law and rules. I welcome the ambition of the MOD to ensure that our armed forces spend more time working around the world, widening and deepening our relationships with our counterparts.

In conclusion, if the UK is to continue to be a reliable and credible ally, we must be ready to respond to unexpected challenges; challenges often come out of the blue and are not predicted. This is not just about personnel, but about having the tools and technology to be ready and to deal with future emergencies, challenges and crises. I commend and thank the Government for committing to invest further in the equipment and technology that we need to remain a credible force for good around the world, with all our responsibilities, and to protect the freedom and wellbeing of our people.

3.22 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I think that any members of the armed forces watching this debate would be encouraged by the seriousness

[*Jamie Stone*]

with which we take this issue. I thank the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) for a tour de force in laying out this whole issue. Sitting where I do and hearing the voices behind me, I am reminded of being on the school bus in the second year when the big boys who made the noise were at the back. I therefore rise to my feet with slight trepidation.

As for the contribution of the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar), I do not think I have heard a more succinct definition of what defence is all about since I have been here—although my parents are no longer with us, I believe I almost hear their cheering from far away. My father served in the 14th Army and fought against a totalitarian regime, the Japanese. My mother told me she had been in the Foreign Office and it was only when certain books were published that I realised that she had worked in a large house near Milton Keynes, although she never told me anything about the work she did there. That generation understood what the defence of the realm is all about, so the right hon. Gentleman has put it very well for us today.

I want to go on record, as have others, in thanking the armed forces for their work during the pandemic. In my far-flung constituency they played their part, and it was much appreciated by local people. I talked to some of the personnel who helped out and it was so encouraging to hear that they appreciated doing something different, it had made their lives more interesting and they felt that they were helping to defeat the unseen enemy of the virus.

The point has been made again and again—I apologise for repeating myself—about buying British. If we can, we always should, because, as I said in an intervention, the intellectual knowledge—the final clever stuff, the last bits—about the piece of kit will always remain with the country or the consortium that made it. With the best will in the world, we will never be told everything about the F-35; we will never know every little bit about it. That is why we must design and build in this country if we humanly can. This is about employing people, about know-how and, at the end of the day, about getting the best, but made in Britain.

I regret that I am repeating something I said yesterday, but a further point is that this is about boots on the ground, as the Chairman of the Select Committee, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) said. Make no mistake, recruitment is beginning to be hit, and that is not what we want to happen at all. The general public are not stupid. They realise the importance of protecting ourselves, and they know that cutting the Army by 10,000 men and women is not a move in the right direction.

Bob Stewart: I should like to support my good friend's comments. When I joined the Army, my battalion was 750-strong. When I commanded that battalion, it had 525 personnel. We now have one battalion in the Army that apparently has 170 people, yet it is still called a battalion. We must beware when people say we have a particular amount of battalions. We may have that amount of battalions, but we do not have the numbers of men and women who operated those battalions when they were properly at strength.

Jamie Stone: The right hon. and gallant Member puts it very succinctly indeed. May I take this opportunity to offer him my personal congratulations on his elevation to the Privy Council? It was looked on favourably by those in all parts of the House. Well done to the gallant Member!

I did not serve at such an august rank as the Minister, or as the right hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) and the hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland), who were full colonels in Her Majesty's Army, and not with particular distinction—that will have to wait for another day—but it makes me realise that what the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East said about getting the support of society is absolutely true. I was doing a day job, but on a Wednesday night and at the weekend I would put on my uniform and serve the colours. The same is true of the cadets. They are appreciated and they involve wider society in the defence of the realm. As has been said, when it comes to having to pay for our defence, it makes it easier if the general public understand these important points.

What has been happening in the Black sea demonstrates that we live in a dangerous world. Anyone who thinks that other states are concerned about the good of the health of the UK should forget it. They are not. The hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) will agree that, as the ice pack retreats, the high north is increasingly becoming an area of operations for the Russian fleet, which sails not very far away from the north coast of my constituency. If the events in the Black sea have demonstrated anything in these last days and hours, it is that we must take this threat absolutely seriously. To fail to do so would be a huge mistake.

I want to end with two points. First, I must go on record and thank those on the Government Front Bench for the courteous way in which they respond to my inquiries. I await a call from the Secretary of State, who is going to tell me about the Black sea at some stage today. Finally, out of courtesy to the Minister, I must apologise for leaving the debate somewhat before the end of it. That is because I have to catch a flight to a faraway place that is rather close to the Russian fleet.

3.28 pm

Chris Loder (West Dorset) (Con) [V]: Thank you for calling me to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to follow the many hon. and right hon. Members in this important debate, which certainly affects a good number of us here in the south-west. As the Member for West Dorset, I should first like to renew my thanks to Her Majesty's armed forces, and particularly the Royal Marines, who supported us at the Dorset County Hospital during the pandemic. Their support has been much valued, and we very much appreciate it.

My contribution to today's debate is not so much about what we have spent and done previously, but about what we should be doing in the future. I have listened attentively to this debate from afar and we have talked this afternoon about many things, but we have not talked so much about the rotary sector. My hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh) spoke and shared his views, but I also say that, as West Dorset neighbours Yeovil, a large number of my constituents are employed by Leonardo helicopters.

With no doubt, the best return on investment for British defence spending, particularly for the rotary sector, is on British manufacturing. It supports our industries and wider communities and it secures our supply chain. For every £1 that the Government spend on Leonardo, £2.40 is generated in the UK economy through its 7,500 staff. That number includes, of course, 500 apprentices and graduates.

As I have mentioned previously, Leonardo is the only end-to-end helicopter manufacturer in the UK and its state-of-the-art AW149 is hoped to be the MOD's new medium helicopter in the programme contained in the defence and security industrial strategy. I urge Front Benchers to please consider the work that Leonardo does and the excellent product that it offers to the defence sector and, particularly, to our armed forces here. By giving a contract to a British manufacturer, the Government will preserve and create jobs not only in Yeovil, for my constituents in West Dorset and for the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil, but up and down the country and across the Union.

Defence manufacture in the UK also reaches far beyond our borders. The British armed forces are considered across the world to be an exemplary military force to be emulated. Frequently, other countries choose models for their militaries based on what the UK has bought. If the UK Government do not invest in their manufacturing capabilities by buying British-made equipment such as the AW149 helicopter, other buyers might wonder why the MOD has not put confidence in its own. Exports abroad then run the risk of reducing. Leonardo exports less than it produces for the UK, but in the context of the £2 billion that the company creates for our economy each year, a Government decision to look at foreign companies for their new medium helicopter will have ramifications across the country.

At home, Leonardo spends £200 million a year on research and development, fitting in perfectly with the Government's plans to make the UK a global science superpower, but this speech is not about extolling just the virtues of Leonardo or even just the AW149; it is about the thousands upon thousands of jobs that are supported by UK defence manufacture in this country. Our servicemen and servicewomen are supported by thousands of engineers, apprentices, scientists and many others whose communities are, in turn, supported by the Government's investment here in the UK. I was delighted, earlier this year, with the Government's announcement of historic defence spending and the spending review on defence. For us in the south-west, it matters hugely. It is right that we continue to have a dynamic and modern military that is capable of keeping us all safe from even the newest of threats.

We saw during the pandemic that our armed forces play a vital role at home, as I mentioned, with service personnel supporting the testing and vaccine efforts where they were most needed, and we valued that incredibly in Dorset. We must recognise that the biggest impact of the UK's armed forces is felt at home through communities and families who support the forces as a whole and the individuals who make it up. In order to keep those communities vibrant, and to ensure the defence of this nation, I urge Ministers, particularly the Minister for Defence Procurement and the Secretary of

State, to consider and choose the AW149 to fulfil the military's need for a new medium helicopter and to keep that production British.

3.35 pm

Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab) [V]: I am hugely grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) for securing a debate that has such enormous implications for my constituency. I declare an interest as a long-standing member and former north-west regional secretary of Unite the union.

I am immensely proud to represent a town that is home to the historic Cammell Laird shipyard. From its slipways have sailed some of the most advanced and technologically sophisticated ships ever seen in British waters, including, recently, the RSS Sir David Attenborough, which is due to make its maiden Antarctic voyage later this year. For far too long, however, British shipbuilders like Cammell Laird have been disastrously let down by procurement policies that have totally neglected to invest in jobs and skills at home, instead buying defence projects off the shelf from abroad. That is why Sir John Parker's independent review of the national shipbuilding strategy, which was clear in its recommendation that defence vessels be open to UK-only competition, was so welcome. So too was the decision to scrap the coalition Government's ruinous "open competition by default" policy, which saw price trump social value and left British suppliers out in the cold.

But we must go further. That is why my party is calling for a policy of "buy British by default", which would require Ministers to prove that a defence project cannot be built at home before buying from abroad, alongside an expanded definition of good value that includes the potential benefits to British manufacturers, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the employment and training opportunities that these companies create.

This must begin with the bidding process for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary's new fleet solid support ships. With the competition now open, I call on the Minister to provide a cast-iron guarantee that these vessels will be built and designed in their entirety in the UK. At the moment, the Government are allowing bidders to work with international partners as long as the ships are integrated in a UK shipyard. This simply is not good enough. As the GMB and Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions have warned, it risks leaving the lions' share of the work to be offshored, with UK workers and companies missing out. I therefore call on the Minister to ensure that the contract is awarded to the Team UK consortium, comprising Babcock International, Rolls-Royce, BAE Systems and Cammell Laird. This would guarantee or create at least 6,500 jobs across the UK, as well as countless more along the wider supply lines, and of the £800 million spent by the Ministry of Defence, at least £250 million would be returned to the Treasury in the form of income tax, national insurance contributions and lower welfare payments. The choice is simple.

3.38 pm

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): In Armed Forces Week, it is highly appropriate to be debating funding for our brave armed forces personnel. On Monday, I was honoured to attend the flag-raising ceremony in Aylesbury organised

[Rob Butler]

by Buckinghamshire Council. It was an important moment to pay tribute to all those who serve, whether as regulars, reserves or cadets.

I am proud to be a member of a Conservative party that has an unequivocal commitment to defence, that recognises that it is essential to have strong, well-equipped armed forces to protect our nation and our allies, and that is investing to tackle new and emerging threats from both established and developing hostile parties. I therefore congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence on securing a substantial real-terms increase for our armed forces, with planned expenditure increasing by 4.9% in the last financial year and further increases above 5% for 2021-22 and 2022-23—although a further increase would naturally be very welcome. I do believe, however, that it is incumbent on us to bear in mind the broader fiscal pressures, particularly as we continue to deal with the profound economic shock of the pandemic. Along with Members on both sides of the House, I pay tribute to the many members of the armed forces who have contributed to the country's tremendous effort to combat covid-19 in recent months.

My constituency is home to two Royal Air Force bases—RAF Halton and RAF High Wycombe. RAF High Wycombe is in fact in the villages of Naphill and Walters Ash, and it is home to Air Command and the new and exciting Space Command. As the MOD has made clear:

“Space, and our assured access to it, is fundamental to military operations... The threat from adversaries in this rapidly evolving operational domain is real and it is here now.”

So I am very pleased to see the investment in the establishment of a UK Space Command for defence and proud that its home is in my constituency.

RAF Halton near Wendover is one of the oldest RAF bases in the country, having been used since 1913, and was bought from a member of the Rothschild family five years later at a very competitive price. There are first world war training trenches still in situ, and the officers' mess is in the splendid Halton House, which has featured in many films and TV dramas, ranging from “James Bond” to “The Crown”, “Poirot” and “Bridgerton”. Revenue raised from hiring out the house provides welcome additional funding to the MOD.

Today, Halton is one of the largest RAF stations, and home to approximately 2,000 personnel from all three armed forces, as well as to foreign military, contractors and civilians. It is the base where many of the Royal Air Force's new recruits begin their careers, as the station's primary role is to train military and civilian personnel to perform to the highest standard for military operations. Last month, I was fortunate enough to be invited as a guest for the graduation of Pearson intake. Talking to the recruits then highlighted the huge range of roles that are necessary for a successful military. One was going on to serve as a chef and another to work in cyber, an ever-increasing and pernicious threat. The pride of the men and women on the parade ground, as well as their families in the stands, was testament to what the armed forces are all about—duty, honour and service. The right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) said that he wanted to see hope for the

future. He need look no further than the brilliant recruits coming out of RAF Halton to see not just hope, but talent, commitment and profound belief in the need for the armed forces to safeguard peace.

It is not just in my constituency that I have seen such dedication to serving our nation. Over the past year, I have been lucky enough to participate in the armed forces parliamentary scheme. One of the highlights was undoubtedly visiting RAF Marham, where my uncle Gordon served as a pilot of Vulcan bombers at the height of the cold war. It was a privilege to sit in an F-35 and talk to the heroic pilots and crews who are currently taking on Daesh while on deployment on HMS Queen Elizabeth.

The F-35 programme is clearly bringing huge strategic and tactical advantage, but the Government have recognised that there is always a need to go further. This is well demonstrated in the investment of more than £2 billion in the future combat air system, which will deliver a mix of crewed, uncrewed and autonomous platforms, including swarming drones and the Tempest fighter jet. That is already creating hundreds of jobs, as my hon. Friend the Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) has described, and this is on top of £6.6 billion going into R and D projects.

Alongside this very welcome investment in cutting-edge technology, I have been reassured to hear from Ministers before today the recognition that accommodation and facilities for our service personnel need and deserve improvement. Conditions in some bases are not always as good as they ought to be, and it is only right that attention is paid to them.

Questions have been raised about funding a new national flagship. I have to say that, for my part, I regard this as a very good and wise investment, even in terms of financial constraint. It is clear that the role of such a vessel would be to promote trade. This is surely in keeping with the recognition of a growing interdependence between defence and the protection of our economic security. As the integrated review says:

“We will play a more active part in sustaining an international order in which open societies and economies continue to flourish and the benefits of prosperity are shared through free trade and global growth... By 2030, we will be deeply engaged in the Indo-Pacific as the European partner with the broadest, most integrated presence in support of mutually-beneficial trade, shared security and values.”

The House heard earlier today about the benefits ahead of joining the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership. For me, the prospect of the UK joining the CPTPP is an enticing prospect indeed, heralding fantastic opportunities for our exporters. Much as I enjoy a crisp sauvignon blanc from New Zealand's Marlborough region, I want to see the award-winning sparkling wines from Daws Hill in my constituency on the shelves in Sydney, Tokyo and Santiago, not only in English Wine Week but every week of the year. I want to see Rumsey's chocolates not only in Wendover but in Wellington and Winnipeg. A national flagship that can promote our country and our products is surely a sound investment, and, beyond that, another means to reassure countries around the world that the future lies with democratic capitalist free-trading nations, rather than dictatorial communist regimes. Such a national flagship will cost an absolutely tiny proportion of the extra £24 billion or so in the

multi-year settlement for defence, and the return on that investment will accrue not just in pounds and pence, but in prestige and sheer physical presence.

Mr Kevan Jones: I would say that the hon. Gentleman is a brave individual, because I am not quite clear from where, in the very tight £13 billion black hole already in the defence procurement budget, the extra £200 million is going to be found, as well as the fact that its running costs would come out of the defence budget. Does he not also think that a better way to promote trade would be what we do already? We use our Royal Navy assets to promote Britain when they visit ports. That is being done already. We do not need an extra gin palace to do that role.

Rob Butler: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. We need both. I would not agree with his description of the proposed new flagship. I am sure it will serve many types of alcohol, including, as I have suggested, the very fine sparkling wines from my own constituency, but to be serious, I genuinely believe that it will provide an added opportunity to show the kinds of products that showcase the fantastic opportunities that exist in this country.

To conclude, we live in troubling and uncertain times. Our enemies are not as obvious as they were 50 years ago. Hostile acts are not always overt or blatant. We are being prodded and provoked, whether through propaganda and disinformation or by enemy jets approaching our airspace. We have the most amazing people serving our country. Our Government are investing many billions of pounds to provide them with the equipment, training and opportunities they need. This is an unimpeachable illustration of the Conservative Government's commitment to defend our nation and our allies; a truly global Britain confident of our place in the world.

3.47 pm

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab) [V]: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me in this important debate. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting time for the debate, and I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) and his colleagues from the Defence Committee for securing it.

I would like to concentrate my remarks on procurement and the failure to support British jobs and communities, but also to make reference to the important contribution of veterans and some of the challenges they face, particularly given that Easington, the constituency I represent, is a high recruitment area for our armed forces. I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I am a member of Unite the union and have the honour of chairing the Unite parliamentary group.

Echoing the comments of my right hon. Friend, I want to point out that UK defence has undergone a decade of decline under successive Conservative Governments. Indeed, Conservative Governments in their various coalitions and manifestations have overseen a steady erosion of our armed forces' numerical strength and capabilities, with cuts in frontline personnel since 2010 of over 45,000 and real-terms cuts of £8 billion to the defence budget over that period.

I was rather hoping that the Government had finally accepted the need for a long overdue change in defence procurement policy. I welcomed the end of the open competition by default that the coalition Government introduced in 2012, under which defence procurement was, effectively, offshored by the Conservative party at the cost of tens of thousands of UK jobs and businesses. Clearly, with a Conservative Government there is no guarantee that defence procurement will be concentrated in the United Kingdom.

As evidence to support that statement, I point out that in May the Government announced a £1.6 billion competition to acquire three new fleet solid support ships—the new Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships that carry munitions and provisions for the Royal Navy's two new aircraft carriers. My trade union, Unite the union, has expressed concern that the Government are

“allowing bidders to work in partnership with foreign companies to create a false image of work being integrated into UK yards.”

It rightly brands that a “smoke and mirrors” deception, because

“the contract could be won by a UK-led bid but then designed and completed largely overseas”.

These are UK ships that need to be designed and built in the UK, using core UK technologies, including UK engineering skills, and UK products such as steel. The Defence Secretary and the UK Government must now show their commitment and their faith in UK workers' skills and expertise. UK shipyards are a vital part of local economies and could play a significant role in the Government's much-stated levelling-up agenda.

Labour would go much further and set a higher bar for defence procurement. I am delighted by my party's decision to adopt a “British-built by default” policy, which would require Ministers to prove that military equipment could not be built in the UK before buying it off the shelf from abroad. We heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham some interesting, and indeed alarming, figures for the expenditure on US-procured weapons in the defence budget.

The integrated review makes it clear that threats to Britain are increasing. UK forces may be deployed further from home, yet the Government's plan is for fewer troops, fewer ships and fewer planes over the coming years. Deeper cuts to our armed forces will limit our capacity to simultaneously deploy overseas, support our allies, including during natural disasters, and maintain strong national defences and resilience. The UK risks being out of step with the defence plans of leading NATO allies; indeed, Canada plans to increase its regular service personnel by 3,500. Labour's commitment to international law, to universal human rights and to the multilateral treaties and organisations that uphold them is total.

I pay tribute to the invaluable contribution of the armed forces to the national covid-19 response in what has become the biggest ever domestic military operation in peacetime. I am appalled that 40% of Britons surveyed by the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association were unaware that the armed forces have supported the fight against covid, while a further 53% did not know that the armed forces had helped with the UK's covid vaccination programme. That is no reflection on the armed forces; it is more a failing on the Government's part to recognise and commend the armed forces' vital contribution to the pandemic response.

[Grahame Morris]

Government failures go beyond military service, however. From substandard housing to mental health and social care, the Government are failing to provide our veterans and their families with the respect and support that their service should afford them. Our veterans are left alone or reliant on charities if they fall on hard times. That is quite simply unacceptable.

Because of the lack of support for veterans' mental health, the community have taken it on themselves to help their comrades. Veterans in my constituency and the surrounding area are fortunate as we have the newly established charity, East Durham Veterans Trust, in my constituency providing practical assistance and mental health support to our veterans community. I take this opportunity to thank its founder and driving force, veteran Andy Cammiss, for establishing the charity and for the invaluable support that he, his staff and the volunteers at the East Durham Veterans Trust provide.

However, the charity has a precarious existence. It is dependent upon fundraising efforts, grants and donations from the community. I know the generosity of this House, and the Minister for the Armed Forces on the Front Bench will appreciate the gaps in support, so while he is working to fix those problems and bridge the gaps in provision, he will be pleased to know that he can make a personal donation if his staff go to justgiving.com/eastdurhamveterans. They can make a one-off donation or a regular monthly donation as they wish. In case other Members missed the address, it is justgiving.com/eastdurhamveterans. All donations, particularly considering it is Armed Forces Week, will be gratefully received.

Finally, related to the work of the East Durham Veterans Trust, I highlight an e-petition by another east Durham veteran, David McKenna, titled "Fight of Our Lives: Reform mental health support for veterans". The petition asks the Government to:

"Offer annual mental health check-ups for three years following discharge...Create a Veterans Mental Health Scheme offering ongoing screening for conditions such as PTSD and a rapid intervention service for Veterans in distress".

It also asks the Government to

"Require coroners to record Veterans suicide",

which is a hidden epidemic in the community that does not get the attention it deserves. I hope the public will support the petition and help it hit the threshold to at least receive a response from Government.

In Armed Forces Week, I pay tribute to the armed forces and those who have served. We live in an increasingly dangerous world, and I hope the Government will listen to today's debate and not repeat the mistakes of the last decade on the size of our forces, on finances and on veterans' mental health care and support.

3.57 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): First, it is a pleasure to speak in this debate, and I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me. Yesterday we were debating the Armed Forces Bill, and we discussed many things. Today I want to focus specifically on the size of our forces, recruitment and their capability to respond. I make my comments in a constructive fashion, and I look to the Minister for a response to some of the

points of view I will put forward on capability to respond. It is important that those are aired and spoken about today.

During the debate yesterday, we sought to firm up our treatment of the armed forces, and I would like to focus on an aspect of that: defence spending on personnel levels. It is my belief that we must address the shrinking numbers of personnel and set aside funding to build them back up. I understand the Government's aim to build up cyber sectors, and that is right and proper, but we also need feet in boots, on boats and in the air. We need to ensure that we in the United Kingdom and our policy can respond not just here but across the world when we are called and where the demands are many.

Perhaps the largest and most controversial sleight of hand is the definition of trained strength. Up until 2016, Army manpower was judged on the basis of personnel who were trained—that is to say, they had completed phase 1 and phase 2 training. The waters have now been muddied by including phase 1 trained personnel in the total Army trained strength. As one service personnel member has said—and I say it very gently—

"This is a fudge, as it falsely inflates the numbers but hides the fact that phase 1 personnel are trained in only the very basic rudiments of soldiering."

For example, phase 1 armoured corps and infantry soldiers are unable to deploy on their vehicles; they are not trained to use radios; they have only very basic first aid training; they can only fire a rifle, not other weapons systems; they cannot use drones; they cannot conduct cyber operations; they cannot do public duties; they cannot carry live, armed weapons to guard their own camps, and many of them will not even have driving licences, so they are unable to deploy overseas and certainly cannot deploy on operations.

I say that respectfully, because I hope that, in response, the Minister will be able to say, "Well, here's what we're going to do to recruit them, train them and get them to that level of capability." Again, I ask this with respect: is it not true that those soldiers are not able to do all that many of the duties that are requested because of their capabilities and their training, and that we should not be using them in an attempt to mask—I hope that is not what it is—the scandal of chronic undermanning? Will the Minister clearly outline whether the new figure of 72,500 will be based on trade-trained personnel and confirm that it will not be fudged or adjusted?

Another area of huge concern is the availability of trained military manpower. Is it not true that as much as 15% of the trade-trained strength—that is, those who have completed phase 1 and phase 2—is unable to deploy owing to temporary and permanent medical downgrading, attendance on career courses, maternity and paternity leave, career breaks and so on? I believe that is further exacerbated by large numbers of personnel being unavailable to deploy because they are in training roles already or in full-time reserve service roles, or they are in the MOD office—civil service personnel—on loan service embedded in other countries' military, seconded to international bodies or serving in embassies around the world. Those are things that they are doing that reduce the number of personnel capable to respond.

Jack Lopresti: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. When he mentioned the 70,000-odd regular deployable forces, he did not mention the reserve forces, which will

be a major element of what we have available. Those will be in excess of 25,000. Will he work into his remarks the availability of reserve forces?

Jim Shannon: I thank my hon. Friend—for he is—for his intervention. I am not quite sure that he and I will agree on the figures game. Perhaps it is one of those cases where we agree to differ. If the reserve forces were trained to the high level of capability that I hope they would be, they would be extra forces, but the point I am making about the 72,500 is that we have a level of soldiers who are not trained to the capability that they should be. That is the point that I am trying to make. It is clear to me that there are issues that need to be addressed.

Mr Kevan Jones: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we cannot simply add the reserve numbers in, because in many cases they are not formed units, they are not training with regulars, and in some cases, even among them, there are individuals who are not fit for deployment?

Jim Shannon: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention, which—I say this very nicely—probably encapsulates the issue better. That is further exacerbated by large numbers of personnel being unavailable to deploy because they are in training roles or full-time reserve service roles. Not all those personnel are available; that is the point that I am trying to make.

If we apply the reality of those factors to the Army numbers, taking account of traditional undermanning of 7%—in layman's terms, failing to recruit to 100% of strength—we are already, to use a snooker pun, behind the eight ball. Take out the staff supporting phase 1 and phase 2 training and any other training organisations that are on the staff assessment; take out the 15% unavailable to deploy, and the British Army regular manpower available to support a brigade-level deployment of just three years—a deployment in intensive operations for six months and every six months—is actually only about 55,000, because they are not trained to the capability that they need to be for so big a response.

I said at the start that I would make these comments in a constructive fashion, because I want the Minister to respond to the queries that we have. Those figures are worrying, and no person here can say that they are not worried by that analysis and those figures.

Given a deployed brigade current manning of about 12,000 people, it does not bode well for us being able to maintain sustained operations for any amount of time. Bear in mind the fact that the Iraq conflict ran for eight years and the Afghanistan one for 12 years, and that between 2003 and 2011 there were simultaneous operations at brigade-plus strength. We have to look at what we had in the past and what we have for the future.

Why focus on numbers? There is an old Stalinist military maxim, “Quantity has a quality of its own.” We should never disregard that thinking. It has been pointed out to me that the residents of eastern Ukraine, watching the build-up of Russian military power on their border, including their motorised nuclear motors, would draw little comfort from the language, and perhaps fanciful notions, expressed in our new integrated operating concept, such as “drive the strategic tempo”, “maximising advantage”, “creating multiple dilemmas”. We are certainly achieving this last one. Here is our multiple dilemma in this United Kingdom: we are likely to know and understand

more than we have ever done in terms of intelligence and cyber, and be less able to do anything about it than ever before. That is the point I am making. If we do not have the soldiers, if we do not have feet in boots, on the boats and in the air, we have a serious problem.

In conclusion, I believe we need to spend the money and have a fully able and equipped force, fully trained. I look to our Minister and our Government today to confirm that that is where we are heading, because if we are not, we are in trouble. If we are, I hope the Minister will reassure us.

4.7 pm

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Mr Deputy Speaker, it is good to have you join us in the Chair this afternoon.

It has been a good debate. I congratulate the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) on securing it. He opened it and intervened several times, with the customary authority and knowledge that we have all become used to. It is good to see the Minister for the Armed Forces in his place. He is a good Minister, a conscientious Minister, but those of us in the Chamber who have been taking part in these defence spending debates for the past few years—indeed, I think you might have, Mr Deputy Speaker, before you went back into the Chair—will note that this is another such debate in which we have failed to get a Treasury Minister to come to the Dispatch Box. I am hopeful that when we inevitably have the next one, we will be able to use our collective imagination to force that to happen.

Like other hon. Members, I too, on behalf of the Scottish National party, want to put on the record our thanks to the men and women of the armed forces, particularly for the past year, as has been mentioned several times. I particularly want to thank them for the job that they have done in Glasgow, with the setting up of the NHS Louisa Jordan Hospital, but also the job that they have done in many other areas of the pandemic and beyond. As has been mentioned by the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone), who is no longer present, and my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes), the pandemic has shown us that the debate on security and the role of the armed forces is way wider than perhaps we would have thought pre-covid. That is something that requires debate, discussion and, yes, public consent and buy-in.

