

Tuesday
13 July 2021

Volume 699
No. 33



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**
(HANSARD)

Tuesday 13 July 2021

House of Commons

Tuesday 13 July 2021

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

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

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

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Social Care Reform

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): When he plans to bring forward proposals on social care reform. [902625]

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on funding for a plan to reform social care for (a) older people and (b) people of working age. [902628]

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): What progress he is making on bringing forward plans to reform adult social care. [902643]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Sajid Javid): I want people to be able to get the care they need when they need it and to have the choices they want. I want people to live their life in full and to live independently as part of a community for as long as possible without facing an astronomical care bill. We are committed to social care reform, and we will bring forward proposals this year.

Mr Sharma [V]: I thank the Secretary of State for responding to my initial question. Eleven years into this Tory Government, 10 years on from Dilnot and almost 700 days since the Prime Minister promised

“to fix social care, once and for all”,

looking at it and studying the options is not enough for the four out of five people who say, “We need a solution now.” Is this just another of the Prime Minister’s promises that will not quite materialise?

Sajid Javid: We have already seen substantial increases in adult social care funding, but the Government have said that we want a long-term, sustainable solution, so we will bring forward proposals on that. The hon. Gentleman will know that later today we are debating the Health and Care Bill, which is also about structural reform, so I look forward to seeing him in the Aye Lobby.

Mr Harper: May I just say to the Chancellor—the Secretary of State, rather—that when he brings forward the proposals, will he make sure that he addresses social care for working-age adults, which actually accounts for more than half of public spending? The debate is always focused on older people, and people of working age often get forgotten. The reason for my slip just now is that he will be aware, as a former Chancellor, that the tax burden was at a 50-year high before covid. When he brings forward the proposals, can we not just default to putting up taxes, however they are disguised, but look at overall Government spending, set some priorities and make some choices about what we think is important? Social care is important, but we need to make those choices about overall Government spending.

Sajid Javid: First, my right hon. Friend is right to bring to the House’s attention the way that the Government are also working on social care for working-age people. He is also right to point out—I was thinking about this the other day—that around 55% of total adult social care spending is for working-age adults, and it is important that we continue to provide that support. He will be pleased to know that I am working with the current Chancellor and other Cabinet colleagues on bringing forward a more sustainable long-term plan, and I hope he will support it when it comes forward.

Martin Vickers [V]: I welcome what my right hon. Friend has said so far and the moves he is making to deal with the social care issue. One thing that elderly people particularly are worried about when they are in care or in hospital are the recent reports of “Do not attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation” orders. Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that they will only be put in place with the authority of the patient or their next of kin? Is he making inquiries into recent reports of their widespread use?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend will be interested to know that the Department commissioned the Care Quality Commission to review the DNACPR decisions that were being made during the first wave of the pandemic. That review was published in March, and the Department then established a new ministerial oversight group that will be responsible for delivery and the required changes that were recommended in the review. We want to ensure adherence to the guidance throughout the system whenever DNACPR orders are used. The first meeting of this new group will take place on 8 June.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State to his new position. I wondered whether he might be able to clarify something for me. Five days ago, he told the Local Government Association conference that for social care reform,

“we may not be able to announce the whole plan...with all the details there”,

but that he hoped to

“set out...the general sense of direction”.

The general sense of direction! It is two years since the Prime Minister made a clear promise to fix the crisis in social care “once and for all”. Since then, more than 40,000 care home residents have died from covid-19 and 2 million elderly and disabled people have applied for care but had their request turned down. Millions more

families and staff have been pushed to breaking point, so may I ask the Secretary of State: what is the plan? When will we see the plan? Will it provide the full details that he and the Minister for Care, the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) have promised, or does keeping your word mean nothing to anyone in government anymore?

Sajid Javid: I think the hon. Lady may well have misunderstood what I said at the conference; I am not sure she listened to the whole session. It is worth repeating that the Government are absolutely committed to coming forward with a sustainable plan for adult social care and to bringing forward that plan to make sure that every person when they reach old age in our country can have the dignity they deserve. We will bring forward full proposals—a full plan—this year.

Covid-19: Departmental Response

Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his Department's response to the covid-19 outbreak. [902626]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Sajid Javid): Since the start of the pandemic, we have acted swiftly to reduce the spread of the virus and to keep the public safe. As our vaccine programme progresses, links between cases and hospitalisations weaken, and that means that we are confident we can move forward with step 4, as I set out in the House yesterday.

Steven Bonnar: I thank the Health Secretary for that answer. After the planned changes next week, the Health Secretary is predicting that covid cases will reach 100,000 a day. Research is suggesting that that could result in 3,000 hospital admissions and again put our health services under pressure. What is his response to Dr Mike Ryan of the World Health Organisation, who described the proposals to remove all covid measures and simply let people get infected as “epidemiological stupidity”?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman talks, understandably, about pressure on the NHS, and he will know that the restrictions we have necessarily had in place during the course of this pandemic so far have also led to considerable pressure on the NHS, especially when it comes to non-covid health problems. He may be aware, perhaps for his own constituents, that mental health problems are up, there are many undiagnosed cancer cases, domestic violence is up and child abuse is up. I hope he will agree with me that one of the things we can look forward to as we gradually start removing restrictions is helping people with their many non-covid health problems too.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I also welcome the Secretary of State to his new role. I hope he will soon see that the Department performs best when it follows the scientific advice. This morning, Professor Graham Medley, the chief modeller for the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, said of mask wearing that

“if it's not mandated it probably won't do any good.”

That advice would explain why, last year, the Government moved from just guidance on mask wearing in May 2020 to making it compulsory on public transport in

June and in shops in July. So if the advice is clear and the Government took that advice last year, why on earth are they moving away from it now?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government's decisions are rightly informed by the best possible scientific advice there is and, as well as that, looking at the data and then taking all of that into account when reaching decisions. The hon. Gentleman asks about masks, and I have answered that question a number of times at the Dispatch Box. I am very happy to repeat that we are moving away from a system of regulation to guidance, but in that guidance, which was published yesterday, we have made it very clear that in certain situations masks will still make sense, and we believe that people will use their common sense and follow that guidance.

NHS Estate

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve the infrastructure of the NHS estate. [902627]

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve the infrastructure of the NHS estate. [902633]

Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve the infrastructure of the NHS estate. [902655]

The Minister for Health (Edward Argar): In our manifesto, we committed to building 40 new hospitals by 2030 and to upgrading another 20 hospitals. We are delivering on this commitment, and we now have plans to build 48 new hospitals this decade. We are also delivering improvements across the country to hospital maintenance, eradicating mental health dormitories and improving A&E capacity. Finally, the Department has received a £9.4 billion capital settlement for 2021-22, including the first year of a £5.4 billion multi-year commitment until 2024-25 for new hospitals and hospital upgrades, and £4.2 billion for NHS trusts' operational capital.

Robbie Moore: Some 83% of the Airedale hospital in my constituency is built from aerated concrete, with the building containing 50,000 aerated concrete panels in its construction, which is five times more than any other hospital in the UK. This building material is known for its structural deficiencies, so can my hon. Friend assure me that when his Department considers new infrastructure projects, schemes with the highest risk profile, such as the Airedale hospital, will be an absolute priority?

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend is a doughty campaigner in this House on behalf of his local hospital at Airedale, going the extra mile, I gather from the *Keighley News*, by committing to run 100 km in 10 weeks to raise funds for, among other things, the Friends of Airedale Hospital—I hope, if he has not finished that yet, it is going well.

To my hon. Friend's substantive point, he raises an important issue. Airedale has been allocated capital investment in the millions for the 2021-22 financial year from a funding budget that is ring-fenced for RAAC—reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete—plank remediation, but I can reassure him that, as we look to set the criteria for the next eight hospitals, safety considerations are highly likely to be one of the key considerations.

Philip Dunne [V]: The Minister will be aware that, in March 2018, Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust was allocated over £300 million to undertake a radical transformation of its acute hospitals at Shrewsbury and Telford. Since then, the trust's management have been engaged in finalising the strategic business case, but as a consequence of changes to the Green Book and clinical standards the cost will have increased. Will the Minister commit to meet with Shropshire and Telford MPs once the business case is complete to help to ensure that the project can still be delivered?

Edward Argar: NHS England and Improvement and the Department of Health and Social Care wrote to the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust on 19 November last year confirming we remain committed to supporting the scheme. This letter confirmed the allocation remains at £312 million at this time, and of course my right hon. Friend will recall that I committed to approving the request in principle for £6 million of early funding to continue to develop the scheme. It is an important scheme, we want to see it proceed and I am very happy to meet him and fellow Shropshire colleagues.

Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con): In my role as chair of the all-party group for axial spondyloarthritis I have heard from many about the importance of hydrotherapy pools in supporting those living with the condition, but there has been a concern that the reopening of these pools following the pandemic has been jeopardised by space within hospitals being allocated to other functions and a general low level of prioritisation. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is vital that we have robust plans in place to reopen as many hydrotherapy pools as possible, and will he consider meeting me to discuss this matter in further detail?

Edward Argar: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and the all-party group for their work. He raises an important point: the challenges posed by infection control and the impact of the pandemic on the operation of hospitals. That has had an impact in this space, but I entirely recognise the value and importance of hydrotherapy as a treatment for particular conditions and I will be delighted to meet him.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): Of course the number of general and acute beds open across the estate impacts on a trust's ability to get on top of the elective backlog, which now stands at 5.3 million—a record high—with 336,000 waiting over a year and 7,000 waiting over two years for treatment. On appointment, the Secretary of State promised trusts that they would get everything they need to get through the backlog. So how much will trusts get and when will they get it?

Edward Argar: It is an important question. The Secretary of State has made it clear that tackling the elective backlog is one of his key priorities in his new role. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Government have already committed £1 billion to helping to tackle the elective backlog. That, of course, comes on top of the record funding of £33.9 billion to '23-24 for our NHS, but that commitment remains. We will do whatever is necessary to ensure that our NHS can tackle the elective backlog and get those waiting lists down.

Jonathan Ashworth: I am grateful to the Minister for his answer, but if it is a priority of the new Secretary of State why on Friday were trusts told that the threshold for accessing that elective recovery funding was increasing, effectively making it harder for a trust to access funding at just the time when hospital admissions for covid are increasing and we have trusts, such as in Leeds and Birmingham, cancelling cancer surgery? Surely we should be giving trusts more resources now, not restricting access to the elective recovery fund.

Edward Argar: In terms of the elective recovery fund, we have worked with the NHS to determine the right thresholds and the right premiums for payment for elective activity over and above what we would be expecting in the circumstances. The NHS is doing an amazing job in difficult circumstances, as the right hon. Gentleman will appreciate, with the impact that infection prevention control restrictions have had on the ability of trusts to see the number of people that they normally would. Trusts are taking huge strides to restore services and the ERF is there to help to ensure that they are funded for that activity level so that they can get provision up and above where it needs to be in order to get the waiting lists down.

NHS: Trade Deals

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): What steps he plans to take to ensure that the NHS is excluded from future trade deals. [902629]

The Minister for Health (Edward Argar): We have been clear that the NHS, the price it pays for medicines and the services it provides are off the table in our trade negotiations. No trade agreement has ever affected our ability to keep public services public, nor forced us to pay for more medicines. My Department works closely with the Department for International Trade to ensure that this is reflected in the negotiations of new trade deals.

Ian Lavery [V]: Last week we proudly celebrated the wonderful creation of the NHS—the most cherished of all national institutions—yet grave fears remain about its ultimate privatisation under this Government. If the Government are determined to sign up to the provisions in the trans-Pacific partnership for investor-state dispute settlement, can the Minister at least do one thing today to limit that damage? Will he guarantee that the NHS will be totally exempt from the scope of those ISDS lawsuits and ensure that that exemption is written into the terms of the UK's accession?

Edward Argar: The Government have been clear in our published approach to negotiations, both on the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership and any US trade deal, that protecting the NHS is a fundamental principle of our trade policy. The UK will ensure that the terms we sign up to in any trade negotiation uphold the Government's manifesto commitment that the NHS, its services and the cost of medicines are not on the table, and that we hold true to our principles underpinning the NHS—of a service available to all at the point of need, free.

Childhood Obesity

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to tackle childhood obesity. [902630]

Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con): What steps he is taking to tackle childhood obesity. [902648]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill): We are committed to halving childhood obesity in England by 2030, and the 2020 strategy takes decisive action to help everybody to achieve and maintain that healthier weight. We have five trailblazer sites working to create a healthy environment for our children. We have laid regulations for out-of-home calorie labelling. We have put £100 million into funding for adult and child weight management, and announced the introduction of some of the toughest advertising restrictions—both on TV and online—regarding children's exposure to high fat, salt and sugar products. This is about the cumulative effect of several policies.

Damian Hinds: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning that wide range of measures. May I also encourage her to work closely with colleagues at the Department for Education and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on an expanded children's sports and activity plan, both in and out of school, to try to make 60 minutes a day as much a norm as five-a-day fruit and vegetables by bringing in the power of sports clubs and the governing bodies, and finally getting more school facilities available for out-of-hours use?

Jo Churchill: My right hon. Friend's question is music to my ears. He will be pleased to hear that, last week, along with Ministers from DCMS and the DFE, I was in front of the Lords National Plan for Sport and Recreation Committee talking about doing just that—about how we can build on the DFE's £10.1 million contribution, so that we can unlock the 40% of facilities that lie on school estates and help to get children active for 60 minutes a day. We will be publishing our cross-departmental update to the school sport and activity action plan later this year.

Suzanne Webb: Ultra-processed food is basically high in fat, high in salt and high in sugar, and it is highly addictive. I believe that it plays a significant part in the growing crisis that is obesity. I genuinely believe that it is not food in itself, when one considers all the flavourings and artificial colourings that have to go into it to make it taste like food in the first instance. Does my hon. Friend agree that the food industry needs to play its part in tackling the obesity crisis, and not contribute to it?

Jo Churchill: I do. This is about helping people and caring for people. We know the detrimental effect obesity has on all stages of our lives. It costs personally, in productivity terms, as well as the NHS, being the precursor to diabetes, heart disease, cancer, musculoskeletal conditions and so on. We cannot afford for the country not to tackle this issue. I am encouraged, but want to see business go faster in the reformulation ambition to reduce the salt, sugar and fat in these products.

General Practice Data for Planning and Research

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): What progress he has made on consultations on the General Practice Data for Planning and Research roll-out. [902631]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill): We are committed to being transparent about the collection and use of data. We paused the implementation of GP data for planning and research services, and we have had productive discussions with the Royal College of General Practitioners, the British Medical Association, health charities and others. We have listened to the concerns and we will respond to them. We will continue to listen and we will take our time. We will show patients and clinicians why they can have full trust and confidence in the programme, where data will only be accessed through a secure environment with the oversight of the Information Commissioner's Office and the National Data Guardian.

Mr Speaker: Mr Zeichner has withdrawn, so let us go to the SNP spokesperson.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) [V]: The Government's plan to give pharmaceutical firms access to pseudo-anonymised data from GP practices in England is creating public concern and distrust, just like the failed care.data project of 2013. Most patients would be happy to see better communication and information sharing within the NHS, as well as for public health and academic research, but are concerned about commercial access to their data. Will the Minister halt the process to allow time for genuine debate and public consultation?

Jo Churchill: The hon. Member and I are both passionate about the use of data to enhance patient care, as she outlined. That is the prize here. We are listening. We are taking our time. The data will only be used for health and care planning and research purposes by organisations that have a legal basis and a legitimate need to use the data. NHS Digital will publish all the details of the data we have shared on our data release register. We want to build confidence. We want to build trust. We are listening, but this is an important agenda that we need to get right to deliver better care for patients.

Dr Whitford: The problem is that the plan to allow commercial access is going to undermine the public trust in improving digitisation within the NHS, and the Minister will be aware of that. The current plans apply only to the NHS in England, but can she guarantee that the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 will not be used to force commercial access to patient data from Scotland's NHS? If so, can she explain why the Department for International Trade is advertising access to the health data of 65 million people, which is the population of the whole UK?

Jo Churchill: I go back to the answer I gave: we do not allow data to be used for commercial purposes. NHS Digital will not approve requests for data where the purpose is for marketing and so on and so forth. The hon. Member would not expect me to respond on behalf of another Department, but I reiterate that we are communicating and building trust. There will be a

public information campaign. We will be working across the professions and across research to make sure that access is appropriate and proportionate. In the Health and Care Bill, we will be redoubling our efforts to make sure people have that confidence.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): At the previous health questions, we secured a commitment from the Minister to delay the implementation date for this data grab in order to properly communicate with the public. However, rather than a significant delay so there could be the public information campaign the Minister says she is so keen to have, on the basis set out by the BMA and the Royal College of GPs, what we have instead is a short pause. The Minister says she wants to listen and to build trust, so why on earth is this being snuck out during the summer recess? The reality is that the Government simply have not passed the test for informed consent. Will the Minister take this moment today to stop this process and commit to a proper engagement campaign, rather than running off during recess?

Jo Churchill: I really respect the hon. Gentleman, but nothing is being snuck out. We are not doing a data grab. I refer him to the answer I gave a few moments ago. It is important that we get this right. We have heard the concerns and will respond to them. We will take the appropriate amount of time—even if that means going beyond 1 September—to ensure that we have engaged properly.

Covid-19 Roadmap

Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con): What evidence he plans to use to inform the Government's decision on whether to proceed with step 4 of the covid-19 road map on 19 July 2021. [902632]

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): What evidence he plans to use to inform the Government's decision on whether to proceed with step 4 of the covid-19 road map on 19 July 2021. [902653]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Sajid Javid): The Government have committed to taking a cautious approach to easing restrictions, guided by the data and not by dates. As I set out in my statement to Parliament yesterday, the decision to lift the remaining measures on 19 July and proceed to step 4 is based on an assessment of the four tests that were set out in the road map.

Karl McCartney [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer and welcome him to his new post.

For me and most of my constituents, 19 July cannot come early enough. It is refreshing to see the Secretary of State's new approach to the wider issues of health provision, and the huge success of our vaccine roll-out has surely ensured that there should and will not be any more lockdowns or restrictions on our civil liberties. Will he assure me that no matter what vested interests have held sway in his Department and across Government in the past 18 months, he is clear that lockdowns and state intervention in the lives of our constituents have gone far enough and need to be curbed?

Sajid Javid: First, I am pleased that my hon. Friend agrees with the decision we have made to proceed with step 4. It sounds like he agrees with the central decision to move from a system of regulation to one of guidance. As he knows, the pandemic is not over, so we are rightly moving forward in a measured way. I am pleased that he agrees with the approach.

James Sunderland: I also welcome yesterday's step 4 announcement. Does the Secretary of State agree that his Department should embrace a bit more risk by working with the Department for Transport to open up the international travel sector fully? Will he also ensure that GPs return to fully physical appointments and that we open up the full range of dental services?

Sajid Javid: I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that, now that we have begun the process of opening up, more work is being done between my Department and the Department for Transport on international travel. The announcements made by my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary last week will certainly help and be welcomed by the sector and travellers. On GP access, now that we have started to open up, working together with GPs we can see better direct access, and especially face-to-face access.

Pharmacies: Primary Care

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab): What steps he is taking to develop the role of pharmacies in primary care provision. [902634]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill): We are committed to the five-year community pharmacy contract and to enabling community pharmacy to deliver more clinical services as well as being the first port of call for minor illnesses. Pharmacists are highly skilled members of the primary care team. We are making good progress with referrals from NHS 111 and general practice, with discharge medicines services from hospitals, and with 96% of pharmacies providing lateral flow tests as well as delivering vaccines. We know that community pharmacies are keen to deliver more, and we should be thinking pharmacy first.

Taiwo Owatemi: I am sure the Minister agrees that pharmacies have gone above and beyond to deliver vital medicines and health advice to patients in their communities during the covid-19 pandemic and that their response underlines the huge potential to grow their already massive contribution to our nation's health. Pharmacies have proven themselves to be a valuable member of the NHS family, so will she prioritise looking at the potential for pharmacies to provide even better primary care? Will she bring forward a plan to unleash their potential post pandemic?

Jo Churchill: I know that the hon. Lady speaks from experience, having been a clinical pharmacist before she came to this place. That potential needs unleashing. We are working across the profession to make sure that pharmacies are enabled to play a fuller part in the primary care family. We should think pharmacy first when we have minor ailments, and pharmacies should be enabled to do everything they can.

Health and Social Care: Collaboration

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve collaboration between health and social care. [902635]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Sajid Javid): We can no longer just think of a health system; we have to think about the health and social care system. We want people's experiences of care to be seamless, which is why we have introduced the Health and Care Bill and will debate its Second Reading today.

Ben Bradley: In order to better integrate and support local services in Nottinghamshire, we would benefit greatly from working with a single integrated care footprint for a simpler and fairer service. A boundary congruous with our county boundary would allow us to offer more equitable care across the whole area. I understand that the decision on the integrated care system boundaries is imminent, so will my right hon. Friend meet me to discuss the potential benefits?

Sajid Javid: I am aware that several factors are helpful in fostering stronger partnerships between the NHS and local authorities, including alignment of boundaries. My hon. Friend will know that the former Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock), asked NHS England to conduct a boundary review for integrated care systems. That review, which is just being completed, will certainly look at and give advice on the best ICS footprint for alignment. No final decision has yet been made, but it is a priority for me. I would be happy to arrange a meeting for my hon. Friend with Ministers to discuss the matter further.

Covid-19: Child Health Services

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): What steps he plans to take in response to the findings of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health on the effect of covid-19 on child health services, published on 14 June 2021. [902636]

The Minister for Covid Vaccine Deployment (Nadhim Zahawi): My apologies, Mr Speaker; I have lost my voice slightly. I was at Wembley on Sunday night and I have to say that those young lions outperformed. We are so proud of them, and I am certain that in 15 months' time the nation will get behind them in Qatar and they will outperform again.

I thank the hon. Member for raising this really important question. We are committed to protecting vulnerable children and ensuring that every child receives the best start in life.

Afzal Khan [V]: Children's and young people's health has been severely impacted by the pandemic, but it is the mental health impact of lockdown and school closures that is perhaps most concerning. Some 12% of in-patient paediatric beds are now occupied by those admitted because of severe mental health problems. That is double what it was in 2019. Does the Minister agree that children and young people have suffered greatly as a result of lockdown and that their health should now be prioritised in our recovery? If so, what steps will he take to put children at the heart of all policies and implement an overarching child health strategy?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am grateful for the hon. Member's question. Our mental health recovery action plan will allow us to deliver additional support for 22,500 more children to have access to community health services—I know that the Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health would say that community access is incredibly effective—and for 2,000 more children to access eating disorder services. It will also help to increase the coverage of mental health support teams in schools and colleges from 29 to 400 by April 2023. That makes it all the more important, as the Secretary of State has outlined, that we get to step 4: it is critical to delivering the recovery action plan.

Patient Transport: VAT

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the effect on patients of the VAT treatment of patient transport service providers. [902637]

The Minister for Covid Vaccine Deployment (Nadhim Zahawi): While the Department of Health and Social Care takes a keen interest in any tax situation that may affect patients, any discussions surrounding the VAT treatment of patient transport services would need to be conducted with relevant officials in Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. Services for the transportation of the sick and injured are exempt from VAT.

Ben Lake: Non-emergency patient transport services provide vital support to those who have no other way of reaching hospital and medical appointments, in addition to those who require specialist transport. An inconsistency in the VAT treatment of providers currently means that some can claim VAT relief while others cannot, despite providing the same services in the same type of vehicles. Would the Minister consider meeting representatives of the sector to better understand the impact and, hopefully, find a way forward?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am very happy for myself and the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), to meet with others about that. Of course, I cannot comment on specific cases, and I would recommend that the services in question take up their concerns with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs as well.

Quarantine-free Travel

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): What discussions he has had with his (a) European and (b) US counterparts on progressing (i) mutual quarantine-free travel for people who are fully vaccinated against covid-19 and (ii) international covid-19 vaccine pass recognition. [902638]

The Minister for Covid Vaccine Deployment (Nadhim Zahawi): I thank the hon. Lady for her question. We are working with the United States authorities, with the EU and with other international partners to ensure a safe return to international travel while managing public health risks. We support a global consistent minimum technical standard for covid status notification. Of course, the NHS app with the NHS covid pass is now accepted in 33 countries around the world.

Margaret Ferrier: The continued lack of recognition of vaccination status between the UK and the EU is putting the UK at a competitive disadvantage, according to the Association of British Travel Agents, especially when compared with the steps taken by the EU and the US. Both the US and the EU now have standardised digital ways to prove vaccination status, so will the Minister clarify why there is an ongoing delay in resolving this matter?

Nadhim Zahawi: The European Medicines Agency and our regulator, the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, work incredibly closely together, and the EMA has authorised the vaccines that are approved by the MHRA. All vaccines that are authorised and deployed in the UK have been subjected to rigorous checks, including individual batch testing and site inspection. Our two regulators work incredibly closely together and I am confident that we will continue to do so and ensure that any issues are resolved as quickly as possible, working with the manufacturers as well.

New Hospitals: Funding Bids

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): What progress his Department has made on selecting the eight new hospital programme schemes invited to bid for funding announced in the spending review 2020. [902639]

The Minister for Health (Edward Argar): On 2 October last year, we announced 40 new hospitals to be built by 2030 and committed to an open process to confirm a further eight new schemes. Taken together, those 48 schemes should represent the biggest hospital building programme in a generation. As my hon. Friend would expect, my right hon. Friend the new Secretary of State is taking a close interest in the detail of this process, and I hope to be able to offer a further update on the selection process for the next eight hospitals very soon.

James Wild: Spending hundreds of millions of pounds patching up buildings long past their planned lifespan—such as the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn, which currently has 200 safety props holding up the concrete roof—does not represent value for money. What reassurance can my hon. Friend give to the thousands of my constituents who in recent days have signed a petition for a new hospital to replace the QEH that the Government are looking seriously at the urgent and compelling case for a new fit-for-purpose hospital for staff, patients and visitors?

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend's constituents will know that, in him, they have a doughty champion of their cause and a strong advocate for his hospital. He and I have spoken on many occasions, and I recognise the challenges facing the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, which he has been very clear about. The spending review 2020 included £4.2 billion this financial year for NHS operational capital investment to allow hospitals to maintain and refurbish their infrastructure, including a ring-fenced £110 million allocation for the most serious and immediate risk posed by reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete. My hon. Friend's hospital has received just over £20 million of that funding to help to mitigate the most urgent RAAC risk, but he will also have heard me say, without prejudging any announcement my right hon. Friend will make about the criteria for the future eight, that safety will be one of the considerations.

Carers

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): What support his Department is providing to young carers during the covid-19 outbreak. [902640]

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to ensure that unpaid carers can access the support they need to provide care to family members. [902647]

The Minister for Care (Helen Whately): We recognise how much carers do and the huge demands that caring places on them. We have made carers a priority group for covid-19 testing and vaccination, funded carers' organisations and asked local authorities to meet their duties to identify and support carers. We have also provided guidance and funding through the £1.5 billion infection control fund to support the reopening of day services.

Kerry McCarthy: I have been contacted by a Megan, a young carer in my constituency, and I have been in correspondence with the Minister about the lack of guidance for young carers on the gov.uk website. We got the Government to remove an outdated linked to a Barnardo's service that had closed at the end of March, but they have not replaced it with anything, which has left a vacuum in where young carers can look for advice and support. Can the Minister ensure that there is adequate, up-to-date information on the gov.uk website and that young carers have somewhere to turn to when they need help and support?

Helen Whately: I thank the hon. Lady for her question and her correspondence on this. She makes a very important point and I will make sure of that.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): When the Select Committee on Housing, Communities and Local Government went to Germany about four years ago to look at its social care system, we saw that people entitled to public funding for social care could either pay the public authorities or care agencies to deliver it. Alternatively, for a slightly reduced amount of money, they could pay their family members, which meant that the person receiving care got the care they wanted, family members got paid for their efforts and the public purse actually saved some money. In reforming the social care system, would the Minister look at introducing elements of the German system into our system in this country?

Helen Whately: The Secretary of State has already said that we are working on our plans for social care reform, and we will be bringing them forward later this year. Of course, as part of those plans we are considering unpaid carers.

Topical Questions

[902595] **Sally-Ann Hart** (Hastings and Rye) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Sajid Javid): It is an honour to be here for my first oral questions as the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and I thank the Prime Minister for bringing me back from furlough. I accepted this role because I

love my country and the NHS. I know that I join this Department at a pivotal time, and I have three pressing priorities for these critical few months. The first is getting us on the path out of this pandemic. The second is busting the backlog of non-covid services. The third is putting social care on a sustainable footing for the future. I want to draw on what I have learnt during this time of adversity and what we have all learnt together. I want to make this great nation a healthier and fairer place, and I am looking forward to working with all hon. Members in this House.

Mr Speaker: You missed the fourth: a 24-hour accident and emergency unit for Chorley.

Sally-Ann Hart: East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust has the potential to get hundreds of millions in investment as part of the Government's NHS estate infrastructure improvement plan. Will funding be allocated on a two to three-year basis, so that the NHS can better plan its funding and estates plans? Where funding has been indicated for a longer term, what plans are there to ensure that providers have sufficient resource in the shorter term to address immediate issues, or to support covid or recovery?

Sajid Javid: We have put more and more capital into the NHS. There are always representations from hon. Members, including you, Mr Speaker, for even more capital. My hon. Friend is right to raise the issue of the importance of local healthcare systems, which will need more capital funding as we progress. She will know that we set out our capital plans for this financial year, 2021-22, but she is right to say that multi-year funding will mean that trusts can plan better, and that is a priority; we want the spending review to have more sight and better planning for capital.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): Let us consider these words about mental health services:

"prior to 2017, no government invested in or prioritised MH services."

Those are not my words but the words of the Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health, the hon. Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries). Indeed, the new Secretary of State was the architect of these cuts, during his time as a Treasury Minister. The unparalleled devastation he left behind has been simply staggering, so does he agree with his Minister? Can he explain to us why 140,000 children were turned away from mental health services last year? Can he explain why a quarter of mental health beds have been cut since 2010? Is he ashamed of his track record?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady will know that the NHS long-term plan that has been set out by this Government is committed to a transformation in mental health services and mental health spending; some £2.3 billion extra is being invested by 2023-24. In addition, she will be aware of the mental healthcare White Paper and the mental health recovery action plan. I hope these are all initiatives she will support.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): May I welcome the Secretary of State to his place? I am sure he will do an excellent job. As he thinks about a 24-hour A&E for

Chorley, I hope he will also think about the urgent need for a cancer institute at the Royal Surrey County Hospital as only second on his list.

The Secretary of State will know that this morning the Health and Social Care Committee published a worrying report about the inhumane treatment given to 2,000 people with learning disabilities and autism in in-patient units, often because no community provision was available. When he brings forward his plans for social care, will he make sure that there is adequate funding for local authorities to give care to such people? Will he also make sure that care workers are always paid the minimum wage, including for the time taken to travel between appointments?

Sajid Javid: I welcome my right hon. Friend's comments and the work that he and other Members do through the Select Committee to scrutinise the work of the Department. He just referred to some of that work, especially in his comments about learning disability and autism, which will remain a huge priority for the Government and certainly for my Department.

My right hon. Friend also rightly raised the issue of care workers and the minimum wage; it is worth pointing out that the Care Act 2014 requires local authorities, when they provide funding, not just to support the minimum wage but to take account of the costs that care workers might incur, such as travelling costs. I look forward to working with my right hon. Friend and the members of his Select Committee.

[902596] **Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab) [V]: I congratulate the Secretary of State on his new role.

There are 1.5 million older people, disabled people and carers with unmet needs who are desperately waiting for care reform. What is the Secretary of State's estimated start date for the implementation of the care package that the Government claimed was ready in their manifesto more than 20 months ago?

Sajid Javid: As the Government have said, we want to make sure that every person in this country has the dignity that they deserve in old age. We have recognised that the current system needs substantial reform. The process of reform has already begun in, for example, the Health and Care Bill that will have its Second Reading tomorrow, but we do need a new, sustainable way to fund care and we will come forward with the plans later this year.

[902600] **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): I know that many of my constituents will be pleased to hear that from 16 August we will end the requirement for people to self-isolate after possible exposure to the virus if they are fully vaccinated. I am sure we all agree that it is right to change the rules as the information changes; however, will my right hon. Friend explain to the House the rationale for making this change on 16 August rather than next Monday?

Sajid Javid: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is good news that we can move away from restrictions and towards guidance. On the rationale for the decision he referred to, it is about vaccine effectiveness: we know that for those with both doses, vaccination is estimated

to be 78% to 80% effective against symptomatic covid-19. The introduction on 16 August of the changes to which my hon. Friend referred will mean that more people will have been vaccinated and will help to reduce severe illness.

[902597] **Kate Osborne** (Jarrow) (Lab) [V]: Macmillan Cancer Support calculates that since March 2020, 37,000 fewer people than expected have started their first cancer treatment, including an estimated 66 people in my constituency of Jarrow who have not started their first treatment. Given that Macmillan estimates that the cancer system will need to work at 110% of capacity for the next 14 months to address the backlog, will the Secretary of State confirm whether the NHS is on schedule to tackle the backlog of cancer diagnosis, care and treatment by the current March 2022 deadline?

Sajid Javid: I want to reassure the hon. Lady—because this is such an important question for so many people across the country—that cancer remains a huge priority for this Government. She is right to refer to the work that Macmillan has done on this issue because, sadly, during the restrictions thousands of people have not come forward in the usual way and their cancer sadly remains undiagnosed. We urge anyone who feels that this is an issue for them: please, go to your GP—please come forward. That is one reason why we have launched the “Help Us, Help You” campaign. We have also provided additional funding for rapid diagnostic centres.

[902601] **Chris Loder** (West Dorset) (Con) [V]: Good afternoon from West Dorset, Mr Speaker. Constituents of mine have been in touch to say that they are struggling to get GP appointments either because there are not any, or because they are struggling with online booking and telephone consultations. That is resulting in people going to A&E, putting more pressures on their hospitals. What is my right hon. Friend doing to ensure that constituents, especially older constituents, can access a GP face to face if they need to?

Sajid Javid: I think we would all agree in this House that GP practices have done a magnificent job in responding to the pandemic, and I want to take this opportunity to thank all GPs and their staff for the work that they have done and that they continue to do. My hon. Friend is right to raise the issue of face-to-face access. We can all understand why it changed during the pandemic, but as we open up, we can start to provide more of this, particularly for older people. Over the coming weeks and months, that will be a priority for my Department.

[902598] **Taiwo Owatemi** (Coventry North West) (Lab): Cancer Research UK estimates that, compared with pre-pandemic levels, nearly 45,000 fewer patients started cancer treatment in the UK in April 2020 to March 2021. It believes that this stems from there being less diagnosis during the pandemic. In England alone, 10,500 of those missing cases were breast cancer cases. What steps are the Government taking to reach out to those at risk of cancer who have not been diagnosed due to limited NHS access over the past 18 months?

Sajid Javid: As I said in response to an earlier question, this is a huge priority for the Government and, again, I am pleased that the hon. Lady has raised the issue. It is

an issue for her constituents and for constituents throughout the country. She referred to the research by Cancer Research UK. I am afraid that it is right: there are thousands of people who did not come forward. We can understand why, so let me say this again as it is so important: for anyone concerned, please do come forward. We have provided additional funding—more than £1 billion—for more diagnostics and we will continue to provide additional support.

[902602] **Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con) [V]: In vitro fertilisation treatment is a lifeline for many people desperate to conceive. My constituent Sarah Barker dreams of being a mother, but sadly suffers from an infertility problem. Sarah is being refused IVF treatment on the grounds that her partner already has a daughter from a previous relationship. Her petition to stop denying women fertility treatment for this reason has already reached almost 13,000 signatures. Does my hon. Friend agree that treatment for infertility should be available based on the medical needs of the women involved, and not affected by the partner that she has fallen in love with having a child from a previous relationship?

The Minister for Care (Helen Whately): I thank my hon. Friend for raising this question and the situation of her constituent. What I can say is that we expect clinical commissioning groups to commission fertility services in line with National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines, so that there is equitable access across England. We are aware of some variations in access, and we are looking at how we can address that. Very specifically, CCGs should not be using criteria outside that NICE fertility guidance.

[902599] **Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): Many of my constituents who are extremely clinically vulnerable due to conditions such as blood cancer are terrified that, from 19 July, the Government are effectively abdicating responsibility for keeping them safe in public. There is evidence that more than two thirds of people do not understand that vaccines are not always effective for people who are immunocompromised or the importance of wearing a mask to protect others and to alleviate anxiety. Can the Secretary of State not see why it would send a much clearer message to keep masks on public transport mandatory, rather than leaving the safety of clinically vulnerable residents to chance?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady is right to raise this issue. As she has rightly explained, there will be a number of people who, understandably, will be concerned about the move away from regulations to guidance. None the less, there must come a point when we start to remove the restrictions slowly, in a measured way, as we are doing—not least because we want to be able to start dealing much more with all the non-covid health problems that have been created as well. We have provided very clear guidance on masks and it was published yesterday. I hope that the hon. Lady can share that with people who are concerned.

[902603] **Paul Holmes** (Eastleigh) (Con) [V]: We know that there have been hidden costs to the restrictions that are in place to protect us, including worsening mental

health and the risk of domestic violence. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the need to balance those risks with the reduced threat posed by the virus is a key part of the Government's decision to lift restrictions?

Sajid Javid: Yes, I can confirm that. Removing restrictions is not without risk—I accept that—but keeping restrictions is not without cost. As my hon. Friend points out, the restrictions have led to increased domestic violence, child abuse, mental health issues and undiagnosed cancer, which we have heard about today, to name but a few. As we start lifting restrictions, that means that we can better deal with all these major non-covid health problems.

Mr Speaker: Wendy Chamberlain is not here, so I call Jason McCartney.

[902606] **Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): I have been contacted by a number of my Colne Valley constituents who have had operations and medical procedures cancelled or postponed at short notice. With coronavirus cases still on the rise, what is the strategy to tackle the backlog in operations and medical procedures?

The Minister for Health (Edward Argar): My hon. Friend rightly raises an issue that I know will be a concern for constituents of all Members of this House. The backlog of treatment—the waiting list—is over 5 million. However, we are making rapid progress with that, and so is the NHS. We are looking at a variety of ways to do that—not just providing the funding needed to do it, but through innovation, accelerator hubs and diagnostic hubs, all designed to get the waiting list down and to get people the treatment they need when they need it. I would be very happy to discuss the specifics of my hon. Friend's local situation with him outside this place.

Mr Speaker: Wendy Chamberlain was online, so let us go to Wendy. Welcome, Wendy.

[902604] **Wendy Chamberlain** (North East Fife) (LD) [V]: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. When I return to my constituency of North East Fife, I will cross into Scotland, where the mandating of face masks is likely to continue. Is it the Government's expectation that

passengers will wear a mask only when they cross into Scotland—or, indeed, Wales? What consultation has happened with the Home Office in relation to guidance to the British Transport police? Do the Government accept that a lack of a four-nations approach to such measures is not helpful?

Sajid Javid: Throughout the pandemic, my predecessor and other Ministers have rightly been working with the devolved Administrations, and of course that work continues; it will remain a priority. I myself have already started weekly meetings with all my counterparts in the devolved Administrations. We discuss a number of issues and keep each other informed, but we also respect that in certain areas, in dealing with this pandemic, we may take a different course.

[902605] **Rushanara Ali** (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab) [V]: I congratulate the Secretary of State on his appointment. Cases of covid rose by 30% last week compared with the previous week, and on 10 July we saw over 35,000 new cases, the highest since 22 January. By mid-August we could see 1,000 people a day being hospitalised, and up to 200 people a day could die, despite the excellent vaccination programmes. Given that the Secretary of State now considers it irresponsible not to wear masks, is it not equally irresponsible for the Government not to require people to continue to wear masks rather than leaving it as an option?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady understandably talks about the link between case numbers and hospitalisation. She will know that the last time we saw cases at 30,000 and above on a daily basis, we saw a lot more hospitalisations. The reason for the difference now is the vaccine wall of defence. Masks do have an important role to play, but we think that that role can be played by moving from regulation to guidance.

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

12.33 pm

Sitting suspended.

Points of Order

12.37 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Select Committee on Home Affairs had been seeking to visit Napier barracks and Tug Haven reception centre for asylum seekers. We approached the Home Office four weeks ago. We had planned to visit today, but we have not received any response from the Home Office, and as a result we are here, not there. Given the importance of this, given the court judgments there have been about Napier barracks, and given our Committee's ongoing inquiry into this matter, the whole Committee is very concerned about the lack of response and our inability to facilitate this visit. Please can you advise me and the Committee on the responsibilities of the Home Office to work with the Committee to facilitate scrutiny and visits such as these, and on what more we should do to try to get such a visit before the summer recess?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Member and to her Committee colleague, the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who I think also has a point of order. I will take that as well, and then I will respond.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I am grateful, because I think the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee slightly underplays the urgency of this matter. For the past month, we have been asking to visit Napier. We have been fobbed off numerous times, and I have to say that this is not an isolated incident: increasingly, it is

becoming difficult to get responses from Home Office officials and Ministers, never mind to get them in front of us here in a timely fashion.

This particular visit is directly related to some evidence that was given to us by Ministers, which has now turned out to be highly questionable, and which impacts on reviews and reports that we are currently preparing. We wanted very urgently to visit Napier barracks, but that probably cannot now happen before the summer recess. How on earth can we get responses from the Home Office in a timely fashion without Committee members and officials wasting time in constantly chasing them, or having to raise it on the Floor of the House, as the Chair of the Select Committee and others have done on countless occasions?

Mr Speaker: I have repeatedly stressed the importance of Select Committees and the essential scrutiny work that they undertake. I am very happy to do so again. For the Committees' work to be effective, Departments need to be constructive and helpful when Committees make responsible and reasonable requests, whether they are about finding time for Ministers and officials to give evidence or, in this case, facilitating visits. It is simply unacceptable that the Committee has not had a response to the request made four weeks ago about a visit. That is discourteous to the Committee and, therefore, the House. Ministers on the Treasury Bench will have heard this exchange. I hope the matter can now be resolved speedily. This is coming not from one side, but from both sides of the House. Select Committees are important for scrutinising the Government's business. It is important for the Government to recognise that. The sooner this can be fixed, the better; the happier I will be, and so will the House.

Electric Vehicle Charging Points (New Buildings)

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

12.41 pm

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about electric vehicle charging points in new buildings; and for connected purposes.

The UK is one of the leaders—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. In fairness to hon. Members who are speaking, I point out that the cameras pick up Members who are going to their seats and who block the view of the Member speaking. I know that it is important to get people into the Chamber, but this is a ten-minute rule Bill, and there is plenty of time for people to come in. Think of others, please.

Felicity Buchan: The UK is one of the leaders in combating climate change and I am rightly proud of that record. Since 1990, the UK has decarbonised at the fastest rate of any G20 country and of course, we were the first to legislate for net zero by 2050. Last December, we went one step further and said that we would have an interim target of a 68% reduction by 2030. That is rightly an ambitious target and I am glad about that. However, if we are to achieve it, we need to focus on our transport sector.

Transport is the biggest emitter of carbon in the entire country. Last year, it accounted for 29.8% of total emissions. If we look forward to 2035, that is likely to increase as a percentage share. Cars account for 55% of those emissions. If we add in light vans, that increases to almost two thirds. Hence we can see how vital it is that we transition to electric vehicles.

I am glad that the Government have brought forward to 2030 the date when we ban the sale of new petrol and diesel cars. That is a huge achievement. However, it is important that we not only set targets but put in place concrete steps to achieve them. That is why I am introducing this ten-minute rule Bill today. It will mandate that all new homes and office buildings should have electric vehicle charging points.

I am delighted that the Bill has the support of two Opposition Members—one from the Scottish National party and one from the Democratic Unionist party—and the support of other colleagues on the Government Benches whom I could not list in the list of sponsors.

The Government did undertake a consultation in 2019 on mandating electric vehicle charging points in new buildings, but we have not yet seen legislation as a result. However, I hope that this Bill is very timely because we should imminently have both the transport decarbonisation plan and the infrastructure strategy plan. I do not want to be too forward, but it would be good to see the Government adopting the thread of the Bill.

Let me set out why I think this is so critically important. Constituents say that their one reservation about buying electric vehicles is concern about the reliability of the infrastructure and the charging network. Because of their concerns about that reliability, they become concerned about range—so-called range anxiety. By mandating that all new-build offices and homes have these charging

points, we will be able to address a lot of these concerns. Residential users will know that they can charge their cars overnight, and people, like many in my constituency, who only have on-street parking will have confidence that they can charge their cars at their offices. It will also, importantly, relieve some of the pressure on on-street parking and on the general grid of the charging network.

The Bill is very important from a safety perspective. It is clearly better that people charge their cars at home with proper chargers rather than some of the ad hoc charging methods that we see at the moment, such as extension leads dangling through windows going towards on-street parking. I am glad to say that the Bill has the support of Electrical Safety First. It is way cheaper to install electric charging points at the point of construction rather than retrofitting. The latest data shows that to retrofit an electric vehicle charging point costs £2,040 but to install it from new costs only £976. It is also very important for the uptake of electric vehicles in rural communities. At the moment, inner cities, like my own City of London, do have good uptake, but all new-builds having these charging points will definitely help in rural communities, where 68% of journeys are done by car.