It is also important—I am sure that the Minister will do this in his remarks—to refer to yesterday's events in the Black sea. The Scottish National party stands four-square behind international law. International law, challenging and challenged though it is, is important to defend, is important to protect. In that, the crew members of HMS Defender have our support. We recognise that that is not easy, and I back the assessment of others: we understand that the Royal Navy was there not to pick a fight, but to make a point. Those are international waters and, indeed, there are no Russian waters there; they are Ukrainian sovereign waters—to reinforce that point, you will have noticed the Ukrainian national colours on my tie, Mr Deputy Speaker.

That, however, is where our consensus may start to come to an end, I am afraid. This is a debate on spending, and spending has never been the Ministry of Defence's strongest suit, no matter how much money it

[Stewart Malcolm McDonald]

may throw at the problem. Indeed, when the announcements were made when the defence Command Paper and the integrated review were published earlier this year, we welcomed many things, but let us not forget—we could be forgiven for forgetting, could we not—that that was about capital spending. Day-to-day spending has not changed, and the pay and the terms and conditions of the members of the armed forces—whom we have all praised this afternoon—have not changed. But I will come back to that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Dave Doogan) spoke with authority and knowledge on many issues of procurement, which he knows all about, having worked in that field for many years. He correctly set out the disparity in spending not just between Scotland and the south-west of England, but in other parts of the UK as well. It is not parochial, as the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh) seemed to suggest, to point that out. Those are just facts that I would have thought any Unionist Member of Parliament would wish to see changed.

We also have to come to the black hole that exists in the Ministry of Defence procurement plan, which the right hon. Member for North Durham mentioned several times when he opened the debate. The multi-year defence agreements, long called for by those on the SNP Benches and others, are welcome, but there is still some way to go. All we have to look at is the National Audit Office report, which came out only this morning, and all those big projects where waste is the fashion of the day—we might almost think that money is going out of fashion in the Ministry of Defence.

The amazing thing, in all the many years of waste under Conservative or Labour Governments, is that nobody has ever lost their job over any of this stuff. Is it not fantastically amazing that hundreds of millions of pounds—into the billions—of public money can be wasted over all those years, and nobody gets so much as a demotion? What is that all about? That is where we need to see greater transparency and accountability on how the money is spent or, rather, how the money is misspent.

What do we get in return? Housing that I would not put a dangerous dog into; housing where hundreds and hundreds of complaints are about the basic things that we all take for granted—the heating does not work, the water does not run, or the hot water does not work. Those are basic repairs that, if we really valued members of the armed forces, would not go unanswered but would be fixed and invested in with a sense of urgency. Is it any wonder that the satisfaction or, rather, the dissatisfaction levels are where they are? Is it any wonder that the retention issues are what they are?

I value the work that those in the armed forces do—I believe we all value it—but the political choices being made are the wrong ones. We need to invest heavily in accommodation services, in getting the armed forces personnel good equipment and in ensuring that they are not having to go to Amazon to supplement the equipment that they have got for themselves. You understand this, Mr Deputy Speaker—I do not think that that is all that much to ask.

We then come to an issue that has been mentioned several times: fleet solid support ships. There is nothing new for me to say on this, other than to support

Opposition and Government Members when they say that those ships should be made here. Let us not fall for the canard advanced by the hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland)—sadly, no longer with us in the Chamber—when he said that, somehow, the European Union was the bogeyman holding us back. That is, of course, false. It was interesting that, following the many interventions from the right hon. Member for North Durham and the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar), who is just scurrying back into the Chamber now, he was unable to rebut that when it was put to him.

I have to come to the issue of the cut in the size of the Army—a cut of 10,000. I will sound like a broken record here, but I make no apologies for revisiting the promises made to voters in Scotland about the size of the armed forces during the 2014 independence referendum campaign. A commitment was given to voters by this Government that 12,500 regulars would be stationed in Scotland. Even if we overlook the fact that they have never come close to that target, the Government have still not been able to tell us, given that they are now going to cut the size of the Army by 10,000, what the new footprint will eventually look like and when they will get to that point. That is before we come to the other issue of the frigate factory that was promised. Quite often, we hear Members say, “Oh, we’re building more ships and there is the frigate factory.” I rather suspect that they know that they are being slightly casual with the facts. The frigate factory that was promised was never built.

In the context of all of this—I thought the Chairman of the Defence Committee opened on this rather well—we need to think about where the threats of the future lie. My party does not believe in the need to raise the nuclear stockpile. We do not believe in that project at all, but where we can get some consensus is on the threats of the future. However, the debate is lacking here. I have mentioned this to the Chair of the Defence Committee and to the Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee, and discussed it previously. As we move into artificial intelligence, crypto currencies and all this new autonomous weaponry that we will be able to deploy, where are the rules surrounding this? This goes to the heart of ensuring that, when we engage our forces or our equipment in whatever form, we do so properly and with maximum transparency, in as much as one would be able to expect. What is important is that we answer the question: who gets to write these rules? As these challenges are presented to countries such as the UK, G7 or NATO countries, they also become opportunities for those who would rather write the rules on their terms, which might not be favourable to open and liberal societies. That is where this House needs to whip itself into shape and have this discussion. I accept that all these new challenges, and perhaps new opportunities, will not go away—indeed, they will increase—so we need to have a discussion about transparency and the rules around them.

I thought that my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire was absolutely right when he made the point that national security is not just about the hard equipment we have or the defence budget—the pandemic has shown us exactly that. But what is crucial is that the public understand this so that, when the Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee achieves the 7% of GDP target on defence spending, which he often wants—[Interruption.] Oh, 3%. He has downgraded it somewhat.

If we are to achieve that, and I am not saying that I necessarily agree with him there, that needs to have not just public understanding, but public buy-in.

When I took on this role as defence spokesman for my party four years ago, a Labour colleague—I will not say who it was—said to me, “The thing you must understand is that defence will never win you any votes, but it can lose you votes if you are seen to not get it right.” We all have differing views on what getting it right means, but I have found that, when we engage the public on it, they are quite keen to have that conversation. As new threats and new challenges present themselves in different ways, if we do not have the public onside, there will be an amazing opportunity for a hostile disinformation campaign, as we saw just yesterday in the Black sea. Imagine if it happened to be about a Russian warship off the north coast of Scotland, for example, or any of the other challenges to sea and air that we often see from the Russian Federation. There is a challenge for us all to better explain the threat picture and why we do what we do—why we believe what we believe. Fundamental to all that—how we meet that threat—is the money that we spend.

We have had a good debate and I congratulate the right hon. Member for North Durham on securing it, but let us not lull ourselves into a false sense of security. There is still some way to go in keeping the public on board and in ensuring that we have good, robust rules and treaties for the new technologies and threats that we will face. I am up for that debate and I know that the Minister is, too. Let us make sure that it happens robustly.

4.20 pm

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting the time for this important debate during Armed Forces Week, when we celebrate the service of the brave men and women, and all those who support them, who make our forces the very best in the world.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) for leading the debate. His wealth of knowledge in this area is incredible, matched only by my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar). I think everyone will agree that the House is well served by the members of the Defence Committee. We also heard strong contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) and for Easington (Grahame Morris), who spoke about the importance of the defence industry to their constituencies.

There can be no doubt that, for the Ministry of Defence, the £16.5 billion extra in defence spending that the Prime Minister announced in November would have been welcome news, especially when it was staring into the abyss of a £17.5 billion black hole in its budget. That money should be an opportunity to balance the defence budget and effect the type of change that the Ministry of Defence so badly needs in its culture. Instead, the Prime Minister announced grandiose plans in the integrated review, which included new capabilities in space and cyber, international partnerships and more collaboration between the MOD and the defence industry. Unfortunately, as always seems to be the case with the Prime Minister, he was short on the detail of how it will all be paid for. However well it plays with the headline writers, jingoism does not account for a clear and concise strategy.

The defence and security industrial strategy lacks a clear rationale about how it will be delivered without proper oversight and project management. Even the most ambitious plans will be derailed by other spending decisions. One of the aims of the DSIS is a mutually supportive, collaborative approach between the MOD and the private sector. That is a cultural shift from the adversarial approach that has characterised defence procurement in the past. It cannot happen overnight. Skilled project management and clear strategies are required to enable that transformation to take place. It is not enough for the Government to state their desired intentions. They must tell us how the plan will work and what needs to be done now to ensure that people with the correct skills are in place and that measurable progress can be made.

Corporate confidence will take time to build. Industry will not be willing to offer increasing transparency without being certain that the MOD has a coherent and deliverable plan. The aspirations of the DSIS and the integrated review are long term, but the MOD has problems right now. As I have said, the MOD's defence equipment plan faces a funding black hole of up to £17.5 billion. The Public Accounts Committee has warned that the MOD faces additional cost pressures, estimated at more than £20 billion, to develop future defence capabilities, which are not yet included in the plan. Damningly, for the fourth year in a row, the National Audit Office deemed the defence equipment plan “unaffordable”. The Secretary of State claimed that he had personally improved affordability, but the NAO said that that assertion was based on the MOD revising its approach to assessing affordability

“rather than the result of actions to address the 10-year funding shortfall.”

Even this morning, the NAO published a report that highlights that the MOD is incapable of managing contracts to time, with delays for key defence projects of up to 254 months, and eight out of 19 major projects rated as at serious risk of failed delivery. Simply put, for the party of business, that would not be good enough in the private sector.

We cannot simply cross our fingers and hope for financial stability. These things take time and work from proper financial professionals. Yet the NAO report on the defence equipment plan says that only 41% of MOD finance staff hold a professional financial qualification. That work needs to start immediately. Ahead of the debate, I had a look at a live job advert for a commercial officer in the MOD. Strangely, even though the MOD has been told by the National Audit Office that it needs to improve the number of people with a professional financial qualification, there is still no requirement for the candidate to currently hold any financial qualifications.

On the ground, there are real concerns about delivering capability. I am sure that all Members of this House will have heard and worried about the problems with Ajax recently, which cannot be ignored. It is a long-standing issue. The Ajax vehicle has been repeatedly delayed and beset by problems. Nearly four years after the vehicle was first expected, only 14 have been delivered, at a cost of nearly £3.5 billion. Worryingly, personnel have needed medical attention after being inside them. As we heard yesterday in the Defence Committee, they cannot fire accurately on the move.

[Chris Evans]

The delay on the vehicles' delivery has left our armed forces inadequately equipped and unable to properly plan for the future. That is worsened by the cancellation of the Warrior project earlier in the year, which resulted in a larger reliance on the Ajax delivery to ensure that the Army was equipped with some modern vehicles. Our armed forces had to adapt in the light of the Warrior cancellation, and now they have been left without any new vehicles that work safely or are reliable. As it stands, the current armoured vehicle capability of the UK is perfectly summed up by the title of the Defence Committee report: "Obsolescent and outgunned".

The cancellation of Warrior not only resulted in £430 million being spent on a vehicle that will never come to service, but has wider economic effects. We talk all the time about such figures as £430 million. They are not inconsequential sums; they will have an effect on the local economy. For example, in April this year, Lockheed Martin announced that because of that cancellation 158 jobs would be lost at the Ampthill site. The suppliers to the programme will also be hit, and the effects would have been felt in the local economy.

How can defence companies, their suppliers and small and medium-sized enterprises invest in research or apprenticeships when such uncertainty looms over them? If the MOD and the Government are going to change their mind suddenly on key equipment areas, that leaves our defence industry and our armed forces extremely vulnerable. I am not going to stand here and denigrate the DSIS. Many of the ideas are very good for an encouragement of British industry, for collaboration and for investment in research. However, judging by the MOD's track record in the past 10 years, one cannot help thinking that those ideas are built on sand.

Some of the major components of the integrated review will take over a decade to realise, so we will require consistent and competent project management oversight. Unfortunately, there is no evidence of that now. Major capabilities are all overrunning on time and cost. Without a significant overhaul, there is no evidence that that will change. For this to work, thousands of civil servants and large numbers in industry will have to be retrained to adjust effectively to new career paths. If the integrated review is to succeed, the Government will need to demonstrate through actions, not just words, that they are able to co-ordinate inter-Department projects, support key programmes and encourage collaboration and transparency between the MOD and industry.

The easiest thing in the world for the Minister would be to dismiss all the points that have been raised today, but it is crucial that the Government get the implementation right. There is no time to wait for the plans to mystically fall in place; the work needs to start now. I say to the Minister that it is not a case of political point scoring; it is instead about the most important people in this, the men and women of our armed forces—the very people we gathered together this week to pay tribute to. Without the equipment they need and the ability to plan for what future warfare will look like, they will be unable to do what they do best: protect our great nation. We must not let them down. We must get this right; it is what we owe them for all they do for us. I welcome the more nuanced and collaborative and less adversarial approach to future contracting set out in the DSIS, but these

documents include big promises and grand words and there is no detail on how they will be delivered. Publishing a plan is not the end of the story; without immediate and concrete action from the Government to lay out how progress will be made and measured, the intentions will simply remain on paper. We expect so much from our forces personnel; in return they should be able to expect only the best from us.

4.30 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heappey):

What a treat it has been for the MOD to have had the opportunity to debate defence matters so many times in Armed Forces Week. Of course urgent questions are not necessarily of our choosing, but it is important that those who serve our nation have seen the matters that concern them, their careers and their families debated so keenly in this week of all weeks. I thank also the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) who I believe was assisted by my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) in securing today's debate, and I thank them, too, for their contributions. Listening to the right hon. Gentleman's speech and his many interventions thereafter, it was almost as if my Minister's box had become an audio book as the parliamentary questions were all read out loud. The only problem is that all his PQs will be waiting for me in my actual box when I get back to it later today. I make light of this, but as other Front-Bench spokespeople have rightly said, the forensic way in which he holds us and our Department to account makes us better, and we are grateful. [Interruption.] Well, we are being nice to each other.

My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East gave us a tour de force on the importance of maintaining our nuclear deterrent. I started today at 3 am in the former bunker in Corsham, where constituents of the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and many other of his countrymen were fighting their way through the mine system as part of their final exercise. The importance of that deterrent was made vividly clear to me, as was the tremendous warrior spirit of the Ulster fighter. My right hon. Friend will appreciate that I cannot say which if any of the first three hypotheses he offered are the right ones for changing our stockpile, but I can absolutely confirm, as he suspected, that the fourth of his hypotheses is not the case.

The Chairman of the Select Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), eloquently paid tribute to our armed forces in his speech. Of course, it will come as no surprise to anybody in the House that Defence Ministers will always take more money for defence, but we cannot ignore the fact that the settlement that the MOD received from the Prime Minister—a multi-year settlement, which we have been asking for for many years and have now got—is a big deal. It puts the MOD finances into a place that they have not been for a long time, and while of course tough decisions remain, the reality is that for the first time the budget looks like it can be balanced and choices can be made based on military need, not because of accounting issues.

I commend to my right hon. Friend the experience of the 3rd Division, who have recently returned from the United States where they have been participating in Exercise Warfighter. The feedback from that exercise is a powerful demonstration of how the land battle is

changing and has validated many of the decisions in the integrated review around trading mass in the close fight for more capability with precision deep fires.

My hon. Friends the Members for Yeovil (Mr Fysh) and for West Dorset (Chris Loder) extolled the quality of helicopters made in Somerset. They will get no argument from the MP for Wells. My hon. Friends the Members for Bracknell (James Sunderland) and for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) made fine speeches on the benefit of the generous defence settlement and extolled the virtues of the new technologies that area emerging and the requirement to employ them in our armed forces. Like so many hon. Members across the House, they also rightly championed the UK defence industry.

John Spellar: The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh) would have difficulty intervening because of the current arrangements. If the Minister thinks the products from Yeovil are so worthy, why are they not being bought?

James Heappey: I expect the right hon. Gentleman knows that he puts me in a tricky situation as an MP from Somerset and a Minister in the MOD. You will not be surprised to hear, Mr Deputy Speaker, that such decisions are ultimately not for me. However, we can all be clear that the options for a helicopter made in the UK are keenly in the minds of Ministers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Rob Butler) spoke up strongly for the Royal Air Force and the amazing transformation we have had in our combat air forces.

The hon. Member for Strangford asked a number of questions seeking reassurance about the shape and size of the Army and, therefore, its resilience going forward. At the Army board yesterday, many innovative ideas were brought forward by the Chief of the General Staff for how we can get combat personnel from the back office and into the frontline. He asked me specifically to confirm that 72,500 is for trade-trained strength, and that is indeed the case. He is absolutely right that we must get after chronic undermanning and lack of deployability. That challenge has been set to the Army. This is a moment to get those things right.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am not sure whether you were in the Chamber for the joy of the speech of the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). I am afraid that it was remarkable only in that it stood out from the sensible and balanced contributions from everybody else who participated in the debate. Rather unsurprisingly, he was unwilling to support freedom of navigation in the South China sea or freedom of navigation in the Black sea; indeed, he was critical of the UK and our allies for seeking that. Of course, he was entirely mute on the Russian build-up of troops, combat aircraft and warships in the Black sea earlier this year. Unfortunately, his contribution was typically tone deaf in what was otherwise an excellent debate.

A number of issues have been raised, but first I want to say that the first duty of any Government is the defence of the realm and I know that Governments of all colours ensure that that is their priority. We may disagree on how it is done, but I do not doubt the motives of those who served in the Ministry of Defence before us, and those who will serve after us will always be keen to ensure that our brave armed forces have the resources that they need to do increasingly demanding jobs. However, with the constraints on resources growing,

not least due to the pandemic, it is imperative that we deliver more punch for our pound and, indeed, that we become more relevant in an ever-changing battlespace. Even casual observers of defence will know that previous Governments of all colours have not necessarily always got that right. Our integrated review and the Command Paper that followed represent a radically different way of dealing with the defence budget and I welcome the opportunity to explain our thinking in more detail.

The approach is threefold. First, in the short term, it is about upping our spending. The threats to our nation are growing and they come in all shapes and sizes, ranging from a resurgent and increasingly more malign Russia to a rising China, and from global terror to the acceleration of a whole range of threats through climate change. Our adversaries are operating below the threshold of conflict and taking advantage of exponential advances in new technologies. We must invest to stay ahead of the curve. Recognition of the dangers that our nation faces prompted the Prime Minister last November to announce the biggest investment in the UK's armed forces since the end of the cold war. In the next four years, we will inject more than £24 billion into defence. In total, we will spend in excess of £190 billion on equipment and equipment support in the next decade, including at least £6.6 billion on research and development.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East thinks that the ratio between defence spending and health spending is out of kilter—especially now that we are in the company of the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. However, I know he will agree with me that the contribution the Prime Minister has made to the defence budget is none the less hugely significant and to be welcomed.

John Spellar: Will the Minister give way?

James Heappey: If the right hon. Gentleman will indulge me, I will make some progress, not least because he has intervened quite a few times in the debate already, but I will come back to him, I promise.

As I was saying, our defence spending will enable us to continue to meet our international obligations and remain a leader in NATO. Notably, we are one of 10 nations not just meeting but exceeding the alliance's 2% target, reaffirmed at the recent Brussels summit. Separately, the International Institute for Strategic Studies places the UK fourth in the table of strongest military capabilities and defence economies, behind the USA, China, and India, but ahead of France, Japan, Germany, Saudi Arabia and Russia. Thanks to our boosted budget, we have been able to plug a potential black hole of some £7 billion on projected equipment spend. Some Members have already pointed out that last year's National Audit Office report suggested the deficit could be deeper still, but that reflected the situation as it was then, not as it is now, following a multi-year settlement, new investment and the defence Command Paper. Together, those have allowed us to redress the imbalance of previous spending reviews.

That brings me to my second point. We have achieved this outcome only by taking tough choices, by refocusing defence on the threats, by honestly assessing what we can and will do, and by retiring legacy capabilities—our ageing tanks, oldest frigates and dated early-warning aircraft—to make way for new systems and approaches.

[James Heappey]

I say in all honesty to colleagues across the House, as somebody who has knowingly served on operations on an outdated platform, that you take no solace from how many of them are in the MOD inventory if you know that they are out of date, you are not properly protected and they lack the lethality for the modern battle space. Coincidentally, there often appear to be the same voices criticising us for retiring legacy platforms as saying we are not doing enough to balance the books or eliminate the so-called “black hole”. You can’t have it both ways. President Eisenhower, no stranger to the military, put it well when he said there is

“one sure way to overspend. That is by overindulging sentimental attachments to outmoded military machines and concepts.”

So, yes, we have taken hard decisions, but they will enable our armed forces to make that rapid transition from mass mobilisation to information-age speed, readiness and relevance.

Those decisions will give us a force fit for the future, equipped with an advanced arsenal of capabilities across sea, land, air, space, and cyber. On the ground, our Army will be leaner but it will be more integrated, active and lethal. It will have revamped attack helicopters, brand new Boxer armoured fighting vehicles, state-of-the-art air defence, long-range precision artillery and new electronic warfare capabilities. At sea, our Royal Navy’s fleet is growing for the first time in years. It will have world-class general purpose frigates—to add to the Type 26 world-beating anti-submarine frigate—air defence destroyers, hunter-killer submarines and a new multi-role ocean surveillance capacity to safeguard our underwater cables in the north Atlantic. In the air, our RAF will benefit from updated Typhoons, brand new F-35 Lightning stealth fighters, new unmanned systems capable of striking remotely and a massive investment in next generation fighter jets and swarming drones. Meanwhile, our growing National Cyber Force will blend the cyber skills of the MOD and GCHQ to counter terror plots, disrupt hostile states or criminals, and support military operations, and our new Space Command will be able to defend our interests beyond our atmosphere.

Of course, we can have the best kit in the world but it counts for little unless we have the best people. Our military and civilian personnel have always been our finest asset and they must be looked after accordingly. That is why we are putting aside resource to help them, whether by investing around £1.5 billion in improving single living accommodation or by spending £1.4 billion over the next decade to provide wraparound childcare.

John Spellar: The Minister has kindly drawn attention to the fact that he is sitting alongside the Health Secretary, so will he take the opportunity to get him to cut through all the bureaucratic nonsense and make sure that our troops on deployment get their jobs?

James Heappey: As we heard at length when I was answering the urgent question yesterday, and as my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary said in the Select Committee meeting thereafter, when we made the case to my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary for jobs for missions that we felt could not be administered in line with age priorities, we were given them without question and we are grateful for that support. However,

the judgment was made that we should not be prioritising fit, healthy young men and women in the armed forces at the expense of more elderly and vulnerable people and communities across the country. As I said many times yesterday, and as the Secretary of State said, we in the ministerial team stand behind that decision.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: The challenge that the Minister is setting is that he will get things right for the people, as opposed to focusing just on the platforms. That is good. There is currently a £1.5 billion backlog of repairs in armed forces accommodation. Will he commit to a quarterly update on where that figure stands, to give a level of transparency that we do not currently have and to ensure that he delivers on the promises he is making at the Dispatch Box?

James Heappey: There is a term popular among those of us who have served in the military: volunteering a mucker for the guardroom. The Minister for Defence Procurement, my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin), will, I am certain, have heard that request and he will no doubt write to the hon. Gentleman in due course to agree with him a mechanism for ensuring that progress is reported to him.

It is not enough to spend money wisely now; we must manage our money for the long term. In the past, over-ambitious and underfunded reviews led to successive years of short-term settlements, followed by short-term savings measures, funding pressures deferred and poor value for money for the taxpayer. However, by agreeing to a long-term multi-year settlement, we are redressing the balance. We are carving out space to deliver capability and drive commercial outcomes, commit investment in cash, fund transmission activities and set a clear headmark for policy. We can at last tackle the root causes of some of the endemic and systemic problems faced by Defence, such as unwieldy procurement, and we can start to develop a sustainable plan for equipment.

Spending on defence is no different from any other large organisation. We must learn to live within our means. That is why the Department has taken the hard decisions to balance our spending plans, rationalise the estate and reduce operating costs as we modernise our equipment. That is also why we have been busy strengthening our financial capabilities. We are currently three years into a five-year programme to enhance the skills of our finance staff, improve cost forecasting and adopt a more realistic approach to risk. But our plan is not just about what we do internally. It is also about augmenting our relationship with industry.

James Sunderland: Does the Minister agree that the ability to write contracts, particularly within the MOD and the DE&S, is fundamental for giving the best possible value to our taxpayers?

James Heappey: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. That is why the training and education programme within our workforce is so important. I do not think anybody in the House would argue that, in the past, MOD contractual negotiations have not gone swimmingly.

Our defence and security industrial strategy, published in March, is the first critical step in achieving all of this. It gives our sector partners more transparency and more clarity on our requirements, and provides for a

more co-operative approach. Meanwhile, we will be bringing out a refreshed shipbuilding strategy to supercharge the sector. We are making sure that shipbuilding investment will double over the life of this Parliament to more than £1.7 billion a year. Our spending reforms are signalling that we are ready to create the jobs and skills that will help to level up our country, and ready to build on the talents of different areas—frigates in Scotland, satellites in Belfast, armoured vehicles in Wales and aircraft production in the north of England—to strengthen our Union.

In a competitive age, it is vital that we get our defence spending right. Failure to do this in years gone by has often cost our country dear, but we have upped our spending, transformed our approach and put in place a plan for the long term. We have aligned our resources and our ambition, and by giving our great men and women the tools they need to succeed, we are helping them to focus on what they do best: safeguarding our shores and advancing our interests throughout the world.

This week as we celebrate Armed Forces Week and look forward to Armed Forces Day, the Royal Navy has three capital ships at sea: HMS Prince of Wales in the Atlantic; HMS Albion returning from the Baltic; and HMS Queen Elizabeth in the Mediterranean. The Royal Navy is forward present in the south Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Caribbean, and our submariners are maintaining the continuous at-sea deterrent beneath our oceans. The Army is part of NATO in Estonia and Ukraine, fighting violent extremism in Mali, Somalia, Nigeria and Ghana, and doing the same against Daesh in Iraq and against the Taliban, as well as keeping the Falklands secure. Our Air Force has our quick reaction alert pilots at high readiness to protect UK airspace, while Typhoon pilots in Cyprus participate in Operation Shader. As well as that, we have more Typhoon pilots in Romania on Op Biloxi and, of course, those on board the carrier with F-35.

Dr Lewis: I do not wish to inject a depressing note into proceedings, but the Minister mentioned the Taliban in Afghanistan. There are many of us who are very concerned about the announcement of a specific end date without a clear military support plan for the Government for which our troops have sacrificed so much. It does not sit well with the objectives that we set ourselves all those years ago in intervening in Afghanistan. I wonder whether he can say anything about that.

James Heappey: That could be the subject of an entire Backbench Business debate and I know, Mr Deputy Speaker, that you are keen to move the business on. I will say two things in response to my right hon. Friend's point. First, he gives me an opportunity to mark the enormous sacrifice of all British service personnel who have served in Afghanistan since 2003. They have done amazing things in an extraordinarily challenging country, and I know from my own experience soldiering there just how grim the grimmest days of that campaign were. He also rightly makes the point that Afghanistan has reached a crossroads. I stand by the argument that I made during the statement on our withdrawal from Afghanistan three or four weeks ago. I believe that it has forced a moment of political decision making in Afghanistan that would not otherwise have come, and I think it is right that the international community has done that, but we all, of course, share his concerns about what the future of the country might hold.

Yesterday, I had a number of opportunities to meet reservists who have been serving in the civil service throughout the last year. People have been involved in certifying vaccines and as part of distributing it around our country. To think that people have been doing that as their day job and then still finding time to serve in our armed forces at the weekend is the most amazing demonstration of just what wonderful people our reservists are. This morning, in the dead of night, in the land beneath Corsham in Wiltshire, I saw—in this case, men of Ulster, but they were representative of all our armed forces who are hugely professional—do the most incredible and amazing things in pitch black.

Being the Minister for the Armed Forces, is, in my view, the best job in Government. It is an honour to associate myself with these extraordinary people, especially as a veteran. I wish them all a happy Armed Forces Day and thank them for their service.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Had the Minister not told us that he had started the day at 3 am, I do not think any of us would have known. I call Kevan Jones for a two-minute wind-up.

4.52 pm

Mr Kevan Jones: We have had 16 contributions from Back-Bench Members and I agree with the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) that it has been a good debate. The debated was entitled “UK Defence Spending”, but we have had a wide-ranging debate. I was going to say that it was well informed but, on occasions, it was possibly not that well informed—with the contribution from the hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland)—but we have also heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar), who made the case for why defence is important, giving the historical context of that and the part that my party has played in it. We heard the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) and the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) making the case for and against the nuclear deterrent, like two former cold war warriors. Both argued passionately and the House is better informed for them both making the points that they did.

One of the main themes that has come out of today's debate is that all of us who are interested and passionate about defence just need to keep making the case for defence and why it is important. We also heard from many Members the important role of defence in their constituencies and the role that our armed forces personnel have played in the covid pandemic. There was very brave support from the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Rob Butler) for the Prime Minister's new gin palace. We will wait to see where that ends up. My hon. Friends the Members for Easington (Grahame Morris) and for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) and the hon. Members for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti), for West Dorset (Chris Loder) and for Yeovil (Mr Fysh) spoke about the importance of UK defence to local economies. It is important that we get this right for the sake of prosperity and spend the money in this country. Instead of the current policy of “buy American first”, we should adopt one of “buy British first”.

Finally, points about the contribution of our people were made eloquently by the Chair of the Defence Committee, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth

[Mr Kevan Jones]

East (Mr Ellwood), and argued articulately by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). Defence is about the big issues that we have discussed today, but at the end of the day it is down to the people who serve selflessly on our behalf to ensure that we sleep safe in our beds at night.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered UK defence spending.

Use of Patient Data

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*James Morris.*)

4.55 pm

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): In winding up the last debate, the Minister for the Armed Forces referred to volunteering a mucker for the guardroom. I hope that my entire speech does not sound like that to the Secretary of State; it is not intended to.

Every couple of years, Whitehall, like an overexcited teenager expecting a new mobile phone, becomes fixated with data. Most recently, it has been about the power of big data mining, and I am sure that that is not just because of the influence of Mr Dominic Cummings. The Department of Health and Social Care wants to open our GP medical records—55 million datasets or thereabouts—to pharmaceutical companies, universities and researchers.

Managed properly, that data could transform, innovate and help to overcome the great challenges of our time, such as cancer, dementia and diabetes. Those are proper and worthwhile ambitions in the national interest, and I have little doubt that that was the Government's aim, but that data is incredibly personal, full of facts that might harm or embarrass the patient if they were leaked or misused. Psychiatric conditions, history of drug or alcohol abuse, sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy terminations—the list is extensive. Revealing that data may not be embarrassing for everyone, but it could be life-destroying for someone.

Unfortunately, in keeping with the Department's long history of IT failures, the roll-out of the programme has been something of a shambles. The Government have failed to explain exactly how they will use the data, have failed to say who will use it and—most importantly—have failed to say how they will safeguard this treasure trove of information. They describe the data as “pseudonymised” because it is impossible to fully anonymise medical records, a fact that is well understood by experts in the field.

Even pseudonymised, anyone can be identified if someone tries hard enough. Take Tony Blair, who was widely known to have developed a heart condition, supraventricular tachycardia, in October 2003. He was first admitted to Stoke Mandeville and then rushed to Hammersmith. One year later, in September 2004, he visited Hammersmith again for a corrective operation. Even the name of the cardiologist is in the public record. A competent researcher would make very short work of finding such individual records in a mass database. That cannot be for the public good. Moreover, the Government seem to intend to keep hold of the keys to unlock the entire system and identify an individual if the state feels the need to do so.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing the debate; I have been inundated with the same concerns from many of my constituents. Does he agree that a system that allows a diversion from the court-appointed warrant to collect information is a dangerous precedent in terms of judicial due process? We must ensure that anyone who opts out is completely opted out, as is promised.

Mr Davis: I take the hon. Gentleman's point and will elaborate on it as I make progress. As presented, the plan is to collect the data first and think about the problems second, but the information is too important and the Department's record of failed IT is too great for it to be trusted with *carte blanche* over our privacy.

There is also the so-called honeypot problem. Data gathered centrally inevitably attracts actors with more nefarious intentions. The bigger the database, the greater the incentive to hack it. If the Pentagon, US Department of Defence and even Microsoft have been hacked by successful cyber-attacks, what chance does our NHS have?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. As we are coming towards 5 o'clock, I will just go through the following technical process.

5 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*James Morris.*)

Mr Davis: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I take it you do not want me to start from the beginning again. That might test people's patience a little.

As I was saying, if the giants of data security can be hacked, what chance the NHS? Big databases and big systems are intrinsically vulnerable. In 2017, a ransomware attack brought parts of the NHS to its knees. Trusts were forced to turn away patients, ambulances were diverted and 20,000 operations were cancelled. That highlights significant problems the Government have not yet had time to address. Despite those problems, the Government have been determined to press ahead with their data plans regardless. They undertook no widespread consultation, provided no easy opt-out, and showed no particular willingness to listen as would be proper with such an important move. The public were given little over a month to opt out of a data grab that few knew existed. The plan was described by the British Medical Association as "a complete failure" and "completely inadequate".

The Government's riding roughshod over our privacy was halted only when a coalition of organisations, including digital rights campaign group Foxglove, the Doctors' Association UK, the National Pensioners Convention and myself, challenged the legality of the state's actions. Our letter before legal action and threat of injunction forced a delay of two months. That is a welcome pause, but it has not resolved the issue.

Earlier this week, the Secretary of State published a draft data strategy that raised the possibility of using health data to improve care, something I know is close to his heart, but plans for securing and handling our data were consigned to a single paragraph—almost an afterthought. If the Government do not take corrective action to address our concerns, there will inevitably be a full judicial review. I have no doubt that, without clear action to both protect privacy and give patients control of their own data, the Government will find themselves on the losing side of any legal case.

Today, I hope and believe the Government will have the courtesy to listen. Indeed, if I may, I will thank the Secretary of State for being here personally today. It is very unusual for a Secretary of State to take the time to

be here—he must be the busiest man in the Government—and address the issue today. That he has done so is, I think, a compliment to him.

A comprehensive health database undoubtedly has the potential to revolutionise patient treatment and save hundreds of thousands of lives. However, this data grab is not the correct approach. There are much better, safer and more effective ways to do this in the national interest. No system is ever going to be 100% safe, but it must be as safe as possible. We must find the proper balance between privacy and progress, research and restrictions, individual rights and academic insights. That also means controlling the companies we allow into our health system. Patient trust is vital to our NHS, so foreign tech companies such as Palantir, with their history of supporting mass surveillance, assisting in drone strikes, immigration raids and predictive policing, must not be placed at the heart of our NHS. We should not be giving away our most sensitive medical information lightly under the guise of research to huge companies whose focus is profits over people.

Of course, this was not Whitehall's first attempt at a medical data grab. The failed *care.data* programme was the most notorious attempt to invade our privacy. Launched in 2013, NHS Digital's project aimed to extract data from GP surgeries into a central database and sell the information to third parties for profit. NHS Digital claimed the data was going to be anonymised, not realising that that was actually impossible. The Cabinet Office described the disaster as having

"major issues with project definition, schedule, budget, quality and/or benefits delivery, which at this stage do not appear to be manageable or resolvable."

The project was ended in July 2016, wasting £8 million before it was scrapped.

However, *care.data* was just one example. I am afraid the Department has a long and problematic history with IT. Before *care.data* the NHS national programme for IT was launched by Labour in 2003. It sought to link more than 30,000 GPs to nearly 300 hospitals with a centralised medical records system for 50 million patients. The initial budget of £2.3 billion—note billion, not million—ballooned to £20 billion, which had to be written off when the programme collapsed in 2011. My old Committee, the Public Accounts Committee, described the failed programme as one of the

"worst and most expensive contracting fiascos" ever.

The possibilities to make research more productive, quicker and more secure are goals worth pursuing. There is no doubt that we all agree on the aims, but the path to progress must be agreed on, and there is clear concern among the public, GPs and professional bodies about this new data system.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman not only for giving way, but for leading today's very important debate. It has been a really difficult year both for clinicians and for the public. The public understand the importance of research and planning, but they need confidence that their data—often about very intimate health needs—is secure. Given the need to maintain the special relationship between the clinician and patient, does he agree that the insufficiency of the current processes will damage that relationship, and therefore that we need a complete rethink about how data is collected and then used appropriately?

Mr Davis: I do absolutely agree. I think there is a common interest, frankly, between everybody in this House, including those on the Front Bench. The worst thing that can happen to this is a failure of trust. The failure of public trust in the care.data system saw some 2 million people opt out, and that is not what we want to see here, but we could easily exceed that figure with this programme now.

A lack of trust will undermine the usefulness of the dataset the Government hope to collect. *The Guardian* reported this month:

“All 36 doctors’ surgeries in Tower Hamlets...have already agreed to withhold the data”

had the collection gone ahead on 1 July as was planned. Other parts of the country are seeing more than 10% of patients withdraw their data via their GP surgery, and that is with little to no public awareness campaign. Much of this would have been avoided had the Government trusted Parliament and the public with a detailed and carefully thought-through plan. As the BMA noted:

“Rushing through such fundamental changes to confidential healthcare data, losing the confidence of the public and the profession, will severely undermine the programme and threaten any potential benefits it can bring”.

It is entirely correct.

Despite the errors so far, this proposal need not necessarily be consigned to the ash heap of NHS history. There are ways of safely achieving the vast majority of what the Government want. The programme OpenSAFELY is a new analytics platform, principally authored by Dr Ben Goldacre, Liam Smeeth and Seb Bacon, that was created during the pandemic to provide urgent data insights, so I know the Health Secretary will be very familiar with it. Working with 58 million NHS records distributed across a range of databases—not centralised, but on a range of databases—their software maintains health data within the secure systems it was already stored on. It is not transported outside the existing servers and it does not create a central honeypot target.

The programme sees the data, but the researcher does not. Furthermore, all activity involving the data is logged for independent review. The way it works is that the researcher sets up the experiment, and the programme returns the results, such as a hypothesis test, a regression analysis or an associational graph. At no point does the researcher need to see the raw patient data; they simply see the outcome of their own experiment. This is very important because the biggest risk with any new data system is losing control of data dissemination. Once it is out, like Pandora’s box, you cannot close the lid.

OpenSAFELY gets us 80% to 90% of the way to the Government’s objectives. Operated under rigorous access controls, it could give the vast majority of the research benefit with very little risk to the security of the data. Therefore, this is a viable approach providing there is a properly thought-through opt-out system for patients. This approach, so far, has been severely lacking: where are the texts, the emails and the letters to the patients that should have been there at the beginning? On the “Today” programme earlier this week, the Health Secretary indicated that he was now willing to contact every patient. That is very welcome. I hope he is now writing to every single patient involved in this proposed database and informing them properly. That information should be in easy-to-understand English or other community language, not technical jargon. Everything in the letter

must be easily verifiable: clear facts for clear choices. The letter should have the approval of the relevant civil organisations that campaign on privacy and medical data issues to give the letter credibility. Unlike the disastrous scenes of only a few weeks ago, this will mean that patients should be able to opt out through their choice of a physical form with a pre-paid return, an easily accessible form online, or a simple notification of their GP. As well as the physical letter, a reminder should be sent to them shortly before their data is accessed, which, again, should give the patient a clear way to change their mind and opt out. The overall aim must be to give patients more control, more security and more trust in the process, and that requires very high levels of transparency.

However, my understanding is that the Government want to go further than the 80% or 90% that we could do absolutely safely. They want to allow, I think, partial downloads of datasets by researchers, albeit under trusted research environment conditions. They may even go further and wish to train AIs in this area, or allow outside third-party companies to do so. In my view, that is a bridge too far. One of the country’s leading professors of software security told me only this week that it is difficult to ensure that some designs of AI will not retain details of individual data. The simple fact is that at the moment AI is, effectively, a digital technology with analogue oversight. Other researchers argue for other reasons that they need to have more direct access to the data. Again, as I understand it, the Government’s response is downloading partial samples of these databases under the control of technology that will track the researcher’s every click, keystroke and action, and take screenshots of what their computer shows at any point in time. I am afraid that I am unpersuaded of the security of that approach. Downloading any of these databases, even partially, strikes me as being a serious risk.

The stark fact is that whether it be data downloads, AI or other concerns that we are not yet aware of, there are significant ethical and risk implications. If the Government want to go beyond what is demonstrably safe and secure, an opt-out system is not sufficient. In this scenario, a database would only be viable as an opt-in system, with volunteers, if you like: people who have decided they are happy that their data is used in a system that is perhaps not perfectly secure. The risk is too great to work on the presumption of consent that an opt-out system has. The Government must make these risks of exposure and privacy absolutely clear to those willing to donate their data. It is obvious that an opt-in system will be significantly constrained by a much smaller data sample, but that is the only way we should countenance such risks. My strong recommendation to the Secretary of State is that the Government pursue the first stage properly with a closed technology like OpenSAFELY that can provide proper security, proper access for researchers, and proper reassurance to the public.

There is no doubt that this is a complex issue. However, it would be a dereliction of our duty if this House did not hold the Government to account on what could have been, and could still be, a colossal failure. Whether it intended it or not, the Department of Health has given us the impression that it did not take the privacy and security of our personal health records sufficiently seriously. This is extremely damaging to the Government’s cause, which I have no doubt is well-meaning. The Department needs to explain to the House how it will

address the legitimate concerns and safeguard this most sensitive of personal data. Only by properly respecting the privacy of the citizen, and by obtaining freely given informed consent, can the Department deliver on its prime purpose, which must be enhancing the health of the nation—something that I know is absolutely close to the Secretary of State's heart.

5.14 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): I have come to the House today to answer this debate because of the importance of the subject matter and the importance of getting this right. I recognise and acknowledge the chequered history that my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) described, and I see that chequered history as one of the reasons that the NHS does not yet have the modern data architecture that it needs. Previous attempts—both the national programme for IT and care.data—have failed, so people have shied away from tackling this problem in a modern, secure and agile way.

I have come to demonstrate and to argue that there is no contradiction between high-quality security and privacy of the data held in a health system and the use of that data to save lives, because in a well-structured, well thought through system, both are enhanced. I profoundly believe that. I think that my right hon. Friend does too, and I agree with him when he says that we agree on aims; the key is the path. I agree with him, too, that the proper use of data has the potential to save hundreds of thousands of lives if we use it as safely as possible but also allow for the insights in the data to be discovered in order to promote better healthcare, better discoveries and the better operation of the NHS.

If someone did not believe that before, they could not have failed to be persuaded by it if they have looked at the experience of the last 18 months. We discovered that an old, cheap drug, dexamethasone, helped to reduce the likelihood of someone dying if they ended up in hospital with covid, and as a result it has saved around a million lives across the globe. We discovered that in the NHS because of the data that we have and because of a well-structured, high-quality data architecture project to find out which drugs worked.

We know that the NHS will operate better if different parts of it can compare their performance better. We also know that patients want their data to be used better, because the frustration expressed to me so frequently by patients who are asked over and over “Who are you and what's wrong with you?”, when that data should be available to the clinicians who need to see it, is palpable. And we know that the clinicians in the NHS want high-quality use of data so that they do not waste so much time on outdated IT and can treat the people in their care better. All these things matter, and they will save lives.

The current GP data service, GPES—the general practice extraction service—is over 10 years old, and it needs to be replaced. The project that my right hon. Friend referred to, GP data for planning and research, is there to unlock the intrinsic benefits of this data, but that must be done in a way that maintains the highest possible standards of security. The goals of this, and the outcomes when we get it right—I say when, not if—are that it will reduce the bureaucracy and workload for

GPs, it will strengthen privacy and security, and it will replace around 300 separate data collections with one single collection.

If I may take my right hon. Friend back to 2018, I piloted through this House the Data Protection Act 2018, in which we brought the GDPR into UK law and strengthened provisions for data security. You may remember that, Mr Deputy Speaker, because you may have received a few emails about it at the time from companies asking whether you were still happy for them to hold your data. You could have replied, “No.” In fact, I came off quite a few lists I was no longer interested in receiving emails from because I was reminded that I was still on them and that I could opt out. I think the time has come for a similar approach—an update—to the way we think about health data in this country that puts security and privacy at its heart and, in so doing, unlocks the insights in that data and allows us to hold the trust of the citizens we serve.

The way I think about that is this. Current law considers that citizens do not control their health data, but the NHS does. For instance, GP data is controlled by GPs. However, the approach we should take is that citizens are in charge of their data. It is our data. The details of my bunion are a matter for me, and me primarily. I will not have anyone in the NHS tell me whether I can or cannot disclose the details of my bunion—it is going fine, thank you very much for asking. It matters to me, even though it is a completely uncontroversial health condition, but, as my right hon. Friend set out, for many people their health data is incredibly sensitive and it is vital that it is kept safe.

On the question at hand, the programme—GP data for planning and research—will be underpinned by the highest standards of safety and security. Like my right hon. Friend, I am a huge fan of the progress and advances we have seen in trusted research environments. Those are the safe and secure places for bringing together data, where researchers can access the data or, more accurately, the insights in the data while maintaining the highest standards of privacy.

I, too, am an enormous fan of Dr Ben Goldacre and his team. The OpenSAFELY project has shown the benefits that TREs can bring, because they allow us to support urgent research and to find the insights in the data while protecting privacy. During the pandemic, the project was absolutely fundamental to our response. In fact, it existed before the pandemic, but really came into its own during the pandemic. For instance, it was the first project to find underlying risk factors for covid-19. OpenSAFELY was the first project around the world to find statistically and significantly that obesity makes it more likely that someone will die of covid. That was an important fact, discovered through this project and without disclosing anybody's body mass index in doing so. That is therefore the approach that we will take.

I can tell my right hon. Friend and the House that I have heard people's concerns about using dissemination of pseudonymised data. We will not use that approach in the new GPDPR. The new system will instead use trusted research environments. All data in the system will only ever be accessible through a TRE. This means that the data will always be protected in the secure environment. Individual data will never be visible to the researcher, and we will know, and will publish, who has run what query or used which bit of data. The question

[Matt Hancock]

was asked: who has access to what data, and who knows about it? The answer is that we should all know about it and that people should have access in a trusted way, but to be able to find insights in the data, not people's individual personalised data itself.

I hope that that will help to build trust. It will mean a different way of operating for data researchers, but I disagree with my right hon Friend that it will allow us only to get 80% or 90% of the research benefit. A well structured TRE allows us to find more insight from the data, not least because the data could be better curated, and therefore more people can spend more time finding the insights in the data, rather than curating it over and over again. The dangers that come with the dissemination of pseudonymised data are removed.

It will take some time to move over to the new system, hence I have delayed its introduction, but we have also made that delay to ensure that more people can hear about it. That is the other reason that I came to the House today: I want people to be engaged in the project. People are engaged in their health like never before, and in their health data like never before, in part because of the pandemic. If we think about the NHS app, which is no doubt in everyone's pocket—it is certainly in mine—if we think about the covid app, which has been downloaded 25 million times, we have never seen people more interested in their health data. We have never seen a greater connection, and we should use that to make sure that consent, when it is given, is given fully and properly.

I can assure the House we have an extremely high benchmark for who can access data. We have put in place a rigorous and independent approvals process, and audits are carried out to make sure the data is only being used for legitimate purposes. We will make sure that the right data can be accessed by the right people at the right time, but only by the right people at the right time. Both sides of that—that it can be accessed by people who need to see it, but only by the people who need to see it—are critical to getting this right.

On the question of the giving of that consent, it is crucial that we ensure that there is enough knowledge and understanding of these changes, that people are brought into the process, and that people know they have an opt-out. The research is clear: the majority of people are keen to allow their data to be used to help to save other people's lives, but they want to know they have an opt-out and are reassured if they have one, even if they stay opted in, because they know then that it is based on their consent.

This important programme will have an opt-out system. We are strengthening the opt-out system already, and we will take the time to work with those who are enthusiastic about using data properly, with those who ensure that questions of privacy and security are put to the fore, with the public and, of course, with clinicians to make sure that we strengthen this programme further in terms of its security and privacy, yes, but also in terms of the outcomes we can get from the data, so that we can find new treatments to help save lives.

This is an important programme. The use of data in the NHS will have a huge impact on the future of health and care in this country, and we want to take people with us on this mission. We have developed this policy together with doctors, patients and experts in data and privacy, and more than 200 prominent scientific and medical researchers have endorsed a statement of support for this mission, but we have decided to take some extra time to consult further and to be even more ambitious about what we want to deliver, with a new implementation date of 1 September.

One of the central lessons of the pandemic is that data makes a difference, so let us keep working to take this programme forward, learning the lessons of the crisis, so that we can build back better and use data to save lives.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): And the Secretary of State's bunion.

Question put and agreed to.

5.27 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 24 June 2021

[CHRISTINA REES *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

White Working-class Pupils

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Select Committee statement

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Order, 25 February).

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

1.30 pm

Christina Rees (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 debates. I remind Members participating, physically and virtually, that they must arrive for the start of a debate in Westminster Hall and are expected to remain for the entire debate.

I also remind Members participating virtually that they must leave their camera on for the duration of the debate and that they will be visible at all times, both to one another and to us in the Boothroyd Room. If Members attending virtually have any technical problems, they should email the Westminster Hall Clerks at westminsterhallclerks@parliament.uk. Members attending physically should clean their spaces before they use them and before they leave the room. I remind Members that Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn in Westminster Hall.

We begin with a Select Committee statement. Robert Halfon will speak on the publication of the first report of Session 2021-22 from the Education Committee, “The forgotten: how White working-class pupils have been let down, and how to change it”, HC 85, for up to 10 minutes, during which no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of his statement, I will call Members as they appear on the call list to ask questions on the subject of the statement, and call Robert Halfon to respond to those in turn. Questions should be brief. I call the Chair of the Education Committee, Robert Halfon.

1.31 pm

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con) [V]: It is an honour to serve with you in the Chair, Ms Rees. May I start by thanking the Backbench Business Committee for providing me with this opportunity? I express special thanks to the Committee Officers for all their hard work on the report, and thank in particular my parliamentary colleagues on the Committee for all their amendments, which have strengthened the report.

Our Committee is dedicated to championing left-behind groups. We have looked at exclusions and children with special educational needs, and are currently undertaking two inquiries, on prison education and children in care. This is why we decided to examine the decades-long neglect of disadvantaged white pupils: the large number of disadvantaged white pupils who underachieve in education remains a significant obstacle to closing the overall attainment gap.

Our Committee is fully aware that other groups experience disadvantage and discrimination in education and deserve support. We understand the justified anger that people feel about racism, prejudice and discrimination. Of course it is vital that we work together as a country to address those issues. All disadvantaged groups struggle, but the picture for white British children eligible for free school meals is particularly bleak.

In 2019, just 53% of FSM-eligible white British children met the expected standard of development in early years. In the same year, just 17.7% of FSM-eligible white British pupils achieved a strong pass in English and maths at GCSE level. FSM-eligible white British pupils have one of the lowest rates of participation in higher education, with just 16% of that group going to university by the age of 19 in 2019. At every stage in the education system, disadvantaged white pupils on free school meals underperformed compared with most other ethnic groups.

There are many reasons for that gap existing and there will be no simple fix. Its existence is not due to any ethnic trait—a person’s ethnicity bears no relation to their natural ability or potential—nor is this solely an issue of poverty, as so many seem quick to assert. Children from ethnic minorities are more likely to experience poverty, yet many of them consistently outperform their similarly disadvantaged white British peers.

During our inquiry, we heard about many factors that may combine to put disadvantaged white pupils at a particular disadvantage. Those include these key areas: persistent and multi-generational disadvantage; place-based factors, including regional economics and under-investment; family experience of education; a lack of social capital; disengagement from the curriculum; and a failure to address their low participation in higher education. No one could deny that children from other ethnic backgrounds experience those challenges, which are often compounded by racism. However, we believe that white working-class families may be afflicted by a greater accumulation of those problems, which puts these children at a grave disadvantage when it comes to learning. Many of the solutions to the issues that we heard about—for example, the importance of high-quality early years support and ensuring that all pupils have excellent teachers—are likely to benefit all children from low-income families.

However, the evidence that our inquiry received also pointed to two key areas that we think are central to understanding the relative underperformance of disadvantaged white pupils: place-based disparity and cultural factors. To tackle them, the Department for Education must acknowledge the extent of the problem and recognise that its approach is not working. What is needed now is a tailored approach with targeted actions.

First, funding and support must be tailor-made at local level to level up educational opportunity. To do that, we need a better understanding of disadvantage and better tools to tackle it. We need data that pinpoints barriers and areas that need more support, so that we can always get extra help to the pupils, schools and neighbourhoods that need it most. The Department must also consider reforming funding mechanisms such as the pupil premium with weighting for long-term disadvantage and better accountability measures to ensure that funding is always spent on the most disadvantaged.

[Robert Halfon]

Secondly, disadvantaged white families must have access to strong early years support and family hubs to support parental engagement and tackle multi-generational disadvantage. The Department should set out a bold vision for every town to have a family hub, using existing community assets where appropriate. Those should offer integrated services, build trusted relationships with families, and work closely with schools to provide support for a child's educational journey.

We also heard that disadvantaged white families may struggle with low levels of adult education, which makes it more challenging for those parents to help their children in school. To support disadvantaged white parents who want to improve their own level of education in order to help their children, the report calls for a community learning centre in every town and for a skills tax credit to incentivise employers to train their staff.

Thirdly, we must ensure the value of vocational training and apprenticeship options, while boosting access to higher education. That does not mean introducing a two-tier system, with practical subjects a second-rate alternative for children perceived to be less able. The Department must reform accountability measures by reforming the EBacc, with a curriculum that includes academic subjects and at least one technical, creative or vocational course in key stage 4.

We need a better approach to widening participation in higher education for disadvantaged white pupils. They deserve to know about all their options on leaving school, including higher education. The Office for Students found in 2019 that around £800 million is spent by universities on improving access and outreach. That money should be sent upstream in pupils' educational journeys, teaching them about the opportunities of higher education, and spent on encouraging and supporting degree apprenticeships. We call on the Office for Students to do more to encourage providers to treat disadvantaged white pupils as a priority, given that they have such low rates of participation in higher education.

Fourthly, all students must have access to the very best teachers, as good teaching is one of the most powerful levers in achieving improved outcomes. We should have teaching degree apprenticeships, just as we have nursing degree apprenticeships and policing degree apprenticeships, and more investment in local teacher training centres to help to get good teachers to the pupils who need them most.

Fifthly, we have to learn to stop pitting one group against another, and find a better, less divisive way to talk about racial disparities in this country. The notion of white privilege can be hugely damaging in creating the perception that the disadvantaged do not need support. However, it has, worryingly, gained credence and exposure in recent months, although it remains a meaningless concept to the young boy or girl growing up in an area without opportunities from one generation to the next. They feel anything but privileged.

It is time to end the neglect and muddled thinking that have characterised the past few decades when it comes to helping and supporting the white working class. The disadvantaged in this country face an unacceptable attainment gap, which the covid-19 pandemic will only have worsened. By finally facing up to the problems faced by such a large group in society and

doing something about it, the Government can really bring about a step change in efforts to close the chasm and ensure that everyone, whatever their background, has the chance to climb the education ladder of opportunity.

Christina Rees (in the Chair): Before we move to questions, I remind Members that we are going to have a hard stop at 1.50 pm. I call Christian Wakeford.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): Thank you, Ms Rees. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) for securing the statement on behalf of the Committee, of which I am a proud member. Although many people would like to focus on the areas of division in discussions about white privilege, will my right hon. Friend highlight some of the positive recommendations on vocational education and apprenticeships for deprived areas, such as Radcliffe in my constituency, with particular focus on issues such as compliance with the Baker clause in relation to inspections?