The Bill is also important because it forces developers to buy into net zero. That means that this is in everyone's mind, because whenever people are in their house or in their office and see an electric vehicle charging point, they realise that the new norm is electric vehicles—because we do need to make it the new norm.

While this Bill does not seek to address all the issues with electric vehicles, we clearly do need a comprehensive and strategic national grid of charging points. We also need to focus on the consumer experience in terms of interoperability. This Bill will go a small way to encourage the uptake of electric vehicles, which is critical to meeting our target for net zero and making the world a better place.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Felicity Buchan, Alan Brown, Tracey Crouch, Philip Dunne, Simon Fell, Damian Green, Mrs Pauline Latham, Tim Loughton, Cheryllyn Mackrory, Selaine Saxby, Andrew Selous and Jim Shannon present the Bill.

Felicity Buchan accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 October and to be printed (Bill 146).

Mr Speaker: I suspend the House for one minute while necessary arrangements are made for the next business.

12.50 pm

Sitting suspended.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Speaker shall put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to Treasury Update on International Aid not later than three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion for this Order; proceedings relating to the motion on Treasury Update on International Aid may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Jacob Rees-Mogg.*)

International Aid: Treasury Update

12.51 pm

Mr Speaker: Before we come to the next item of business, I wish to remind the House that, on 7 June, I said:

“the House has not...had an opportunity for a decisive vote on maintaining the UK’s commitment to the statutory target of 0.7%. I expect the Government to find a way to have this important matter debated and to allow the House formally to take an effective decision.”—[*Official Report*, 7 June 2021; Vol. 696, c. 667.]

The Government have now come forward with today’s motion and the written ministerial statements to which it relates.

The motion before us may not be the preferred way of dealing with the issue for some hon. and right hon. Members, in that the formal procedural consequences of voting against the motion are limited and the motion itself is not amendable. However, it facilitates a dedicated debate on the subject, and the written ministerial statement commits the Government very clearly to a certain course of action in the event of today’s motion being negatived. The Government have assured me that they will not resile from such a commitment, which represents a very significant step forward in the House’s ability to scrutinise the Government’s policy on this important matter.

I personally would like to thank the Government Front Bench for enabling this debate to take place, and I thank them for respecting this House.

12.53 pm

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Written Ministerial Statement relating to Treasury Update on International Aid, which was made to the House on Monday 12 July.

I believe that, on this vital subject, there is common ground between the Government and hon. Members on both sides of the House, in the sense that we believe in the power of aid to transform millions of lives. That is why we continue to agree that the UK should dedicate 0.7% of our gross national income to official development assistance.

This is not an argument about principle. The only question is when we return to 0.7%. My purpose today is to describe how we propose to achieve this shared goal in an affordable way.

Here we must face the harsh fact that the world is now enduring a catastrophe of a kind that happens only once a century. This pandemic has cast our country into its deepest recession on record, paralysing our national life, threatening the survival of entire sectors of the economy and causing my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to find over £407 billion to safeguard jobs and livelihoods and to support businesses and public services across the United Kingdom. He has managed that task with consummate skill and ingenuity, but everyone will accept that, when we are suddenly compelled to spend £407 billion on sheltering our people from an economic hurricane never experienced in living memory, there must inevitably be consequences for other areas of public spending.

Last year, under the pressure of the emergency, our borrowing increased fivefold to almost £300 billion—more than 14% of GDP, the highest since the second world war. This year, our national debt is climbing towards 100% of GDP, the highest for nearly six decades. The House knows that the Government have been compelled

to take wrenching decisions, and the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015 expressly provides that fiscal circumstances can allow departure from the 0.7% target.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend and the Chancellor for their constructive engagement with those of us who have been profoundly concerned about our departure from the aid target. Will he reconfirm to me and to the House that this is not a fiscal trap, and that the mechanism set out in a written ministerial statement is a genuine and full-hearted attempt to return to our commitment of 0.7% at the very earliest economically sustainable opportunity?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his work on and expertise in this matter. I know how deeply he cares about this, in common with many other Members across the House, and I can indeed give him that confirmation. The decision that we made was temporary, to reduce our aid budget to 0.5% of national income.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: With great respect, if the House will allow me, I will make as much progress as I can in this speech, and then allow the, I think, 77 others who wish to contribute to have their say, so I will not take any more interventions.

In the teeth of this crisis, amid all the other calls on our resources, we can take pride in the fact that the UK will still invest at least £10 billion in aid this year—more, as a share of our GDP, than Canada, Japan, Italy and the United States. It would be a travesty if hon. Members were to give the impression that the UK is somehow retreating from the field of international development or lacking in global solidarity. As I speak, this country is playing a vital role in the biggest and fastest global vaccination programme in history. We helped to create COVAX, the coalition to vaccinate the developing world, and we have invested over half a billion pounds in this crucial effort, which has so far distributed more than 100 million doses to 135 countries.

The Government’s agreement with Oxford University and AstraZeneca succeeded in producing the world’s most popular vaccine, with over 500 million doses released to the world, mainly to low and middle-income countries, saving lives every hour of every day. The UK’s expertise and resources have been central to the global response to the emergency, discovering both the vaccine and the first life-saving treatment for covid. We have secured agreement from our friends in the G7 to provide a billion vaccines to protect the world by the end of next year, and 100 million will come from the UK. We are the third biggest sovereign donor to the World Health Organisation, and the top donor to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, which vaccinates children against killer diseases.

We are devoting £11.6 billion, double our previous commitment, to helping developing countries to deal with climate change, including by protecting their forests and introducing green energy. I can tell the House that this vital investment will be protected.

[The Prime Minister]

When it comes to addressing one of the world's gravest injustices—the tragedy that millions of girls are denied the chance to go to school—the UK has pledged more than any other country, £430 million, to the Global Partnership for Education, in addition to the £400 million that we will spend on girls' education this year.

Later this month, I will co-host a summit of the partnership in London with President Kenyatta of Kenya. Wherever civil wars are displacing millions or threatening to inflict famine in Syria, Yemen, Ethiopia or elsewhere, the UK is responding with over £900 million of help this year, making our country the third-largest bilateral humanitarian donor in the world. It bears repeating that we are doing this in the midst of a terrible crisis, when our public finances are under greater strain than ever before in peacetime history and every pound we spend in aid has to be borrowed. It represents not our money, but money we are taking from future generations.

Last year, we dissolved the old divide between aid and diplomacy that once ran through the entire Whitehall machine, by creating the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. In doing so, my objective was to ensure that every diplomat in our service was actuated by the mission and vision of our finest development officials, and that our aid was better in tune with our national values and our desire to be a force for good in the world. So I can assure any hon. Member who wishes to make the case for aid that they are, when it comes to me or to anyone in the Government, preaching to the converted. We shall act on that conviction by returning to 0.7% as soon as two vital tests have been satisfied. The first is that the UK is no longer borrowing to cover current or day-to-day expenditure. The second is that public debt, excluding the Bank of England, is falling as a share of GDP.

Mr Mitchell: Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I am just coming to the end. The moment the Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts show that both of those conditions will sustainably be met, from the point at which they are met we will willingly restore our aid budget to 0.7%.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: Plenty of people want to speak in this debate. The Government will of course review the situation every year and place a statement before this House in accordance with the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015. But as we conduct that annual review, we will fervently wish to find that our conditions have been satisfied. This is one debate where the Government and hon. Members from across the House share the same objective—

Yvette Cooper: Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I am sure the right hon. Lady will have plenty of time later on.

As I was saying, we share the same objective and the same fundamental convictions. We all believe in the principle that aid can transform lives, and by voting for

this motion, hon. Members will provide certainty for our aid budget and an affordable path back to 0.7%, while also allowing for investment in other priorities, including the NHS, schools and the police. As soon as circumstances allow and the tests are met, we will return to the target that unites us, and I commend this motion to the House.

1.2 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I start by thanking you, Mr Speaker, and hon. Members from across the House for ensuring that this debate took place today. In particular, I thank the right hon. Members for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) and for Maidenhead (Mrs May). I think they are the “lefty” propagandists that the Prime Minister was talking about a couple of weeks ago. I have to say that if the Prime Minister had confidence in the arguments he is making to this House, he would have given way to them a moment ago so that his arguments could be tested. He does not have confidence in them, otherwise he would have done so—that is obvious already. However, we do welcome the chance to debate this motion.

The motion is broad and, if I may say so, from this Prime Minister it is typically slippery. The House should have had the opportunity for a straight up/down vote on whether to approve or reject the Government's cut to overseas aid to 0.5%. This motion does not do that. But the Chancellor's written ministerial statement is clear: if the motion is carried, the cut in overseas aid to 0.5% will effectively carry on indefinitely. I will expand on that point in just a moment—[*Interruption.*] I will expand on that point and take interventions on it.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Keir Starmer: I am going to develop that argument. When I get to it, I will give way so that that argument can be tested, in the usual way. But if the motion is rejected,

“the Government would consequently return to spending 0.7% of GNI on international aid in the next calendar year”.—[*Official Report*, 12 July 2021; Vol. 699, c. 4WS.]

Let me be clear: Labour will vote to reject this motion tonight and to return overseas aid to 0.7% of GNI.

Mr Harper: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Keir Starmer: I am going to summarise my argument—[*Interruption.*] I am going make my argument, and when I get to the relevant part, I will take interventions.

The case that we make is this: first, that the cut is wrong because investing 0.7% on international aid is in Britain's national interest; secondly, because the economic criteria set out by the Chancellor would lead to an indefinite cut that is likely to last beyond this Parliament; and, thirdly, because it matters that this House keeps its word to the voters who elected us. Every Member here—every Member here—was elected on a manifesto to retain the 0.7% target, and it matters that we keep our promises to the world's poorest, particularly at such a time of global uncertainty.

Mr Harper: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way. I agree with him about keeping promises, and Conservative Members

were also elected to keep fiscal promises to reduce our debt and not to borrow for day-to-day spending. I hope in his remarks he will set out, given that he is not going to support this motion, which areas of spending he is going to cut to pay for it or which taxes he is going to raise. If he does not do either of those things, then I am afraid his promises and his vote today are hollow, and no one will believe him.

Keir Starmer: I have to say that it is a bit rich from someone who may break the manifesto commitment to say that the vote today and the words today are hollow, but just to take that straight on, it is a false economy, I am afraid. Cutting aid will increase costs and have a big impact on our economy. Development aid—we all know this—reduces conflict, disease and people fleeing from their homes. It is a false economy to pretend that this is some sort of cut that does not have consequences.

Mr Mitchell: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is making a House of Commons speech, not a partisan speech. Can I ask him what I would have asked the Prime Minister if the Prime Minister had given way? First, will he confirm that the cut we are discussing today is 1% of the borrowing the Prime Minister described that he quite rightly sanctioned last year? Secondly, will he underline the fact that this was an all-party promise made at the general election by every single one of us, and we really should not break our promises to the poorest in this terrible way?

Keir Starmer: Yes and yes. It was not ambivalent in the manifestos and it was not conditional; it was clear.

On the first part of the argument—the national interest—British aid saves lives, it builds a more secure world, and it promotes democracy and British soft power. For the last 20 years, that has been the political consensus across this House. Tony Blair and Gordon Brown first set the goal of the UK reaching the 0.7% target—*[Interruption.]* I am making a speech to the House and for the House. David Cameron and the right hon. Member for Maidenhead made it a reality, and we acknowledge that in the right way. It has been supported—*[Interruption.]* The chuntering is all very well, but this has been a cross-party position for 20 years, and successive Prime Ministers have kept to the commitment. Every other living Prime Minister thinks this is wrong; there is only one Prime Minister who is prepared to do this, and he is sitting there, on the Front Bench. I acknowledge what those on the Benches opposite did in relation to this—the previous Prime Minister is sitting opposite. I am openly acknowledging that, and it has been supported by all parties, and rightly so. As the sixth richest country in the world, Britain has a moral obligation to help the world's poorest, and our aid budget has done that with fantastic results.

Dame Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Keir Starmer: I will in a moment.

This has been providing education for women and girls; fighting poverty; providing sanitation, healthcare and vaccines; building resilience and infrastructure; and doing incredible post-conflict and reconstruction work, where I think Britain does a better job than anyone else, so it has real results. Let us be clear what these cuts

would mean: 1 million girls losing out on schooling; nearly 3 million women and children going without life-saving nutrition; 5.6 million children left unvaccinated; an estimated 100,000 deaths worldwide. *[Interruption]* The Prime Minister says “Rubbish”; that is the human toll of the choices the Government are making, and it is not rubbish.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The case being made by the right hon. and learned Gentleman is that the Prime Minister is making a promise he will not keep, but what did Tony Blair and Gordon Brown do? They made a promise but they never, ever spent 0.7% of GDP on aid, and therefore the right hon. and learned Gentleman's speech lacks all moral force.

Keir Starmer: They more than doubled it; they set the goal, and then successive Prime Ministers implemented that goal. That is such a weak argument—11 years into this Government that is such a weak argument. When I was Director of Public Prosecutions, which has a five-year term, the very idea that I could turn around four or five years into the role and say it was somebody else's fault five, 10, 15, 20 years ago—I have always found such an argument particularly weak. This is such a bad argument but it is used all the time. They have been in power for 11 years; either take responsibility for what you are doing or give up.

Our overseas aid budget goes beyond that moral obligation: it also helps build a more stable world and keeps us safer in the UK. In Afghanistan aid has supported improvements in security, in governance, in economic development and in rights for women and girls, yet, despite all the challenges that that country now faces and the security and terrorist threats that that poses to the UK—we know about those, and the previous Prime Minister the right hon. Member for Maidenhead knows about them—UK aid to Afghanistan is being cut from £192.3 million to £38.2 million. That is Afghanistan. *[Interruption.]* The Prime Minister chunters, but they are actually the Government figures. In Yemen, where there is the biggest humanitarian crisis in the world, UK aid has been cut by nearly 60%; in Syria, the Government are slashing aid by around 50%; and for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh there is a cut of 42%. All of those decisions will create more refugees, more instability and more people having to flee their homes.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of the words of General James Mattis, the former United States Defence Secretary? When President Trump proposed cutting overseas aid, General Mattis said, “Fine, cut it, but you will have to give me, the Defence Secretary, more money to buy more bullets.”

Keir Starmer: I am aware of that, and it exposes the false economy argument in the Prime Minister's case.

This cut will also reduce UK influence just when it is needed most, and of course it risks leaving a vacuum that other countries—China and Russia, for example—will fill. At a time when Britain will host COP26 and has hosted the G7 we should be using every means at our disposal to create a fairer and safer world, but we are the only G7 country that is cutting our aid budget—the only G7 country. That is not the vision of global Britain

[*Keir Starmer*]

that those of us on the Labour Benches want to see, and I do not think it is the vision of global Britain that many on the Benches opposite want to see either.

Dame Andrea Leadsom: All of us in this House long to see our aid commitments re-established at 0.7% of national income, but the Leader of the Opposition will nevertheless appreciate that we continue to be one of the most generous foreign aid donors. He is making a good point about the 0.7%, but can he explain why, in all the Labour years of Labour Government, they averaged 0.36% of national income on overseas aid?

Keir Starmer: They doubled it, actually.

Let me turn to my second point, which has already been debated: the economic argument behind the Government's position. The Prime Minister and Chancellor say that these cuts are unavoidable because of the pandemic and the economic consequences we now find ourselves in, but the whole point of the 0.7% target is that it is relative to the UK's economic success or challenges: it rises when we grow and falls when we experience economic shock like the pandemic. Nobody in this House is arguing for overseas aid to be maintained at the pre-pandemic level during the downturn in strict terms. We all recognise that a contracting economy means a relative contraction in our aid budget, but the Chancellor and Prime Minister are asking the House to agree to go beyond that, to impose a new target of 0.5% and to create entirely new criteria for ever returning to 0.7%. In effect, the Chancellor is proposing a double lock against reverting to 0.7%. The written ministerial statement makes it clear that Britain will go back to 0.7% only when public debt is falling as a percentage of GDP and there is a "current budget surplus".

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): Will the right hon. and learned Member give way?

Keir Starmer: Let me make this point, and the Prime Minister can intervene if he wants. On the former point, the Office for Budget Responsibility does not predict public debt falling as a percentage of GDP until 2024 or 2025 at the earliest. If the Prime Minister wants to intervene, I am ready. That would mean returning to 0.7% will not happen in any year in this Parliament. I am clear about that. Does anyone want to intervene? That is the OBR's prediction.

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for allowing me to intervene. Perhaps he can help in ascertaining when those targets would have been met in the past 20 years.

Keir Starmer: Well, that is a very good point. I think it is once in 20 years. However, there are two points here and, if there is a contrary argument, the Prime Minister can make it. On the first point, the OBR does not predict a fall in debt as a percentage of GDP until 2024 to 2025. Therefore, anybody voting tonight who is pretending to themselves that the cut is temporary and will be changed in a year or two is not looking at the facts. If anybody wants to say they have better statistics and the OBR has got it completely wrong, please do so—that includes the Prime Minister.

On the second point, the OBR does not forecast a current surplus for its entire forecast period. In fact, there is no expected timeline for that criterion to be met at all. What the Chancellor is setting out is not a temporary cut in overseas aid; it is an indefinite cut. Let me remind the House that only, I think, five times in the past 30 years has a current budget surplus been run—four of them, I might add, were under a Labour Government and one under the Conservatives—so the chances of those criteria being met under a Conservative Chancellor are remote at best. All the more so, because the statement creates an artificial £4.3 billion fiscal penalty for any Chancellor who seeks to rebalance the Budget. So this is an indefinite cut—it is not going to be reversed next year or the year after—and, however much the Prime Minister shakes his head, there is no contrary argument.

This is not just about economic necessity; a political choice is being made. Not only is it against our national interest but it further erodes trust in our politics. That brings me to my third point: trust. There is now a central divide in British politics and across the world between those who value truth, integrity and honesty and those who bask in breaking them. We were all elected on manifestos that committed to the 0.7% target. I am proud to have stood on that commitment and I know that many hon. Members across the House are as well.

Mr Simon Clarke: Will the right hon. and learned Member give way?

Keir Starmer: I will in just a moment. Let me quote page 53 of the Conservative manifesto, which says:

"We will proudly maintain our commitment to spend 0.7 per cent of GNI on development".

Do not shake your head, Prime Minister—it is there in black and white. As Conservative Members have said, that is not equivocal or conditional. It was a clear promise to voters and it should be honoured. If it is not, where does that leave us? There are already countless examples of the Prime Minister breaking his promises, such as: no hard border in the Irish Sea; no cuts to our armed forces; and an already-prepared plan for social care—the list is endless. That matters. It matters to the British people that they can trust a Prime Minister to honour a clear commitment. It matters to our reputation around the globe that the word of the British Government will hold in good times and bad.

Today, the House has the chance to stand up for a better kind of politics for the national interest, to do what we know is right and to honour our commitments to the world's poorest. When the Division is called, Labour MPs will do so, and I am sure that others on the Conservative Benches will do so. I urge all Members to do so.

Mr Speaker: Order. I just remind all Members that there is a three-minute limit.

1.19 pm

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): I thank you, Mr Speaker, and the Government for enabling this debate today.

I stood on a manifesto commitment to maintain international aid funding at 0.7% of gross national income—and not just that, because we said:

"We will proudly maintain our commitment to spend 0.7 per cent of GNI on development".

Early last year, the pandemic hit. It had an immediate negative effect on the economy, yet in September 2020, when that effect on the economy had been seen, when public spending was increasing and when the Government were already borrowing hundreds of billions of pounds, they confirmed in their response to the fourth report of the International Development Committee that they would honour that manifesto commitment, saying:

“a commitment enshrined in law and one to which the new Department”—

the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office—
“will honour its responsibilities.”

The Government went on to say that investing that 0.7% was at the heart of the vision of the Government’s integrated review for the UK

“as an active, internationalist, problem-solving and burden-sharing nation.”

Where is that vision now, as the Government turn their back on some of the poorest in the world?

With GNI falling, our funding for aid was falling in any case. To reduce it from 0.7% to 0.5% is a double blow. This is not about palaces for dictators and vanity projects; it is about what cuts to funding mean: fewer girls will be educated, more girls and boys will become slaves, more children will go hungry and more of the poorest people in the world will die.

The Government have promised what they see as a compromise, and I am grateful to the Chancellor for speaking to me last night. I asked how long it would take before the tests are met and we return to 0.7%. I was told, “Four to five years, but it could be sooner, because the economy is recovering so well.” If the motion is defeated tonight, it will be 0.7% from January next year. The Government appear to be saying to us, “We cannot afford 0.7% next year because the economy is doing so badly, but actually the economy is doing so well that we could very well be able to restore 0.7% very soon”. The Government cannot have it both ways.

I certainly doubt whether the tests will ever be met in five years’ time. Meeting them depends not only on a significant recovery in the economy—the Office for Budget Responsibility is forecasting trend growth of less than 2%—but on the Government reining in their inclination to continue to increase public spending. We are told that there will be dire consequences for tax and public spending if this motion is defeated. We have borrowed £400 billion—where are the dire warnings about that? It seems that £4 billion is really bad news; £400 billion—who cares?

Finally, as has been pointed out, the two tests have only been met in one calendar year in the past 20 years. I have been in this House for nearly a quarter of a century. During that time, I have never voted against a three-line Whip from my party. As Prime Minister, I suffered at the hands of rebels. I know what it is like to see party colleagues voting against their Government. We made a promise to the poorest people in the world. The Government have broken that promise. This motion means that promise may be broken for years to come. With deep regret, I will vote against the motion today.

1.22 pm

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): There is not a single nation on the planet that has escaped the devastation of this global pandemic, and there is not a single person who is pretending that the challenge of recovery from

covid is easy. We also know that it has been the poorest of our own society who have been hit the hardest over the past 18 months. Tragically, that has been replicated across the globe. Inequality has widened. Millions have been pushed into poverty. Development gains have been reversed, and it is the poorest and most vulnerable in our societies who are dying.

We therefore need a global recovery that builds forward better, creates a fairer, more inclusive and more sustainable world and ultimately honours the millions who have lost or are losing their lives to this terrible pandemic. In order to do that, the wealthiest countries in the world, of which the UK is one, must step up to tackle the great challenges facing humanity, not step away. However, it is with the deepest regret that this UK Government’s callous cut to the aid budget is not only jeopardising those efforts, but will mean that the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world will pay the ultimate price. Make no mistake: these cuts will cost lives.

The UK Government are making a desperate effort to stress the economic necessity of cutting aid from 0.7% to 0.5% of GNI. They are desperate to talk about fiscal tests, borrowing levels and tax receipts, but they do not want to address the questions that put them to shame. How many children will go without an education? How many girls will be forced into unwanted marriages and teenage pregnancies? Ultimately, how many individuals will die needlessly because of this Government’s decision? Those are questions that the Government have run away from, just as they have run away from this debate and this vote for the past six months.