Robert Halfon: I thank my hon. Friend for all his hard work on the report. I am proud to have him as a colleague on the Committee. He is absolutely right to point to the work that we have done on the report in supporting more degree apprenticeships; ensuring that universities encourage degree apprenticeships; asking for a teaching degree apprenticeship so we get more teachers, particularly in disadvantaged areas; looking at the curriculum; and introducing design and technology as part of the English Baccalaureate.

My hon. Friend mentioned the Baker clause. It is vital that schools enforce the Baker clause and ensure that children are taught about apprenticeships and skills as proper career options. We say in the report that if that is not done properly, schools should get an unsatisfactory rating from Ofsted. That has to be done. In the House of Lords, Lord Baker himself is introducing to the Government's Skills and Post-16 Education Bill an amendment proposing that there should be a statutory element to enforcing the clause. I hope that some of our recommendations will be taken up by the Government.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): We know that ethnicity, gender, class and economic opportunity all play a part in pupil attainment—to varying degrees in different schools and in different parts of the country—but may I put it to the Chair of the Select Committee that we know what works in tackling inequality? As a former schools Minister with responsibility for the London Challenge, I know that the performance of children in London schools, including the poorest pupils and those on free school meals, improved dramatically under the scheme. Of course, it was scrapped by the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives in 2011. I put it to the right hon. Gentleman that it would be better for him to focus on policies like that, rather than making simplistic and divisive comments in his report.

Robert Halfon: I thank the right hon. Lady for her question. If she reads through the report, she will see that we discuss concepts such as the London Challenge. The London Challenge was very successful, and I am glad that London schools are now some of the best in the country. The problem is that investment has been thrown at the cities and policy reform developed for

them, but often the towns have been left behind. We have a significant section in the report, which I mentioned in my opening remarks: funding should be tailor-made. We need to reform the pupil premium and ensure that the funding goes to the neighbourhoods and areas that need it most, particularly in towns where disadvantaged white communities may live.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): It is a pleasure to have played a part in this report and I congratulate the Chair of the Select Committee on putting it together in the way that he has.

I have been slightly surprised to see comments made by certain Opposition colleagues that this is all to do with austerity and that it is all to do with poverty in a general sense. If that were the case, surely all disadvantaged groups would be impacted in exactly the same way. A key issue here is the disparity when it comes to a certain disadvantaged group of pupils performing a lot less well than other groups.

Why does the Chair of the Committee, on which I sit, believe it is the case that, even when the facts are there in front of us, some people seem determined to ignore them? Is it wilful ignorance, or is it a sense that they believe that this group is less deserving of attention and support than other disadvantaged groups?

Robert Halfon: I thank my hon. Friend. He is another active and hard-working member of the Committee, and he did a lot of work on proposing important amendments to our report. He makes a very important point. Sadly, people read what they want to read. The section on white privilege is just a few pages of a report of 90-odd pages.

Lord Blunkett, a respected former Education Secretary and a senior Labour figure, said that our Committee is “entirely right” to highlight the “decades of neglect” of white working-class kids in schools:

“The report is about neglect, it is about aspiration whatever your race and ethnicity and background.”

And this is absolutely relevant to the point made:

“I just think we have got to stop these knee-jerk reactions and examine the reality.”

Sadly, there have been a lot of knee-jerk reactions to our report, and people have not read it from cover to cover. I hope the debate on the statement gives people an opportunity to look at the report again.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con) [V]: I welcome the report and congratulate my right hon. Friend and his Committee on investigating the issue of the underachievement of so many white working-class children. Does he agree that it is vital that we encourage and help those pupils; that we need to recruit talented and inspirational teachers; that we must present role models to the children; and that we must get parents and families who have experienced poverty and disadvantage more engaged in their children’s education?

Robert Halfon: My right hon. Friend has been a champion of white working-class communities since he became a Member of the House of Commons. He is absolutely right. Two core elements of our report are about that issue. We have suggested not only that teachers should be given financial incentives and bursaries to go to disadvantaged areas, but that we should introduce teaching degree apprenticeships. We have nursing and

policing degree apprenticeships, and we should encourage more teachers. We have a recruitment issue anyway. We should set up local training providers in areas of disadvantage and encourage teachers to be in those areas.

On parental engagement, the report includes evidence from Reach Academy Feltham, which has an incredible parental engagement programme and which works on parents who have been disengaged from the education system from generation to generation. It has had tremendous success, and we suggest not only that the Government should put family hubs in every town, but that they should work on and develop parental engagement programmes just as Reach Academy Feltham does.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): A key finding of the Education Committee is that the use of terms such as “white privilege” might have contributed to the neglect of white working-class pupils. What utter nonsense. White privilege is not about kids from poor white working-class backgrounds not being disadvantaged; it is just that their disadvantage is not based on the colour of their skin. The crux of the issue is that continual cuts and lack of Government funding for the likes of free school meals leave all kids from poor backgrounds perennially pushed out.

I usually have a great deal of respect for the right hon. Gentleman and his Select Committee, but does he feel a sense of shame or guilt for having facilitated such a finding, which itself drew on a much discredited report from the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities to try to inflame the Tory culture wars, gain newspaper headlines and further stoke divisions and tensions within communities?

Robert Halfon: I have great respect for the hon. Gentleman, who is a remarkable MP, but I completely disagree with what he has said. Let me make it clear: the problem is that the use of terminology such as “white privilege”, which keeps spreading, is wrong-headed for three reasons. It implies a collective guilt when individuals should be responsible for acts of racism. It portrays white working-class disadvantaged communities as white privileged. It is factually incorrect, as those from almost every other ethnic group who are on free school meals do much better than their white working-class counterparts who are on free school meals.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the funding issue. I have campaigned for more funding. A previous Committee report asked for a long-term plan and more funding. I had an article in *The Sun* newspaper two weeks ago calling for more funding from the Chancellor. The crucial point is this: everyone is under the same funding regime, so why is it that almost every other ethnic group under the same funding regime that he talks about performs better than white working-class boys and girls on free school meals?

Again, I quote the former Education Secretary, Lord Blunkett, a man I hugely admire, and a very respected Labour party figure:

“To put it bluntly, the last thing that young people facing disadvantage need to hear is anything about ‘white privilege’. Hope, support, guidance and, above all, adult role models are what all of them need—wherever they are from.”

If the hon. Gentleman does not want to listen to me or look at the report in its entirety, I suggest he listen to what David Blunkett has to say—

Christina Rees (in the Chair): Order. The sitting is suspended until 2.5 pm.

1.50 pm

Sitting suspended.

Covid-19: Community Response

2.5 pm

Christina Rees (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 each debate. I remind Members participating physically and virtually that they must arrive for the start of debates in Westminster Hall and are expected to remain for the entire debate. I must also remind Members participating virtually that they must leave their camera on for the duration of the debate, and that they will be visible at all times to one another and to us in the Boothroyd Room. If Members attending virtually have any technical problems, they should email the Westminster Hall Clerks at westminsterhallclerks@parliament.uk. Members attending physically should clean their spaces before they use them and as they leave the room. I also remind Members that Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn in Westminster Hall.

2.6 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the role of the community in responding to the covid-19 outbreak.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Rees. I start by thanking so many Members from across parties who were kind enough to support the application for this debate to the Backbench Business Committee. It is wonderful to see so many here in person and online.

I called for the debate to give Members a fantastic opportunity to formally recognise the unprecedented and undoubtedly life-saving support that local community groups and their members have provided to those most vulnerable and in need during the covid-19 pandemic. I know I speak for so many when I say thank you to each and every person who has sacrificed in service of their neighbour and their community over these difficult and traumatic months. They are absolutely the unsung heroes of the pandemic, and their dedication and sacrifice, exemplified by the late Captain Sir Tom Moore and all his fundraising efforts, are an absolute inspiration to us all.

If anything positive at all can be taken from this pandemic, it is that it has shone a light on the strength of community spirit that has emerged through the local groups and individuals who have delivered support to those most in need. We would do well in the House to hold their sacrifice at the forefront of our minds as we look towards creating a brighter future out of the pandemic. I want to celebrate the work of several support networks in my constituency whose care and support for those in need over the past 16 months cannot be overstated: the East Kilbride Covid-19 Network, which includes organisations such as Share Alike; our local food bank, Loaves and Fishes; Moncreiff Parish Church; the East Kilbride Community Food Bank; Older & Active; and VASLAN, or Volunteer Action South Lanarkshire. The East Kilbride Covid-19 Network has provided hundreds of thousands of meals over the course of the pandemic

and has packed and distributed thousands of toiletry parcels and hundreds of mental health and special birthday packs.

I also pay particular tribute to Denis Curran MBE and his wonderful wife Cathie, who recently announced that they are retiring from their roles at the heart of the Loaves and Fishes food bank in East Kilbride after nearly 30 years of dedicated service. I submitted early-day motion 113 celebrating their service to the local community through Loaves and Fishes and urge hon. Members to consider signing it. We owe it to Denis and Cathie, and all those we pay tribute to today, to ensure that future generations grow up without the need for food banks, an area of support that has grown exponentially during the pandemic.

I also celebrate the work of Avondale community support group, which as part of Working Together for Avondale has been working with Strathaven and Glassford Community Council, Sandford and Upper Avondale Community Council, Strathaven Business Association, Strathaven Evangelical Church, Outreach Community Church, Avondale LEAP, Glassford Community Group, Strathaven Foodbank, Avondale Young Farmers and Sandford Giving Tree.

The Avondale community support group has put together a series of mindfulness sessions, which is quite unique, with local business Mind Marvels, has founded four peer support groups, and also ran an online family fun day earlier this month. It put together 200 craft kits for summer holidays in partnership with Creative Strathaven, and has worked with local restaurant Taal Cuisine and with Ann Davidson Butchers to provide food vouchers and food parcels, and with Climate Action Strathaven, which has kindly offered its hub as the food parcel outlet.

I also want to mention the work of the Blackwood and Kirkmuirhill Resilience Group and its support for the local area, through the establishment of an emergency call centre and distribution team, which has been travelling throughout Blackwood and Kirkmuirhill to provide emergency support and supplies to those most in need throughout the pandemic.

The Blackwood and Kirkmuirhill Resilience Group, run by the wonderful local lady Lesley Speedie, who has been in constant touch with me, has based its response on community recovery, community spaces and climate action challenges. It has also put on numerous events throughout the pandemic, including a children's "Kindness Rocks" campaign, where young children painted rocks in the local community to brighten up local spaces. It has delivered spring flowers to isolated residents from Allison's Flowers and ordered fish teas for elderly residents—I would have liked one of those myself, but I did not get one. The much-attended virtual online bingo has been a huge success. The group also organised a Santa parade at Christmas for all in the community to enjoy.

I must pay special tribute to South Lanarkshire Council's community engagement team, in particular Heather Robertson and Brian Borland, who have gone so far beyond their official remits to help to facilitate, co-ordinate and empower the abundance of good will and generosity that has poured out of our local community.

It is vital for us to remember that many of the community groups in our constituencies would not have been able to do all that they could without vital financial support

from our local businesses and community funds. With that in mind, I would like to thank Banks Renewables, Falck Renewables, the Sandford and Upper Avondale Community Council, Kirkmuirhill Second Chance Shop and our local Co-op, for all the financial support they have provided throughout the pandemic for our wonderful local efforts.

I also want to thank the Trust Jack Foundation in Stonehouse, which has supported young people's mental health recovery—that is going to be so vital as we move ahead in the coming months—and NHS Lanarkshire psychological services, led by Dr Gary Tanner, with innovative online psychology programmes led by Professor Jim White. They have ensured that mental health and wellbeing have been prioritised in my constituency throughout the pandemic.

Many of the unsung heroes of the pandemic have worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that daily lives continue to function. In that, I include pharmacies across the constituency and the UK, which provide a vital medicine supply, food and grocery stores, and factories and all their essential staff, as well as our local high streets, including the corporates who were so good locally and regularly kept in touch with me to provide special deliveries for the most vulnerable. I include bus and train drivers—all of those in public transport companies who kept going through the pandemic, ensuring that essential staff in our NHS and social care could travel safely to work and turned up for their roles, day in, day out, despite their own concerns about the pandemic.

I thank the essential council staff who provided care, support and maintenance of our local communities, and those emergency frontline staff of the police—including Police Scotland—the fire brigade, paramedics and the emergency response units. All of these services are vital, but many have perhaps gone less recognised than others. Not today. We salute their fortitude and dedication to our lives and our safety.

An amazing group has taken off in East Kilbride during the pandemic: East Kilbride Community Litter Pickers, led by the inspirational Alice Alves. Her motto and mine is "Take pride in East Kilbride". There are now thousands of litter pickers across my constituency who work every week to clean up our town and local landscape, making such a difference to our outlook, taking pride in our area, our villages and our town, and showing that we care about our environment.

I thank the local schools who have helped—Our Lady of Lourdes, Calderglen High and Duncanrig Secondary, my own former school. They have been engaging in this work, and the Boys' Brigade has also been collecting litter across the area as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Awards. They are making a vast difference, helping with positivity and inspiring our way ahead.

I want to draw Members' and the Minister's attention to some national initiatives. The Forest of Memories project aims to create a network of memorial forests across the UK in memory of all those who have lost their lives as a result of the pandemic. It has been supported by national bodies such as the National Trust and the Woodland Trust, and by charities such as Mind, Shelter and Marie Curie.

Sustainable forest can allow families to remember their loved ones in an environmentally sustainable way, surrounded by the beauty of nature. It is vital that we

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

give our constituents every opportunity to take time and space to reflect and grieve, in the light of the loss and trauma that they have experienced over the last 16 months. As a supporter of the Forest of Memories and the primary sponsor of its early-day motion, and as we turn our minds to the legacy of the pandemic, I can think of no better tribute, and I commend its work to the Minister. We must look towards sustainable places of reflection, and demonstrate leadership through COP26 and across our Commonwealth. The legacy must pay tribute to the lives we have sadly lost, but also pay respect to our planet.

Finally, I draw Members' attention to the Thank You Day celebrations, due to take place across the UK on Sunday 4 July. The initiative behind Thank You Day was started by just 13 volunteers, and it is now supported by hundreds of organisations, from the Scouts and the Guides, to Rotary, the Royal Voluntary Service and the NHS. This year, they have teamed up with Keep Britain Tidy to organise community litter-picks across the UK, as well as tartan tea parties, lunches and cheers for volunteer moments. I urge Members to look into how they might celebrate that occasion in their constituencies for those who have given so much to serve others.

I thank everyone who has come together to make a difference to the lives of the most vulnerable. We could not have come this far without them, and they make us strong in our will to get past this pandemic and build back better. I look forward to the contributions of Members of all parties today, and to learn about the amazing work that has taken place in their constituencies. The resilience of our scientists, our health and social care services and all those on the frontline has made a crucial difference to our lives. We thank them from the bottom of our hearts and are proud to represent them in this House of Commons.

Christina Rees (in the Chair): I intend to start the winding-up speeches at 3.03 pm at the latest, so I am imposing a formal time limit of four minutes on Back-Bench speakers.

2.18 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing this debate. She has done the House an enormous favour by giving us the opportunity to thank our community champions for all that they do. As Members of Parliament, we know how much it means when people actually say thank you to us. This is a great opportunity to celebrate and say thank you.

I find increasingly that if you want a job doing, ask a busy person, and the community champions are all very busy. Local charities, community groups and individuals were vital for helping vulnerable individuals before the pandemic, but they have been especially brilliant throughout it. Many selfless volunteers in Southend have given up their time to assist those who cannot help themselves. This debate is so well judged.

Southend is fortunate to have plenty of wonderful charities that help a broad range of individuals and groups. The Music Man Project, set up by the brilliant David Stanley, would have been going to Broadway

were it not for the pandemic. David Stanley is inspirational and has helped people with learning disabilities realise their full potential. It has played at the London Palladium and the Royal Albert Hall, and now it is going to go across to America.

I was pleased to support Trust Links' new online wellbeing service, which adapted how it supports individuals with mental health and wellbeing issues. I met Matt King, the chief executive, and I hope it can resume its services, which help 1,500 people every year with therapeutic gardening programmes, counselling, work programmes and mental health and wellbeing coaches.

Local charities that help rough sleepers have been extremely busy during the pandemic. I have been working closely with HARP—the Homeless Action Resource Project—and Off the Streets. Homeless people have been able to get into shelters and receive the coronavirus vaccine. I supported HARP's "Everyone In" campaign to ensure that the progress made during the first lockdown was successfully continued to keep rough sleepers safe. I have seen the effects of homelessness first hand when visiting night shelters and during on-street visits. I urge the Government to support the charities helping rough sleepers as restrictions are hopefully easing.

I know colleagues will agree with me that our magnificent carers deserve recognition for the vital work that they have been doing. It was Carers Week earlier this month, and I was pleased to support Southend Carers and all those unpaid carers, to let them know how much they are valued. The contribution they made to families in Southend show a level of commitment and selflessness that is rare.

The week is Children's Hospice Week. In July, Havens Hospices will be launching their Hares About Town project to bring communities together to raise awareness of the mental health problems children are facing and to raise money for the charity. I look forward to this project and wish them the best of luck.

Elderly people often need assistance with shopping deliveries and other day-to-day tasks that have been made more difficult during the pandemic. It was heart-warming to see the Southend Scouts and the Royal British Legion use their resources and time to assist those who could not go out food shopping or needed help collecting medicine. There are so many charitable organisations in Southend that have a passion for helping others.

Carla Cressy founded the Endometriosis Foundation, with which I have worked closely as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on endometriosis. It has done wonderful work. Similarly, Kelly Swain and Natasha Ralph have launched National Online Wellbeing Services' "N.O.W's the time for change" campaign, aimed at providing health-based and therapeutic coaching to improve emotional and mental health for children, young people, adults and families. It focuses on early intervention and coaching to overcome life's challenges.

It is not just charities that have been champions in our communities. People have come to rely on the many places of worship that have done a magnificent job. With the weather thankfully improving, more people have been using the beaches. Southend Lifeboat and the Chalkwell Lifeguards have been very busy keeping people safe. I recently met the Chalkwell Lifeguards to present them with new emergency equipment, which will help save more lives. They do a wonderful job.

Southend emergency fund has given almost £200,000 to help local Southend charities and individuals to provide food, heating, personal protective equipment and mental health support to develop strategies to cope with life after coronavirus.

Christina Rees (in the Chair): Order. Sorry to cut you off in your prime.

2.22 pm

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP) [V]: I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing the debate and for allowing us all the opportunity to highlight the role of community in tackling the covid-19 pandemic.

In my constituency of Upper Bann, I have been blown away by the support of local community groups with clubs, churches and other bodies, such as the Orange Institution, in meeting the challenges posed by covid-19. It is no exaggeration to say that without the volunteering spirit of so many, more lives would have been lost, loneliness and the consequences of isolation would have been more prevalent, and families facing unexpected struggles would have been left helpless.

Faced with the unprecedented need and facing so many unknowns, and balanced against the risk of increased exposure to covid-19, it was inspiring to watch so many stand with neighbour or stranger to help them through this challenging time. In Upper Bann, our food banks faced unprecedented demand, but never left anyone without supplies. Food parcels were distributed by Orange lodges, churches, sports clubs and community groups. Volunteers checked in by phone with elderly neighbours and we had groups such as Warrior Scrubs making much needed PPE for our local healthcare heroes on the frontline. There are literally hundreds of people in my constituency alone who deserve our recognition, and therefore I will desist from singling out any particular group, save to say our thanks and praise for what they have done and continue to do.

What must recognise the vital role of community and ensure that we provide this sector, in all its manifestations, with the support it needs to thrive. This needs to be through financial support, but also through support for volunteer recruitment and development. We also want to promote the benefits of community participation among our younger generations.

I am proud of the role played by young people in my constituency throughout the covid-19 pandemic, but I would love to see it as the start of a movement towards young people getting involved in community groups and driving their priorities forward. We are making steady progress on the road to normality, but let the journey of community activism continue when we get to freedom day, because we have much to do to recover from the trauma brought about by covid-19. I thank all the volunteers in Upper Bann.

2.25 pm

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing such an important debate. I am delighted to have the opportunity to spend a few minutes paying tribute to the community organisations and volunteers in Crewe and Nantwich

who played—and continue to play—an enormously important role in helping us respond to the challenges of covid.

There is no way for me to recognise all the positive work done by so many different groups and people, but I thank each and every one of them. I will mention a few of the groups and individuals who enabled others to contribute, including Liz Parkin and members of the Nantwich Buddies team; Councillor Janet Clowes and members of her Wybunbury Viral Kindness team; Philip Garcia, Connie Davis, Helen Mollart and others, who are part of the Haslington Support Group; Nadiyah McKeown and her team of 40 volunteers in the Community Isolation Help Group for the Wistaston, Crewe and Nantwich Facebook group—in fact, this year the local charity Motherwell recognised Nadiyah as an inspiring woman for her fantastic work leading the group; and the fantastic group of volunteers, such as Chris, Emma, Christina, Paul and Nicola, who were supported by office. There are too many to mention, as I said.

I also want to mention the many volunteers supporting charities such as the Wishing Well, Hopes and Beams, St Paul's Centre, Nantwich food bank, the YMCA and the Salvation Army. Collectively, they helped people stay in their homes, helped get medicines and helped pharmacy queues. They helped support lonely and isolated people. There was an enormous range of tasks that they engaged with. I had the pleasure of meeting Jean Fuller and husband-and-wife volunteers Geraldine and Ernie during a visit to the Wishing Well charity during Volunteers Week earlier this month. They exemplify community spirit—the idea that to give one's time to help others is special, important and enriching.

If there is one thing that we can do positively as a result of the pandemic, it is to try to capitalise on that community spirit, on the many people who were new to volunteering, and on the new friendships and the new organisations that were built to respond to the pandemic. I am already seeing such groups grow and sustain beyond the work of responding to the pandemic. For example, the Haslington Support Group, like many of the groups I have mentioned, did not exist before the pandemic. As well as still helping people with collecting medicines and getting to appointments, the group recently created a poppy trail throughout the village and has just announced that it will be creating a scarecrow trail as well.

We all have a responsibility to each other. That is what it means to be part of a community, and I remain in awe of those individuals who are willing to do so much to try to fulfil that responsibility. If every person could give just an hour of their time once a month to volunteer in the community, as those people do, our communities—in fact, our entire country—would be so much better for it. I look forward to the proposals coming from the Department on the volunteering strategy for the coming year. If we can get behind people and grow what is positive as we come out of the pandemic, it will really create sustained improvements for all our constituents and our communities.

2.28 pm

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Rees. I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing such an important debate.

[Mr Virendra Sharma]

The last few months have been very difficult for so many different people, though I have nothing but pride for the way in which the people of my Ealing, Southall constituency have stepped up. Our community has responded with tremendous generosity and solidarity with those who have suffered greatly. Tragically, the poorest households and most vulnerable in our society have borne the worst effects of the pandemic, with rising levels of food bank use and social isolation.

I am so proud of the truly inspirational community and faith groups in my constituency who have played their part in supporting people during their time of need. They have handed out thousands of food parcels, and provided helpful advice and emotional support to the most vulnerable and to key workers in the constituency. In particular, I thank all the gurdwaras, all the Hindu temples, all the mosques and all the churches, along with the Indian Workers' Association Southall, the Southall Lions, and many local restaurants such as Kulcha International, TKC, Saravana Bhawan and many, many more. Most importantly, I thank the Hope for Southall Street Homeless charity, which has worked closely with homeless people.

All places of worship have stepped up during this crisis, not only to feed the needy but to deliver medicine and host vaccination events. Their great work has helped the NHS to reach even wider groups of people with its highly successful vaccination programme, and to further safeguard public health. For their incredible work in protecting and improving our local environment, I wholeheartedly commend the Litter Action Group for Ealing Residents—LAGER Can—for their noble effort in cleaning our green and urban spaces. I am incredibly proud and inspired by their efforts to clean up our community during their Great Big Southall Clean-up fortnight, during which they were able to clean up every street in Southall—an astonishing feat.

I am incredibly grateful for the personal sacrifices of members of those groups, and want to let them know that their contribution to the common good has not gone unnoticed. I know I speak for everyone locally when I thank them for what they have done—the donations they have made and the time they have given up to help us all. Some of these groups were recognised for their outstanding contribution to our community with the great honour of a Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, though their good works are deserving of so much more. The Government must commit more funds to the voluntary sector, and to local government, to ensure that these groups can sustainably continue and expand on their excellent work in our communities.

These groups, religious institutions and businesses have shown their commitment to shared strength and community co-operation. The coronavirus crisis has ultimately shown nothing but the best of our communities, the strength of our society, and the will of people to overcome any and all forms of adversity. I thank them for their efforts, and pledge to do all I can to ensure they can survive and flourish in the future.

2.32 pm

Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Rees. I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on having secured this important debate.

I often talk about Peterborough being a special place—a caring city—and I talk regularly about being proud of Peterborough. It has become almost a personal catchphrase, but nothing makes me prouder of Peterborough than the way in which the community has responded during the covid-19 crisis. I would like to publicly thank a lot of the people who have worked with me—worked tirelessly—to support people during this effort.

Cocoa Fowler from the charity Food for Nought has supported teams across the city, delivering food to food banks. Hotelier Colin Wilson has been hailed as a hero by his wife for supporting his community during the covid-19 lockdown by cooking over 200 free meals a week—his local MP agrees with Mrs Wilson. Zoe Wareham, a nurse at Peterborough City Hospital, had to leave her children with their grandparents because they were particularly at risk of infection, but the hours she put in to support people were an inspiration. My friend Zillur Hussain, the chief executive officer of the Zi Foundation, has been honoured for his services to the community in Peterborough during covid-19. Along with his business partner Chavdar Zhelev, they provided thousands of free meals to the vulnerable and the deserving. He was honoured with an MBE, and again, he receives my public thanks. Ishfaq Hussain led efforts to provide meals to rough sleepers and, along with the charities Children of Adam, Unite 4 Humanity and the Garden House, ensured that rough sleepers were fed and housed during the outbreak. I also thank Atiq Rehman, Shezad Yousaf and Steven Pettican, who are good people in part motivated by their faith.

Takeaways and restaurants in Peterborough have been absolutely brilliant at offering free meals to the deserving, and my Peterborough's Favourite Takeaway contest was a way to thank them for their efforts. Rony Choudhury of the Bombay Brasserie, Zeeshan Manzoor and the teams at Big Mouth and Five Lads, Touqeer Tariq of Rizq Peri Peri Grill, Becky and Emma at Flavour takeaway in Chadburn, the gang at Netherton Fisheries and countless others all deserve mentions, as do Jacki Wood, the landlady of The Bull pub in Newborough, for her efforts supporting the village, and Wendy Sayer of the Newborough coronavirus support group.

Peterborough is home to a number of community food banks. All organisers and volunteers merit thanks. I volunteered at the Millfield community fridge and was looked after by Carol Knight, and supported the efforts of Christine Nice at the Westwood community café and Erin Tierney at the Thorney and Eye food bank. Last but not least, Stevie Wiley and Richard Bastow of the Coronaheroes Facebook group led me to dress up as Father Christmas, handing out presents to children. They have been a real inspiration in Peterborough.

It is a special place, Peterborough, with the Sikh community, the Hindu community, the Nepalese community, five big mosques, churches across the city, the East Timorese community and Petr Torak from COMPAS, which provides support to the Czech, Slovak and Roma communities. They have all been absolutely marvellous during this campaign, as have the Peterborough Litter Wombles, the new organisation that supports litter picking and so on. Family Voice is another superb charity.

It is not difficult to say that Peterborough is a very diverse constituency with people from all sorts of communities. We come from different faiths, cultures and communities; we are different shapes and sizes and

even speak different languages. But we came together as one city, and that is why I am proud of Peterborough, why it is such a special place and why all these people deserve a specific mention.

2.36 pm

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Rees. Let me begin by thanking the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for securing this important debate.