It should simply never have come to this. This Parliament should have had a vote on the aid cut before it was implemented, but instead the Government pressed ahead with international austerity on the backs of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people. Without consultation with those most in need, without any impact assessment and without any debate in this Parliament, the Government made their decision based on a Treasury spreadsheet. With a stroke of a pen, they signed the death sentence—a policy that will lead to 1 million children’s excess deaths.

Those who are considering voting in favour of the motion should reflect on these questions. Are they building forward and leaving no one behind in a global strategy against covid? Are they honouring the millions who are losing their lives and the many more millions who will lose their livelihoods as a result of the pandemic? Are they happy to sign that death sentence?

Let us look at a few examples of the life-saving aid programmes that have been curtailed or cancelled, with horrifying consequences right now. Yemen is the world’s worst humanitarian disaster, where 20 million people are suffering from hunger and malnutrition. Many of them face famine after years of war. Despite that, the UK Government have slashed their humanitarian funding to the country by more than 60%. The UN Secretary-General put it bluntly:

“Millions of Yemeni children, women and men desperately need aid to live. Cutting aid is a death sentence.”

Given that 400,000 children under five might starve to death in Yemen alone this year, how on earth can this Government defend themselves?

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point about Yemen, although it should be acknowledged that the

[Tim Loughton]

UK gave aid to Yemen well in excess of what we had budgeted for, and that we have a very generous record. Does he agree that it is not only a question of emergency aid? If we are to find peace in that country, we will need to give aid for its reconstruction to keep it out of civil war and famine again, so it is entirely the wrong time not to step up with the money necessary for a lasting peace.

Chris Law: I agree with every point that the hon. Member makes. It is important for our national security and in our national interest to be stepping up at this point, not stepping away.

The UK Government's funding to the United Nations Population Fund, which provides contraceptives and reproductive health supplies globally, is being cut by a staggering 85%. Yes, Mr Speaker, you heard that correctly: 85%. The UNFPA has stated:

"These cuts will be devastating for women and girls and their families across the world."

The money being withheld by this Government would have helped to prevent a quarter of a million child and maternal deaths, nearly 15 million unintended pregnancies and more than 4 million unsafe abortions.

A third example, which just shows how ridiculous the cuts are, is that tens of thousands of people are likely to die needlessly because nearly 300 million doses of medicine for the treatment of neglected diseases in Africa are at risk of expiring following the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's announcement that it is almost entirely withdrawing its allocated funding. So far, the UK Government have not confirmed that the expiring medicines will be distributed urgently rather than destroyed. What an utter folly—an absence of simple human decency. Hon. Members voting on the motion must tell their constituents that, because these are the simple facts.

Those are just three examples that cover women's reproductive rights, disease prevention and urgent humanitarian assistance, but cuts are happening across the board. Programmes to eradicate poverty, to prevent conflict or even to combat climate change—in the year that we will host COP26 in Glasgow—are all suffering a similar fate. Each budget reduced, each project scaled back and each programme cancelled results in a loss of hard-fought progress, a loss of expertise and, fundamentally, a loss of trust. This so-called temporary measure will inflict long-term damage and long-term pain and suffering, which is why the cut must be urgently reversed. The Government are pretending that there is no other option than to cut from 0.7% to 0.5%, but we know that that is not the case. In fact, it is blatantly not the case.

It must have been a complete humiliation for the UK Government when they hosted the G7 summit in Cornwall last month, which should have been a moment of pride in demonstrating our shared collective values. This House may ask why. It is because every other G7 country has recognised the necessity of helping those in urgent need at this time of unprecedented volatility and increased aid spending.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Member for giving way, but would he acknowledge that those countries may have raised spending from a much lower level and that we shall still be the third highest in the G7?

Chris Law: I thank the hon. Member for his comments. This is not a question of pride that we are still giving very generously—that we will be the third most generous. We are the sixth wealthiest nation. We keep talking about global Britain, but we are actually a shrinking Britain with these cuts. We are actually losing our soft power. You are going against national security. You are going against our collective national interest right across this House, with every party that is here today.

Sadly, because of these brutal cuts by the UK Government, the massive increase in spending—to come back to the hon. Gentleman's point—by Germany was effectively cancelled out. Within these islands, I should also add, the Scottish Government have increased their international aid budget by 50%. That puts this House, frankly, at shame with this motion.

It is simply a matter of political priorities, and this Chancellor and this Prime Minister have shown where their priorities lie. Let us not kid ourselves that this is being spent on health, welfare and education at home because it clearly is not. The Chancellor chose to take money away from preventing famine and malnutrition, conflict prevention, and protecting our planet and marginalised communities from the devastating effects of climate change. Instead—I am glad to see the Chancellor in his place—he chose to spend the money on enhanced cyberweapons, AI-enabled drones and, the biggest folly of all, increased stockpiles of nuclear weapons, weapons of mass destruction, after he delivered a windfall for the defence budget—in the very same month the cut from 0.7% to 0.5% was announced.

If that is not an act of national shame, let us look at the icing on the cake. The Prime Minister, who is no longer in his place—he should be embarrassed when I read this—believes that spending upwards of £200 million on a shiny brand new royal yacht, *Britannia 2.0*, is more important than using lifesaving aid to deliver a more just, peaceful and secure world. That is despite the fact of the royal family's complete displeasure. Mr Speaker, how un-British could that be?

Mr Speaker: Order. Normally, we do not bring the royal family into our debates. They are outside our debates. Those are the rules of the House.

Chris Law: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I raised it only because it is on the record elsewhere.

Even every former living Prime Minister has opposed this cut and continues to do so. The simple fact is that aid spending has always been in the Prime Minister's sights, ever since he described it as

"spending huge sums of British taxpayers' money as though we were some independent Scandinavian NGO"

and

"shovelling money out the door".

He has now chosen to go against a decades-long cross-party consensus, breaking his own manifesto promise and that of all his Conservative colleagues as he is dragged far right by the UK Independence party and the Brexit party, and implementing their promises to cut aid instead.

This will likely herald a new decade of austerity. Let us call it austerity 2.0. We all know what the first decade was like. There is nothing temporary about this motion. This is not global Britain; this is a nasty, short, poor, brutish and, most of all, very little Britain. Across this

House, we all stood on a manifesto commitment to protect the 0.7% spend on international development. That is, for those who are not very good at maths, 7p in every £10. When I describe that to children in primary schools I visit and to young people in my constituency, they are surprised at how little we spend as the sixth wealthiest nation in the world and they are right to be so.

Today, we have an opportunity to reaffirm our values, rather than be led into voting to balance the imaginary books on the backs of the world's poorest. We must all keep to our word to deliver on our promises to our fellow global citizens who are the most marginalised and vulnerable people on earth. If covid has taught us anything, it is that we all share in the same struggles and challenges, but also the hopes and dreams of a better future, working together as one planet and one community. Now more than ever before we must step up to support our global community, not step away. There is no honour for those who have suffered as a result of this pandemic in stepping away. There is no meaning in the phrase "building back better" if we turn our backs. For those who decide to vote for this immoral motion today, there is no place for you to hide. When asked the question, "Why did you vote for this?" by your own children, friends and family and, equally importantly, constituents, it will be an indelible mark against your opportunity to do the right thing here today and you will have to live with it for the rest of your time in this House.

1.35 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my interests, as set out in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

The Government have done the right thing today in ensuring that this House has a vote on this matter, and thank you, Mr Speaker, for standing up for Parliament in that respect. There is a straight choice here, as was outlined by the Leader of the House yesterday in his statement. It is between rejecting this motion, in which case the Government will restore the 0.7% from next year—that was the olive branch that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I suggested—and accepting this so-called "Treasury compromise". I tell the House that it is no compromise at all; it is a fiscal trap for the unwary.

First, it is quite possible that these conditions will never be met. We do not need to look in the crystal ball—we can read the book. It is indisputably the case that there has been only one occasion in the past two decades—in 2001—when these conditions would have been met. If we look at what the OBR has said, we see that it is incredibly clear that the debt to GDP measure will not fall until 2024-25 and day-to-day debt will not fall until 2025-26. Given that the 0.7% goes up and down with our economic performance, a very important point is that the 0.7% policy protects us in that respect.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend not accept that the OBR has exaggerated the gloom on the debt and deficit, particularly in the last two years? It exaggerated it by £50 billion for last year between November and March, so why on earth does he believe the OBR's gloomy figures now? I am sure we are going to get the deficit down.

Mr Mitchell: My right hon. Friend is looking in the crystal ball, but I have read in the book: in the past 20 years, this would have happened on just one occasion. So a vote for the Government tonight is a vote to end our 0.7% commitment.

Anthony Mangnall: I am sorry to interrupt my right hon. Friend, but does it say something when every economic and political commentator has said that this new mechanism will not see the 0.7% return in the way that it should and that this is a cop-out of the highest order?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As I said, this is a trap for the unwary and a tribute to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's silver tongue. So I shall certainly be voting against this motion and against the Government today. I shall do so with absolute conviction and profound disappointment. This is only the third time since I was elected in 1987 that I have voted against the Government, and on one of those occasions I was in the company of the Prime Minister in the Lobby. It is never easy to rebel and I thank those who have stood with us to support our manifesto. We should not be breaking our promise in this way. We should certainly not be seeking to balance the books on the backs of the poorest people in the world. I am incredibly proud to have been a member of a Conservative Administration who declined to do that even with the austerity that we faced.

For goodness sake, this is 1% of the borrowing that the Chancellor rightly made last year to shore up our country from covid. It is a tiny figure and it is the only cut that he has announced. That will have an enormous impact on our role in the world and, above all, on the huge number of people who will be severely damaged, maimed, blinded, as often happens, or indeed who will die as a result of the cuts. I remind the House that the cuts include a 25% cut to girls' education, which is a top priority of our Prime Minister and this Administration. For neglected tropical diseases—thank goodness, the philanthropists have stepped in for one year only to protect the British taxpayers' investment—we have cut aid by 90%. In Yemen, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) said, we have cut it by 60%, which is literally the equivalent of taking food away from starving people. This is what we are doing to the world's poorest. This is how we are trashing our international reputation. We are the only country in the G7 that is cutting in the middle of a pandemic. Everyone else is increasing. This is a decision that we do not need to make. Since we started this campaign, there has been a 9% increase in support across our country for the Government's policies. It is, to coin a phrase, worse than a crime; it is a mistake.

May I say, finally, in humble respect to my own party, that some of us have seen this movie before? It took us 23 years—until 2015—to achieve an overall majority by wiping out the Liberal Democrat seats, and to achieve it we secured the support of decent, internationalist, pro-development spending people, who saw from our time of austerity that we would stand by this promise. The former Brexit Secretary—my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis)—and I visited Chesham and Amersham. May I say that our much-loved former colleague, Cheryl Gillan, would have been voting with us on this issue tonight? Anyone who thinks that

[Mr Mitchell]

this issue is not affecting our party's reputation is living in cloud cuckoo land. Chesham and Amersham has the biggest Christian Aid group in the country.

There is an unpleasant odour wafting out from under my party's front door. This is not who we are. This is not what global Britain is. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against this motion.

1.40 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab) [V]: It does not show respect for the House to ask us to take such a significant decision with little notice, little explanation and no clarity about the consequences of today's vote. It does not show respect for communities in the poorest parts of the world when this Government are willing to play games with their lives and livelihoods in this way. The Government present the motion as giving Parliament an opportunity to have a say on when and how the UK will return to spending 0.7% of GNI on aid. But today is not really about the 0.7% target, the cuts or the livelihoods that are already being affected by our reduced spending. It is about exerting pressure on Government Back Benchers who have been brave enough to call out what the Government are doing. Basically the Government are saying, "Back this or you will be blamed when taxes rise or spending falls"—things that will likely happen because of the pandemic anyway.

Today is yet another example of this Government's complete lack of regard for parliamentary scrutiny, and they have form. There is a pattern of this Government withholding information until the last minute and then only making the most basic details available. Let us be clear: the Government have not brought forward a substantive motion for this debate. The motion that they have tabled is made in neutral terms—a device that was intended to allow the House to debate an issue without coming to a view. They claim that this debate is binding. It is not our procedures that make it binding; it is their political choice. This is a knee-jerk reaction dreamt up between last Thursday and yesterday in the face of growing criticism of this Government.

Yesterday's written ministerial statement talks of returning to 0.7% only when we are not borrowing for day-to-day spending and underlying debt is falling. On their own, each of those tests is a high hurdle. When combined, these conditions become incredibly strict. Since the 0.7% target was introduced in 2013, these tests have been met only once. They explicitly link ODA spending to policy decisions made by other Government Departments on tax and spending. This double lock could lead to an indefinite cut in aid spending, and, of course, the tests do nothing to prevent the Government from dropping lower than the 0.5%.

The Office for Budget Responsibility has said that the UK's economy is forecast to return to pre-pandemic levels in the second quarter of 2020—faster than originally thought. If a return to economic normality is getting closer, why the need to introduce these extra tests before returning to 0.7%? They are just added roadblocks artfully placed by the Treasury on the track back to the legally mandated level of 0.7%. Fundamentally, the statement paints aid spending as an either/or choice; we are spending either on domestic public services or on

international aid. It is an artificial choice that MPs are being forced to make. This is a breathtakingly cynical manoeuvre and the House must not fall for it.

1.44 pm

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I consider myself an economic Thatcherite, yet when I come to choose between money and lives, I always choose lives. This House should remember—this should be at the forefront of every Member's mind today—that this is a vote where we are choosing whether or not to intervene to save lives. That is the key issue, not the monetary issue, which I will return to in a second.

The Government argue that this is a policy the United Kingdom cannot afford, but while we have heard about this being a small fraction of our borrowing, we should remember that it is an even smaller fraction of our spending. We spend, in a non-covid year, at least £800 billion; the £3.5 billion saving we are talking about is less than 0.5% of that. That is what the Treasury tells us is the critical, overwhelming measure that forces us to do something that has such dramatic consequences.

The Chancellor might say, as his press spokesman did in the course of last week, "Well, you find the money from somewhere else"—saying that to a past Public Accounts Committee Chairman is very dangerous for a Chancellor. We were in Chesham and Amersham a week or two ago, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) said, and Cheryl Gillan would have said to the Chancellor, "Well why don't you just cancel HS2?" That is between £100 billion and £200 billion; it would pay for 25 to 50 years of this shortfall. It is really that simple.

So I do not really accept what the Chancellor is saying—that the only place, indeed the best place, for savings to be found is cutting aid, which will cost lives. Such a choice is morally reprehensible. Let us be clear about that—morally reprehensible.

Mr Mitchell: My right hon. Friend is making an incredibly good point, but has he also noticed that, in the Chancellor's outstanding policy on spending announced last November, the cut that he is referring to—this cut of 1% of the borrowing on covid last year—is the only cut that has been announced?

Mr Davis: My right hon. Friend is right. The prioritising of this cut makes it even more morally reprehensible. Indeed, at the same time, as I think the spokesman for the SNP, the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law), said, we are increasing spending on defence. I happen to agree with increasing spending on defence, but I do not agree with cutting spending on things that will lead to the need for more defence because of migration, civil wars and the rest of it.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield, the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) and the Leader of the Opposition have pointed out, the Government's proposed double lock on returning to 0.7% is deceptive. It is designed to look reasonable. However, in fact, none of the people who have spoken so far has actually stated the full case. Although we say that the condition has been met only once since 1990, under a Conservative Government, and has never been met, really—well, it was once, just

about—since the 0.7% policy was put in place, it has actually never been met since 1970, because the wording is not “a current budget surplus” but

“a sustainable current budget surplus”.

All the current budget surpluses we have been talking about so far have been for one year—and frankly, the one under us in 2018 lasted about 10 nanoseconds; it was a very tiny surplus. In practice, we have not had a sustainable current surplus since the 1970s, so I am afraid that, under the actual wording in the statement, we are not looking at 0.7% for a very long time indeed. We heard the Leader of the Opposition say it would be years, possibly decades, possibly never, and I think he is right about that.

Even if the conditions were to be met, the proposal will do nothing to deal with the crises that are caused by the policy already, right now. The Government argue that the cuts are temporary, but death is never temporary—and this will cause deaths.

Mr Speaker: Order. I call Hilary Benn.

1.48 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Since Ministers announced that the UK was going to be the only G7 country to cut its aid this year, despite all the other countries facing the same fiscal pressures, there is not one Member of this House who is not now aware of the consequences of the decision that Ministers have taken—a cut of 85% in the support that we give to the United Nations Population Fund to prevent maternal and child death and unwanted pregnancy; a cut of 95% to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, at the very moment when the world is closer than it has ever been to eradicating that dreadful disease; and a cut of 50% in the support we give to the humanitarian mine action programme, which stops people losing their arms, their legs and their lives to unexploded ordnance. It is a very long list, and every one of those things harms our reputation and does not help us to persuade others, because other countries judge us not by what we say, but by what we do.

The choice before the House today is a very stark one: do we act to put this right, or do we accept the double lock that has been proposed? I urge the House to reject it, because there is a principle here. What is it about the level of Government spending on helping the world's poorest people that means that it alone is going to be subject to these tests? No other area of Government expenditure is: just this one. If this is about protecting the public finances, why is this area of Government expenditure—the money we spend on getting children into school, or on vaccinating children so they do not die of diseases that our children do not die of—being singled out? I have great admiration for the OBR, but determining the level of our international aid spending is not part of its responsibility. It is the Government's responsibility, it is a political responsibility, and Ministers should not try to pass the buck on to someone else, especially since the latest OBR forecast makes clear that it is exceedingly unlikely that the two tests would be met in the next five years.

Mr Harper: Can I just pick the right hon. Gentleman up on that point about other areas of expenditure? The Treasury and the Chancellor have set out these tests—promises that are in our manifesto, and which we mean

to keep. The comprehensive spending review is taking place this year, and it seems to me that we will be judging all other areas of Government expenditure by these same measures. I see the Chancellor nodding, so it seems to me that we are being very consistent here, and it is important that we keep our promises about our fiscal responsibilities as well as getting back on track to meet our aid responsibilities.

Hilary Benn: I am afraid that I take a different view of the Government's consistency from the right hon. Gentleman's, because they have chosen quite specifically, knowingly and deliberately to break a cast-iron promise to the world's poorest people that was also contained in that manifesto. As I said in my last contribution on this subject, most of those people probably have no idea that this House made that commitment together, but the Government have chosen to break it, and the choice we are making today is whether we think that is right or wrong.

The Chancellor might think that the double lock is a way out of this political problem, but I do not think it is, because the issue before us has not gone away. It is just the same as it was on the day when the original cut was announced, and the question before us is whether it is right—morally, practically or politically—to break our word to the world's poorest people. I would argue that it is not: it is wrong in principle and it is harmful in practice, as we have heard from excellent speeches made by Conservative Members. It is not who we are; it is not the country that we should aspire to be; and I ask the House to reject this motion so that we can restore aid to 0.7% and keep the promise that we made to the people of this country and the people of the world.

1.53 pm

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I rise really very sadly today, because like everybody else I stood on a manifesto that said that we would honour that 0.7% commitment, and I was there when we voted on it originally. The people we are trying to protect have already been hit, because our economy declined at the beginning of the covid pandemic. They will continue to be hit by this reduction to 0.5%, because 0.7% of a figure is a lot more than 0.5%. The amount has gone down hugely already, and people are suffering.

If we take a random family with two parents and maybe six children, four of whom are boys and two of whom are girls, the girls will be the ones who have less food and who would benefit from the nutritional programmes that we provide, but we will not be providing those programmes. The girls would normally get less food, because boys are prioritised in many families, and the boys would probably go to school, whereas the girls would not be able to go to school because they would not have the funding to enable them to afford it. The Prime Minister has stood so often on the promise that he will educate all girls with 12 years of quality education. Well, no matter how he protests, that is not going to happen now.

I feel that we are letting down the poorest people in the world. We are devastating their futures for £4 billion, which, as we have heard, is 1% of what has already been borrowed. It is not a lot of money. We have borrowed that money and, as has been said by many, the people who we should be benefiting will not benefit. They will

[Mrs Pauline Latham]

not have malaria treatments, they will not have the neglected tropical disease treatments and they will not have all the help they need. Especially, they will have earlier marriages and younger pregnancies because we are cutting the devastating figure of 85% of the family planning budget and the abortion budget. That is going to devastate many girls. Many girls will die in early childbirth because of this decision by the Government.

I find it shocking that this Government are doing this. We are a Conservative Government, and we decided to spend the 0.7%. We legislated for it, and now we are letting the very poorest people down. I do not see how anybody who has heard the speeches today could in all conscience vote to support what the Government want to do with the double lock, because we will never get back to 0.7%.

1.56 pm

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD) [V]: I thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank Members from across the House for their perseverance on this issue. When the Government announced last summer that the Department for International Development would merge with the then Foreign and Commonwealth Office, I and my fellow Liberal Democrats warned of the risk to overseas development assistance and funding. I asked an urgent question to the Foreign Secretary I wrote to the Secretary of State for International Development on those very issues. The Secretary of State said at the time:

“We are committed to the 0.7% of GNI commitment...We want the aid budget and the development know-how and expertise that we have in DFID—it has done a fantastic job...at the beating heart of our international decision-making processes.”—[*Official Report*, 18 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 947.]

But here we are, just one year later. With the Government having claimed just last week that the opportunity to vote on this cut to ODA spending had been lost by a Division not being called in the recent estimates day debate, I wonder what has caused them to change their mind and bring forward today's debate at such short notice.

Economic circumstances caused by covid are not the fault of the world's poorest, and we and the many charities and NGOs that contacted me in advance of today's debate know that the poorest will be hardest hit by these cuts. The reality of the covid pandemic is that no one is safe until everyone is safe. At the heart of this is the sharing of urgently needed vaccines around the world, but it is not only that. We know that global inequalities and poverty mean that people around the world cannot take precautions to protect themselves. We cannot expect those without access to clean water—785 million at the last count in 2017—to be able to wash their hands for 20 seconds.

Slashing development spending is deeply harmful to the notion of global Britain and to us at home. The cuts to this funding also mean cuts to spending within the UK, a fact that I think is sometimes lost. ODA funding goes to many places, including our universities that are doing research into how best to tackle the entrenched causes of global inequality and how to support developing countries to be self-sufficient. St Andrews University in my constituency is looking at up to 50% cuts to some of

its active projects, which will impact on the poorest today. These cuts harm not only those in need around the world but our own research and innovation industries, which are vital to our response to Brexit and to facing the climate crisis.

Turning to the Government's update, the fiscal tests for development spending presented today are the height of cynicism. They are designed never to be met. As others have said, we have met these tests only once in this century. Conservative MPs must know that supporting today's motion means not returning to 0.7% in this Parliament, and that means that every one of them who supports the Government today will be breaking their manifesto promise for five years in a row. It is a straight choice: do we return to 0.7%, as we were all elected to this place to do, or do we fail to be the global leader on this issue that the UK has been to this point?

1.58 pm

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I am delighted to be called, and I pay enormous tribute to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is sitting on the Front Bench today. The Chancellor demonstrated during his career before reaching this place that we can do well by doing good. In working for the Children's Investment Fund Management, he proved that finance and capitalism can support the world's poorest and change lives, but he will also recognise that even an impressive fund such as that is built on a stable platform created by Governments and guaranteed by organisations, international bodies and others. I am very sorry but for that reason I will not be able to support him today, because that platform is so important. That confidence and ability to rely on a stable platform for the future is essential. Instead of that continuity and that guarantee of an enduring future, we are sadly going back towards the yo-yo policy. That is not just bad because of the variability; it is bad because it costs more and delivers less. Frankly, it is inefficient, it is an error and it undermines our capability.

Nobody in this House is more passionate about global Britain or Britain's place in the world than me. Nobody believes more that we should have a place at every table and a voice in every room. But we need to know that we are no longer buying that with gunboats; we are buying it with the aid and the effectiveness that we bring.

Anthony Mangnall: My hon. and gallant Friend is making an impressive speech. He talks about global Britain; the point of global Britain is diplomacy, trade, aid and defence. Those four things are interconnected with one another: if we reduce one, that has an impact on all. That will be detrimental to everything from the integrated review to our outside approach.

Tom Tugendhat: My hon. Friend is completely correct. Of course, the reality is that we are not living in a vacuum—we are not taking these decisions with nobody watching. Our friends are watching and our rivals are watching. As we make this decision, as we change our policy on Afghanistan, and as we buy different seats at various UN tables through our diplomacy in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and South America, we know that we are changing the rules by which we live. We are literally changing the standards of our modern world through how we buy support, develop allies and partner around the world.

As Members have said, this debate is of course about the world's poorest, but it is not just about the world's poorest. Fundamentally, it is about Britain and how we protect ourselves. How do we shape this world? How do we get the standards that make sure that British businesses succeed, British finance shapes the world and British rules are those that the world lives by? We do that by making sure that we win the votes at the UN by making sure that we have the voices around the table—the voices of the Foreign Ministers of countries around the world. We can do it; I know that because we have done it. For 20 years we have won debates, shaped arguments and defended our position. We have done it by doing well by doing good—exactly as the Chancellor demonstrated in his pre-political career.

I can understand why the Government might say that these targets—these ambitions—are too high and that they wish to set a different spending limit, but that is not the argument they are making. The argument that the Government are making is the Augustinian argument: “Lord, make me chaste—but not just yet.” If you wish to be holy, choose sanctity; if you wish not to be, be frank with what you are choosing.

2.3 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab) [V]: That was a great speech and it is a pleasure to follow it.

The House does not need a former Chief Secretary to the Treasury to lay out how today's motion is a con job, but I shall explain it anyway. The Red Book published at the most recent Budget shows that public sector net debt will not fall until 2024 at the earliest, but there is no way that a Chancellor or Chief Secretary would ever make a judgment about whether it was falling sustainably on one year alone, which means that this cut is now forecast to stretch way into the next Parliament. Yet the sums we are talking about are just 0.14% of the national debt stock. This comes at a time when we are putting up defence spending by £24 billion yet cutting aid spending by £4 billion. We are boasting about our soft power superpower status and then slashing into the budget that delivers that soft power. A country's values are judged by its budget, and this aid cut tells us everything we need to know about this Government's priorities.

The second point is that this aid cut will cost lives and it will cost livelihoods. The Prime Minister sailed into the G7 very proud of his declaration that he wanted to jab the world and make sure that, by the end of next year, the world would be safe from covid. However, by the end of the G7, the IMF said that we were about \$23 billion short of what we needed for a global vaccination programme. This aid cut will not help that; it will hurt that effort to jab the world.

Moreover, we have a significant problem now getting the world back on its feet after this pandemic. The IMF thinks that we need about \$200 billion extra in spending to protect the world against covid and \$250 billion of extra investment—climate-friendly investment—to help safeguard the recovery. How will this aid cut help with that great global project that we must attend to in the years ahead? It will not; it will damage the world's efforts to get there and it will damage our efforts to help persuade others to get to that big target.

It is 36 years to the day since we celebrated Live Aid, an example of how we in this country set out to lead the world to help the world's poorest. On this day of all

days the Government are set to surrender that leadership. We cannot have a rules-based order if we have a Prime Minister who continues to shred the rules. This is a renegade act by a renegade Government and I will be voting against the motion tonight.

2.6 pm

Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): There are, I think, two primary arguments for opposing the Government this afternoon. The first is that the 0.7% overseas aid target was a manifesto commitment. That is a serious point, though the electorate will appreciate that the expectations on which those manifestos were based have changed substantially since covid-19.

The second is that the target is in statute in the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015. That is true, but the Act also envisages and allows for circumstances in which the Government might not meet the target in any given year, including the impact on public borrowing, and Parliament cannot stop the Government doing so. The Act, at section 3(1), is very clear about that. We have the right only to be informed of how and why the target is to be missed. As far as I can tell, nobody is proposing to amend the 2015 Act, so it will remain unchanged whatever the vote this afternoon.

I welcome the Government's clarification that they are not seeking unilaterally to change the statutory target, but rather to miss it. Those are different things, and the former would, in my view, be both wrong and unlawful, but we either trust the Government or we do not. If we do not trust the Government—and we are here because a large number of Members do not—why would we trust them to keep the 0.7% commitment beyond next year when the Act so clearly allows them to decide not to? Transparent, externally judged criteria, arguably at least, would leave those of us who want to see the preservation of aid spending in a stronger position than under the 2015 Act alone, which applies what are in truth fairly loose shackles to Government on aid spending and leaves it entirely to Government to decide when to escape them, and that cannot help provide the certainty that the aid sector rightly seeks.

I believe in the merits of overseas aid spending and I have used many of the arguments made so eloquently by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), who deserves huge credit for extracting the compromises that the Government have already made. Those arguments, though, must in the end persuade the public whose money we are spending. As Conservatives, we also argue that high public debt is bad for our long-term capacity to support the vulnerable everywhere. Enduring public support for aid spending may well depend on the public recognising that we have apportioned the financial burden of the covid crisis fairly, and not protected aid spending to the detriment of other areas of spending that they may find at least as deserving. I think the Government are now trying to strike that balance. Recognising though I do the strength of the arguments made by many on both sides of this House in the course of this debate, it is important and necessary to give the Government credit for that effort.

2.9 pm

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): The Government's decision to renege on their international obligations rides roughshod over those ring-fenced commitments

[Sam Tarry]

and puts at risk the lives of millions across the globe. That is not in our national interest, and it is certainly not in our national security interest, and that is before taking into consideration our moral duty as a nation to alleviate global poverty.

Damningly, several former Prime Ministers, who proudly upheld our country's aid commitments, have voiced their concerns about this Government's handling of their international aid obligations. Indeed, we heard earlier that the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) has committed to voting against a three-line Conservative Whip for the first time ever, so powerfully does she feel about this issue.

When the right hon. Lady spoke in this debate, she was crystal clear on what the aid cuts would mean, "fewer girls will be educated, more girls and boys will become slaves, more children will go hungry and more of the poorest people in the world will die." A damning indictment from a former Conservative Prime Minister.

The UK has a long and proud track record of stepping up to support those in need. We cannot abandon our responsibilities to those around the world who are most poverty-stricken, least of all in a global pandemic. The UK is currently the only G7 country to commit in legislation to spending 0.7% of gross national income on international development, a target set by the United Nations, and it is the second largest international development donor behind only the US. That is right and proper, and it is a fact.

The extended families of many of my Ilford South constituents directly benefit from UK aid, lifting millions out of illiteracy and poverty and providing so much support to some of the poorest communities around the globe, including in Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka.

However, instead of leading by example, this Government are now, shamefully, the only G7 Government to cut their aid budget this year. There can be no clearer argument against cutting aid than the devastating impact on the covid response. In April this year, when the delta variant was ravaging India, vital coronavirus research centres—including a project tracking variants in India—had their funding reduced by up to 70%, prompting the project lead to say that the cut would not only make vital projects unviable but would, in effect, kill them dead.

In May, the Tropical Health and Education Trust criticised the UK Government for slashing £48 million in global healthcare funding as part of their wider cuts. Indeed, the NHS's plans to donate 6 million items of personal protective equipment to healthcare workers fighting new variants across the world were held up, yet again preventing the containment of the virus.

We have a duty to act, and we must do so now before it is too late for millions who rely on direct aid. This is not about giving a man a fish to feed himself but about giving him a net to provide for himself. It is about our historic obligation to lift up the global south using our nation's far greater resources.

I welcome the actions of Conservative Members who will join us today in voting against this callous and awful manoeuvre by the Government.

2.12 pm

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): This is a very difficult debate, because all of us, on both sides of the House, know what good UK aid spending does. We are all proud of what we have been able to achieve with our aid spending. It does not just help in and of itself; it also helps the British taxpayer and British people because, by investing in areas like education, vaccination and supporting local economies, we stop some of those problems washing up on British shores.

We understand that but, when we get underneath all this, it is really about competing political necessities and competing political choices. On the one hand, as we come out of the covid pandemic—we know how many hundreds of billions of pounds have been spent—we have a real need, as a responsible Government in fiscal terms, to get our day-to-day spending back in balance and to ensure that our debt ends up falling as a percentage of GDP. That will enable the public spending to support all the vulnerable people in this country—all British taxpayers everywhere—as well as the poorest people in the world through aid spending. At the same time, there is a need to help the poorest people in the world. That is the balance that we are trying to strike, and I believe that the Government have struck the right one.

Some hon. Members have talked about the fiscal tests the Government have set, and they somehow suggest that the tests have been met only once in the past 20 years. I have looked at it, and both tests were met in 2000-01, 2001-02 and 2018-19. If I am right, although the Chancellor may correct me if I am wrong, underlying debt fell for four years in a row before the pandemic, so it is not true that, somehow, these are impossible tests.

Even if hon. Members do not believe me, the key thing, and this is why I respect and accept this compromise position, is that these are transparent and clear criteria. Everybody knows what they are. We can judge them independently, and the OBR, which we all know and trust, is perfectly capable of doing so. Finally, what is important is not just how much money is spent but how we spend it. What I would like to see in our aid budget is more of that money, not just with multinationals, which do a lot of good work, but for smaller charities working on the ground such as Harpenden Spotlight on Africa, which is based in my constituency and does fantastic work in rural Uganda. Having seen the work that it does on the ground, working with bigger multinationals and the Ugandan Government, I know that such charities can do fantastic things, and I would like to see the spend that we have, at 0.5% temporarily, go more towards some of those grassroots organisations so that we can spend our money even more effectively and get more for what we are doing.

2.15 pm

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): I would like to say that it is a pleasure to speak in this debate, but that would not be true. I am appalled that we are having to vote on this proposal at all. This cut to our international aid budget reflects badly on all of us, not just the Government, and portrays the UK as inward-looking and self-serving.

This is a Tory manifesto promise that will be broken, and broken very publicly, as the whole world is watching. I wonder how the Prime Minister can have the bottle to

attend COP26 and call on other countries to raise finances for climate action, given that he is in charge of a Government who are cutting their own contribution—surely the ultimate act of hypocrisy.

If overseas aid funding was going to finance vanity projects, trips to the moon or high-flying, cutting-edge dodgy ventures, I could begin to understand the reasoning behind the decision, but none of the projects fall into those categories. They are basic health and social care projects that benefit millions of people across poorer countries on our planet. It funds basic projects such as polio eradication, sexual health advice, the clearing of landmines, education programmes, the provision of clean water and sanitation, and the prevention of sexual exploitation of women and girls. The money funds training programmes such as the NHS overseas training scheme, which trains 78,000 healthcare workers in Nepal, Uganda, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Many projects will now come to an end, affecting lives in countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, Somaliland, Nigeria and many more. By cutting funding to those numerous projects the Government will cause many unnecessary deaths, which is a scandal. We must highlight that callous approach today. Before Government Members say, “Oh, it is just Labour Members whingeing again”, let us have a look at the people who are calling for a reversal of the cuts: Tory Ministers such as Ruth Davidson; Baroness Sugg, who resigned from the Government in November over the cuts; and the right hon. Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma).

World leaders have condemned the cuts, including Samantha Power, head of the United States Agency for International Development, and Malala, who calls on the Prime Minister to keep his promise of helping 40 million girls go to school, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, who describes the Chancellor's decision as “shameful and wrong”. Interestingly, every living former Prime Minister is opposed to the plan. These are big hitters, and their condemnation is clear. I therefore urge the current Prime Minister and the Chancellor to think again, go back to the drawing board, and plan a different route that does not disadvantage millions of people in countries less affluent than our own. This is not fair and it is not right. I want to be very clear: I will vote against the Government's plan to cut the overseas aid budget by £4 billion this year, and I urge Government Members to do the same, because the world is watching.

2.18 pm

David Warburton (Somerton and Frome) (Con): I am pleased that the House has an opportunity both to debate and to determine this question. I have always defended our aid budget, and I do not think that we should search for economies at the expense of the most vulnerable globally and at the expense of our own reputation and influence globally.

I do not need to rehearse the case for ODA spending, which funds the vaccination of 55 million people; saves an incredible 10 million children from hunger; and helps to provide 50 million people with the means to climb out of poverty. I do not need to describe its soft-power benefits: the influence for Britain culturally, diplomatically, and politically; its symbolic significance; and its demonstration of leadership. I could not, therefore, support the reduction of that spending when the return to 0.7% is effectively at the whim or under the control of

the Government. No matter how strong the intention to raise it again, events are always likely to overtake and overcome good intentions.

I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor for the conversations that we have had in recent days. Given the uncertainty in the economy, I entirely understand his reluctance to offer a date for the restoration of the 0.7%. However, a set of conditions would provide a pathway, governed by objective circumstances, to a solution. Ceding control of the mechanism to the OBR and basing it on conditions that were met as recently as 2018-19—and forecasted by the OBR in 2018-19 and in 2020 to be met in the following financial year—would provide that pathway back to our manifesto commitment and our duty to the world.

The Treasury is effectively outsourcing its spending decisions to the OBR and the state of the public finances. I do not believe that that has happened before and it provides us with the certainty we need that the cut is temporary and that our commitment to 0.7% will be upheld. It also ensures that our public finances are protected. That not only gives us a route back, but ensures that the current position is transitory, so I will support the motion. The worth of a commitment is whether it is upheld in the face of challenges, and the motion allows us to meet our challenges and our commitments.

2.20 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: There is no economic or moral justification for cutting overseas aid from the richest to the poorest at this most desperate time in the eye of the pandemic storm, which spreads death, disease and hunger like a wildfire through developing nations. Let us imagine looking at our children starving in front of us, huddled in a tent in the blistering heat of Afghanistan, Yemen or Syria, as we think about the cars, houses, fridges and Netflix that people have in the west. Let us imagine looking at our daughters who could help create a better world with an education but will not get one, or our parents who have just died from covid. We can help alleviate such poverty, ignorance and disease by reinstating the aid budget. As host of the G7 and COP26, we should take moral leadership.

Let us be clear: we can afford to help those in greatest need more, not less because the cost of UK borrowing is down, not up, since the pandemic. Why? Global interest rates are down, so our borrowing costs are down—from £37 billion in 2019-20 to £23 billion in 2020-21. That is a saving of £14 billion in spending on debt interest for the UK, but aid spending is still being cut by £4.4 billion. The Prime Minister has just said that every pound we spend on aid has to be borrowed. We can afford more aid now because our borrowing and debt interest costs are massively down. Now is the time to invest and to build back better out of the pandemic in the developing world, and to invest in climate change adaptation, with new green industries that will help all our environments.

In a low interest world, now is the time to borrow and invest. A cut of £1 billion in aid could be reinstated and service a debt of £100 million in investment. Only the G7 can borrow at such low interest rates; developing nations cannot. It is no use saying that we cannot afford it this year due to the pandemic and that maybe we will reinstate money in future years. We can afford it this year, and now is when the money is needed most. If

[Geraint Davies]

savings were needed—and they are not—they should be made after the pandemic, when the poorest are back on their feet, not in their darkest hour of need.

We know the politics of popular nationalism. We know that 7.6 million people in the UK are in hunger, so of course people are saying that charity begins at home. But that hunger is unnecessary too and we should not give other G7 nations an excuse to cut their aid. We need more aid, not less. Britain is better than this. Let us make the world better. Let us reinstate our aid budget now.

2.23 pm

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): I am glad to see the Chancellor in his place; I have a couple of specific questions for him on science policy.

First, in the context of this debate, I am very proud of our leadership and our contribution to supporting people right across the world. I voted enthusiastically for the Act of Parliament that brought the 0.7% commitment into law. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) for his work on that Act, but, in so doing, he will know that it specifically anticipated circumstances in which, temporarily, the 0.7% target may not be met, including

“any substantial change in gross national income”

and/or

“fiscal circumstances...in particular, the likely impact of...the target on taxation, public spending and public borrowing”.

It is hard not to consider that the circumstances that we are experiencing fall plumb into line with what the framers of the legislation and those who supported it had in mind.

Mr Mitchell: I was involved in the drafting of the Act and I do not believe that that is what we intended with those clauses. Has my right hon. Friend noticed that the Governor of the Bank of England has said that the economy will have been restored to pre-covid levels by next month? Does he not think that that is a very significant indicator of why we should not be doing what the Government would like us to do today?

Greg Clark: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I quite agree that that is an encouraging assessment, not least for the prospects of our returning to the 0.7%.

I studied very carefully the *Hansard* transcripts of the debate, and some of the criticism was that the criteria might be insufficiently precise, so the innovation of establishing in advance and giving to the Office for Budget Responsibility the trigger for the return is a sensible course. Indeed, this mirrors, more or less, the fiscal rules that were once called the fiscal mandate that were in place at the time that the Act was originally adopted. I want the target back, and I hope, as the Governor does, that that will be sooner rather than later, and that the Chancellor will be able to confirm that it is his firm intention, as I think is clear from what he said in the written statement.

My questions on science are twofold. First, the science budget is, very importantly, increasing from about £9 billion a year in 2017 to £22 billion a year from 2024-25. That includes, as it always has done, official development assistance. Will the Chancellor specifically reiterate the commitment to achieving that £22 billion by 2024-25?

Secondly, will he reassure me on a report I read that the 0.5% limit on ODA could somehow prevent us from engaging in international scientific research projects that we were perfectly willing to fund because they are excellent and are justified as part of the budget that is rising to £22 billion? We all know that science is inherently international. The best science is global and the best teams are often international teams, so it would be a great concern if the 0.5% target would in any way be a cap on international collaboration. Knowing my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's commitment to science and technology, I cannot believe that that is his intention. His commitment to the £22 billion budget and his reassurance that the target will not be a cap will be very important in establishing that the science aspect can continue, and that this is, in effect, the removal of a ring-fence rather than a limitation on international scientific research.

2.28 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): The Prime Minister told the House earlier that there was common ground in the House. I think he is right, but I suspect, having listened to contributions from the Conservative Benches, that he is not standing on that common ground. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) for the courage that he and other Conservative Members have shown in standing up for this issue consistently, and also standing up for their manifesto, along with the rest of us. The Government have a good story to tell on this issue if they wanted to—on Gavi, for example, and on their support for education for women and girls. I wonder why they do not want to tell this story to the country. I think it is because too many of them are ashamed of it and because, as the right hon. Gentleman said, they are playing to a gallery but playing to the wrong gallery. It is a dangerous game that they are playing.

The proposals before the House today are myopic and mean-minded. They are mean-minded because we can see that this is a trick—a fiscal trap. We were promised a straight up-and-down vote but we were not given one; instead we were given this little twisting mechanism. It is mean-minded, too, because, as we have heard, it will cost lives to make these cuts, and because they are already a cut to what would have been a smaller cake anyway. The money had already gone down and to cut it further is simply mean. With any of these programmes we cannot simply turn the taps on, then off and then back on again. The damage that will be done to British overseas aid programmes will carry on long after we restore the 0.7%, if, under this proposed mechanism, we ever do restore it.

This cut will set programmes back. It will set research and development back, including for my constituents. I have a constituent who works in water purification and another who works in localised energy matters. These cuts will have an effect overseas, but let us be clear: they will have effects in this country as well, in terms of innovation and our ability to take technologies across the world. They will have effects in areas such as the polio eradication programme. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) has said, cuts of 95% will set that programme back. The cut is myopic, for the reasons already set out by my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat):

it will damage British soft power, with the British Council telling me that it will lose 15% to 20% of staff and will be unable to carry out programmes in the countries where we need to be influencing; and it will affect our strategic position, as the Leader of the Opposition has said.

Overseas aid is a moral issue, but if we cannot look at it like that, let us be clear: our adversaries, Russia and China, and our enemies, al-Qaeda and Islamic State, will fill the gap if we do not, and this will simply make matters worse in the long run. This is a short-sighted, short-termist cut. It is mean-minded. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield for his leadership, and I will not be accepting this motion tonight.

2.31 pm

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con) [V]: I start by acknowledging the excellent speeches made by a number of hon. Members who have so passionately set out the case for official development assistance. In particular, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) eloquently and characteristically passionately made the case for the ODA budget. In normal times I would be with him in this debate, but today I support the Government's decision.

I am a big believer in the role of international aid and how it shows the world what we stand for as a nation. Our role on the global stage is amplified by our magnanimity through international aid, and in a world with ever-increasing threats our ODA budget represents a tool through which the UK can demonstrate its generosity, moral strength, friendship and nobility. When considering this, one can understand why it evokes so much passion from Members in all parts of the House. Indeed, many of my constituents have spoken to me about the importance they attach to the ODA budget, but time and time again they have said to me, "We know it has been a difficult time. We know we must manage the economy. We know we must pay the bills." As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has already said, we cannot ignore the state our economy is in, after the worst crisis since the last two world wars. Having borrowed more than £300 billion, the equivalent of 14.3% of our GDP, it is clear that difficult decisions have to be made.

In that context, I understand why the Government have had to make this temporary cut, but it must be temporary. With the clarity offered by the Treasury, I believe it will be. Of course we must repair our economy—that is not a controversial thing; it is simply what is expected of us by the British people. We will also continue to spend almost £10 billion as part of the ODA budget if this cut is to go through. The British people also expect strong public services and efficiency from government, so difficult decisions are inevitable and they obviously have to be made. We also continue to demonstrate our soft power through other means, with the distribution of the vaccine being an excellent example. The Government's investment meant that there were 500 million doses available to 168 countries, all distributed at no profit. By the end of the year, we will have distributed 3 billion doses—this is British ingenuity and British generosity.