There is no doubt that the covid crisis has been immensely challenging for people across the country. Devastatingly, just when they needed support most, the vulnerable in our society were let down by a Government intent on securing the country's finances above protecting and supporting its people. Where the Government failed, the local community stepped up. Today's debate presents an important opportunity to bring attention to the critical work of community groups up and down the country. In my own constituency of Manchester Gorton, which has some of the highest rates of poverty in the country, community groups became a lifeline to those who needed it most.

I have been left in awe at the selflessness, kindness, and compassion of the people in Manchester Gorton. Over the past year and a half, I have had the pleasure of visiting initiatives such as Cracking Good Food, Qadria Jilania Islamic Centre and Urdu Global, where teams of volunteers and local councillors have worked tirelessly to provide hot meals to those in need. Food banks across Manchester including Fallowfield and Withington food bank, Work for Smile Longsight and Smile Aid, with the help of the Rafay Mussarat Foundation, have worked long hours to ensure there is always food available to those struggling to make ends meet. And when the virus trapped many people in their homes, volunteers at The Place at Platt Lane and Ardwick and Longsight mutual aid group delivered food parcels to those forced to shield or self-isolate.

That incredible community spirit has extended beyond providing food. Initiatives such as Levenshulme Inspire's virtual community drop-in has allowed neighbours to stay connected and even strike up new friendships. Such work has been invaluable as we as a society have struggled with increasing loneliness and worsening mental health. Although this new digitally connected world has allowed many people to stay in touch with friends, family and loved ones, for older people in our society with limited digital skills or connectivity this time has been even more isolating. Once again, in Manchester Gorton community groups rose to the challenge. The Myriad Foundation and Northmoor community centre have ensured older people can access the technology they need to connect with their loved ones.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank all the faith groups for the wonderful work that they have been doing. I am talking about all the mosques, the churches, the Levenshulme Jain centre, the Medina mosque and, in Whalley Range, our gurdwara and the Hindu temple. All have done incredible work in helping people. The wonderful community in Manchester, Gorton have ensured that "isolating" does not mean "isolated", and I could not be prouder of them.

2.39 pm

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Rees. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing this important and timely debate. It has been a real pleasure to hear the stories that we have heard so far about the way all our various communities have pulled together in the face of the pandemic that we have been going through, and to take a moment to celebrate the contribution of the many unsung heroes in our communities.

I will highlight just a few examples of the good work that has been carried out in the communities across my constituency of Gordon. Derek Davidson and the community council in Danestone, in the north of Aberdeen, have contributed a lot to their local community by keeping up local morale and spirits with the fairy doors and the welly wall and by organising litter picks and keeping the planters made by the gentlemen at the local men's shed planted and brightening up the community in what has otherwise been a pretty dark time for us all.

Moving out towards Inch, in the countryside, the Rev. Dr Kay Gauld of the Inch-Leslie-Premnay-Oyne Church of Scotland and her team, Diane and Debbie, established a resilience group in the town of Inch, supporting people who were in isolation and who were shielding. They also set up a community larder, which continues to offer support, gathering—according to need—everything from firewood to clothes, bread to tinned goods, and even meals if there was a need to help out in that way.

In Ellon, the local Baptist church made its whole building available to the local food bank, which is run by the Trussell Trust and which normally operates out of a much smaller part of that building. Every square inch of the building was needed to cope with the generosity of the community in terms of the donations that were made and to accommodate the support in other aspects that was received.

In the time remaining to me, I would especially like to draw attention to what happened in the town of Huntly and how it pulled together in a particularly adverse set of circumstances earlier this year. On 2 February, the town experienced a complete failure of the gas network—a total shutdown. That left approximately 4,500 people without gas overnight, in temperatures of minus 6°. As if that was not enough, exactly the same thing happened just a month later, again leaving residents without gas overnight, that time in temperatures of minus 5°.

It was testament to the success of the multi-agency response that the prolonged losses of supply did not have more serious consequences, but what really shone through was how, without being asked, local organisations, agencies and individuals stepped up to the plate in order to assist each other in any way they could, whether that was by highlighting those in the community who were especially vulnerable or simply by taking any practical measures that they could to ensure the safety and comfort of others. It included local Facebook pages helping to share information and the local Neep & Okra Kitchen—a locally sourced food project and community business—giving away free food. So many people—too many to mention in the time available—stepped up to look after each other.

[Richard Thomson]

Often, it is in the worst circumstances that we find the best of ourselves. We hope that with more and more people each day being double-jabbed, an end to this situation might be in sight; and hopefully we have discovered not so much a sense of community as a renewed sense of community—the understanding that we are each of us part of something much greater and much bigger than ourselves and that our greatest calling in life is to be in the service of others. That is a sense of purpose that can serve us incredibly well in the weeks, months and years ahead as we all seek to build back better in our communities and beyond.

2.44 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under you in the Chair, Ms Rees. I, too, thank the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for calling today's debate.

The communities of York flow with generosity. Time and resources have poured out of people's hearts to see injustice challenged, inequality quashed and people helped and supported in their time of need. From the unseen acts of kindness through to its highly developed and superbly led voluntary sector, the community effort has been the glue that has held our city together. Rehearsed in our response to flooding in York, we were adept at pulling together in a crisis and acting on values that are deep-rooted in our city's history of social pioneers, Quaker heritage and progressive values. Literally thousands of people reached out: some to their neighbours, some to organisations, and some supporting community hubs to distribute food and pharmaceuticals. Others set up mutual aid groups and found a new calling to meet need.

My research into York's pandemic response showed a community-led determination that no one should be left behind or go without. But as the weeks have turned to months, and with the ending of furlough drawing others back to work, one thing is clear: the sustained and enduring fallout from the pandemic continues. Need deepens, job losses grow and, for the isolated and lonely, the silence echoes ever louder. York is renowned as a volunteering city. According to Onward's UK social fabric index, York scores extremely highly on all its indices. We love to be generous; we love to be kind.

Tragically, we had the first cases of covid in the UK, so we have already lived with the pandemic for 18 months. We are now ready to move on, but this time ensuring that no one is left behind. Although some are trying to go back 18 months, Labour will not. We want to go forward and focus on our community; build a greener, cleaner and more welcoming city with social projects to improve our environment; create a fully accessible and inclusive city; build a family-friendly city so that local people reap the benefits of living in such an incredible place; invest in jobs that are well paid and secure; invest in our new volunteers centre, a place of reciprocity, giving and gaining; and, as this last year has shown, create inclusive communities, building the homes that local people want to live in and the social infrastructure so that communities can thrive.

The past year's community response has laid the foundations. Last spring, John and Julie McGall put out a table with some food on and invited others to share. Now they feed more than 100 people a day and

make 1,000 deliveries a week. They have supported the homeless and those with no recourse to public funds, and found help for those experiencing domestic violence and comfort for those alone. Now a highly sophisticated operation, they serve our city every single day. People can expect to be bowled over by their gracious hearts and kindness.

Supper collective restaurants pooled their skills to turn out 12,000 meals for those in need. I know from constituents how much that has meant. Phone calls from Age UK, Tang Hall Big Local and many other places turned painful, empty days of isolation into moments where people felt the warmth of others and need was met. Bubble buddies went on walks with people, improving the health and wellbeing of their new-found friends.

A sector that has given so much and that must play a critical role in social recovery has received little support. The Government must now focus on supporting and sustaining an inspirational society that has been so transformative. My local community in York—the churches, the community groups and the individuals—have given us so much hope for our future. It is an honour to serve them.

Christina Rees (in the Chair): May I remind Members participating virtually to keep their cameras on at all times, please? I call Taiwo Owatemi.

2.48 pm

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Rees. I thank the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for securing this important debate.

This is a perfect opportunity to celebrate our community champions—individuals who go above and beyond to support their neighbourhood during this most difficult of times. I am proud that my constituency of Coventry North West is blessed to have so many people who fit that description. I could fill my time simply with a roll-call of names, but instead I will try to be selective and choose a handful who most embody the spirit of togetherness that binds great communities together in times of adversity.

With food poverty a serious issue in our city, Clare Allington-Dixon and her team at Urban Goodies have stepped forward to provide hot meals and food packages throughout the pandemic. Their community enterprise combines the best traditions of charity with a determination to make a lasting difference by teaching cooking skills that blend together all of the fantastic cultural influences that make Coventry special. Their work has given many hope in dark days over the last 18 months.

Others of our community champions have focused on imaginative ways of combating the isolation and loneliness that lockdown has created. Summer of Sunflowers, an initiative that started on the border between my constituency and the next, brings people together through the simple shared experience of growing flowers in their front garden. I have to mention two people in particular. Mark Halpin has put energy and effort into making this idea a success, and I am not the only person delighted to see how Summer of Sunflowers is spreading across our neighbourhoods and schools, encouraging neighbours to work together to turn our streets golden.

Likewise, Katie O'Sullivan's fantastic artwork on the side of O'Toole's Cafe has created a centre of community interest in recent weeks. In giving her time to the community, Katie has created a brand-new landmark for Coventry, one I am proud to have in my constituency. The buzz around Summer of Sunflowers has allowed communities to start socialising once more, in a responsible and covid-secure way.

I also pay tribute to Langar Aid for not only helping Coventry's homeless community but going as far as Dover in Kent to provide meals to lorry drivers who were stranded there due to covid restrictions.

Coventry is blessed with many organisations supporting the most vulnerable in our community, and I would like to thank Hugh McNeill at Coventry food bank, which celebrated its 10th anniversary this month, for all its hard work over the past decade. I am proud to have had the opportunity to volunteer and support it with food bank deliveries.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the faith groups for their incredible work in supporting the local community by distributing food and pharmaceuticals and ensuring the success of Coventry's vaccination scheme. I am grateful to all the gurdwaras, mosques, churches and faith institutions. In addition, the volunteers at Lawrence Saunders Baptist Church and St Oswald's have done an incredible job in providing wraparound support for families during this difficult time through their food bank, debt relief and job club services.

I also thank Jac Danielle, Robin Synnott and all the fantastic volunteer litter pickers for keeping our streets and parks clean. They have played an incredible role in bringing pride to our local area and showing that we value our environment.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention the remarkable women who have been selected as the 14 modern-day Godivas, representing our city as community champions as we celebrate Coventry being the city of culture this year.

I could go on listing individuals, but for the sake of time I will close by giving thanks to everyone who has gone the extra mile to help our city weather the storms of the past year and a half. They are the glue in our neighbourhoods that binds us together, and I am incredibly grateful to each and every one of them for all they have done over the past 18 months.

2.52 pm

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Rees. I am also grateful to the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for securing this debate.

Have we ever seen a better example of the strength of community spirit than that shown during this pandemic? The community response to this unprecedented situation was simply incredible. In my own constituency of the City of Durham, Fram School, Belmont School, Durham rotary club and many others sprang into action to make and donate PPE to frontline workers. While some were donating PPE, the Capital Indian restaurant generously donated curries to keep NHS staff at the University Hospital of North Durham well fed on their shifts. While lockdown has often kept us apart, that has not stopped youth groups such as Cheesy Waffles and Durham

Area Youth, which have continued to deliver fantastic services for children and young people, both online and in person. They are both incredible projects.

Then there are the community groups and organisations that recognised the need to support families throughout the pandemic. I have seen for myself the incredible work of Gilesgate and Belmont Wellbeing Project, which has supported people in a variety of ways over the past year, including through its food bank.

I never cease to be amazed by the graft and drive of the colourful character and Ludworth legend that is Dave Woods, who along with the community association volunteers, Tesco community champion Joanne Reay and Councillor Lucy Hovvels, worked tirelessly to keep community spirits up with food deliveries and hot food services.

Conservative Members present will be glad to learn of the generosity of the Durham branch of the National Education Union, which has been a constant source of support in the community. It gifted presents to 344 children in Durham last Christmas, donated key equipment to schools, ran online extracurricular sessions and so much more. It has been truly amazing, and it would serve the Tories well to remember that before they continue to scapegoat unions and school staff.

We cannot ignore the fact that groups have often had to step up because of Government failure. That the Brandon community runs the food bank at Brandon Primary School is brilliant, but it should not need to in 21st century Britain. When the Government disgracefully decided that feeding hungry children was not a priority for them, businesses and organisations decided that it was a priority. Hospitality businesses such as the Drunken Duck and community organisations such as the Brandon Carrside Youth and Community Project and One Step at a Time selflessly provided free lunches during the holidays. Durham Women's football club ignored the fact that it could not take gate receipts last season, and instead asked its fans to watch online and donate the cost of a ticket to the End Child Food Poverty campaign, which raised thousands to feed children in Durham.

Those services should not rely on the generosity of society, because it is the responsibility of the Government to ensure that no one lives in food poverty or any kind of poverty. Fortunately, in Durham we had a Labour council for most of the pandemic, whose support was noted to be among the best in the country. I hope the new Lib Dem-Conservative coalition is equally committed.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the work of the City of Durham Labour party, which made a series of donations to food banks and community organisations across the constituency over the past year, putting people before politics. I have shared those examples to give credit and thanks to the unsung heroes of Durham. They reaffirm my belief in the strength of community. We can say once and for all that Mrs Thatcher was wrong: there is such thing as society.

2.56 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for securing this debate. I always enjoy the debates that she brings forward. She and I are often on the same side and say the same things.

[Jim Shannon]

I want to put on the record my thanks to the people of my constituency. The unity and dedication that they have shown through the course of this pandemic have been truly admirable and inspirational. The past 15 months have not been easy for anyone, but people have been brought together. That is what I have noticed. I see the good coming out of all the badness and hurt that there has been in the past year.

I have a love for my country, and its history makes it even more unique, because the term “community” was not often used in a positive light during the height of the troubles. There was little sense of community across the great divide, and at times we had a justified fear of going out of our way to help others who were different from us. We were a much-divided nation, and that continued for years, but things have changed. In a way, covid made that happen to our advantage.

I believe that the constant efforts of the people of Northern Ireland, and particularly those in my constituency of Strangford, have been tremendous throughout the pandemic in addressing that fear and creating that togetherness when we had to be apart. Some 79,000 people were furloughed in Northern Ireland and 62,000 lived off self-employment schemes. The need within the communities was very clear, and the people came together in the best way they could. We may be apart, but you are not alone—that is the statement that I want to make in my contribution.

I want to put on the record my thanks to local residents groups—the Eastend Residents Association, in particular, which has delivered 165 food parcels, the Scrabo Residents Association, the Westwinds Development Association in Newtownards and the Glenn Association. They devoted themselves in their local areas to elderly residents who have to self-isolate or are at high risk. My colleague Councillor Billy Walker, who represents Killyleagh, Crossgar, Saintfield and part of Ballynahinch in the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, paid out of his own pocket for butchers’ meat parcels for elderly residents in his area of Killyleagh. It was a really massive contribution. We cannot take away from these people whose generosity was incredible. The list goes on.

Ards Elim Church sent a team out in full personal protective equipment with home-baked goods for elderly and ill. The Eastend Residents Association had a localised leaflet drop with emergency contact numbers. We must not forget the work of our local schools either. Tor Bank School in Dundonald undertook work for local pupils whose parents worked full time or did not have sustainable childcare for their special needs because of the coronavirus. People came together.

Community carers and district nurses have also earned our utmost respect. They went to multiple houses of the vulnerable daily in full PPE. We can never really acknowledge or understand just how great their contribution was, not just for the community but because of the danger in which they put themselves.

I hope that the last year has brought us closer together as friends and neighbours. If there is a lesson we can all learn, it is not to take things for granted. As restrictions lift, we must not forget about those who are suffering. I thank the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow for leading this debate on this topic, which we have all thought about a lot. I am always

proud to represent Strangford, but when I consider the grit, determination, love and empathy shown by people in my constituency, and in everybody’s constituencies, I am humbled and I honour them in this place.

3 pm

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): I offer huge thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for giving us the opportunity to thank the incredible people in our constituencies who went above and beyond the call of duty during the main lockdown.

I remember a family member telling me that lockdown had brought out the worst in people, and it saddened me because, by virtue of our jobs, we are able to see how it brought out the best in so many. We were not sheltered from the negative impacts. Apart from experiencing some of them personally and in our families, as constituency MPs we were fully aware of the despair and sometimes desperation felt by the people who were most affected. For me, any low moods that were induced were offset by the incredible people I am about to tell hon. Members about.

I hope it is not just me, but normally when I make a speech I feel the ever-present pressure to be inspiring, but not this time. The material I am working with and the people of Glasgow North East are inspiring enough. The pressure today is not to forget to name anyone. I could not possibly give a comprehensive list of everyone I would like to thank, because that would take up the entire 90 minutes allocated to this debate. Instead, I have decided to tell hon. Members about the organisations I was involved with during the main lockdown. I acknowledge that there were many more, and if anyone listening would like some recognition for a group I do not mention, please get in touch and I will publish an early-day motion in their honour. I appreciate that makes me sound like a radio DJ taking requests, but it is worth noting.

I hoped to have time—although I do not think I will—to comment on some of the people we have heard about today. I would normally do that when summing up, but I am sure other hon. Members will forgive me if I prioritise Glasgow North East champions. It has been really good to hear about everybody, across the whole of the UK.

To my mind, there are three categories of people who fit the term “champion”. First, there are those who carried on doing their regular paid job in very difficult circumstances: healthcare workers, emergency workers, communications workers, shop workers, journalists, public transport workers and, yes, teams working for MPs and MSPs. They did not have any reduction in income but there were massive change to their daily lives and they were working in unsettling, if not downright scary, environments in order to keep our essential services going. They provided such reassurance to us that the world was not completely falling apart and I know we are all very grateful to them.

I pay tribute to those workers forced against Government guidance to go into work, when they could have worked at home. I have talked about that before and I will talk about it again. I thank them for bearing with us while we try to fight their corner.

Secondly, there are those whose jobs changed completely, such as housing officers, who suddenly had to organise, stock and manage food deliveries, or youth workers, who had to find creative ways of keeping in touch with young people when they could not meet in person.

Thirdly, there are those who volunteered. It was not their job and nobody was paying them, but they just got up and said, “What does my community need?” and got on with it. I am certain many of them thought it would be for just a day or so, maybe a week, and it turned into more of a full-time job without pay. Others thought it would be for maybe three weeks, and then the weeks turned into months and then a year, but they carried on, I will not say for no reward, but certainly for no financial reward.

Turning to the community champions in Glasgow North East, all of these groups and people did much more than I will be able to talk about in the time I have, but I want to name them and put my personal thanks as their MP on the record.

In March last year, I started to host a weekly Zoom meeting of all the groups working to support people in the Springburn area and another weekly meeting of everyone in the Milton and Lambhill areas. Today, both those groups still meet regularly and I want to list the members of each group. In Springburn, we had NG Homes, a local housing association. I want to make particular mention of Margaret Fraser, who leads the community outreach for NG Homes and tires me out just by watching her. She never stops. There is no way she can do everything in the hours she is employed for, and her imagination knows no bounds. If there was anything I could not find for a constituent, she had it, or she could access it.

Overnight, the Brunswick youth centre spent all of its reserves on food and became a full-time food delivery service. Not only that, they would turn whole streets into bingo halls, which was pretty crazy, but it was so much fun. New Rhythms for Glasgow was one of the groups that worked creatively with young people, and also worked creatively under the restrictions we had with people experiencing addiction. Glasgow Girls Club developed software that allowed groups to easily get up-to-date information about what help was available in this terrible time. Sisco does incredible work with addicts in prison and—so importantly—addicts leaving prison. Imagine leaving prison during lockdown, but Sisco was there for them, every minute of every day, and its workers just put so much energy into it.

I only had to tell Glasgow North baby food bank about a baby whose family needed food, milk, clothes or nappies, and its workers were on their way to support them. Colston Wellpark Parish Church provided food and advice several days a week, and support for the other groups as well. Tron St. Mary’s Church delivered fish and chips to older people on Fridays—they never let me go to that, for some reason—and held numerous online events, none of which could top their weekly get-together of the Cannae Sing choir. Just for the record, they can sing, but they cannot sing on Zoom—trying to sing with a group of people on Zoom was one of the funniest experiences I had last year. North Glasgow Community Food Initiative is about not just providing food, but helping people to eat healthily. It offers so many different things, with online cooking classes being just one of them. I also thank the Salvation Army, Afghan United, Bangla Centre, Stronger Together Enterprise and North Glasgow Integration Network.

If I may, I would like to say a bit more about a couple of organisations. Springburn Community Council, Springburn Parish Church and Spirit of Springburn are three organisations that work together, and many people were involved in working day in, day out to shop for and deliver food and prescriptions to people who either had no money or simply could not leave the house. The one person who is part of each of those three organisations, who has been working full time throughout the past year for not a single penny while also contending with family bereavement, is Helen Carroll. She spearheaded the entire operation and is now leading Spirit of Springburn, set out to regenerate her local area, and I pay particular tribute to her.

African Challenge Scotland provided food that African families could not easily access during lockdown because it was not widely available from supermarket deliveries or food banks. I accompanied them on a few trips and watched how tirelessly they worked, led by the indomitable Ronier Deumeni. It is not members of this group in particular that I am talking about, but Springburn Youth Forum held online quizzes, and had the nerve to beat my team one night. They are still doing wellness packs for young people. The Milton group includes Lambhill Stables, North United Communities, LoveMilton, Healthy North Glasgow, Milton Community Council, Milton Food Hub, Colston Milton Parish Church, North Glasgow Community Food Initiative, and the Ashgill Recreation Centre in Milton.

If I have time—I have two minutes left—so will name just a few more, starting with Royston Youth Action, Spire View and Copperworks housing associations, St Paul’s Youth Forum, Everlasting Arms food bank in Dennistoun, Carntyne and Riddrie Credit Union, and FARE. Citizens Advice has been incredible. Lifelink is an organisation providing a counselling lifeline for people who felt that they really were struggling to go on. I also thank the Green Deal Action Group in Balornock and Barmulloch, Achieve More! Scotland, Susan Wilson at Reidvale community allotments, Possibilities in Possilpark, Possilpark Young Peoples Futures, Thriving Places Ruchill and Possilpark, Partick Thistle football club, and councillors, MPs and MSPs from across the political spectrum who recognised how important it was to just make sure that people survived and that we put our political differences aside.

Something that grew from the pandemic was the Scottish Pantry Network, of which I am now a board member. It was dreamt up by Glasgow councillor Mandy Morgan, and I need to mention it because it is a great solution to food poverty and food waste, and introduces that element of dignity. We now have seven of them, and not just in Glasgow. Basically, the idea is that food that would otherwise go to waste but is still fresh is taken there. People go along, pay £2.50 and get £15-worth of food in a nice shop and a nice environment. They can get meat, fish, fresh fruit and vegetables. It takes away that sense of it being “the poor shop”. It is not a food bank—people are paying. People go whether they need to save money or whether they want to save the environment. It adds an element of dignity.

I have tried to mention those I worked with during lockdown. I have mentioned a couple of others, but I do not want to miss anybody out—I know there were others, and I am very happy to hear about them. As the hon. Member for Coventry North West (Taiwo Owatemi)

[Anne McLaughlin]

said, these people are the glue of our neighbourhoods. If they are keeping our neighbourhoods together, I as their MP want to know about it.

3.10 pm

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab) [V]: I pay special thanks to the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for calling such an important debate, where we can thank and honour those who have provided exceptional services to our nation, especially in the last year when, due to covid, their efforts were taken to new heights.

We live in an era where clickbait stories and internet trolls sometimes overshadow the true community spirit of our nation, but in the darkest of days, when businesses were closing their shutters, workers leaving their workplaces not knowing if they would return, families suddenly shutting their doors to their friends and relatives in a single moment, not knowing what would come next or whether they would ever get an opportunity to say their last goodbyes, at that moment our nation witnessed the best of being British and the true image of modern Britain.

People from every community, those of faith and no faith, from all four nations of the United Kingdom, stood up to play their part and support our nation in our time of need, with their kindness and generosity. Our brave NHS staff stepped up to the pedestal, working long hours to provide the care and vital support needed, including for the Prime Minister when he was infected with covid-19.

In those moments, there was no debate about whether someone was a foreign doctor or a refugee nurse. They were our doctors, our nurses and our frontline staff, delivering care to more than 100,000 people taking their final breaths and to hundreds of thousands who they saved with their care.

In those moments, when most of our economy was shutting down, we witnessed the hard work of frontline workers—shopkeepers, supermarket workers, delivery drivers, police officers, taxi drivers and so many more—who continued to carry on with their work, despite being in high-risk jobs. If it was not for them, the pandemic in those early days could have been so much worse.

Millions across the UK felt the true community spirit that I felt here in my community, with communities coming together. Those who had never volunteered became volunteers. Those who had left the NHS were signing their names to enlist once more, to play their part. In the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North West (Taiwo Owatemi), they are the glue that binds us together.

Despite the challenges that covid-19 was bringing to churches, mosques and community centres—to everywhere across the nation—we now find cathedrals or churches in almost every city or town that are vaccine centres. People of the Christian faith opened their hearts and responded to covid-19 relief efforts from day one.

In London, the famous Lord's cricket ground handed over the bat to the Jewish community of St John's Wood synagogue, which will now house the vaccine centre. In Slough, one of the largest Sikh gurdwaras in the UK, Guru Maneyo Granth Gurdwara, responded by providing

more than 1 million meals across every borough in London to all those in need. Hindu communities responded in various ways, including the volunteers from Swaminarayan Sanstha, who rallied to launch a nationwide programme to support communities during the pandemic. Various UK Hindu temples, including the Neasden temple, were illuminated in blue every Thursday as a mark of respect and gratitude for the tireless and selfless NHS workers.

I saw at first hand the efforts put in by Muslim communities, not only in my home city and constituency of Bradford, but in all the efforts documented in the covid-19 report of the all-party parliamentary group on British Muslims—from mosques becoming emergency morgues and hospitals, to local Muslim shopkeepers in Scotland leading the way by providing emergency relief. In fact, when those such as the Moonlight Trust in Batley started their voluntary work, they thought, like many of us, that covid-19 would be here for the short term. As covid prolonged, so too did their efforts.

The charity sector, which has always been the backbone of providing support to the vulnerable and needy, had an even bigger task on its hands, and despite its finances being in a vulnerable state, it delivered. Our brave Army personnel were always ready to protect our borders, provided strategic and hands-on support for the NHS, and were involved in building the Nightingale hospitals and delivering the vaccines. They did what they do best: worked to protect our nation and its people.

While our institutions played their part, including local councils that had to restructure essential services, there were individual heroes who we will never forget, many of whom were themselves grieving the personal loss of loved ones to covid. Many of them were from minority communities, which were impacted disproportionately by covid-19. When the Government dithered over providing free school meals, it was the business community across the country that stepped in.

Captain Sir Tom Moore began walking 100 lengths of his garden in aid of NHS Charities Together, with the goal of raising £1,000 by his 100th birthday. On the morning of his 100th birthday, the total raised by his work had passed £30 million, and by the time the campaign closed at the end of that day, it had increased to more than £32.79 million. While Captain Sir Tom Moore may not be with us any longer, his efforts have surely made his family and friends, and our nation, proud. He will forever be remembered.

Similarly, Dabirul Choudhury, another 100-year-old, walked lengths while fasting in the month of Ramadan, and raised £150,000. Susan Rees, an advanced nurse practitioner from Johnstone in Pembrokeshire, Wales, recently received a British Empire Medal. After semi-retiring from her full-time role in infection prevention in 2018, she returned to work for three days a week as soon as covid was on the rise. In Belfast, Michael Oliver McBride, the chief medical officer for Northern Ireland, worked tirelessly during the pandemic.

I am sorry, but even if I stood here literally all day, I would still not be able to mention the efforts of everybody in our communities during this period, so please forgive me. On behalf of the Labour party, I put on the record our thanks and our pride to each and every person who played their part, be it through volunteering or fundraising, to support our nation during this pandemic. You are all our country's heroes.

In closing, I say this to those who want to create culture wars, to pitch community against community and to target minorities, making them feel like they do not belong in the UK: reflect and think again. As my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy) said, there is such thing as society. As the chief executive of the Ramadan Tent Project, Omar Salha, tweeted this afternoon:

“The force of separation and division is strong, but the force and power of our community spirit...is most definitely stronger.”

If I am asked, “What is the British spirit?”, I say that it is what we saw in this pandemic, whether it is the Muslim doctors who were sadly the first to die from covid-19 on the frontline or the Sikh volunteers delivering langar; the black train driver in London or the white taxi driver in Devon; the church providing PPE or the synagogue setting up a vaccine centre; the European supermarket worker or the refugee delivery driver; the doctor, the nurse, the care worker or the cleaner. This is modern Britain: diverse, inclusive and all playing our part to protect our country, our NHS and our people. This is modern Britain.

Christina Rees (in the Chair): Minister, we must end by 3.35 pm. Would you mind leaving a few minutes at the end so that Dr Lisa Cameron can wind up?

3.18 pm

The Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government (Luke Hall): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Rees, I think for the first time.

I extend the thanks of everybody here today to the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for securing this hugely important debate. This afternoon, we have seen the best of this House and heard about the best of Britain. We are all grateful to her for the chance to put on the record our thanks to so many remarkable people right across the country. Today's debate has given us the chance to talk about community champions and the incredible work they have done during their remarkable response to covid-19. I am very proud, and I am sure all Members have been proud, to stand here today and thank them, recognise their work and put it on the record that they were the backbone of our response to covid-19.

Even in the most difficult times for our country and the globe, we have seen the best in people and the best in our communities. Even in the midst of great loss, suffering and hardship, communities have come together to support each other with great bravery, spirit and love. Whether it was as part of community groups, charities or faith groups, or as individuals reaching out to each other and their neighbours, it is the strength of character of the people in our towns, villages and cities that has got us through this incredible period.

We have heard so many inspirational stories this afternoon, and there are so many unsung heroes, as the hon. Lady said. I will mention a few of them, starting by thanking the Blackwood and Kirkmuirhill Resilience Group, and Lesley, who has clearly done so much work to deliver flowers, to order in those fish teas, which I am extremely jealous about, and to organise the online bingo—that sounds absolutely incredible. We are equally grateful to the East Kilbride litter pickers and Alice. It is fantastic to hear about the passion and pride that

they have shown for keeping the community clean over the last year and a half. I cannot begin to say how grateful we all are.

We have heard some incredible stories about how groups have utilised online technology to support people with their mental health, including the incredible work done by Trust Links over the last year. We heard about the work by those in the Nantwich Buddies support group and what they do collecting medicines and providing support, and it is incredible to hear that they are starting the poppy trail and a scarecrow trail. I cannot wait to visit and see that. It sounds absolutely incredible, and I thank them for the work that they are doing.

We have heard that Peterborough is the caring city. I have heard that said many times before, but today we really saw that through the examples, including Food for Nought and the Norfolk community fridge. A really important point was made about those who volunteer to give up their time for childcare to ensure that key workers can still get to work and support the health service and our key services. We have heard the same about Manchester, Gorton, where community groups run online virtual drop-ins to support mental health, and my huge thanks go to them, too.

We have heard about the Inch resilience group in Scotland and the excellent work that it does. I thought that the story we heard about the community in Huntly, who had a gas outage on 2 February and another a month later, and were experiencing temperatures of minus 5° but all came together to support each other and vulnerable people through local food groups and share information online, was really fantastic.

We have heard about the spirit and determination in York to ensure that nobody is ever left behind, about the focus on community, and about the work done by Age UK to reach out so many of the constituents of the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell). I am pleased to hear about the volunteer centre and how beneficial it will be.

We have heard how in Durham, the rotary club has been supporting people with PPE, and we have heard about the work of Cheesy Waffles to support young people. My thanks go to them.

We have heard about Clare Allington-Dixon and her team in Coventry North East. They have been teaching cooking skills to people during the pandemic. What a fantastic way to support the community, by encouraging people to make better use of their food through such a difficult time. We have heard about the Summer of Sunflowers and the work that Matt is doing spreading literal growth right across the community and the country.

The SNP Front-Bench spokesperson, the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin), spoke passionately. She was nervous that she would sound like a community DJ taking requests, but she did not, I can assure her. She sounded like a passionate representative of her community and her country, talking about the types of community groups that have contributed so much, including housing officers, youth workers, the volunteers who were giving back so much that they almost became full-time workers, Margaret and what she was doing, the Brunswick youth centre and the parish church in Springburn. We are really grateful to them for everything that they have done.

[Luke Hall]

I also want to say something about rough sleeping. We have heard so much about the incredible work in Southend to support people in the Everybody In scheme, the street homeless charity in Ealing that has done such incredible work, and the Garden House in Peterborough, which has contributed so much. Looking at the Government's response to the pandemic, we see that one of the most important pieces of work carried out was to support rough sleepers, and the work that has not been praised enough as part of that is the volunteers' response. Volunteers were out there, night after night, day after day, supporting rough sleepers who, in some cases, had for years been nervous about engaging with the council or with volunteers. The volunteers really stepped up and supported people during that time, meaning that by May 2020, 15,000 people had been supported into accommodation and were receiving help and support, often for the first time in years. That was, of course, an important part of the national Government response, but I think it shows the alignment with volunteers and how that can really deliver the best for our society.

We saw the same with shielding, as we have heard. Volunteers helped shielding individuals by delivering food, providing support and just phoning them up to make sure that they were okay. Although the Government work is hugely important, the most remarkable response to the pandemic was surely on the ground, as we have heard. It was the willingness of individuals to step up and go the extra mile, be it for friends, neighbours or simply anybody in need, regardless of whether they had met before. It was truly heart-warming, and the scale of the volunteer response was unprecedented. As we have heard, more than 12 million people across the UK delivered support during this pandemic, which is incredible to behold.

We also saw how almost 2 million people delivered support and services as NHS volunteer responders, completing millions of tasks and supporting 171,000 people at risk from covid. My thanks go to them as well. In addition to the volunteer response through the formal channels that we and communities have helped to organise, we saw a huge growth in informal volunteering—people stepping up to help others when they saw need, whether through collecting shopping, walking dogs, gardening or checking in on neighbours. You name it, someone in this country volunteered and did it over the past year and a half.

Throughout our country, we saw communities rapidly mobilising to help local people, especially those who were particularly at risk or who were hit the hardest by isolation. That shone through, certainly in my experience as a constituency Member of Parliament. We saw more than 2.5 million people volunteer with 4,000 mutual aid groups. That is a unique grassroots movement, the likes of which we have never seen before.

We have seen communities in all corners of our country demonstrate their resourcefulness and adaptability by working on their individually unique strengths. Despite the daily challenges and difficulties for so many people during such an incredibly difficult part of our country's history, many people took their first steps into volunteering. Many new volunteers got involved for the first time—over 4.5 million people.

Although many millions of people were mobilised and joined volunteering for the first time, we should take a moment to recognise the people who normally volunteer and do so much but who were constrained because they were shielding during the pandemic. Many such people found new and innovative ways to support others throughout the last year, be it through getting to grips with technology or just phoning up people and keeping in contact in ways that they had not done before. I can imagine how it felt for people not to be able to be involved or offer support in the way that they wanted, but that adaptability has shown real resilience. The national effort saw volunteers spring up from less traditional places in some respects, and I pay tribute to everybody who did so much.

We have the chance to thank communities, organisations and individuals for what they have done, and to thank people who have volunteered in any way over the past 18 months. I want to put on the record and promote the Prime Minister's Points of Light awards, which recognise all the work that has been done by those at the forefront of the response to the pandemic. The hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) talked about Captain Sir Tom Moore. Who can forget the incredible and inspirational example that he set the rest of us in this country?

We have heard a lot about faith groups. I extend my thanks to our faith communities for what they have done during this pandemic, including Moncrieff parish church, Colston parish church and the others that we have heard about. Faith groups have risen to the challenge by providing services in a way they have not done before and offering solace, comfort, advice and support through a multitude of different support services. We have seen examples of groups from all faiths delivering food and supporting people who were shielding. I really believe that faith communities have been a linchpin for many people by providing pastoral care and support networks, especially for older and more vulnerable people, and even continuing some forms of informal education for people who did not have access to the same external services during the last year or so. Yes, faith communities were already undertaking much of that work, but it increased in scale, passion and determination. We all put our thanks to them on the record.

The hon. Member for Bradford West talked about the role of volunteers in the vaccination programme. I join her in thanking all volunteers for the work that they are doing, and I ask for their kindness and forgiveness to just keep going. They are helping us—our whole country—to light the way towards the better days that are now within our grasp. We need everyone's support to signpost communities to verified sources of important information about the vaccines, and we must continue to reinforce positive messages.

I also put on the record my thanks to civil society. The Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership, made up of over 200 community organisations, has supported the covid response, helping to map unmet need and improve emergency response through new data platforms. The response really has been incredible. We have provided clear support with £750 million for charities, social enterprises and the voluntary sector, ensuring that civil organisations, including those at risk of financial hardship, continue the incredible work they did before and throughout the pandemic. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has

provided £23 million of funding to 60 councils and the voluntary sector to expand their work and to support those most at risk from covid.

I want to leave the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow some time to wind up the debate, so I thank all hon. Members here today and, on the Government's behalf, everyone who has done so much in every corner of our country. Volunteering is a vital part of our national identity, and that has only increased over the past year. I agree with the hon. Lady who said that when we start to build back better we will be holding the sacrifice that others have made over the past year and a half at the forefront of our minds.

3.32 pm

Dr Cameron: I thank all Members who have taken part today. It has been extraordinary to hear about the efforts that have gone into supporting communities across everyone's constituencies. As others have said, we cannot mention everybody today because so many people have contributed, but we can thank them all, and we have put our thanks on the record today.

I thank all elected Members of Parliament, because what has shone through today's debate is how intrinsically well everyone knows their communities and how everyone has worked hard to galvanise the frontline effort across all parties. MPs, MSPs up in Scotland, Members of the Welsh Parliament and those in Northern Ireland have all been working tremendously hard to ensure that they support volunteers and those working on the frontline. I must say that I did not really know much about what MPs did before I became one myself, but I now know a bit more about the hard work that goes on. Elected Members really have stepped up to the plate.

We will need many more resources going forward to continue to support volunteers in communities, so I am pleased that the Minister said that thought will be given to finance and support. We still have some way to go, but we can have hope, given all the work and motivation that communities have brought to the effort so far, that we will come out the other end of this, perhaps with stronger communities. I thank everybody.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the role of the community in responding to the covid-19 outbreak.

3.33 pm

Sitting suspended.

Covid-19: Support for Aviation, Tourism and Travel Industries

[DR RUPA HUQ *in the Chair*]

[Relevant documents: Fifth Report of the Transport Committee of Session 2019-21, The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the aviation sector: Interim report, HC 1257, and the Government response, HC 28; Seventh Report of the Transport Committee of Session 2019-21, Safe return of international travel?, HC1341; e-petition 565102, Allow international travel to visit partners and family; e-petition 303081, Support the British aviation industry during the COVID-19 outbreak; e-petition 549014, Extend furlough beyond October for the travel industry; e-petition 331434, Extend furlough scheme for the UK Aviation sector to help stop redundancies; e-petition 552725, HM Government to outline a plan to Save Future Travel; e-petition 332280, A government cash bailout for the coach industry before it's too late; e-petition 585438, Allow ALL vaccinated British Expats to visit the UK without quarantining.]

Dr Rupa Huq (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice 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 debates. I remind Members participating, physically and virtually, that they must arrive for the start of a debate in Westminster Hall and are expected to remain for the entire debate. A couple of people have trains and planes to catch, appropriately, and they have negotiated with me. That is okay because the timing of this one did change.

I remind Members participating virtually that they must leave their camera on for the duration of debates in Westminster Hall. There is one exception; we know who you are. That has been okayed by me, at the discretion of the Chair. Members will be visible at all times, both to one another and to us in the Boothroyd Room. If Members attending virtually have any technical problems, they should email the Westminster Hall Clerks at westminsterhallclerks@parliament.uk. I think everyone got something that said what to do about email.

Members attending physically should clean their spaces before they use them and before they leave the room. I remind Members that Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn in Westminster Hall. I think we are sorted, and everyone is sitting in the right place with a tick on it.

Members who are not on the call list but wish to intervene—do we have anyone of that description? No, that is not necessary. In that case, I call Henry Smith to move the motion.

3.51 pm

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered support for the aviation, tourism and travel industries in response to the covid-19 pandemic.

It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair for this important debate, Dr Huq, as we seek to recover from the covid-19 pandemic, and I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Minister in his place. I will be interested to hear his comments.

[Henry Smith]

Aviation, travel and tourism were among the first sectors to face the negative effects of the covid-19 pandemic, which were almost immediate, and unfortunately, owing to the nature of those industries and the restrictions still in place, they will be among the slowest to recover fully. In normal times before the pandemic, more than 1.5 million people were employed in those sectors. Sadly, many of them have lost their job over the past 15 months or so. About 50% of people in the sector are still on furlough, which finishes at the end of September, and I fear that if travel, aviation and tourism cannot pick up meaningfully over the summer months, many of them will also unfortunately lose their job.

This is devastating for aviation communities such as mine in the Gatwick area. An assessment of unemployment from February 2020 to February 2021 showed an increase of 115% across the nation, but for the top 20 aviation communities the increase was 147%. I do not think we have yet seen the worst of the situation.

Do not mistake this for some parochial plea for support for these sectors because aviation and international connectivity are essential for the UK economy. In normal times, outbound travel accounts for a contribution of about £37 billion to our economy, and inbound travel accounts for £28 billion. That travel has not been able to operate meaningfully for a year and a half, and the impact has been significant. If we were able to operate in a more meaningful way this summer, it would make a contribution to the UK economy of an estimated £19 billion—quite significant.

The title of the debate refers to support for the travel and aviation sectors. The best way to support them is to allow them to meaningfully and safely operate. If that cannot happen, I am afraid the bill for unemployment benefits this coming autumn and winter will be a significant burden to the taxpayer. Many companies and employers in the sector will be coming to the Government asking for bailouts. Far better that we let the industry recover and make money for the UK Exchequer, whose bills are already significant, than cost it some more.

I pay tribute to the Government for the world-leading vaccination programme over the past six months. We were told just before Christmas that if we had a successful vaccination programme, that would allow us our liberty and enable us to get back to much more normal life. Yesterday, we hit the target of 60%-plus of people across the country who have been doubly jabbed with covid-19 vaccines. I fear that we are squandering the vaccine dividend that we were told would allow us far greater freedoms once again.

We are, quite simply, at a competitive disadvantage. Many countries in the EU and the world are allowing a far greater number of countries to be travelled to, particularly for those who have received full covid-19 vaccinations. This is not just about two weeks on the beach in a sunny environment, nice though that is. It is about global Britain and us being a trading nation. For every day that there is not meaningful transatlantic travel between the UK and the US, an estimated £32 billion is lost to the British economy.

I welcome and support the Government's traffic light system for international travel. It is absolutely right that for parts of the world where cases of covid-19 are still unfortunately far too high, we must protect ourselves

against that and new variants. I support those quarantine arrangements, but for countries that have had a similar vaccination roll-out success and similar or lower infection rates than the UK, we need to have a much more pragmatic regime for amber and green list countries.

I welcome the fact that the Government are reportedly looking at requiring those who are fully vaccinated and travelling from amber countries only to test, rather than to quarantine at home. That would be very positive, but I think we need to go further. We need to expand the green list of countries—I welcome reports that it will be announced later today that Malta and the Balearic Islands will be added to that list—but the list needs to be far wider than that.

The cost and complexity of covid-19 testing for international passengers is a major disincentive for people to travel. For a family of four, it really becomes prohibitive. It is ridiculous that many tests are more expensive than the flight itself. Perhaps more rapid antigen testing for lower risk countries would be appropriate, particularly if we are also dealing with people who are fully vaccinated. If there is a positive test, they can have a PCR test to back that up. It is interesting that, of those who have been tested who have been able to travel, less than 1% have proved positive in that test.

This is about people's jobs and livelihoods. It is not just about going on holiday. Airports are likely to lose a further £2.6 billion if we do not see meaningful opening up. We are losing about £60 million in exports throughout this period because we do not have people able to visit this country and spend their money here.

Finally—I want to make sure that as many colleagues as possible can take part today and I am grateful to hon. and right hon. Members from all parts of the country and across the House for contributing to this important debate today—I want to comment on where respect for the restrictions is beginning to seriously break down. We hear that Wembley will be three quarters full for the Euros final, because an exception will be made for VIP guests from UEFA to come to London. I do not mind Wembley being near capacity. I welcome that easing of restrictions, but what is not right is to have one rule for VIPs and another for everybody else. When parents cannot go to school sports days, VIPs should not be able to come to Wembley.

The answer is to open up in a realistic and pragmatic way, to save jobs and recover our economy from the devastating effects of covid-19. The best way to support the travel, aviation and tourism sectors is to allow them to operate, save those jobs and make money for our economy, rather than them being yet another burden on every taxpayer for years to come.

Dr Rupa Huq (in the Chair): Given the popularity of the debate, the three Front-Bench spokespeople and the new finish time of 5.25 pm, I reckon that if everyone sticks to within four minutes, everyone gets in and Henry Smith has time for concluding remarks. I call Ben Bradshaw.

4.3 pm

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Thank you very much indeed, Dr Huq. Many of us here attended yesterday's day of action for the travel industry. Fine people from all over Britain were there. They do not want a handout.

They want to get back to work and they were united in one thing: a feeling of total abandonment by this Government and, I am afraid to say, by my party and all the Opposition parties in this House. In 26 years as a Member of Parliament, I cannot remember an instance like this, when the leadership of all the political parties have been more or less in the same position on a policy, and on one that has no basis in the evidence any more.

We hear the Government say constantly that their decisions are based on the data and public health is a priority, but, as the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) has already pointed out, that is now clearly belied by the facts. The seven-day covid rate in the UK is as of yesterday 97 per 100,000. In Greece, it is 31—much lower on the islands. In Italy, it is 13—one seventh of the UK rate. In Germany, it is eight—less than a tenth of the rate here in the UK. Yet people arriving from or coming back from those countries to here, all with a negative PCR test, still have to quarantine for 10 days. It makes more sense in health terms to quarantine someone travelling from Ealing to Exeter than someone travelling from Italy, Germany or Malta to the UK.

We had further proof this week when the Government published Public Health England's findings on the testing of arrivals from amber list countries and all arrivals between 20 May and 9 June. Those results show that the proportion of positive tests on people arriving from amber list countries was 0.4%, compared with a level of 2.7% of the tests carried out on people living here in the same period. That means that someone coming from an amber list country is one seventh less likely to have covid than someone moving around the United Kingdom. Also, not a single variant of concern was found on any passenger returning from amber or green list countries.

If the Government were really basing their decisions on data and public health, there would already be more countries on the green list and there would be a significant expansion of that list today—and not only places such as Malta, Madeira or the Balearics, as briefed by someone in Government for today's newspapers, but Italy, Germany, Finland, the Greek and several Caribbean islands, and many other countries currently on the amber list that all now enjoy a fraction of Britain's covid rates. If the Government do not do this, we will know their decisions have nothing to do with the data or public health, and everything to do with politics and control.

We have seen that in the UEFA decision. It is completely outrageous for the Prime Minister to grant an exemption to our quarantine rules for thousands of bigwigs from European football when he is actively preventing ordinary British families from seeing loved ones abroad or from simply having a holiday, destroying thousands more jobs in an industry already on its knees in the process.

I am beginning to think that the Prime Minister does not want British people travelling abroad this summer because they will see how life in other countries got back to normal and that those countries are freer than us, despite our much-vaunted vaccine dividend. Many of our European neighbours have been free to travel since Easter, and now Americans can too. From next week, every EU citizen will be able to travel freely—with a vaccine, a negative test or proof of infection—using the green card system, and Americans are already flocking back to their favourite destinations in Europe, although of course not to here. Our Government are only just now talking about the possibility of a vaccine passport—

allowing people to travel without quarantining if they have a vaccine. We are less free than our neighbours, we are less free than Americans and we are less free than we were last summer, in spite of being the most vaccinated country in Europe after Malta.

Even with this high level of vaccination and immunity, if we are to remain closed for fear of an as yet unknown new variant, we will never unlock. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), the shadow Defence Secretary, told Sky yesterday that we need to restart travel again as soon as possible, and he warned that Britain is getting left behind. He was absolutely right. I hope that signals a change in my own party's policy. Regardless of that, the Government, who are responsible for this, need to do the right thing, let the British people travel safely again and throw the thousands and thousands of fantastic people who work in our transport and travel sectors a desperately needed lifeline. Let them get back to work before it is too late.

4.7 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr Huq. It is also a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Henry Smith), who has done so much to champion the plight of Gatwick and the wider Sussex community, and my friend the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), a fellow Transport Committee member, who speaks for me as well as himself. The remarkable point is that our calls are on all our Front Benches—we are all, cross-party, disappointed with all the Front-Bench positions. We do not feel that we are being led to a better place for our constituents and those who want to go abroad to see their loved ones and retain some life.

I have received emails not only from constituents but from people across the country who are crying out for some form of help to allow them to get back to their lives. I will read a few, if you do not mind, Dr Huq. Anna Wozniak is a cardiac physiologist at Doncaster Royal Infirmary. She has worked hard through the pandemic. She cannot afford to meet her boyfriend in America anywhere and meet the cost of testing, nor to take time off work to quarantine. Erin Cork from London has not seen her boyfriend, who lives in New York, for 467 days. Imagine that.

Missed life events have come through as well. Giulia Molteni is a dual UK-Italian national. She is 35 weeks pregnant with her first child. Her double-vaccinated Italian parents have not seen her while she has been pregnant, and she feels that she needs her mother's support. Her parents want to come to the UK, but it is a huge financial commitment, and they are concerned that Italy could be added to the red list, as hotel quarantine costs are out of the question. One of our own in the travel sector, Louise Gardiner, works as a ground staff member at Heathrow. She had her son Rowan in May 2020 and he has met his Californian father only four times. He has never met his paternal grandparents. Louise was supposed to move to the US to be with her partner, but due to the pandemic her earnings have been lost, so she no longer qualifies as a sponsor.

I could go on and on with all the emails that I have received, but this is not just about holidays, as people sometimes say—although what is wrong with going on holiday? People's lives are being ruined. Their mental

[Huw Merriman]

health is being put at risk because of a ridiculous and restrictive policy that appears to have no basis when we look at the data. Let us look at what has happened with the traffic light system and travellers returning to the UK. Analysis of the latest figures from NHS Test and Trace found that only 89 of 23,465 passengers who travelled to the UK from amber list destinations between May and June tested positive for coronavirus—a rate of 0.4%. There are 167 countries on the amber list, and there were no positive cases from 151 of those.

If the Government look at the data, it surely demonstrates that going abroad is safe when we consider the amount of covid on these shores. It has positive benefits not just for people, but for our international trade and our economy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley has stated, it is worth billions to the economy. What will actually pay for our NHS and our vaccination programme? International travel and international trade.

I will be particularly interested to hear the Labour Front-Bench spokesman's speech and whether he will talk about why the sector needs aid and a specific sector-based deal. He might be better placed to call for his own leader and shadow Home Secretary not to ditch the amber list and move all those countries to red, because that will just put more and more people on the scrapheap when it comes to their jobs.

Dr Huq, I have taken my four minutes, but I could go on for four hours. I am absolutely sick and tired on behalf of all the people who want to get their lives back safely and travel abroad, and the workforce I met yesterday, who care so passionately and are so positive about their sector and their customers. Let us give them their opportunities back, take a bit of a risk, cash in on the vaccine dividend, and allow people to travel internationally again.

4.12 pm

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP) [V]: Thank you for your leniency, Dr Huq, in permitting me to leave a little earlier. I commend the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) for securing this debate on a very pressing matter facing many constituents and businesses across the United Kingdom.

Yesterday, I joined representatives of the Association of Northern Ireland Travel Agents, local pilots, cabin crew, ferry workers and hoteliers at a protest at Stormont, as part of the national Unite day of action to highlight to the devolved institution at Stormont the need for support for the sector and to demand a restart to international travel. It has now been over a year of devastation for jobs, family incomes and the future of the sector. Many have already lost their jobs. In my constituency, just three weeks ago, Thompson Aero announced 180 job losses, one quarter of the workforce, in a devastating blow to the local economy. Each of those jobs is someone's livelihood—the means to pay their mortgage, feed and clothe their family and to secure their future.

Although the support provided by the Government to the sector has been welcomed over the past year, I know from a conversation I had with the industry yesterday that what it really desires more than anything is an indicative date of hope—a date for when international travel will be allowed once more. That will be the kickstart that the industry requires for the businesses to

make money, generate cash flow, and support the jobs of tens of thousands of people once again. We have to get to that point soon because businesses are at breaking point right now. With no clarity and constant knock-backs, their sustainability becomes more difficult day by day. We need to do this safely and sustainably, as stop-start will only cause more problems for the industry. I believe we can do this now, and I urge the Transport Secretary and the global travel taskforce to provide this pathway.

The vaccine roll-out is our passport to restart travel. It is proven that the vaccine is of huge benefit to people, and therefore we need to go forward and get travel opened up again. We also need clarity around travel. A lot of constituents are confused by the mixed messaging, and this is also inhibiting travel. Now is the time to act, before it is too late for jobs and much-valued local businesses.

4.15 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr Huq, and thank you for your leniency in letting me leave slightly early this afternoon.

I am grateful to be called in this important debate, not least because, like most hon. Members here, I joined the lobby yesterday and met constituents who had travelled to Westminster. I wanted to show my support for the travel industry in these challenging times. It was a lobby that highlighted yet again that the UK travel industry has had to deal with extremely tough impediments, more than most industries, and needs our support.

Today's debate comes in the midst of what is still an incredibly challenging time for businesses and workers in the travel and tourism industry. Analysis from ABTA—The Travel Association estimates that 195,000 people working in the travel industry have either lost their job or are at risk of losing their job due to the crisis. Considering that the sector employs around 526,000 people across the UK in normal times, we are looking at the livelihoods of more than a third of the people in the industry being wiped out.

I will focus my remarks on smaller travel businesses, which feel forgotten and are staring into the unknown. Office for National Statistics figures show that revenue for travel agents and tour operators have been down 86% to 90% each month since February 2020, with no specific sector support forthcoming from the Government and limited access to more general grant support measures. ABTA estimates that around 60% of SME travel agents will not have the cash to survive for more than three months, based on current trading conditions and the Government support that is available at the moment.

Last week, I visited Karen Marin Reyes and the team at La Vida Travel in Newport East. La Vida Travel is an award-winning business with a loyal local following and a reputation for very good customer service. Karen, who was here in Westminster yesterday for ABTA's day of action, spoke to me about the difficult outlook her business and the sector faces, and echoed all the calls for sector-specific financial support for the travel industry, which remains busy but is struggling to make money in the face of very low new bookings and cancellations.

Companies such as La Vida Travel were not able to shut their doors when the pandemic came; they were busy helping their customers, including processing many

cancellations and rebookings. Like all hon. Members, having helped constituents abroad to get home during the first months of the pandemic, I do not underestimate how stressful that is for clients and the staff helping them, or the sheer amount of work involved. These businesses were also having to foot the bill for transaction charges from credit cards, debit cards and banks, which are not refunded to the travel agent. I would like the Minister to look at that specific point, because they are carrying that loss themselves.

Travellers typically book six months ahead, so there are long delays in receiving payments made for bookings, which are only received a few months before the date of travel. These companies do not see the money for many months. For bookings that are being made now for next summer, the travel agent will receive payment in the spring at the earliest. Because of lack of confidence, many travellers are unwilling to pay in full for holidays next year because of the uncertainty. I note the comments made by other Members about the need for consistency in travel advice. My right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) made a strong contribution about that; we need confidence in the Government's system.