Finally, in a world of finite resources and increasing strains on our economy, we must make sure that our ODA is being deployed effectively, and projects should

be subject to the highest levels of scrutiny. In other words, not just how much we spend, but how we spend that money should be important—outcomes matter. The effectiveness of the budget should not be measured purely in monetary terms; we should measure it against robust targets, which are set to achieve our objectives and ultimately make the world a better place.

2.34 pm

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con) [V]: I am enormously proud of our record of supporting the most vulnerable and using aid to make our people and those around the world safer, but we have suffered the biggest recession in 300 years. That is not a situation that we could have predicted when I fought the election on our manifesto promises, yet the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015 explicitly anticipated this sort of crisis where a departure from targets is necessary.

If I had been asked during the election whether I would reconsider the 0.7% commitment, I would have said, "Yes, but only in the very darkest of times," and if the last year or so has not been the darkest of times, then what is? Since my election, we have faced an enormous number of difficult choices. In Rutland and Melton those difficult choices and dark times have looked like this: the Government having to support 17,900 jobs through furlough and 4,500 individuals, and underwrite nearly £123 million in loans—that is almost half of all employee jobs in Rutland and Melton that we had to save. That support was necessary, but the costs pose real risks for the future, too.

Even with the reduction in UK aid, we remain the second largest donor in the G7. The taxes of residents of Rutland and Melton will continue to go towards saving lives, disaster relief, peacekeeping, and tackling climate change. We should be proud of that, and I hope that the reorganisation of the FCDO can augment our capacity to respond to crises outside of the ODA budget through the new conflict centre.

But today in the Chamber hon. Members have criticised the Government by arguing that other G7 countries are not temporarily reducing their ODA budgets, yet in 2020 we were one of only two G7 countries to meet that target and we are the only one to do it every year since 2013. Perhaps it is because those countries have not met their commitments in normal times that they do not now need to make a temporary reduction; indeed, they had no plans in the first place to meet the 0.7% they promised.

With this temporary reduction, we will still exceed the funding provided by every country bar one; we will remain one of the most generous countries in the world. This is a temporary measure that recognises the fiscal duty we have to our children. It recognises that we will still stand by those most in need, and the Government have defined the fiscal circumstances in which we will return to 0.7%. This does not diminish our country, and, while this is a difficult decision, it is the right one for now because we have faced the darkest of times.

2.37 pm

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): The Scottish National party opposes these cuts, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) eloquently outlined. We

are committed to our 0.7% manifesto commitment. Some 98.2% of the votes cast in the Sterling election in 2019 went to parties committed to the 0.7%, so I am representing my party and my constituency in the stance we have taken.

I pay tribute to and warmly praise a number of Members on the Government Benches; we have heard some refreshing blasts of integrity throughout this discussion. This is too important for Punch and Judy politics.

There are just three points I would make, because this is a well-trodden path at this point in the debate. First, the 0.7% figure is a Government manifesto commitment made barely 18 months ago. Secondly, yes, covid has changed everything of course, but it has changed everything for everybody else as well, and to use covid as a pretext for this cut when the developing world is also dealing with covid and the effects of the economic impact is reprehensible.

Thirdly, the cut is out of step with the rest of the world. The UK is the outlier in this; other countries are increasing, not decreasing, their aid spending. The UK remains, as we have heard, a significant donor of international aid—I applaud that, I welcome that, I acknowledge that—but this is a broken promise to the poorest people in the world at the worst possible time, and it flies in the face of the global consensus. Canada is increasing its spend by 28% while the UK is decreasing its by 25%, and France is increasing its spend by 36%, Italy by 13%, the US by 39.4% and Germany by 6%. It is the UK that is out of step.

Global Britain is clearly not the SNP's project, but we are engaged in this because we do not want to see the poorest in the world let down. We want to try to rectify a mistake and to see Scottish taxes—or, more realistically, Scottish debt—go to effective purposes rather than where this Government might take them. We are entirely unconvinced by the Government's compromise proposal; we think that to present this as an arithmetic formula is to misrepresent this issue entirely. Estimates and numbers are arguable of course, but, as has been acknowledged throughout this debate, only once in the last 20 years have the criteria foreseen within the Government's mechanism been met. We fear this is a formula to entrench the cuts, not to bring the spending back.

Now, of course the books need to be balanced, and I feel for the Government in that task, but the difference between 0.5% and 0.7% is barely 1% of the global sum. For a Government who have spent money on increasing defence spending and nuclear capacity, blown £1.3 billion on a needless stamp duty freeze and yet—worse—are talking about a royal yacht, I think the priorities are wrong. I do hope that a significant number of Conservative Members will join the coalition to put this right.

2.40 pm

Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith).

I have been speaking to my constituents in Derbyshire Dales who are, by and large, generous and kind-spirited people. I have listened carefully to their views and, following those discussions, I will be voting for the motion as it provides certainty and a clearly outlined path for our international spending to get back to our 0.7% manifesto commitment while delivering responsible

public finances and allowing us to maintain a high level of spending on other priorities at home such as the NHS, schools and the police. It also delivers on our manifesto promises for responsible public finances.

At 0.5%, the UK is spending more than £10 billion on overseas aid this year. That is a phenomenal amount of money. Let us not forget that we are one of the most generous, kindest and biggest spenders in the world. I remind those who wish unfairly to characterise the Government as somehow mean or uncaring that Conservative Governments have consistently spent more on international aid than Labour. Under Labour Governments between 1997 and 2009, the average spend on overseas aid was just 0.36%. The Opposition are therefore hardly in a position to lecture the Government on overseas spending. The Leader of the Opposition may find those arguments helpful in court, but they do not work here. Once again, the Opposition are totally out of tune with the British population.

We believe that, given the unusual time that the Government have had with the covid pandemic, we must balance spending. The Government have spent more than £400 billion on keeping the nation safe, keeping our families secure and preserving jobs and livelihoods. That has given the people of my constituency a way forward in frightening and worrying times. On behalf of the people of Derbyshire Dales, I thank the Government for their support. They are kind, not mean.

We must not forget that, as my adult sons remind me regularly, every pound we spend on international aid is borrowed from our future generations. As a mother of four adult children, and representing many families in Derbyshire Dales, I have a duty to help restore the public finances to some sort of responsible level. For those reasons, I have no hesitation in supporting this sound motion.

2.43 pm

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab) [V]: We had a 20-year cross-party consensus that we should meet the UN's target of 0.7% of GNI on aid. I very much regret that that consensus has been lost. Of course, when GDP goes down, our aid budget will go down, but the pandemic is no justification for reducing the proportion of national income committed to international aid.

In a fine speech, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) referred to the strength of Christian Aid in Chesham and Amersham. As a Treasury Minister in the late 1990s, I saw the Churches play the key role in securing that cross-party consensus. They were the instigators of Jubilee 2000 ahead of the millennium and the key supporters of Make Poverty History afterwards. Those campaigns led to the historic 2005 Gleneagles deal in which \$40 billion of debts owed by 18 highly indebted poor countries were written off. The idea of cancelling unpayable debts inspired people and drew them together. Rooted in teaching in the Bible, it had a dramatic impact on Government policy and on the lives of millions.

Last month, I joined MPs on a virtual trip to Togo organised by the Christian charity Compassion UK. We “visited” its UK aid-funded child survival project. The situation in Togo is desperate. Under-five mortality is among the worst in the world, one in 25 babies do not reach the age of one, and women have a one-in-58 chance of dying in pregnancy or childbirth. Compassion

UK's work, supported by UK aid, is starting to change things: in the first year, the project reached more than 4,000 people in extreme poverty and the number of full-term healthy babies delivered was 24% above target. UK development aid helps to save lives among the world's poorest people.

We met somebody called Ama, who registered in the programme when she was seven months pregnant. She was struggling to feed her children. When she reached full term, her husband left suddenly. She also had malaria. Her baby and her own life were at risk. The child survival project provided food and hygiene support. Her expenses were paid, she gave birth to a son and she has since been able to set up a business of her own.

Even a small amount of aid saves lives. The cuts to UK aid put thousands of projects like those run by Compassion UK in Togo at risk. I really hope that Parliament will reject the motion.

2.46 pm

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I am grateful to be called to speak in this debate. I recognise that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has probably the most difficult job in the Government, bar none, and perhaps in the whole country. He is the only person employed to say no and make difficult choices about the spending demands that we all present at the door of the Treasury. Nevertheless, I share the concerns, fears and doubts expressed by colleagues this afternoon about whether the cuts that we are debating will become permanent. I share their fear that 0.5% will become the default setting for our overseas aid spending and that the cuts will become locked in—a permanent withdrawal and a permanent stepping back from the level of commitment that Britain has given overseas among the poorest countries on earth. I share those fears not only for reasons that hon. Members have already outlined, but because I think we are in danger of overlooking just how enormous the effort was that got us to the point where the House of Commons was united on making the commitment to 0.7%, as the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) has just reminded us.

I am perhaps one of the few Members present who was in the House in 2005. I recall the enormous lobbying efforts made not just by churches, but by trade unions, women's institutes and groups in all our constituencies. There was demand for that commitment. It required Opposition Front Benchers to work with Government Front Benchers; it required Opposition Back Benchers to work with Government Back Benchers. For me, it represented a high water mark of what can be achieved in this House of Commons when people choose to bury some of their political differences and work together for a cause much bigger than our most immediate political needs.

Mr Mitchell: My right hon. Friend is making a wonderful speech. He refers to his longevity in the House. Does he remember how Make Poverty History galvanised national opinion? Crack the Crises is the current successor to that generation, and it is reinforced by younger people. Does he accept that once covid is over and they are able to show what they feel, they will make very clear their opposition to this foolish decision that the Government have made?

Stephen Crabb: My right hon. Friend makes a very strong point, and he is right that there was a popular movement behind the commitment. Nevertheless, it was not universally popular. There were staunch critics inside and outside the House, sections of the press absolutely hated it, and as we went through the financial crisis in 2009 and 2010, the criticism became louder.

As the ripples from that crisis have moved through our politics over the past 11 years, it has become increasingly difficult to keep making the case for investing 0.7% of our GNI in helping the world's poorest people, but I am proud that we chose to stick to it. Even when we were making very difficult decisions and choices about other aspects of public spending, we took a decision that spending more on the people with the very least, globally, was the right thing to do. It was the right thing to do then in the wake of the last financial crisis, and I believe it is still the right thing to do now as we are going through this awful pandemic. Yes, we face a moment in our politics when we have enormous pressures on our public finances—and I made those remarks about the Chancellor of the Exchequer very sincerely at the start—but what is a difficult moment for us fiscally and politically is an absolutely tragic, devastating moment for the poorest people around the world for whom the pandemic has been the cause of another wave of dire poverty and suffering, and that is what we are really debating here this afternoon.

These are difficult issues, and sincere speeches have been made on either side of the argument, but I am very sad that I will not be able to support my Government this afternoon. As I have said, I think the 0.7% commitment we made all those years ago was the right thing to do—I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) for the role he played—and sticking to it now is still the right thing to do.

2.50 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): The Prime Minister brought a very sombre tone to the Dispatch Box this afternoon, trying to convince us that this decision was all a regrettable consequence of the economic impact of the pandemic, but that rings hollow when we remember the glee with which he stood at the Dispatch Box this time last year and announced the abolition of the Department for International Development, when he described aid and DFID as a

“giant cashpoint in the sky”.—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 670.]

We also remember that, as Foreign Secretary, he quoted Kipling in a Buddhist temple in Myanmar and, when he was a journalist, used the language of “piccaninnies” and “watermelon smiles”.

This is a Prime Minister and a Government who know little and care less about the struggles of poverty, whether at home or abroad, or about the life-saving, life-changing difference that aid can and does make around the world. A bit like the English votes for English laws Standing Orders that we will be debating later today, the aid budget to them is just another part of David Cameron's legacy that they seem so keen to bury. I think the Prime Minister likes the fact that he is the only living Prime Minister who supports the cut in the aid budget. It is part of this year zero, hard rain approach to the UK consensus that has existed for so long.

[Patrick Grady]

That consensus saw every single Member of this House, as has been said, elected on the commitment of 0.7%. It is a consensus that has existed for 20 years, with a target that has been met consistently since 2013. The 0.5% figure is completely arbitrary; 0.7% was calculated by international organisations when it was set in the 1970s. As I have said, the 0.5% figure is completely arbitrary, and we have not heard why it is not 0.4%, 0.6% or 0.3%. It is simply that it sounds good and sounds as though the Government are taking decisive action. That seems to be their attitude to so many aspects of government just now, never mind the impact or the feasibility.

Dame Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Member is making some very serious points, but does he accept the fact that the UK has set out 0.7% in law? Many countries around the world also commit to 0.7%, but always fall short and do not bother to have a discussion about it.

Patrick Grady: But the UK is now resiling from that. The Government are resiling from it, and they will not even give us a legally binding vote on the decision to resile from the commitment agreed by the entire House. What we consistently hear from the Dispatch Box is about being a soft power superpower and about global leadership, and in a year when the UK should be taking the lead, it is taking a step backwards.

Of course, the decision to cut aid has been shown to be doubly problematic because aid was due to fall anyway. GNI has been falling as a result of the pandemic-related economic contraction anyway, and there would have been tough decisions and funding squeezes, but those would have been predictable and manageable. There is this notion that it is all being paid for by debt, but we could say that about all kinds of aspects of Government spending. All Governments around the world run debts and deficits, and they invest for the future. Aid is an investment in all of our collective futures, but what is happening now in real time is that drastic, sweeping cuts have already been made to get down to this completely arbitrary target of 0.5%, and these will be massively difficult to undo.

Despite today's attempt to bounce the House into a decision and all these other shenanigans, the Government's own rhetoric does not add up. The Prime Minister repeatedly says that the covid investment they are making is going to be additional. Well, if it is going to be additional, how can the Government spend 0.5%—they must be spending more than 0.5%—and if it is not additional, then what else is going to be cut? It does not make any sense.

I did not get an answer in the last debate about the concerns raised about UK Aid Match. The public have been donating £1 to certain charities in good faith on the basis that the UK Government would match that, but charities such as Mary's Meals have now been told that this funding will be delayed, and they will be wondering whether it will ever appear at all. Hundreds of constituents in Glasgow North have contacted me about that since the cut was first announced. That speaks to thousands of activists and organisations across the country.

Aid works best when it is stable and predictable in the long term. There will be no undoing some of the damage caused by the UK Government's cuts. They

have been hastily and, in some cases, disastrously implemented. A return to 0.7% as soon as possible will at least mitigate some of that damage. I hope that some of the Tories who have been opposed to the Government's decision so far will continue to show resilience and vote tonight to restore our aid commitment to our poorest brothers and sisters around the world.

2.55 pm

Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con): I did not come to this House to reduce overseas aid, but then I also did not come here to tell people that they cannot see their parents or their grandchildren, that they had to close the business they have spent years building up, or that they could not get married with their friends and family there to support them. Those are just some of the soul-searching choices that covid has forced on all of us in the past 18 months.

Today's choice is no different. Voting for the Government's motion will take £5 billion out of the overseas aid budget. Voting against it will cut £5 billion out of our public services here in the UK or necessitate tax rises on our constituents, many of whom have been living on restrained incomes over the pandemic. It is important that we are honest with our constituents, especially at a time when the NHS has a huge task to get a backlog of millions of operations and treatments down, when so many children have had their education so badly disrupted, and when the police are dealing with a chilling rise in crimes such as domestic violence.

There have been some suggestions in the debate today. My right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) suggested cutting HS2. That would no doubt be very popular in some places, but business leaders throughout the east midlands have made it clear that that would significantly degrade the ability to grow the economy there. The hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) suggested degrading our cyber capabilities at a time when our public services, businesses and society are increasingly reliant on digital infrastructure and digital services. There are no easy choices here. There are no cost-free options.

The second point I want to make is that the definition of ODA is very narrow. It excludes much of the support the UK provides overseas from being included in it: £85 million invested to help to develop the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, which is now being distributed without profit across the world; we are the largest donor to Gavi, immunising 300 million children against infectious diseases; and we provide £350 million a year to the UN's peacekeeping budget on top of our ODA contributions.

Finally, even with the reduction to 0.5%, the UK will spend more as a percentage of GNI than almost any other major economy—more than the US, Canada and Japan, and well above the OECD average. We will still be the third-largest bilateral humanitarian donor in the world. So to talk about Britain as if it is withdrawing from the world or turning its back on people is, in my view, divorced from reality.

2.58 pm

Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (Alba): First, like others, I wish to pay tribute to individuals on the Government Benches who have brought us here because of their tenacity. They have shown the courage of their

convictions, convictions the Government claimed to hold but, despite the obfuscation of the Prime Minister, are seeking to renege on. That is why this debate is so welcome. It is an opportunity to rehearse the arguments we have had before. As others have said today, they remain—the principles still remain and the arguments still apply. It is still in our own economic self-interest to ensure that we remain committed to 0.7%. It is environmentally necessary, especially with the spectre of COP26 arising. It is also the case that international aid is a right, not a charity given by us. It is something we need to repay for historical acts.

There are two primary arguments, twin imperatives, that I think apply and those are the arguments that I wish to make. First, there is a moral imperative. This is for humanity. We are all part of the human race and we are required to look after our sisters and brothers wherever they are, whatever nationality or passport they hold—even whatever colour that passport may be. Equally, and as a corollary of that, it is a necessity of public health, because it is in our own self-interest that we carry out these actions.

I will deal first with the moral argument. Many others have quite eloquently made it clear that these cuts will be catastrophic. It is not enough for the Prime Minister to say that the pandemic is a once-in-a-century event. It will be repeated, as we have seen with the variants. Indeed, we will face other health challenges if the third world continues to face the problems that it does. That is why we have to address the issue. Those in the third world are unable to deal with these things as we are, notwithstanding the challenges we are already facing. We have seen what happened in Africa with AIDS; the consequences for Africa from coronavirus are horrendous. There is therefore a moral imperative that we take actions to ensure that we protect them, as well as us.

That brings me to the public health argument, because if we do not address the issue there, it will come here. As others have mentioned and as I said earlier, we have had the delta variant. We have had other variants, and we will have other variants still, from which our vaccinations will not be capable of protecting us. If it is not the coronavirus outbreak, it will be some other form of ill health that will challenge humanity, and therefore we must take every step possible to ensure that we not only protect ourselves, but protect everybody: by protecting everybody we protect ourselves.

People will march. People will come. People will fall ill and people will be infected. If Border Force cannot keep out drugs, it will not be able to keep out individuals and an illness. It is therefore in our own interest to ensure that we carry out that moral imperative, which is right for the benefit of society and us all. Equally, for our own benefit in our own land and, indeed, individually, we must protect the public health of the country.

3.1 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Lothian (Kenny MacAskill), who speaks with passion. I do not accept his arguments, but I accept that those people who will vote against the Government tonight do so with genuine concern. I welcome the fact that we have a lot of SNP Members here, we have the Democratic Unionist party here and we have the Liberal Democrats—

ah, but only two Labour Back Benchers have bothered to stay in the debate, and one has just arrived, so I am not so sure about the concerns expressed by those on the Labour Benches.

I welcome one thing that the hon. Gentleman mentioned: the fact that this Parliament is having a vote and a debate on this issue, and that is to the great credit of the Government. They are bringing forward a motion that they may well lose tonight, and that is to their credit. They are letting this Parliament decide on this very important issue.

I think this debate is not particularly about the merits of overseas aid and 0.7%; it is about the state that the economy is in. I cannot tell from sitting here whether the Chancellor is his happy self. He is very popular at the moment because he has been giving money away and helping people, but there is an economic crisis coming down the line, and certainly on these Benches, we should recognise that. That is the reason we should support the cut of £4 billion in overseas aid. If we do not do that, the Chancellor either has to borrow £4 billion more, or he has to tax more, or he has to cut public expenditure. That is actually what the issue is about, and that is why I will be supporting the Government tonight.

I will just touch on what I think is more important with overseas aid: it is the outcome, not the amount of money we are spending. Labour Governments used to say, “We are spending record amounts of money”, but that did not mean they were having record outcomes. When I was chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on human trafficking, it was often the small charities without state money that were having the best outcomes.

The great thing about this Government is what they have done with the vaccine and AstraZeneca. The fact that we have given this to the world and that there will be 3 billion doses across the world by the end of next year is tremendous testament to this Government. That is world-leading and it is changing the world, and it is saving millions of people from being seriously ill and dying. That is the sort of thing we should be proud about. We should not be worried about a figure.

3.4 pm

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): Many right hon. and hon. Members have already spoken about the different areas that will be impacted by the proposed cut to the international aid budget, and I will focus my remarks on a subject that is really important. Last month marked 40 years since the first reported AIDS case and the subsequent discovery of HIV, and although we have made big progress in fighting HIV in the UK and across the world, AIDS remains a leading cause of death for women of reproductive age. Although it is preventable, over 1.5 million people acquired HIV last year, and 690,000 people lost their lives to an AIDS-related illness. The HIV epidemic continues to devastate communities right across the world, yet screening has fallen by 40% in Africa and Asia over the past year.

Ending new HIV transmissions in the UK is a global effort, yet shamefully, our funding of the UN AIDS budget has been reduced by a staggering 83%. As we know only too well, pandemics can only be beaten together. Up until now, the UK has been instrumental in reducing the stigma around this terrible disease and

[*Florence Eshalomi*]

helping to save the lives of millions of people, and I pay tribute to the Terrence Higgins Trust for its new campaign launched today, called “Life really changed”, celebrating people who live with HIV.

I represent Vauxhall, a constituency with a large migrant population and one of the highest rates of HIV prevalence in the country. Now more than ever, if we are truly committed to global Britain, it is so important to step up and meet our responsibilities, not step back. The UK should take a leading global step to help reverse the devastating spread of HIV and AIDS, otherwise how are we supposed to meet our target of zero transmissions by 2030? I hope that Members will reflect on that, and the fact that this is about issues not just in our country, but right across the world. I hope that they will join me in voting against this motion.

3.6 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I welcome the fact that this Government have brought this motion before the House today, but I am afraid that I am going to vote against it, and to restore the 0.7% commitment. I am worried that the new criteria would only have been met in one of the past seven years, and goodness knows when they will be met again. Effectively, we are locking in 0.5% for the foreseeable future. I absolutely acknowledge the huge generosity of the UK taxpayer and the contribution by COVAX and others, but we cannot stop now.

I voted and campaigned for that 0.7% commitment, and was really proud that a Conservative-led Government enshrined it in law. I proudly stood on a manifesto to keep it in 2015, 2017, and 2019. Our 2019 manifesto said that

“We are proud of our peace-building and humanitarian efforts around the world, particularly in war-torn or divided societies, and of our record in helping to reduce global poverty”

and

“We will proudly maintain our commitment to spend 0.7 per cent of GNI on development”.