The knock-on effect of all these factors is a shortage in cash flow that is especially pronounced for smaller travel businesses, especially as they make their money to survive through the winter in the summer. They need more help with the loans that they are due to pay back, because many just do not have the money at the moment to start making payments.

We need the Government to step up and do better. As others have said, it is not just about holidays; it is about people's jobs and livelihoods.

4.20 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) on securing this debate. He was spot on with his remarks about Wembley, much as I want us to win that match on Tuesday, and I also agree with the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), the Chairman of the Transport Select Committee. We do have an airport in Southend, which is very popular; I always have to balance that with the complaints about damage to the environment and night flights, but I am very proud of it.

I want to concentrate briefly on the tourism sector. A major aspect of the tourism industry is that it is seasonal, and Southend is a coastal town where the local economy thrives in the summer. With the extension of restrictions, many businesses in the tourism and hospitality industries will continue to suffer despite the recent warm weather. The Government have undoubtedly provided generous financial support packages, but many limited company directors and businesses in my constituency have frankly been left to fend for themselves. I ask the Government to implement a robust recovery strategy in the travel and tourism industry as we return to some sort of normality.

I have spoken to concerned business owners in my constituency who rely on tourists to eat in their restaurants, drink in their pubs and stay at their hotels. Grants were welcomed by many of my constituents, but they did not cover the fixed costs of operating small businesses, and those businesses do not, unfortunately, have the reserves to survive much longer. Many of them are running at a

loss. The Government should provide further support in the form of extending the reduced rate of VAT and the business rate relief.

However, it is not just the hospitality industry that relies on the influx of tourists: it is the leisure and entertainment industries as well. Being a popular seaside town, Southend would normally attract plenty of tourists to our wonderful summer festivals and theatres, for example. Southend carnival has been cancelled this year, and the Leigh regatta, the Leigh Folk festival and the Village Green festival have all been postponed, which damages the local economy. I say again that, when coronavirus lockdown measures come to an end and restrictions are fully lifted, the Government should provide support to local authorities to help them cope with the influx of people to tourist hotspots such as Southend.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Qatar, I have seen how helpful Qatar Airways has been to our country during the pandemic, transporting over 100,000 people safely back to the United Kingdom, and I say a big thank you to them. Qatar Airways is heavily suffering, and that country is on the red list despite having relatively few coronavirus cases compared with other countries, and despite a high proportion of its population having been vaccinated.

In conclusion, there are so many reasons why Southend should become a city next year. We are a cultural hub with a plethora of charming local boutique shops and brilliant stores, and if it is not being greedy, I think we should be the city of culture as well. Southend attracts many visitors each year to our beaches, our theatres, and the world-famous Southend pier. Tourism is a major part of our diverse economy in Southend, and while it will play a part in gaining us city status, the individuals and businesses who comprise the industry need urgent governmental support to recover from the pandemic.

Dr Rupa Huq (in the Chair): It would not be a David Amess speech without a plea for city status.

4.23 pm

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr Huq, and a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West—in the new city of Southend—(Sir David Amess). I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) for the work he has done to champion this issue. Like him, I have a great interest in aviation because of the close proximity of Manchester airport to my constituency: obviously in his case, it is Gatwick. Around 3,500 people living in my constituency work at that airport, not just as pilots and cabin crew but in all the ancillary services—the catering services and engineering services—that generate business and provide employment for people who live in my constituency. It is those people who I am speaking for today.

Actually, I have already spoken quite a few times in the House on this matter, because it is an incredibly important issue for our economy. This is a critical sector, not just for my constituency of Warrington South but for all of our regional economies. It is really interesting that Members from every part of the United Kingdom have attended the debate, demonstrating the critical issue that we are all facing.

[Andy Carter]

In Parliament Square yesterday, the pilots, cabin crew, travel agents, catering staff and all those in the wider supply chain, who are desperate for the industry to make some progress, had some incredibly compelling messages. More than 1.5 million people are employed in the aviation, travel and tourism sectors, and the cabbies are really feeling it as well. I cannot say how many times I have got into a taxi in London and the first thing the driver has talked about is the lack of tourists in the city and how it is impacting on their livelihoods. Sadly, many of the people working in the sector have already lost their jobs, and so many are still on furlough. We know that the aviation and travel sectors make their money during the summer in order to survive through the winter.

As furlough comes to an end in September, we need to look carefully at how we extend the support for the sector if travel is not possible, so that it can generate income through the winter months. The lost summer, which I fear it will be, will cost our economy somewhere around £19 billion. I mentioned earlier my relationship with Manchester airport, and we have rightly heard lots about airports. Manchester airport is the engine room for the northern powerhouse, and we need to do everything we can to support it and get it back up and running.

I want to spend my remaining time by talking about some of the microbusinesses in my community that really rely on the sector. I listened to the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) talk about travel agents in her constituency, I am hearing about exactly the same issue from travel agents in my constituency. Adrian Harper, who owns a travel agency in Lymm, talked to me last week about consumer confidence being shattered. As we heard earlier, the sector has gone through massive structural change and disruption through the arrival of global competitors such as Expedia, which has changed the nature of the business. It has not just damaged the business in the short term; it has made a massive change. The clientele—predominantly now a base of older people—need to be able to plan for the future, and they have no certainty about what will happen in the months and years ahead. These are not people who want to jet off to Ibiza with a week's notice; they are planning six to 12 months ahead, and sometimes years in advance, for worldwide cruises and trips to see family on the other side of the world. One of the key issues that the sector faces is that, due to low consumer confidence, people are booking, cancelling, rebooking and everything else in between. That is impacting significantly on the cash flow and income of small businesses.

I am looking forward to the announcements due to be made later this evening by the Secretary of State for Transport. I very much hope that we will see some advances in terms of the green list, and I look forward to giving the industry the chance to get back on its feet.

4.27 pm

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese (Slough) (Lab): I express my gratitude to the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) for securing this important debate. As we know, the past 15 months have scarred many of our once-thriving and great industries, which have been struck down by the consequences of a devastating pandemic, but the aviation, tourism and travel industries have been especially hard hit.

Despite bringing in £22 billion to the UK economy in a normal year and sustaining thousands of jobs, including in my Slough constituency, the Government seem to have left the industry largely to fend for itself, even though restrictions have reduced international travel by 97%. Coronavirus measures have undoubtedly saved lives and protected the NHS, but they have not come with the levels of financial support required. Some 50% of all aviation staff are still on furlough. UK airlines have announced over 30,000 job cuts, and a further 1.5 million jobs are still at risk. That is without taking into account the supply chain and supporting businesses that rely on the aviation and tourism sectors.

Given my Slough constituency's proximity to Heathrow airport, I know all too well the impact that the situation has had on our community. My inbox has been full of correspondence from airline workers, ground staff, taxi drivers, travel agents, retail workers and others who have been left behind despite working in the industry for decades. Behind each of the numbers, there is a lifelong career, a family being supported and a passion being fulfilled. Real people are involved here, and they have been continually let down by Government through no fault of their own, which is why Government should step in. Restrictions must come with measured and tailored support. The Labour party has been clear about that all along in discussions with unions, airlines and airports. Political squabbles will not help those who have lost their jobs, but assured and sensible action from Government will.

It is clear what is needed: a bail-out package for aviation on the conditions that a clear climate plan is in place and that companies have set out terms to protect workers and their rights. Rather than delivering that and ensuring that struggling industries flourish post pandemic, the Government have taken their usual approach of confusion and backtracking, with bluster over the amber list, being too late to put countries on the red list and providing little clarity for passengers.

The mess we have seen over the last few weeks on the quarantine policy epitomises that, so why have the Government not reviewed the policy and outlined options for robust testing in airports to safely minimise the need for 14-day quarantine periods? Why have they left passengers, including my own Slough constituents, to pay thousands for quarantine hotels without sufficient access to drinking water and good-quality food? Why did Ministers not prevent, from the outset, the mixing of passengers from green list countries with those from covid hotspots? Why is it one rule for elites who have the ear of Government, and another rule for hard-working Brits? The whole thing is chaotic.

Like all here today, I want to see a thriving and greener aviation sector in a post-pandemic Britain. If we are to achieve that, we must ensure that adequate support is available now, because this shambles has gone on for long enough.

4.32 pm

Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Huq. Today, I feel a sense of déjà vu. On Monday this week, I spoke in the House about the future of the steel industry and the devastating effect that the loss of jobs in that industry can have on communities such as mine in Cynon Valley.

Here I am, three days later, speaking about the aviation industry, and again I must highlight the same problems facing my constituents.

I have said this before, but I cannot say it often enough for some Government Members to grasp what it really means. Unemployment, poverty, worrying about their family's future, worrying about keeping a roof over their head and worrying about whether to heat or eat—these are realities for far too many people in areas such as mine. Those are areas that this Government talk about levelling up, in a sham and a shambles of an attempt to address the underlying problems caused by a total lack of investment or an industrial strategy to take people such as my constituents into a greener, more secure and more prosperous future.

Like steel, aerospace is a vital manufacturing industry for the Welsh economy. In Wales, it generates £1.47 billion in GVA. The threat to GE Aviation in Nantgarw in south Wales, which employs workers from my constituency, is significant, and it arises because of the lack of an industrial strategy from this Government and the dominance of their belief in a free market economy. In 2020, 540 redundancies were made, and more job losses are on the horizon. There is no question in my mind but that aerospace needs a strategic, sector-specific support package, and I fully support Unite's industrial strategy, "Fighting for the Future of UK Manufacturing", which was published this time last year. The answers and the way forward are there.

In GE Aviation, we have here in south Wales a skilled and relatively well-paid workforce, and the loss of those jobs will have a huge knock-on effect on the local economy. One of my constituents, Ross Williams, who is an aviation worker and a trade union official, said:

"We've lost almost half of the workforce at GE aviation Wales, and almost half the workers from Cynon Valley... We fear that without sector specific support either by way of a furlough extension or other government funding... jobs within it are under massive threat. We as a Trade Union feel that once these jobs and the specific skills sets within them are lost they will be gone forever. We are desperate to maintain these highly skilled engineers, these well paid jobs".

The answers are there—read Unite's document and invest in upskilling and reskilling our workforce.

We know from the pandemic how vital and helpful a sound British manufacturing industry is when repurposed to meet new challenges. We must build local, buy British—positive public procurement—stop offering contracts to the lowest bidders, involve the workers, through their trade unions, in decision making and look at new models of ownership of these industries. The free market economy is not the answer to our economic woes. We cannot build the economy on job losses and site closures. We need Government investment for a just and well-resourced transition to a green industrial revolution to tackle climate change. The will is there to make these changes. The skills and the workers are there. Their trade unions are there. Where are this Government?

4.35 pm

Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Huq, and to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter). My thanks go to the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) for leading this important debate and to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) for his work on this issue.

There is no doubt that the coronavirus pandemic has had a severe impact on the aviation sector. It has already caused a huge number of job losses in my own constituency and throughout the country. To add insult to injury, we have seen bad employers in the sector resorting to outrageous fire-and-rehire practices—essentially, using a pandemic to disgracefully diminish the terms and conditions of their hard-working staff during the most stressful of times. There is no doubt that the situation for the aviation and tourism industries is complex. They are some of the only industries where the easing and tightening of restrictions are not wholly determined by the UK Government; they are also reliant on decisions taken in other nations.

The Secretary of State for Transport said that the traffic light system was based on infections, vaccination, variants, testing and quality of data and that he would publish the detail. He still has not done so. Does this Minister agree with me that there needs to be transparency over the traffic light system, and the criteria used, to enable the industry to plan?

I am pleased that positive noises are now coming out of Government regarding the likelihood of restrictions ending on 19 July, but there is no guarantee that restrictions on inbound travel will not be extended beyond that date. The airline and ferry industries are the only industries in this very specific situation when it comes to easing restrictions arising out of the pandemic.

I commend this industry for its flexibility during this crisis, but the ongoing complexities and uncertainties mean that there must be a tailored support package. The industry cannot survive much longer with frequent and unplanned stops and starts. Does the Minister agree with me that the aviation and tourism sectors must be given a bespoke job protection scheme beyond the current proposed end of the coronavirus job retention scheme? A bespoke financial support package would allow the industry to engage in proactive recovery planning. It would offer a sense of security for employees against further stop-and-go travel restrictions that may occur in the future.

Skills retention is key for the stability of the sector, but we are already seeing a skills leakage from the industry to sectors that have managed to recover faster. A new starter in the aviation industry will need to go through a complex process of training, qualifications, checking and certification. The time between recruitment and the first day at work is usually a matter of several weeks. A medium-term extension of the furlough scheme is therefore necessary to protect the skills that the sector will need in the future.

A recent report by Syndex UK—a report commissioned by Unite the union—stated that the support required for the industry as a whole would be a maximum of £1.4 billion for 18 months, based on the assumption that an average of 40% of the employees are eligible for furlough during the whole period. The support package would begin to pay for itself in the long term, as it would aid a faster recovery. In addition, we can easily measure the recovery by looking at passenger numbers. That means that the duration of the support could be tied to the return of demand and therefore it could fall away when the industry recovers.

I hope that the Minister will consider these ideas, because, as I am sure he will agree, the aviation and tourism industries are critical to both the UK economy and our national interest.

4.39 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP) [V]: We can all agree that of all the sectors affected by the pandemic, aviation, travel and tourism have been hit particularly hard. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has indicated that the aviation sector has been the hardest hit of the entire economy, with hundreds of thousands of jobs lost or under threat. The latest data also shows that travel agencies and tour operators suffered an 89% decline in output in the first year of lockdown, when severe restrictions were imposed across the travel industry.

If the traffic light regulations continue to have the impact that they are having, more support will be desperately needed. We need to retain the existing furlough scheme and self-employed income support for businesses operating in aviation and international travel, without tapering, for a minimum additional six months, with future reviews built in. Also needed is the creation of a new sector-specific recovery grant regime for travel agents, tour operators and travel management companies that rely on international travel for their revenues. Travel agency businesses receive all their income through commission paid close to their clients' departure dates. Given the cautious restart of travel, they need additional financial support to help them through the coming months. The issue of travel agents carrying the cost of refunding card payments was raised earlier in the debate, and I raised it specifically with the Chancellor last April. It has still not been addressed.

International travel is extremely important to our tourism and hospitality sectors, but we also know that it is important to reduce the risk of importing new cases and new variants of the virus. Indeed, the new delta variant entered Scotland while Scottish restrictions were at their highest levels because the UK Government would not engage with concerns expressed by the Scottish Government. They were too slow to act. That could have undone all the hard work and sacrifice that populations across the UK have made to help beat the virus. That is not good enough.

We need to reinstate a four-nation decision-making approach to international travel, which was suspended by the UK Government as the Scottish Government urged more action. It must be recognised that the aviation industry faces one of the longest periods of recovery, given the impact of covid-19 on route networks. The French and German Governments have given more than twice the financial support for every aviation and aerospace job than the UK Government have.

The Minister will be keen to tell us about the support that his Government have already provided, but there is no escaping the fact that the French and German Governments have provided double the support that those jobs have had in the UK. Clearly, those Governments are backing their travel industries now to help provide a driving force in the economic recovery of their countries. I urge the Minister to do all in his power to provide further support to these sectors at this challenging time.

Dr Rupa Huq (in the Chair): The penultimate Back-Bench speaker is another Scot, but in the Boothroyd Room this time. I call Neale Hanvey.

4.42 pm

Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba): Thank you, Dr Huq; it is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship. I thank the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) not just for securing this debate but for his tenacity and championing of this cause from the very start. That really should be recognised. I also thank the Minister before he even gets to his feet. Our meetings have not been as productive as I would have liked, but despite that he has been available and he has listened. Like others, I urge him to listen to the gaps. It is the gaps that we are concerned about today and the gaps that urgently need the support.

As the Minister will know, my constituency of Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath is very close to Edinburgh airport. Constituents of mine include pilots, cabin crew, ground crew and those who work in the general airport environment. I also have constituents who are travel agents, and they are the group I am currently most concerned about.

In ordinary times, outbound travel is worth more than £37 billion a year to the UK economy. It supports the employment of more than half a million people across the UK and plays a crucial role in sustaining our leisure and business activity. ABTA's collective membership puts people on planes, ships and trains—outbound, inbound and domestically—across leisure and travel. It is fundamental to our regional connectivity, opportunity and prosperity. The aggregate turnover is £40 billion in normal times and that supplies over £6 billion to the UK Treasury.

Those businesses know that recovery will be slow. The travel sector has been hardest hit, with bookings down by 90% and in some cases more. A 2021 survey of ABTA members found that 57% of small and medium-sized enterprise travel agents did not believe they had the cash to survive more than six months, based on current conditions and available Government support. Strikingly, 87% of SME travel agents believed they would fail within a year.

I am not complaining about this only to the UK Government; I am raising the issue across these islands. The Scottish Government recently said that travel agents have had support. They have had support in Scotland and down here, but it is not enough, it is not tailored and it does not recognise their unique needs. That is the fundamental issue. It must be really hard for business people who have invested their lives in building a thriving travel business to hear of an underspend by the Scottish Government of more than £450 million when they desperately need that help now.

This is about a joined-up approach. It is about coming together and recognising where the gaps are, and, most importantly, recognising the fundamental role that travel agents play in the industry. The airlines have had staff on furlough and been bailed out, and the public have either been on furlough or been allowed to continue to work and enjoy an income, but the travel agents are the ones who have moved bookings, taken the cancellations and kept open the pipeline of supply for the recovery we all hope for.

All of us—Government, tour operators and airlines—should be bending over backwards to ensure that travel agents get the support they desperately need, because they will secure and supply business as we move forward.

4.47 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab) [V]: With Heathrow in my constituency, naturally I am worried about what is happening in both aviation and tourism. The number of people claiming unemployment benefit in my constituency has risen by more than 220% in the first year of the pandemic, so there is an urgent need for action.

I will make four brief points. First, I agree with the criticisms of the Government's list system made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) and the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman). The system is confusing and ineffective, and it needs reform based on the data we now have, but whatever system we use, it needs to be properly resourced. Also, there has been a lack of sufficient staffing support for border control at Heathrow. That has put existing staff under intense pressure, and even put their health at risk.

My hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) raised the issue of the quarantine system resulting at times in the abysmal treatment of families who have been forced to quarantine at great expense. On arrival at Heathrow, they have been crowded on to buses, often unsafely, and they often find that the booking for their original accommodation has been cancelled. When placed in accommodation, they are provided, exactly as my hon. Friend said, with inedible, inadequate or unsuitable food.

Secondly, my constituents—the workers in those sectors—want to get back to work and to get back to earning a decent living, but they know that doing so safely will take time. They are not unrealistic about that, so it is critical that the Government recognise the fact that some sectors will need continuing support. As my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Kate Osborne) said, precipitously ending the furlough scheme and the financial support being provided now will force many of my constituents into either losing their job or having their wages cut even further. The Government need to provide some certainty and reassurance to the companies and the workers in those sectors that there will be continuing support to get them through the remainder of the pandemic.

My third point, regrettably, is that the appalling practice of fire and rehire, which has taken hold in our economy, started initially on any scale at Heathrow. Thanks to Unite, we fought off the worst aspects of the first wave of that attack on my constituents, but that does not mean that the threat has gone away. Other companies are persisting in what is effectively workplace bullying. That is why we need urgent legislation to ban the practice, not the mealy-mouthed, broken-promise approach that we have seen from the Government so far.

My fourth point is that, as we come through the current crisis brought on by the pandemic, we need to recognise that we must face up to the next crisis, which is the existential threat of climate change. The Climate Change Committee today criticised the Government for setting wonderful targets with no means to deliver them, and that is exactly the situation in aviation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter) said, we need a sustainable aviation strategy, and we need it fast. It should be based on a clear, just transition programme so that communities such as mine are given resources to develop a local economic strategy that will

ensure we benefit from the environmentally sustainable aviation sector and have access to skilled and well-paid jobs in other developing sectors of the economy. We need that urgently, if not tomorrow.

Finally, as a west London MP, I want to say this: let us end the ludicrous nonsense that building a third runway will in any way comply with our climate change duties.

Dr Rupa Huq (in the Chair): No comment from me today on that one.

4.51 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Dr Huq. I thank the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) for securing this debate and the Backbench Business Committee for granting it.

We had a similar debate in the Chamber less than two weeks ago, but the situation facing the aviation sector, and indeed much of the wider travel industry, is so stark and immediate that we could debate the issue of support every week. The hon. Gentleman, who represents Gatwick airport in much the same way as I represent Glasgow airport, has campaigned hard on this issue, and I commend him for it.

One third of the 6,000 on-campus jobs at Glasgow airport have gone, and countless more have gone in off-campus support services and supply chain companies. Perhaps the most important thing to note is that those thousands of local jobs have gone while there is a furlough scheme in place, such is the cash burden and the grave outlook for the sector. I do not want to begin to imagine how many more jobs will go in September if the furlough scheme is not extended in that industry at least.

We are looking at a calamity for thousands of families across Renfrewshire, and perhaps hundreds of thousands around the UK. That would be an economic catastrophe, both locally and nationally. I very much echo the comments that the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) made about fire and rehire. It needs to go now.

Amid all this doom and gloom, there is a sector trying to remain positive and plan for a brighter future. It includes Loganair, based in my constituency at Glasgow airport, which has announced that its new GreenSkies programme will include a £1 charge on every ticket to invest in schemes aimed at tackling climate change and to remove the same amount of carbon from the environment as is generated by its aircraft. It is also beginning trials in Orkney of aircraft powered by hydrogen and renewable electricity. It has committed to being fully carbon neutral by 2040. That, of course, follows Glasgow airport becoming the first to introduce electric bus fleets to its operations, and achieving carbon neutrality for emissions under its direct control in 2020.

Ambitious plans for net zero are not only the preserve of Glasgow. I am not parochial—well, not on this occasion. I spoke to Bristol airport recently, which proudly told me of the ambitious plans on contributing to making the industry and the country at large net zero. That is all excellent stuff. It is very welcome and, indeed, necessary, but the reality is that if the sector survives, much of it will be so indebted or reduced in scope and capacity that the capital required to make such investments simply will not exist. That is clearly me done with the positivity, Dr Huq.

[Gavin Newlands]

I said to the Secretary of State this morning during Transport questions that I have lost count of the number of times I have brought up support for the aviation sector since the start of the pandemic, either before or after the Government promised to do just that. I have since had the opportunity to check and the answer is 34. I have brought this up 34 times with the Government and had the same bluff and bluster response, including that the industry has had access to various routes for loan funding. That has resulted in our airline industry having a higher debt ratio than much of its international competition, where support has been largely through non-repayable grants, which in the USA totalled over £23 billion, in Germany nearly £8 billion, in France £6.5 billion and in the Netherlands £3.2 billion.

In November, the Government finally announced limited business rates support for the sector, seven months after the Scottish Government had announced a similar scheme in Scotland. I say similar, Dr Huq, but in Scotland the scheme is uncapped and extends to airlines based there as well. Moreover, this moratorium has been extended by a full year by the Scottish Government, while the UK Government's limited and capped version will continue for only six months. Given the situation the sector faces, this is clearly unsustainable. In his summing up, I hope the Minister will confirm that an extension is being considered. If so, will the caps and limitations be removed?

We finally have an agreed four-nations approach to border health to manage the risk of importation of new cases and variants from international travel, in the form of the traffic light system. Under the previous arrangements, the delta variant entered Scotland because the UK Government would not engage with the Scottish Government's concerns, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) has already mentioned.

The level of risk earlier in year was such that all UK Governments were advised that all direct arrivals should enter managed-isolation hotels. Scotland did so, but only red list arrivals had to do so in England. Moreover, the UK Government refused to help identify passengers in England travelling on to Scotland, so that they could also be required to enter quarantine hotels. The significant delay, perhaps for political reasons, in announcing that India would go on to the red list was far too long and we can see the direct results of that in our record case numbers in recent days.

Any system, traffic lights or otherwise, needs to be dynamic, requiring rapid decision making on emerging risks that are identified by the Joint Biosecurity Centre. The Scottish Government are keen to stick to a four-nations approach, but if Scottish Ministers feel they need to, they will make the decisions that are right to protect Scotland. Fundamentally, we absolutely understand the importance of international travel to the tourism and hospitality sector, not least for jobs in my constituency.

In terms of the wider tourism and hospitality sector, which is equally important to the Scottish economy, UKHospitality is clear: while the Scottish Government are providing firms with breathing space on business rates, the UK Government are just kicking the can down the road. The Scottish Government's extension of

100% hospitality rates relief is for a year, which is far longer than the three months offered in England, with a discount for a further six months.

In fact, retail, tourism, hospitality, aviation and newspaper businesses in Scotland will pay no rates during 2021-22 at all. Kate Nicholls, the chief executive at UKHospitality, told the Treasury Committee earlier this month:

"In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, 100% business rates holidays have been given to hospitality for a full year. It gives those businesses breathing space to avoid having to make the tough decision between paying taxes and paying people. In England we do not have that luxury. We will have to pay our taxes from day one."

One of the cogs of the Scottish tourism sector is the coach industry, which is worth an estimated £400 million and supports around 4,000 jobs. Around 80% of the coach industry's income is derived from tourism. The Scottish Government have a coach operators fund to support the sector, but the UK Government have no such scheme.

In written evidence to the Transport Committee, Kevin Mayne of Maynes Coaches said that the help and understanding of the Scottish Government towards coaching has been well received by the industry. Moreover, the then Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism, Fergus Ewing, told the Scottish Parliament in January that Westminster "declined" his calls to provide support for the coach industry across the UK. He said:

"That is why we are going ahead with the Scottish scheme to compensate coach operators, which are an essential and quality part of the tourism offering in Scotland."—[*Scottish Parliament Official Report*, 21 January 2021; c. 32.]

Mr Ewing provided the following in evidence:

"Mr Ewing's description of coaching as 'essential' contrasts with controversial comments made by Transport Minister Baroness Vere at the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK Bus and Coach Conference on 12 January.

She told delegates that the UK government regards home-to-school and rail replacement services as essential, but that other coaching activity is seen as 'non-essential.' That created a 'very difficult' situation for them when deciding whether to offer a UK-wide support package for coaches."

Will the Minister commit to comprehensive support for the English coaching sector?

It is regrettable that the Conservatives remain committed to imposing a September cliff-edge on the tourism sector by ending the 5% VAT rate. In particular, extending the relief is critical for those who operate on a seasonal basis, a significant amount of whom are in Scotland, especially given that summer lasts for about a week. Kate Nicholls of UKHospitality said in the same Treasury Committee meeting:

"The single biggest thing that the Government have done to help the sector through this crisis, which has helped to support and sustain jobs through the crisis, has been to introduce a lower rate of VAT for tourism services".

Can the Minister confirm that an extension is being actively considered?

I will conclude by bringing my remarks back to where I started: aviation. I said earlier that I had raised the issue 34 times—it is now 35 times. This morning, I asked the Secretary of State directly if he was going to introduce an aviation, travel and tourism recovery package to support the sector and its workers, such as those protesting on College Green yesterday. He could not jump out of the way quick enough, even though he was

sat before the Dispatch Box at the time. Instead, the Minister, whom I very much respect, had to take the hit and repeat all the various stats about support. Although that support is welcome as far as it goes, we will see the demise of the sector if it is not improved. I ask the Minister again: are the Government actively considering an aviation, travel and tourism recovery package or, at the very least, some further support for the sector?

As I have said previously in this place, the UK started the pandemic with the world's third-largest aviation sector. With about one third of the workforce already gone, it will certainly not be the third largest coming out of the pandemic, and there is a real risk that we will never regain such a lofty position without some dynamic and urgent action from this Government, who still seem unable to understand the importance of aviation to connectivity and the wider economy. Their time is running out.

5.1 pm

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr Huq. To the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith), with whom I have been a fellow traveller for a number of years on the matters of aviation and the Chagos islanders, I say well done for securing the debate.