There were no riders that that was dependent on the state of finances, on whether debt was going up or down, or on how much revenue the Treasury was bringing in. There was no small print, no ifs and no buts, and I believe in standing by manifesto pledges. It would have been even more unsatisfactory if we had not at least had this vote today.

Everyone has talked about difficult decisions. It was specifically to avoid short-term difficult decisions that we enshrined that commitment in law, and crafted a careful formula so that the money went up in good times and down in bad times, as is happening. However, this will be a double whammy, as has been said: funding is going to go down because the economy has contracted, and it is going to go down further because the formula is being changed as well. Covid has impacted severely on many countries whose health systems are far less resilient than ours at dealing with the pandemic, and as we know, global pandemics need globally co-ordinated action, including us all facing the challenges posed by the new strains mutating in far-flung corners of the world. The UK plays a key part in that and must continue to do so, not just with vaccines.

However, this decision is also a false economy. Abruptly pulling projects part way through—pulling funding for the malaria programme in Nigeria, which is supposed to go on until 2024; cutting £48 million from the NHS overseas training scheme, when people are being trained in important posts in developing countries; the £80 million cut to water sanitation in the middle of a pandemic; and the circumstances in Yemen that I mentioned earlier—makes no financial sense and increases uncertainty.

Global Britain is not just about projecting military and diplomatic influence, or pursuing new trading and investment partnerships beyond this continent. Complementary to global Britain is the exercise of soft power, which is hugely important and has proved highly influential and effective for UK plc. Our world-leading commitment to 0.7%, enshrined in law, is an important and, I have to say, very cost-effective part of that. Climate change is a major focus of it—we are chairing COP, for goodness’ sake. What message does this reduction to 0.5% send to the rest of the world? This is a false economy at the wrong time.

3.9 pm

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this important debate. I draw Members’ attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

The choice that we face today is clear: are we global Britain or little Britain? This is a trap for the unwary. In fact, it goes further than that. This is a deliberate cut in aid, which the Conservative party has been wanting to do for a long time. I share the concern of many Government Members who do not want to be seen as the nasty party. We are the only G7 country to be cutting our aid, so it simply does not have to be done. We do not have to shrug our shoulders and say, “We are in the middle of a pandemic. This is another cost of covid. We just have to get on and do this”. No, this is a deliberate choice about what we do to retain our promises to the world’s poorest people at a time when we are all suffering around the world together. This is not only about how much we are cutting, but how the cuts are being made: not very strategically; very fast for many of the smallest projects which have the best outcomes; and without any impact assessment being done. The figure of 0.7% is not some arbitrary number dreamt up by a Treasury civil servant.

One of the most memorable days of my life was standing on a stage in Edinburgh, introducing Eddie Izzard to a massive crowd of people. Why am I bringing that up now? It is because it was a Make Poverty History rally. People had got up the night before and travelled overnight in coaches from communities across the whole country. They were of all ages and all backgrounds, and had one mission: to make poverty history and see the 0.7% prescribed in law. That happened many years after; there were many years of campaigning that brought the 0.7% into reality. It is not something that we can lose so easily. I share the concerns of many Members that if we lose it today, it will be many years—if ever—until we see the return to 0.7%, which the British public want.

People from across my constituency have written to me saying that they do not agree with the aid cuts. It is a small amount in the whole scale of Government spending—just 1% of our borrowing—and it is very good value for money. It is a false economy and it is

wrong to cut the South Sudanese peace project, which has been built up over many years and is based in trust. This cut will result in devastating results in South Sudan. It has been called a “crushing blow” to the people of South Sudan. Today is an opportunity to restore the cross-party agreement on aid, to restore our ambition and our own influential place in the world, to do the right thing and to vote against these cuts.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call Catherine West—*[Interruption.]* We do not seem to have any audio, so let us go to Tobias Ellwood and come back to Catherine West.

3.13 pm

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): This is a vote about our soft power; a vote on the definition of global Britain; and a test of our political courage to see the bigger international picture and stay committed to our international obligations even when we face difficulties at home. I will not tire of telling the House just how dangerous and complex our world is becoming. A simple question that I put to the Prime Minister, the National Security Adviser, the Defence Secretary and all the respective heads of the armed forces was this: is global instability over the next five to 10 years going to increase or decrease? In every single case, the answer was increase.

We face an unpredictable, uncertain decade, with growing authoritarianism and extremism on the rise, an ever assertive China and Russia, and, of course, climate change increasingly wreaking havoc across the world. The Government acknowledge that in their own integrated review, but hard and soft power are two sides of the same coin, as we learnt to our peril in Afghanistan. Cutting our soft power will have operational, strategic and reputational consequences. The sheer scale of global challenges was acknowledged at the G7 summit, yet here we are debating the reduction in our soft power profile—the only G7 nation to do so. In contrast, China is using its aid programmes as part of a long-term strategy to advance its own global reach. Look at what is happening across Africa and Asia. A new global soft power war is taking place. This, to me, is the face of a cold war that is slowly emerging, but we in the west have yet to wake up to its reality. China is weaponising its immense soft power to significantly advance its influence and reach and to promote its own interpretation of the international rules-based order, and it ensnares dozens and dozens of countries into its sphere of influence. That is why we should not be diminishing our own soft power.

I suspect the Government may succeed in winning the argument today, but they will lose the moral high ground. We claim to be a problem-solving and burden-sharing nation with a global perspective. It is simply not a good look to promote a global Britain agenda, emphasising leadership, responsibility and resolve, but then to cut our overseas aid budget.

I urge the Government to ask what Churchill might say to the House now, given the 1930s feel to the world. Why not articulate to the nation the wider geopolitical uncertainty that we face, the urgency for the west to regroup, and the influential role that Britain could play if we retain our soft power commitments so we can begin to address the progressively dangerous trajectory

our world is now on? I have no doubt that, if the Government did that, the nation would be fully in support.

3.16 pm

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): May I begin by saying how pleased I am that the Government have finally bowed to pressure and that we in this House are having the vote that we were promised on cutting money to the world's poorest people? It is absolutely right that we have that vote because every Member of this House must declare his or her position. I fear that, without a meaningful vote, Members on the Government Benches could continue to hide behind crocodile tears or meaningless words of regret, without ever having to display the courage of their convictions and stand up and tell this Government that the decision to take £5 billion away from the world's poorest people is fundamentally wrong and morally repugnant.

At the end of this debate, we will all have to declare where we stand, and no one can continue in the hope that, by choosing to stay silent, he or she will not be asked to come off the fence. Although this vote has been a long time coming, it does mean that we are all in this House well rehearsed in the arguments. Absolutely no one can pretend that he or she does not know what they are voting for this evening, or that they do not understand the consequences of their actions when they vote. They now know that, if they support the motion, that money is not coming back.

I find it utterly incomprehensible that the Government of one of the richest countries in the world appear hellbent on making the poorest people on this planet even poorer and more susceptible and vulnerable to disease, hunger and the lack of clean water. For them to push this as vigorously as they have, despite every single analysis telling them and us that millions of people will die, simply beggars belief. It is shameful that, if the motion is agreed tonight, it will mark a new low point for a country that pretends or boasts about being a beacon for tolerance, decency and humanity. This is the test of that vote.

As I have said before, this country has a moral obligation to help those in what we now call the developing world, not least because this country is in no small way responsible for the situation in which they now find themselves. The UK—Great Britain—grew rich and powerful on the backs of the world's poor. We invaded, conquered, divided and plundered, leaving behind an impoverished wasteland. It is about time that this country woke up to its moral responsibility to assist those we abandoned to live with the consequences of British imperialism. We should not be running away from that responsibility. Those on the Government Benches have to accept that that is the consequence of their action tonight.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): We now go back to Catherine West.

3.18 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab) [V]: What a pleasure it is to follow the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara), who is wearing a navy suit and a navy tie with white dots, just like our favourite football manager, Mr Southgate.

[Catherine West]

I am very proud to stand on my promise today, which was laid out in the manifesto of each of the political parties in the House, for the UK Government to spend 0.7% of gross national income on the world's poorest. The UK's economy and health have been ravaged by covid. In my local authority area alone, covid has led to many, many deaths and the loss of jobs. Haringey borough has one of the highest numbers of workers on furlough and at risk of joblessness in the autumn, and child poverty is on the increase. However, my constituents care deeply about the work that the UK does around the globe, especially in Africa. They do not wish to see so many girls lacking in education; they do not wish to see more infants die from malaria; and they do not wish to see Daesh prosper from the withdrawal of important civil society programmes that promote stability throughout north Africa.

The decision we take today will affect the UK's regional universities as well. For example, it could inhibit the important work that is done to strengthen health systems around the globe by doctors and nurses working through the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, or the important scientific research by Durham University on the making of insecticide-treated anti-malarial bed nets. The Prime Minister claimed to support British science but the motion suggests the opposite.

In 2021, 23 more billionaires reached *The Sunday Times* rich list. Inequality is worsening day by day and the Government's proposal fails to address the grotesque inequality around the globe. If I thought that, if I agreed with the Government today, they would instead fund summer schools for children in my constituency, reinstate the 5,000 mental health beds that have been withdrawn since 2010, or fund the capital needed for social homes and housing services for those in housing need, I would change my mind. Instead, the motion is the beginning of more austerity, along with the £20 cut to universal credit recipients, the potential breaking of the triple lock for pensioners and further cuts to local government.

The past 10 years brought the country to its knees and weakened health systems and society, so when covid reached our shores, we fell like flies. When will we learn that the Government must act to protect and build defences, or we will suffer even more?

3.21 pm

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): I thank the Government for being courteous in having the Prime Minister present and the Chancellor respond to this debate. They have been courteous in holding a vote at long last, but I am afraid that is where my thanks end.

As we have heard in the course of this debate, the 0.7% target was not only a manifesto commitment made by every political party in this place but a commitment to the world's poorest. It was a commitment to join in force with other nations around the world. Many Members have said, "We didn't do anything—no other country followed us" but Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Luxembourg all now fulfil the 0.7% target, France is set to hit the 0.7% target next year, and the United States of America has uplited its spending by \$16 billion. We say that we did not have influence; I beg to differ.

Today's debate is really about the fight for parliamentary engagement. In 2015, this House voted for the International Development Act, which enshrined the right to make sure that we did not make short-term decisions and that when the years were good the spending went up and when the years were bad the spending went down. That is something we should have kept in mind before we made today's decision. Instead, we have been offered a mirage. What looks like a compromise is something that will never be reached. Despite the arbiters of the OBR, the spending decisions on the issue will still be made by the Treasury. This announcement comes before a spending review, so we do not know how much is going to be spent on social care, health or education. We do not know what the Government's financial commitments will be in the years to come. We are therefore being led down the garden path, and by that I am appalled. Just as with Gordon Brown's checklist to join the euro, we will never meet these targets.

The Government's proposal is a short-termist approach. Like many Members, I have seen the value of what we spend in foreign aid, whether that is on women's education, AIDS programmes, deradicalisation or climate change. I believe passionately that the UK leads by example in those policy areas, so I will not apologise for voting against the Government tonight. I will not apologise for the fact that I will be standing up on behalf of the NGOs and experts who are based in the UK but operate around the world and who lead by example and help other organisations to follow suit. For that, I offer no apology, but I remind Members of this House that we make an extraordinary impact in the world and to shirk from it for a short-term decision is something that we should all be appalled by.

3.24 pm

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) for an excellent speech.

Twenty-two years ago I visited a hospital in sub-Saharan Africa where a woman, who was about the same age as I was then, was being treated for AIDS. When I say "treated", I stretch the definition to breaking point. She was receiving aspirin, and I felt totally helpless. That visit was part of a professional trip to write about the work being done by an international Christian charity, but it was part of a much more important journey for me.

My once carefully protected eyes had long been opened to the poverty in the world, but on that trip and others I came to realise the significance of the international aid that the UK Government provide, both in creating a stable international community and in making a real difference to the lives of people who need it most.

The Prime Minister highlighted the work this Government are doing as part of the global response to the pandemic, and yes they are, but these cuts are being made at a time when Ministers have often said that no country is safe until the virus is under control in every country. The same applies to international aid.

The world is in the grip of insecurity and democracies are under threat. Long-term strategic support is key to building resilience and capacity in places such as Myanmar. By reducing our support, power vacuums will be filled by countries, such as Russia and China, with very different agendas from our own. China has 500 Confucius

Institutes across 140 countries, with plans for 1,000 more, and it is increasing its global presence through education and culture as part of a strategy of having boots on the ground, education and soft power.

And where are we? Withdrawing from the international stage. Cutting our international aid budget leaves the British Council some £10 million short, which has led to 20 offices being closed. How do we have a global Britain if we blunt the very tool that delivers and embodies that ideal?

Instead of saying, “Look at what we’re doing. Isn’t it great?”, what we see in the world around us should drive us to do more, underlining how important it is. It should make us determined to fight to save children from starvation and girls from being abused. It should drive us to help protect and enhance their health, their rights and their democracies, because we have the ability.

The Government reassure us that this is a temporary measure, but their definition is, frankly, the height of cynicism and heartlessness.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): My hon. Friend will have spent time knocking on doors in Chesham and Amersham, as I did. Is not her characterisation of the new Tory party exactly why many of those voters said they were turning away from the Tories in that election and voting Lib Dem instead?

Christine Jardine: Yes, it is, as we have heard other hon. Members say today. Those same people will know that more than 2 billion people in this world do not have access to clean water, and cutting aid will make it more difficult to change that. The rate of HIV infection across the world remained at 1.7 million people in 2019 alone. The leading killer of women of reproductive age is AIDS.

When I visited that hospital 22 years ago, I felt helpless. I feel the same today, but my Government can help. This Government can help, and this afternoon I will be voting to remind them that they should.

3.28 pm

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I have listened very carefully to the speeches in this debate, and many of them focused on our manifesto promise on aid spending. That is entirely correct but, as I said in one of my interventions, we also made a commitment not to borrow money for day-to-day spending and to reduce our debt burden. All those commitments have been made more challenging by the global pandemic we have faced. The Treasury’s motion, which I will support, as I hope all my colleagues will, is an attempt to deal with the challenge of the pandemic and deliver on all our manifesto commitments in a way that reflects the reality of what has happened over the past year.

I have also heard many Members talk about the borrowing that we have had to make over the last year. I know the Chancellor and I am very proud of that borrowing, because it has helped us get through an incredibly difficult year, but one-off borrowing for a crisis is not the same as ongoing day-to-day spending. I am surprised by many of my colleagues who talk about the £5 billion a year that it would cost to replace this spending as if £5 billion was not a lot of money.

I can remember many difficult conversations when I was a Minister, and indeed when I was Government Chief Whip, about far smaller sums of money, sometimes involving many of the colleagues I have heard talk about £5 billion as if it were nothing. I am afraid that we are going to have to get used to the fact that there are certain realities in the world—that money we spend has to be paid for, and it either has to be borrowed or financed from taxation.

One of the problems we now have with the borrowing we have had to make over the last year is that we are very vulnerable to increases in inflation or interest rates. I heard someone say we are living in an era of low interest rates. We do not know how long that is going to last, and a 1% rise in inflation and interest rates would cost us twenty-five thousand million pounds, five times the amount we are arguing about today. Those are the realities that not just the Chancellor but all of us in this Parliament, and particularly those of us in the governing party, have to grapple with.

My final point is just to say to my colleagues that I fear that this debate is going to be repeated many times as we move through the comprehensive spending review. We are all going to have to face very difficult challenges. Governing is about choosing. It is about setting priorities for what we think is important. This is important, but so is keeping the fiscal measures on balance. All of them are important, and I am glad that the Chancellor has brought forward the measures that he has today.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am sorry that we have not been able to get more speakers in, but we now have to move to the wind-ups. I call the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves.

3.31 pm

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): The Government say that global Britain is at the heart of how we engage with the world, but this move to unilaterally cut overseas aid is a direct attack on what it means to be global Britain. It is a decision that will reduce our power, reduce our influence in the world and undermine our security here at home. At this moment perhaps more than any other, we should be looking to project our power and influence for good around the world, to create change in our national interest but in the global interest, too.

I am proud—we should all be proud, in this House and across our great nations—of what we have achieved together through overseas aid. Together, we have pushed polio to the verge of eradication. Together, we have improved water and sanitation for more than 1.5 million people. Together, we have reduced maternal and infant mortality, as my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) spoke about. And together, we have ensured that girls in the poorest places in the world can go to school, as we all take it for granted that our daughters and granddaughters can go to school.

Yet today the Government seek to undo that great progress. Instead of being a global leader, this Government seek to retreat on the international stage. I can see the understandable discomfort that that is

[Rachel Reeves]

causing hon. and right hon. Members on the Government Benches, who know the consequences of this decision and the short-sightedness of what the Prime Minister has said and what I fear the Chancellor will go on to say.

I commend in particular the contributions of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), who advised colleagues to beware the traps set for the unwary; my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), who said that this motion is just not who we are as a people; and the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), who said, “When it is a choice between lives and money, I choose lives.”

The reason there has been a consensus from five previous Prime Ministers across both parties, including the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), on the importance of the 0.7% commitment is that the case for overseas aid both expresses the moral responsibilities that we have and is firmly in the national interest.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): One of the NGOs that I would be involved with is the HALO Trust, the organisation that clears mines, unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices. If it comes to giving money to one group, there is a group that saves lives, as the hon. Lady refers to.

Rachel Reeves: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, and he speaks powerfully of what he has seen. What has guided former Prime Ministers and Ministers is a moral compass, and I ask the Chancellor what moral compass guides the Prime Minister and Ministers today, as we cut the lifelines of support, and in the midst of a global pandemic as well. For several decades, we have recognised that the world is increasingly interdependent, and that overseas aid helps tackle poverty, infectious diseases and climate change, and reduces conflict, terrorism and the need for people to flee their own countries and seek refuge elsewhere. The Chancellor himself made that point in 2015, arguing that

“this Government’s commitment on international aid is a tangible example of...leadership”.—[*Official Report*, 20 October 2015; Vol. 600, c. 793.]

Where is that leadership today?

Crucially, overseas aid helps us respond to pandemics. Covid cannot be eliminated anywhere if it is not eliminated everywhere. These cuts will impede the ability of some of the poorest countries in the world to mobilise their public health systems and roll out this vaccine effectively. What good does that do any of us here? Until covid is under control globally, the risk is that this virus mutates and comes back to Britain and threatens all of us, including those who have already been double vaccinated. The Chancellor knows full well that our country’s commitments are as a proportion of our gross national income, and that is right; it means that as our economy grows our generosity as a country grows, but as our economy shrinks so does our generosity to those in the poorest parts of the world. That is right and it happens automatically, without the cuts being proposed on top.

As the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) puts it, the “simplicity” of the 0.7% commitment is

“built into the formula: our payments go up in times of plenty and fall back when our economy is stretched.”

But with a 30% reduction—that is what we are talking about today—in just one year, never has our aid budget been cut so savagely, so suddenly and by so much.

Let us be very clear about the tests for returning to 0.7% of GNI spent on overseas aid. The second test the Chancellor set out is on our debt to GDP ratio falling. The OBR has forecast that that will not be met next year or the year after; at the very earliest it will be met in the financial year 2024-25. Let us look at the first test. In the past 30 years, the current budget balance test being proposed by the Chancellor today has been met only five times, and only for one year under a Conservative Government. But the test proposed by the Chancellor goes further than that, because it does not just refer to a “current budget balance”; it refers to a “sustainable current budget balance”. In the past 30 years, that has been met only under a Labour Government.

So if the Chancellor’s small-print conditions are applied to the latest OBR forecasts, we will not be achieving a current budget surplus in the whole of the forecast period. These are not tests to go back to 0.7% of GNI spent on overseas aid; they are tests to stop that ever happening under a Conservative Government again. So let us be clear about what we are voting for. If we vote for the Chancellor’s proposal today, this will not just be for a year; it will hang over us for as long as the Conservatives are in government.

If the Chancellor is serious about saving money—and I believe in value for money in every pound of taxpayers’ money spent—why did he happily sign off cheques for £2.6 million on a media briefing room that will not properly used and £200 million on a vanity yacht project to sell global Britain around the world—why not invest that money on overseas aid instead? There was £37 billion on a test and trace system that does not even work, and £2 billion on crony contracts for friends and donors of the Conservative party. What exactly does it say about the priorities of this Government? Why is the overseas aid budget being singled out for cuts by this Government? It is because this is ideological; it is not about value for money.

If this cut goes through this evening and the House votes for it, it will diminish Britain. It will reduce our power and influence for good in the world, and it will undermine our security here at home too. This is not just about how much aid we give overseas. It is about the country that we are and the country that we want to be. Whether a Government or a football team, when someone is on the world stage, how they conduct themselves and whether they lead by example really matters. Many hon. and right hon. Members on the Opposition Benches—and on the Government Benches too—know in their heart and in their head that what the Government propose is profoundly wrong. They know full well that it breaks the proud promises that we all made at the election only 18 months ago, not just during crisis but for as long as the Conservatives are in government, so I urge hon. and right hon. Members to reject the motion and do what they know is right for

the poorest people in the world, and to honour the proud commitments that we all made in the national interest.

3.40 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rishi Sunak): I am grateful to Members in all parts of the House for their passionate and principled contributions to today's debate. Given the short time available, I shall highlight some of the powerful speeches that we have heard in support of the Government's motion, including by my hon. Friends the Members for Somerton and Frome (David Warburton), for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami), for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns), for Derbyshire Dales (Miss Dines), for Rushcliffe (Ruth Edwards) and for Wellingborough (Mr Bone). Of course, I am disappointed that not all my colleagues feel able to support the Government today, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). No one can doubt the sincere commitment to this cause of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell). I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) for his kind words about my career before I came to the House.

There were particularly thoughtful speeches from my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Jeremy Wright), both of whom highlighted the explicit provisions in the 2015 Act that envisaged these circumstances arising. I can give my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells my commitment to the £22 billion, in which I believe very strongly, as does the Prime Minister. We are determined to create a science superpower in this country.

As ever, my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) made a powerful speech about our promises—all our promises, not just some. While the Opposition might not be concerned with promises about managing the public finances and looking after people's money responsibly, Government Members always will be.

May I pay tribute to the Members who have worked with the Government? I am grateful for their constructive co-operation over the past few weeks in finding what I believe is a genuine compromise to bring the House together so that we can support a policy that commands, I think, the broad acceptance not just of this place but of the British people. Those right hon. and hon. Members include my hon. Friends the Members for Stafford (Theo Clarke), for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) and for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt), my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman). I am very grateful to them for all their engagement.