The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) and I have just had a private discussion about the people of Scotland and Greater Manchester giving peace a chance. The First Minister should perhaps have picked up the phone to Mayor Andy Burnham before she made a decision to ban people from Bolton, which has a smaller covid outbreak than Dundee. I think we can do better than that. We are not going to burn the First Minister in effigy—that betrays human dignity—but we are thinking of donning the woad and marching north as a conurbation.

It was heartening to see the whole industry come together to lobby. As has been mentioned, yesterday on College Green, hundreds spoke up for travel, airlines, airports and travel agents. Unions, cabin crew, and colleagues from all parties united to highlight the dire situation of the UK's aviation, travel and tourism industries. The hon. Member for Crawley robbed from my speech when he spoke in his articulate way about the worth of those industries not just to our constituencies but, as the hon. Member for Warrington South (Andy Carter) pointed out, to the wider economies around airports in particular.

That is why I really want to push the Government on what the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North said about the sector-specific deal. The Chancellor promised way back at the beginning of the pandemic that he would deliver a sector-specific package for the aviation industry, and we are still waiting. The Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) assured the House that a tourism recovery plan was on the way and would be announced by the end of spring. Well, solstice was on Monday, and according to my rusty Latin, it means “when the sun stands still”. The only things standing still at the moment are our travel, tourism and aviation industries.

There has been much debate about the traffic light system, which I know has been challenged by the Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Bexhill

and Battle (Huw Merriman). I should point out that there have been great speeches from Members from both sides of the Chamber, and I wish I could name them all in the time I have available. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, there is a real human cost. We in this House have lost friends. I have lost Lord Jimmy Gordon of Strathblane, who was a mate of mine. I lost an aunt to covid the other week. A councillor where I live has just come out of hospital after being in ICU. I have not seen my friends and family in the west of Ireland for nearly two years. There is a real human cost to this disease, and the hon. Gentleman was right to mention it.

On the traffic light system, the Government have to get going so that we capitalise on the immunisation dividend that hon. Members have mentioned, but maybe that is a discussion for another day. We are talking about getting confidence back in our industry, not lurching from false start to false start. Her Majesty's official Opposition are thinking of setting up a taskforce to look at the number of taskforces that the Department for Transport has set up in the past 12 months that have been ineffectual.

Nobody is arguing in favour of unrestricted travel, but given the success and advanced state of our vaccination programme, thanks to the wonderful NHS, it may now be time for the Government to follow their own recommendations, which were announced in the global travel taskforce. As was pointed out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), how can we as a nation be more restricted now than we were 12 months ago when we did not have a vaccine? The rationale and data must be published, and the methodology shared of how the decisions are made to place a country on the red, amber or green list.

I say directly to the Minister that the Manchester Airports Group should not be having to launch legal challenges against the Government in order to get transparency on the traffic light system. We will listen at what the Government say tonight, but we will see in a couple of weeks what the courts say.

We have a pandemic. We are not attacking the Government, but we are highlighting their inadequacies. This stop-start nature is ruining the confidence of this industry. As we approach the summer, the Prime Minister has been saying it is not going to be a full season. That immediately knocks millions more pounds off these important industries.

We have said time and again that we support the furlough scheme. I agree with Members who have said that we will highlight unscrupulous employers who have attacked workers' pay and conditions during this time. That is not British and it is unpatriotic every time, and we will call it out.

We have consistently called for a sectoral deal. As is illustrated in this debate, politicians are urging the Government to intervene. Ministers have to intervene. The dither and delay cannot go on. We have to either get a summer season or introduce a package. The Government's modus operandi is to put the situation back on the industry, whether it be travel agents or the cruise industry, which takes 2 million passengers a year from UK shores and adds billions to our economy, or whether it is passengers in amber list countries, making it up as they go along—“It is your responsibility for you

[Mike Kane]

to be safe.” The Government need to tell us and give confidence and certainty to the industry. That is what it is crying out for.

The delay in opening up on 21 June was a hammer blow to the industry and a potential final blow to many who are struggling. The message that we should go with from here today is that we are very proud of our world-class aviation industry, which is the third biggest on the planet—one that we want to be greener, cleaner and more efficient—with world-leading technologies and well-unionised jobs across the sector. Millions are employed by it. We have a world-class cruise industry that takes people across the planet and around our shores. We have a world-class travel industry, second to none. This is what is going to regenerate our economy, give pride back to our nation and get the country back on its feet. We need certainty. We do not need any more dither and delay.

5.8 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Robert Courts): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Dr Huq. I thank the House for all of the excellent speeches that we have heard—all of them impassioned, well informed and constructive. I particularly thank my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) for securing this important debate. He is the voice of Gatwick and is consistently eloquent in his advocacy. He is consistently constructive. He has put the case with real passion and clarity today, and not just for his constituents, but for the travel, tourism and aviation sector in a much broader sense, highlighting the global importance of the sector. I thank him for so doing.

The House should be under no illusions: the Government recognise and deeply value the critical importance of international travel. My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley said that it is not just about two weeks in the sun, although as my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), who chairs the Transport Committee, said there is nothing wrong with that—and he is right, partly because of the enjoyment that it brings people and partly because what lies behind those two weeks in the sun are people’s jobs. It is about the industries and the sector in a much broader sense.

We have heard much, understandably, from many right hon. and hon. Members on the impact on jobs in their constituencies. I hope they will forgive me if I only mention them by name, given the very limited time I have. The right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and the hon. Members for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), for Jarrow (Kate Osborne), for Upper Bann (Carla Lockhart), for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Neale Hanvey), for Newport East (Jessica Morden) and for Slough (Mr Dhesi) all mentioned the impact of this crisis on their constituents with real passion and clarity. My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Andy Carter) talked about the wider ecosystem and those who support the wider sector.

It is about jobs, of course, but it is also about much more. Travel, aviation and tourism also connect families that have been kept apart. It is about people’s lives. Travel underpins the economy in every possible way, but it is also central to the way we see ourselves as a nation:

outward-looking, global, a trading nation. The desire to explore is in the British DNA. That is perhaps why so many Members are here today. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle gave a vivid description of the personal costs of the pandemic. That is why it is essential that the steps that we take now lay the groundwork for a sustainable return to international travel in the future and build upon our successful vaccination programme.

I will say a word or two about our approach at the outset. The Secretary of State confirmed on 7 May that non-essential international travel could resume on 17 May; that is when the “stay in the UK” regulation was lifted, allowing international travel to recommence under the new traffic light system. This system cautiously balances the reopening of international travel while at the same time managing the risk posed by imported variants. That is the basis of the traffic light system.

I heard the comments from hon. Members, and I heard the speech from the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), for whom I have the greatest respect. However, when I hear Labour Members call for the amber list to be scrapped, which is precisely the thing that will harm the travel sector even more at the moment, and I set that alongside the reported comment that the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) gave from the shadow Transport Secretary yesterday, who said that we should open up travel, if I have understood it correctly—

Mr Bradshaw: The shadow Defence Secretary.

Robert Courts: The shadow Defence Secretary; I am grateful to him for correcting me. That is the confused position of Labour: simultaneously calling for the travel sector to be opened up while at the same time arguing to scrap the amber list, which would damage the sector. I hope Labour Members will forgive me for saying that they are not in any position to give lessons to the Government about how to manage this when their party’s position is changing by the day.

Mike Kane: My right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) is a Back Bencher; I am the Front Bencher.

Robert Courts: The right hon. Member for Exeter gave a reported comment from someone. Provided that is the case, Labour’s position is changing by the day.

In any event, the Joint Biosecurity Centre produces risk assessments of countries and territories for the traffic light system, so it is data-driven. Sometimes difficult decisions have to be made, which are guided by the information given by the JBC and then made by Ministers. A summary of that is published on the website, alongside the wider public health factors that we have to take into account.

The right hon. Member for Exeter made a powerful speech. I entirely share his passion for international travel and I have the greatest respect for him. I know he will understand that, at a time like this, the Government have to take difficult decisions. We are in the early stages of a return to international travel, and as the data allow, we will look to open up international travel as it is safe to do so, but it must be safe, it must be sustainable and it must be robust. We have to accept that travel may

not be quite the same this year. I say that because it is so important that we do not throw away the hard-won steps we have taken.

Thanks to the sacrifices of the British people, we have been able to get to the stage that we are at now. I accept that the approach is cautious, because it is meant to be robust. These have been difficult times, but none of us wants to go backwards, for the reason that the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East said at the beginning of his speech, when he reminded us of the cost of covid.

Mr Bradshaw: I hope the Minister will go on to say something about the expansion of the green list and what will happen with covid passports. Can he explain why the Governments of other countries—Germany, those in the rest of the Europe, and America—who have just as much concern for the health of their people, are ahead of us on international travel, when we are more highly vaccinated? Where is the vaccine dividend that the Government promised? We are getting left behind comparable countries, in spite of our vaccination levels. How does the Minister explain that?

Robert Courts: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point. Every country is approaching this issue in a slightly different way, and it is not as straightforward as simply comparing the way one country manages it with the way another does. We are doing something that is cautious, because we are seeking to protect the vaccine dividend to which he rightly draws attention. He asked me to talk about the green list. I know he understands that I cannot foreshadow any announcements that might take place later today, either on that or on the point of vaccination. We of course recognise the strong strategic rationale and the success of the vaccination programme, and we are working to consider the role of vaccinations in shaping a different set of health and testing measures for inbound travel. We will be able to set out our position on that in due course.

I stress that the measures that are set out at present, and what is seen by right hon. and hon. Members in the traffic light system at present, are not set in stone. We are working towards a future travel system that can co-exist with an endemic covid-19. As such, and as recommended in the global travel taskforce report, the Government's approach will be assessed on 28 June, 31 July and 1 October to ensure that the measures and approach that we have in place are adequate. Of course, as Members will realise, the first such review is imminent. I know Members have a real hunger for further information, and we will set out our position in due course.

The Government recognise that there is plenty more to do. The tourism recovery plan has recently been published—I would have very much liked to speak about it in a bit more detail, but I am conscious that the time is rapidly running out. The Government are developing a forward-looking strategic framework for aviation,

which will explore key issues such as workforce, skills, regional connectivity, noise, innovation, regulation and consumer issues, alongside climate change and decarbonisation.

I am sorry that I need to sit down to allow my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley time to sum up at the end, but I will finish by quoting him. He said that the best way to support travel and aviation is to enable them to operate. The Government and I fundamentally agree with him on that, and we are working hard to turn those words and aspirations into reality. There are no two ways about it: the pandemic has brought dark times on the country. Thanks to the success of the vaccination programme, however, the light is growing.

5.18 pm

Henry Smith: I thank the right hon. Members for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) and for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), my hon. Friends the Members for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), for Southend West (Sir David Amess) and for Warrington South (Andy Carter), and the hon. Members for Upper Bann (Carla Lockhart), for Newport East (Jessica Morden), for Slough (Mr Dhesi), for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter), for Jarrow (Kate Osborne), for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Neale Hanvey), for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) and for Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands)—he has had to fly back to Scotland and cannot be present.

I also thank my hon. Friend the aviation Minister. I know he understands the importance of getting the sector back up and running. Even though he cannot say so, I know he shares many of our frustrations. The message I want to leave is that we cannot operate as an economy, be it international travel or anything else, on a zero-covid strategy. The coronavirus will probably be with us for the rest of our lives. We will probably have to have a rolling vaccination programme for the foreseeable future. We will have to learn to live with it. We cannot afford for it to dominate our lives for much longer. Otherwise, the impact that it will have on employment and general prosperity—mental health has been mentioned as well—will be severe. There is a special case for the sector to have furlough extended beyond September, because of the fact that, unlike most other parts of the economy, it seems, sadly, that it will not be able to open in a meaningful way.

I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for their eloquence and erudite comments, many of which, if not all of them, I very much agree with.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered support for the aviation, tourism and travel industries in response to the covid-19 pandemic.

5.20 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 24 June 2021

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

FCDO Services Ministerial Targets 2021-22

The Minister for Asia (Nigel Adams): My noble Friend the Minister for South Asia and the Commonwealth, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, has made the following written ministerial statement:

FCDO Services operates as a trading fund of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). I have set the following ambitious performance targets for 2021-2022:

An in-year surplus in excess of 0.0% before interest, tax and dividend;

Achievement of the return on capital employed (ROCE) of at least 6.5% (weighted average);

A productivity ratio of at least 82%, measuring actual billable hours versus available billable hours;

An in-year customer satisfaction rating average at least of 82%;

An average Civil Service People Survey "Your Say" score for 'Employee Engagement' of at least 61%; and

An average Civil Service People Survey "Your Say" score for "My Manager" of at least 65%.

FCDO Services will report to Parliament on its success against these targets through its annual report and accounts for 2021-22.

FCDO Services is a trading fund of the FCDO. It provides a range of integrated, secure services worldwide to the FCDO and other UK Government Departments, supporting the delivery of Government agendas. Services include protective security, estates and construction, cloud computing, communications and monitoring, logistics, translation and interpreting. This is combined with a portfolio of global maintenance work. FCDO Services also manages the UK National Authority for Counter Eavesdropping (UK NACE), helping protect UK assets from physical, electronic and cyber-attack.

[HCWS118]

TREASURY

Public Service Pensions: Cost Control Mechanism and Discount Rate Methodology

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Steve Barclay): The Government have today published two consultations relating to public service pensions. These consultations seek views on two important aspects of the framework governing public service pension schemes: proposed reforms to the cost control mechanism and the methodology used to set the discount rate used at valuations of unfunded public service pension schemes.

One of the proposed reforms to the cost control mechanism could mean that the discount rate used at valuations of unfunded public service schemes to set employer contribution rates may also become relevant to the outcome of the cost control mechanism in the future. These consultations are therefore being published in parallel to ensure that respondents are fully informed of any potential interactions and to allow them to consider their responses across both areas of the public service pension framework.

The cost control mechanism

The first consultation document published today is titled "Public Service Pensions: Proposal to Reform the Cost Control Mechanism".

Following recommendations from the Independent Public Service Pensions Commission in 2011, the cost control mechanism was introduced into the valuation process for public service pension schemes in the Public Service Pensions Act 2013 following consultation with member representatives. It was designed to ensure a fair balance of risk regarding the cost of providing defined benefit (DB) public service pensions between members and the taxpayer.

In September 2018, the Government announced they would ask the Government Actuary to conduct a review of the mechanism amidst concerns that it was not operating in line with its original objectives, which are:

To protect taxpayers from unforeseen costs

To maintain the value of pension schemes to the members

To provide stability and certainty to benefit levels—the mechanism should only be triggered by "extraordinary, unpredictable events".

The Government Actuary's final report, which sets out his findings and recommendations, was published on 15 June. The Government have considered this report and are now consulting on reforms they propose to make to the mechanism to ensure it operates as intended. All of the Government's proposed changes are recommendations by the Government Actuary.

The consultation will last for eight weeks and close on 19 August. The consultation document can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/public-service-pensions-cost-control-mechanism-consultation>.

The discount rate methodology

The second consultation is titled "Public Service Pensions: Consultation on the discount rate methodology".

"SCAPE" (superannuation contributions adjusted for past experience) is the name of the process for setting employer contribution rates at valuations of unfunded public service pension schemes. The "SCAPE discount rate" is the discount rate used as part of this process. It is used to express the pension promises being built up in a scheme as a present-day cost and is set by HM Treasury following a prescribed methodology.

The Government previously consulted on the methodology used to set the SCAPE discount rate in 2010. In response to that consultation, they announced that the SCAPE discount rate methodology would be based on expected long-term GDP growth.

In response to the 2010 consultation, the Government expressed an intention to review the SCAPE discount rate methodology every 10 years. This consultation meets that intention and seeks views on the most appropriate methodology for setting the SCAPE discount rate going forward.

The consultation will last for eight weeks and close on 19 August. The consultation document can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/public-service-pensions-consultation-on-the-discount-rate-methodology>.

[HCWS117]

DEFENCE

Exercises in the Black Sea

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): On Wednesday 23 June 2021, HMS Defender (a Type 45 destroyer), left the Ukrainian port of Odessa en route to the Georgian port of Batumi in the Black sea. HMS Defender conducted innocent passage through Ukrainian territorial waters via a direct route using a traffic separation scheme (TSS), as is the right of the United Kingdom (and all nations) under international maritime law. This TSS is governed by the International Maritime Organisation and is designed to assist vessels in safely transiting congested waterways. The United Kingdom does not recognise any Russian claim to these waters, nor do we recognise the assertion from the Russian Ministry of Defence that HMS Defender was in violation of the UN convention on the law of the sea (UNCLOS).

At 0950 BST, HMS Defender entered the TSS, inside Ukrainian territorial waters. At 1000 BST, a Russian coastguard vessel warned that Russian units would shortly commence a live fire gunnery exercise. At 1008 BST, HMS Defender noted gunnery astern and out of range of her position. This posed no danger to HMS Defender. During her transit, HMS Defender was overflown by Russian combat aircraft at varying heights, the lowest of which was approximately 500 feet. These aircraft posed no immediate threat to HMS Defender, but some of these manoeuvres were neither safe nor professional. HMS Defender responded by VHF radio to the Russian units on several occasions and was, at all times, courteous and professional.

HMS Defender maintained a safe course throughout her innocent passage, on one occasion manoeuvring to avoid a hazard presented by a Russian coastguard vessel before re-assuming her intended course. HMS Defender completed the passage safely and in accordance with her intended route, departed Ukrainian territorial waters at 1026 BST. At no point were warning shots fired at HMS Defender, nor bombs dropped in her path as has been asserted by the Russian authorities.

Later on Wednesday 23 June 2021, the United Kingdom's defence attaché was invited to a meeting in the Russian Ministry of Defence at which he received a note verbale. This will be considered and addressed in due course.

Under Article 19 of UNCLOS, HMS Defender had the right to exercise innocent passage through Ukrainian territorial waters in the manner she did without giving any notice of her intention to do so. This is a right the United Kingdom affords to Russia and other states in the context of the UK's territorial waters, including the Dover TSS in the English channel.

The Royal Navy, as well as other NATO and partner nations, have enjoyed a routine maritime presence in the Black sea for many years. At the time of this interaction, there were both Dutch and US warships operating elsewhere within the Black sea. The Royal Navy's presence is about co-operating with our partners and allies to advance regional security, stability and freedom of navigation.

HMS Defender continues with her planned deployment and programme of visits. The Royal Navy will always uphold international law and will not accept unlawful interference with innocent passage.

[HCWS122]

UK MINUSMA Deployment

The Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heappey): I would like to update the House on my previous statement (HCWS622), announcing the start of the UK's long-range reconnaissance group (LRRG) deployment to the United Nations multidimensional integrated stabilisation mission in Mali, MINUSMA.

The UK's first rotation to MINUSMA, led by the Light Dragoons, began in December 2020 and I am pleased to report that they have now completed their handover to their successors, following a successful six-month deployment.

Our troops have so far delivered on their objectives—to contribute to improving the UN mission's performance and to help reduce the spread of insecurity across Mali and the wider Sahel.

Our forces have engaged with Malian communities who had never before met UN forces to understand their needs and concerns. They have gathered intelligence to support mission planning and improve overall mission performance, including the protection of civilians. They also led MINUSMA's first cordon and search operation for some time, seizing weapons and equipment hidden by terrorists threatening local communities, and demonstrating how UK personnel can make an innovative and effective contribution to the mission.

Their high performance and professionalism have been acknowledged by international partners on the ground, and the UN Force Commander.

The Light Dragoon-led task group has been replaced by a contingent led by the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment, with personnel drawn from The Queen's Dragoon Guards and other units from across the armed forces.

I congratulate our returning troops on completion of a successful tour in a challenging and dangerous environment, and I am confident that the second rotation is well placed to build on the solid foundations laid by those preceding them. The new UK task group will be under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Will Meddings, of the Royal Anglian Regiment, and will continue to form a crucial component of the mission and force, working alongside over 60 other nations.

Despite the successes of our armed forces, we are conscious that the ongoing situation in Mali remains complex and needs a whole of Government approach to achieve our desired results. The coup in Mali last month reinforces the important role the international community plays in supporting stability in the country. The UK remains committed to the transition process towards democratic, constitutional rule in Mali. We will also maintain a close relationship with our allies, ensuring our activity aligns with planned adjustments to France's footprint in the Sahel.

Our peacekeeping deployment to Mali is part of a broader HMG contribution seeking to help tackle the root causes of conflict. This includes a number of UK-funded programmes across Mali that intend to not only improve the lives of the civilian population, but also complement the tasks conducted by our armed forces. Programmes include helping communities resolve conflicts over land and resources; supporting women in taking a stronger role in conflict resolution; and helping civilian and military actors to better co-ordinate work.

While I am pleased to report that the troops in our first rotation will arrive home safe and well, we remain clear that this mission does not come without risk to those deployed. We regularly assess risks and will continue to make adjustments to ensure our forces can conduct operations safely.

Lessons identified from our first rotation will be applied to future MINUSMA deployments. We will also continue to draw on insight provided by the LRRG to support our efforts within the UN in New York to drive policy reform. They will feed into a review of our future commitment at the end of the year.

As outlined in the integrated review, the UK deployment to MINUSMA is a clear demonstration of this Government's commitment to play a leading international role in multilateralism, collective security and conflict resolution. I am pleased to report on the successes of this first rotation, and will provide further updates to the House as the deployment progresses.

[HCWS121]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

News UK Undertakings: Application for Release in Full

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Oliver Dowden): On 1 February 2021, News UK submitted an application to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport requesting that I release in full the undertakings that were accepted by the then Secretary of State, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Jeremy Wright), in 2019, to replace conditions put in place by the then Secretary of State for Trade, the right hon. John Biffin MP, in 1981.

News UK has submitted that the changes in the newspaper industry and the challenges posed by the covid-19 pandemic mean that the undertakings are no longer necessary.

They note that the undertakings place them at a competitive disadvantage to other newspapers, and that the release is necessary to allow the continued provision of quality news by *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*.

Copies of the invitation to comment and the application documents will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The deadline for comments is 5 pm on 15 July. This application will be considered in a quasi-judicial manner through a fair and transparent process.

If, after considering the responses, I am minded to release, or vary the undertakings, there will be a further consultation on my decision as required by legislation.

[HCWS120]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Landscapes Review: Government Response

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): In May 2018, DEFRA commissioned Julian Glover and an independent panel to consider how we might improve the management of our national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs).

Their report, the landscapes review, was published in September 2019. It set out a series of recommendations, including that more should be done to support nature's recovery in these landscapes; that the status of AONBs should be strengthened; that there was a need to bring the family of protected landscapes closer together with more strategic oversight and greater opportunities for career progression; and that more funding should support public access to protected landscapes.

The Government agree that more funding should be directed towards making space for nature and supporting nature's recovery in our protected landscapes. Since the review was published, we have been supporting important projects in our protected landscapes through our nature for climate fund and green recovery challenge fund. Our future local nature recovery scheme, part of the future agriculture policy, will also support the objective of nature's recovery in our protected landscapes and beyond. I have also asked Natural England to prepare proposals for the possible designation of additional national nature reserves, where there is landowner support, and to consider how nature's recovery within such designations might be supported financially through our new landscape recovery scheme (also part of our future agriculture policy).

The Government also agree that we should do more to support public access to protected landscapes. Today, I am announcing the new farming in protected landscapes programme, which will provide additional investment to allow farmers and other land managers to work in partnership with our national park authorities and AONB teams to improve public access, and deliver bigger and better outcomes for the environment, for people and for places.

Natural England also will be taking forward the Government's commitment to designate additional protected landscapes and is currently considering the designation of four new areas.

Yorkshire Wolds AONB

Cheshire Sandstone Ridge AONB

An extension to the Surrey Hills AONB

An extension to the Chilterns AONB

This work will contribute to the Government's commitment of protecting 30% of our land by 2030, and boosting biodiversity, while taking forward the review's recommendation to designate more areas of the country for their natural beauty.

Each of our protected landscapes has its own identity, and many of their functions require local accountability. However, we are also considering how their structures might be changed so that we can bring the family of protected landscapes closer together, and ensure there is more strategic direction nationally, while retaining their local functions. We will also be exploring opportunities to increase private investment, particularly by diversifying funding sources to include emerging markets in natural capital and other commercial opportunities. We are also considering options to strengthen the status and support given to areas of outstanding natural beauty and the recommendation to possibly change their name. The Government will be working closely with our partners over the coming months including local authorities and national park authorities, to address the review's recommendations in full and consult on draft proposals later this year.

[HCWS119]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

High Fat, Sugar and Salt Advertising Consultation Response

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill): Today, I am pleased to announce that the Government are publishing the consultation response to both the 2019 and 2020 consultations. This outlines the final UK-wide policy on restricting high fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) advertising, which we intend to legislate for in the upcoming Health and Care Bill.

Covid-19 has brought the dangers of obesity into sharp focus and highlighted that as a country we need to address the risks obesity presents. The Prime Minister has been clear that helping the nation get fitter and healthier must be a national priority and will make us more resilient to diseases in the future.

In 2018 the Government set the ambition to halve childhood obesity by 2030 and help adults reach a healthier weight. As part of a suite of measures to meet this ambition, it is important that we reduce children's exposure to advertising for products high in fat, sugar and salt on TV and online. We want to ensure that the media our children engage with mostly promotes a healthy diet. Evidence suggests that exposure to HFSS advertising can affect what and when children eat, shaping children's food preferences from a young age. Over time, excess consumption can lead to children becoming overweight or obese, all of which puts their future health at risk; already one in three children leaving primary school are overweight or living with obesity.

In July 2020, as part of the tackling obesity' strategy, the Government announced their intention to implement a 9 pm watershed on TV for advertising high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS). This followed on from a consultation held by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and DHSC in 2019. The Government also announced they wanted to go further online and from November to December 2020 held a public consultation on introducing a total HFSS restriction online.

Shaping the marketing to our children

We will be introducing a 9 pm watershed on TV and UK on-demand programme services (ODPS) alongside a restriction of paid-for advertising online.

The product categories in scope of the restriction have been revised since consultation to focus on those that are of most concern to childhood obesity. The healthiest products within a specific category can still be advertised and products such as butter, olive oil and

condiments are out of scope. This is consistent with the approach used for the promotion restrictions on volume and location which is also part of the strategy.

The online restriction is limited to paid-for advertising and will not apply to "owned media"—those spaces online where full editorial control and ownership applies, such as a brand's own blog, website or social media page.

The policy will have a number of exemptions to balance health benefits and impacts on business. These are as follows:

Brand advertising (online and 9 pm watershed): Provided there are no identifiable HFSS products, food and drink brands can continue to advertise. This is to ensure that brands are not pigeonholed as synonymous with HFSS products and have the freedom to reformulate and move towards offering healthier products.

Small medium enterprises (SME) (online and 9 pm watershed): Businesses with 249 employees or fewer, that pay to advertise HFSS products that they manufacture and/or sell, will be exempt from the HFSS restrictions and can continue to advertise.

Audio (online only): As the impact and levels of child exposure to HFSS advertising on audio- only media (e.g. podcasts, online only radio) remain unclear, these forms of media are not subject to restrictions.

Business to business (online only): Businesses can continue to promote their products or services to other businesses, which we hope will prevent unintended consequences of impeding business activity where commerce is not with the purpose of encouraging children's consumption of HFSS food or drink.

Transactional content (online only): To ensure that online content for the purpose of facilitating transactions involved in buying and selling products can continue and that consumers have enough information at the point of sale/purchase.

The enforcement approach will mirror current frameworks with broadcasters and ODPS under UK jurisdiction being liable for breaches of the watershed and advertisers being liable online. Ofcom will also be appointed as the appropriate regulatory authority for these restrictions and will be able to appoint a day-to-day regulator to carry out frontline regulation. The Government expect the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) to fulfil this role.

Obesity is a complex issue that will not be solved by one policy alone. This is why our strategy includes a suite of measures such as expanding weight management services and restricting promotions of HFSS products.

This is the latest measure to support individuals to improve their health and thereby reduce pressure on the NHS. I welcome Members' support and their views on how we can support the nation to get healthier and achieve our ambition of halving childhood obesity by 2030.

[HCWS123]

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