What we are asking the House to vote for today is a road map for returning to 0.7%. That road map reaffirms our values while recognising the reality that covid has caused severe damage to our public finances. It puts beyond doubt the fact that the reduction in the aid budget is temporary; it defines a reasonable set of tests for when we will return to 0.7%; and it makes those tests objective and verifiable, based on data, not dates, measured not by the Government ourselves, but by the independent Office for Budget Responsibility.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): Does the Chancellor accept that in areas of instability and potential social decline, if we withdraw aid and support people are more likely to end up needing the support of our military? We know that for a fact, because we have had to give that support a lot in the past. Does he not accept the principle that in areas that are extremely volatile it is much, much cheaper to the British purse to provide support via aid workers than to send the military in with hardware and put our soldiers on the frontline, often in danger?

Rishi Sunak: It is not an either/or. This Government are doing both. We are one of the largest donors to the UN peacekeeping operations and that is why we are making a difference in countries across the globe, not just through our ODA budget but through all the other ways we express global leadership.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The Chancellor is right to say that the countries with big hearts also need clear heads, so will he confirm that, with the road map he has set out today and the proposals before the House, we will still be spending 20% more on overseas aid than we were when Labour was last in government?

Rishi Sunak: If my numbers are right, as a percentage of GDP we were for the last few years spending double what Labour ever spent when it was in office, and my right hon. Friend is right about what we will be doing even at this reduced level.

Today's approach is a pragmatic approach to meeting our commitments to the world's poorest today and to have the secure fiscal foundations we need to meet those commitments for decades to come. We should be proud of what UK overseas aid means to millions of the world's poorest people. It means tens of millions of girls around the world getting a better education. It means food parcels stamped with a Union Jack arriving in famine stricken countries such as Syria and Somalia. It means wind turbines, solar panels and hydroelectric dams generating clean energy in developing countries. I am proud, as I know the whole House will be proud, of the extraordinary good this country is doing around the world.

John Redwood: I am looking forward to this answer. Will the Chancellor remind the House, given that we are rightly keen to save as many lives as possible, that this country has given a great gift to the world with many free vaccines and pioneered the cheapest and one of the best vaccines to save lives all around the world?

Rishi Sunak: I completely agree with my right hon. Friend, and I will come on to that in a minute.

I am proud, too, of our response to last year's economic crisis—the deepest recession this country has ever seen. In total, we have provided hundreds of billions of pounds to protect jobs, keep businesses afloat and help families to get by. That was the right approach, but we should be clear-eyed: covid has severely damaged our public finances. We have the highest level of borrowing since world war two, national debt of £2 trillion and rising, and debt expected to peak at 100% of GDP. If we want to

[Rishi Sunak]

continue to meet our commitments in the future, both at home and overseas, we must act now to rebuild our fiscal resilience.

Christian Matheson: This is all well and good, but the Government had already taken the decision to scrap the Department for International Development before covid came along. That is how committed they were to international aid.

Rishi Sunak: On the contrary; this Government have brought a coherence and a strategic symmetry to our approach to international development and foreign policy, which is improving how we project our influence and effectiveness around the world.

I have heard that this is the only difficult thing that we are doing, but that is simply not true. We have had to build fiscal resilience and have asked businesses to pay more tax. We have frozen the personal income tax allowance, taken a targeted approach to public sector pay and, yes, we also had to take the difficult decision to temporarily reduce our aid budget. This decision follows a path that Parliament explicitly envisaged when it enshrined the 0.7% target in law. Section 2(3) of the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015 clearly foresaw the fiscal circumstances that might mean the target could not be met. And let us be honest: if that test is not being met in the aftermath of the worst economic shock in 300 years, surely it never will.

This decision is categorically not a rejection of our global responsibilities. The UK will spend over £10 billion this year on overseas development. According to the latest figures, that is more as a proportion of national income than all but two of the G7 countries—more than Japan, Canada, Italy and the United States, and much more than the average of the 29 countries in the OECD's Development Assistance Committee.

Our spending on humanitarian causes goes far beyond just our ODA budget. We have the fourth biggest defence and security budget in the world and the third largest diplomatic network. On average, we contribute nearly £500 million a year to the United Nations peacekeeping budget. We use our trade policy to reduce poverty, with developing countries benefiting from tariff savings of up to £1 billion a year. It is why we are working with the G7 to deliver the clean and green infrastructure financing initiative. With UK Government support, this year 1.5 billion people around the world will be vaccinated with the Oxford-AstraZeneca jab, provided at no profit whatsoever.

There is no question about our commitment to overseas aid. The only question is when we return to the 0.7% target. The motion puts beyond all doubt that we will do so once two clear objective tests have been met: our national debt is falling and we are no longer borrowing for day-to-day spending. Those tests are in line with the approach set out in our manifesto and at the Budget. They are practical and realistic.

If the House votes against the motion today, it is an effective vote. We will return, irrespective of the circumstances, to 0.7% next year. Instead of voting for responsibility, the House would in effect be voting to say that no circumstances could ever justify a move.

I know that a deep sense of conscience underpins the view that the amount we spend on overseas aid is a moral issue. Many hon. Members will know the words:

“Charity is patient, is kind.”

I think of those words and I share that sense of conscience. That is why we are maintaining the target, not abolishing it; why we are setting out the conditions, not obscuring them, and why we are basing the conditions independently—

3.51 pm

Three hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the motion, the Speaker put the Question (Order, this day).

The House divided: Ayes 333, Noes 298.

Division No. 49]

[3.51 pm]

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Barclay, rh Steve
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Brokenshire, rh James
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, rh Conor
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam

Chalk, Alex
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura

Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay

Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Largan, Robert
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher

Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham

Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:

David Rutley and
 Maria Caulfield

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven

Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brine, Steve
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy

Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Chishti, Rehman
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Girvan, Paul
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, rh Damian
 Green, Kate
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret

Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Meg
 Hoare, Simon
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lockhart, Carla
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Loughton, Tim
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.

McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Mercer, Johnny
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Pawsey, Mark
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar-Javed, Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd

Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Seely, Bob
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Jessica Morden and
Anthony Mangnall

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Written Ministerial Statement relating to Treasury Update on International Aid, which was made to the House on Monday 12 July.

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

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rishi Sunak): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I recognise the passion and conviction with which Members who voted both for

and against the Government's motion spoke in favour of the 0.7% target. To me, that is the salient point. While not every Member felt able to vote for the Government's compromise, the substantive matter of whether we remain committed to the 0.7% target not just now but for decades to come is clearly one of significant unity in this House. Today's vote has made that commitment more secure for the long term while helping the Government to fix the problems with our public finances and continue to deliver for our constituents.

I commit to the House that I, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary will continue to work with all hon. Members on how we can continue to be a global leader in helping the world's poorest and on how we can improve our aid spending, targeting it most effectively and ensuring that it gets to those who need it most. Having now provided the House with an effective vote on this matter, the Government will move forward with the planned approach.

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

4.3 pm

Sitting suspended.

4.5 pm

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I hope you can help us. In the debate after the next one, we are discussing the regulations that the Government have brought forward that will deprive thousands of people who work in our care homes of the right to work and not give them any compensation. The Government said on 22 June that alongside the statutory instrument they were laying an explanatory memorandum together with an impact assessment. The impact assessment has not been laid. Yesterday I raised this issue and referred to the fact that the Department of Health and Social Care had written to the Library to say, "The impact assessment has not been laid yet. We will be laying it at the earliest opportunity." That was at midday yesterday. I have recently spoken to people in the Vote Office and they say that they have now been informed by the Department that this impact assessment will not be laid before the debate. So either it does not exist and there was a fault when it was asserted that it did, or it has been suppressed because it does not fit in with the Government's agenda. In any event, is it open to you to put pressure on the Government to withdraw that item of business until we have an impact assessment?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for giving me advance notice of it. No, I cannot ask the Government to withdraw the motion and the business statement that has been agreed to, but I do share his disappointment that the document has not been made available before the debate after next. I hope that it will be fed back from those on the Treasury Bench that the Minister should address the issue in her opening remarks in the debate.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have recently been on a four-colleague call with the Care Minister where she confirmed to us that the said impact assessment would not be made available until after the debate. That strikes me as a rather back-to-front approach. I just provide that clarity to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Member for that clarity. It is what we rather suspected, and what I was trying to hint at, in that it was not going to be ready but the Minister would address that in her remarks when she opens the debate.

Sir Christopher Chope: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Given what my hon. Friend has said, it is available and it could be made available immediately, but the Government are choosing not to make it available until after the event.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has reinforced his point that if it is available it could be made available before the debate. We understand that it is not going to be, but, as I say, we will pass back the very strong feeling that the Minister should address why that is the case in her opening remarks.

ARMED FORCES BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 3)

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

That the Order of 23 June 2021 (Armed Forces Bill: Programme (No. 2)) be varied as follows:

(1) Paragraphs 5 and 6 of the Order shall be omitted.

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

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

Question agreed to.

Armed Forces Bill

[Relevant document: *Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill, Special Report of Session 2019-21: The Armed Forces Bill, HC 1281.*]

Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

New Clause 1

DUTY OF CARE TO SERVICE PERSONNEL

‘(1) The Secretary of State must establish a duty of care standard in relation to legal, pastoral and mental health support provided to service personnel involved in investigations or litigation arising from overseas operations, as defined in section 1(6) of the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act 2021.

(2) The Secretary of State must lay a copy of the duty of care standard under subsection (1) before Parliament within six months of the date on which this Act is passed.

(3) The Secretary of State must thereafter in each calendar year—

- (a) prepare a duty of care update, and
- (b) include the duty of care update in the Armed Forces Covenant annual report when it is laid before Parliament.

(4) The duty of care update is a review about the continuous process and improvement to meet the duty of care standard established in subsection (1), in particular in relation to incidents arising from overseas operations of—

- (a) litigation and investigations brought against service personnel for allegations of criminal misconduct and wrongdoing;
- (b) civil litigation brought by service personnel against the Ministry of Defence for negligence and personal injury;
- (c) judicial reviews and inquiries into allegations of misconduct by service personnel; and
- (d) such other related fields as the Secretary of State may determine.

(5) In preparing a duty of care update the Secretary of State must have regard to, and publish relevant data in relation to (in respect of overseas operations)—

- (a) the adequacy of legal, welfare and mental health support services provided to service personnel who are accused of crimes;
- (b) complaints made by service personnel or their legal representation when in the process of bringing or attempting to bring civil claims against the Ministry of Defence for negligence and personal injury;
- (c) complaints made by service personnel or their legal representation when in the process of investigation or litigation for an accusation of misconduct; and
- (d) meeting national standards of care and safeguarding for families of service personnel, where relevant.

(6) In subsection (1) “service personnel” means—

- (a) members of the regular forces and the reserve forces;
- (b) members of British overseas territory forces who are subject to service law;
- (c) former members of any of Her Majesty’s forces who are ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom; and
- (d) where relevant, family members of any person meeting the definition within paragraph (a), (b) or (c).

(7) In subsection (1) “duty of care” means both the legal and moral obligation of the Ministry of Defence to ensure the wellbeing of service personnel.

(8) None of the provisions of this section may be used to alter the principle of combat immunity.’

This new clause will require the Secretary of State to establish a duty of care standard in relation to legal, pastoral and mental health support provided to service personnel involved in investigations or litigation arising from overseas operations.—(Stephanie Peacock.)

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.9 pm

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 2—Report on dismissals and forced resignations for reasons of sexual orientation or gender identity—

‘(1) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a report on the number of people who have been dismissed or forced to resign from the Armed Forces due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

(2) The report under subsection (1) must include cases where—

- (a) there is formal documentation citing sexuality as the reason for their dismissal; or
- (b) there is evidence of sexuality or gender identity being a reason for their dismissal, though another reason is cited in formal documentation.

(3) The report under subsection (1) must include recommendations of the sort of compensation which may be appropriate, including but not limited to—

- (a) the restoration of ranks,
- (b) pensions, and
- (c) other forms of financial compensation.

(4) The report must include a review of the cases of those service personnel who as a result of their sexuality have criminal convictions for sex offences and/or who are on the Sex Offenders register.

(5) The report must include discharges and forced resignations back to at least 1955.

(6) The first report under subsection (1) must be laid no later than 6 months after the day on which this Act is passed.

(7) The Secretary of State may make further reports under subsection (1) from time to time.

(8) In this section, “sexuality or gender identity” includes perceived or self-identified sexuality or gender identity.’

This new clause requires the government to conduct a comprehensive review of the number of people who were dismissed or forced to resign from the Armed Forces due to their sexuality and to make recommendations on appropriate forms of compensation.

New clause 3—Armed Forces Federation—

‘(1) The Armed Forces Act 2006 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 333, insert the following new clauses—

“333A Armed Forces Federation

(1) There shall be an Armed Forces Federation for the United Kingdom for the purpose of representing members of the Armed Forces in the United Kingdom in all matters affecting their welfare, remuneration and efficiency, except for—

- (a) questions of promotion affecting individuals, and
- (b) (subject to subsection (2)) questions of discipline affecting individuals.

(2) The Armed Forces Federation may represent a member of the armed forces at any proceedings or on an appeal from any such proceedings.

(3) The Armed Forces Federation shall act through local and central representative bodies.

(4) This section applies to reservists of the Armed Forces as it applies to members of the Armed Forces, and references to the Armed Forces shall be construed accordingly.

333B Regulations for the Armed Forces Federation

- (1) The Secretary of State may by regulations—
- prescribe the constitution and proceedings of the Armed Forces Federation, or
 - authorise the Federation to make rules concerning such matters relating to their constitution and proceedings as may be specified in the regulations.
- (2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1), regulations under this section may make provision—
- with respect to the membership of the Federation;
 - with respect to the raising of funds by the Federation by voluntary subscription and the use and management of funds derived from such subscriptions;
 - with respect to the manner in which representations may be made by committees or bodies of the Federation to officers of the Armed Forces and the Secretary of State; and
 - for the payment by the Secretary of State of expenses incurred in connection with the Federation and for the use by the Federation of premises provided by local Armed Forces bodies for Armed Forces purposes.

(3) Regulations under this section may contain such supplementary and transitional provisions as appear to the Secretary of State to be appropriate, including provisions adapting references in any enactment (including this Act) to committees or other bodies of the Federation.

(4) A statutory instrument containing regulations under this section shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.

(5) This section applies to reservists of the Armed Forces as it applies to members of the Armed Forces.”

This new clause would create a representative body for the Armed Forces, akin to the Police Federation, which would represent their members in matters such as welfare, pay and efficiency.

New clause 4—Armed Forces Mental Health Care review—

“(1) The Secretary of State must publish a report containing a review of the mental health treatment provided to Armed Forces personnel through the—

- Defence Medical Services,
- Departments of Community Mental Health and the Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service, and
- Reserves Mental Health Programme.

(2) The report under subsection (1) must be laid before Parliament within three months of the date on which this Act is passed.’

This new clause would require the government to conduct a formal review of the standards of mental health care available for serving personnel.

Amendment 1, page 4, line 27, clause 7, at end insert—

“guidance under subsection (3)

- must provide for charges of murder, manslaughter, domestic violence, child abuse and rape to require specific consent by the Attorney General to be tried in court martial when the offences are alleged to have been committed in the United Kingdom, and
- if the Attorney General has not granted such consent, guidance under (3)(a) shall provide that charges as set out in section 4A(a) to be tried in civilian court only.”

This amendment would ensure that the most serious crimes – murder, manslaughter, domestic violence, child abuse and rape – are tried in the civilian courts when committed in the UK unless the Attorney General has specifically consented for such crimes to be tried under courts martial.

Amendment 7, page 16, line 1, clause 8, leave out subsection 5.

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to obtain the consent of Ministers in the devolved legislatures before issuing or revising any guidance under section 343AE relating to the duties imposed by sections 343AB(1), 343AC(1), and 343AD(1).

Amendment 8, page 17, line 34, clause 8, leave out “consult” and insert “obtain consent from”.

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to obtain the consent of Ministers in the devolved legislatures before widening the scope of the duties in sections 343AA(1), 343AB(1), 343AC(1) and 343AD(1) when exercising this power in devolved contexts.

Amendment 2, page 18, line 28, clause 8, at end insert—

“343AG Section 343AF: report

‘(1) The Secretary of State must lay a report before each House of Parliament no later than three months after the day on which this Act is passed, and thereafter must make a report at least once in every calendar year.

(2) The report in subsection (1) shall set out how the powers in section 343F (Sections 343AA to 343AD: power to add bodies and functions) will work in practice.

(3) Any report published under subsection (1) after the initial report made 3 months after this Act is passed must include—

- a statement detailing how the powers granted through section 343F (Sections 343AA to 343AD: power to add bodies and functions) have been used since the last report was issued,
- a review of the relevance of the listed bodies and functions in section 343F (Sections 343AA to 343AD: power to add bodies and functions) in relation to the Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report under section 343A of AFA 2006, and
- the outcome of a consultation conducted by the Secretary of State with the Armed Forces Covenant Reference Group on the bodies and functions listed in section 343F (Sections 343AA to 343AD: power to add bodies and functions) in regard to their appropriateness and relevance as part of the Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report.”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to set out how powers in the Bill could be used to widen its scope to address all matters of potential disadvantage for service personnel under the Armed Forces Covenant including employment, pensions, compensation, social care, criminal justice and immigration.

Stephanie Peacock: Labour stands firmly behind our armed forces and our brave service personnel who serve our country. It is a privilege to be speaking on behalf of Her Majesty’s Opposition on this important legislation. From their work across the country on the frontline of the pandemic to operations around the world, Britain’s armed forces deserve our admiration and gratitude. My grandad, who would have been 100 this year, served with the RAF during the second world war. Nearly all of us will have loved ones whose service we look back on with pride, and I am sure that we would all hope they were given the support they needed and deserved during their service and afterwards.

Labour supports our armed forces and the principles behind the Bill. It presents a once-in-a-Parliament opportunity to bring about meaningful improvements to the lives of our service personnel and veterans and their families, and I want to take this opportunity to thank all the organisations—local authorities, service charities and voluntary organisations—that have contributed to this legislation.

[Stephanie Peacock]

It is the duty of any and every Government to look after their people, and there are welcome steps in the Bill, which we support—the creation of a legal duty to the principles of the covenant, and the implementation of key elements of the Lyons review—but we believe the Government can and should go further. Our forces communities cannot afford for this Bill to become a missed opportunity, and that is why Labour has put forward our amendments in good faith to strengthen the Bill and offer the support and protection that are needed by many of our service personnel.

Turning first to amendment 1, currently serious crimes, including murder, manslaughter, domestic violence, child abuse and rape cases that are committed in the UK by service personnel are prosecuted in the service justice system, the SJS, not the civilian courts. Victims and their families often do not get the justice they deserve, and quite often sexual abuse cases are tried as “disgraceful conduct” and other service offences, meaning those who commit the offences are not put on the sex offender register.

Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP): I greatly welcome the shadow Minister’s commitment to the rule of law in amendment 1. Almost 50 years ago 14 unarmed civil rights marchers were murdered on the streets of Derry by the Parachute Regiment. Five of those victims were shot by David Cleary, otherwise known as soldier F. For 50 years he has been granted anonymity; now the Government want to give him an amnesty. Does the shadow Minister agree that nobody—none of the perpetrators involved in murder during our troubles—should be granted an amnesty?

Stephanie Peacock: The Labour party is committed to the Stormont House agreement and the leader of the Labour party, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), made it clear in Northern Ireland last week that the rule of law must be central to our approach to legacy in Northern Ireland.

Returning to amendment 1, last week I met with the charity Salute Her at Forward Assist, who shared with me statistics showing that up to six out of 10 women serving in the military have experienced some form of sexual harassment or abuse. This is an issue that disproportionately affects women of lower ranks; it is a harrowing issue, and these women deserve real justice. This amendment would ensure the Armed Forces Bill provides appropriate support, protection and access to justice for our forces. Serious crimes will be tried in civilian courts when committed in the UK unless the Attorney General has consented for such crimes to be tried under courts martial.

Moving on to amendment 2, a significant part of this Bill relates to the armed forces covenant and the introduction of a legal duty for public bodies to have regard to its principles. I am proud that my local authority, Barnsley Council, is not only one of the leading signatories of the covenant but has achieved the gold award in the defence employer recognition scheme. More needs to be done to end the postcode lottery of support and introducing a legal duty in this Bill is a welcome step, but we believe it can go further not only in the duties themselves—currently limited to healthcare, housing and education—but in who they apply to as well.

While the Bill creates new responsibilities for a wide range of public bodies, from school governors to local authorities, central Government are not included. The Government are notable by their omission from these legal responsibilities; they should show leadership in at least holding themselves to the same standard they are asking others to follow. Our amendment would place the same legal responsibilities for the armed forces covenant on central Government as their current drafting requires of local authorities. Twelve of the UK’s leading military charities wrote an open letter to MPs last week sharing their concern that the new legal duties in the Bill do not cover the “full range of issues” currently affecting our armed forces community. They are urging the Government to widen the Bill’s scope to make sure that greater protections are given in areas such as employment, pensions, social care and immigration. I hope that the Government will today listen to those charities and support our amendment.

4.15 pm

Through new clause 1, we are calling on the Ministry of Defence to recognise its duty of care to British service personnel who are subject to legal action arising from overseas operations. It simply cannot be right that so many families have been put through the trauma of long-running investigations with little to no legal or welfare support from the MOD. Labour repeatedly attempted to resolve this issue with amendments to the Bill that became the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act 2021, but Ministers did not accept this important duty as part of that Bill. We are asking the Government to reconsider this issue and ensure that they deliver on their responsibilities to members of our armed forces.

New clause 2 would establish a comprehensive review of the number of people who were dismissed or forced to resign from the armed forces because of their sexuality, and to consider appropriate forms of compensation. The institutional and cultural discrimination against the LGBT+ community is a shameful feature of our not-so-distant past and remains a serious issue today. I am proud that the last Labour Government abolished the ban on homosexuality in the armed forces in 2000, and I believe the Government’s new policy of medal restoration for those veterans is a very welcome first step. But it simply cannot be right that so little further work has been undertaken to seek to right this wrong, so we ask Ministers now to consider the restoration of ranks and pensions, and other forms of compensation to appropriately honour those who have served our country with courage and distinction, irrespective of their sexuality.

New clause 3 is calling on the Government to create a representative body for our armed forces. It has been clear for some time that the armed forces need independent advice. There are many issues on which members of the armed forces need representation, in matters such as welfare and pay, which is why Labour is calling for a representative body for the armed forces, to work with the MOD to further support service personnel. The US and Australia already have similar models embedded in military command structures, and the model is used successfully in this country in the police force, through the Police Federation. Our armed forces give their lives for us. Ministers should seize this opportunity to give them a real voice.

Finally, new clause 4 calls on the Government to conduct a formal review of the standards of mental health care available for service personnel. The Government are currently missing a range of targets on mental health care for people who have served. Forces personnel face a wait of 37 days for a face-to-face appointment to be offered through the transition, intervention and liaison service. The target is 14 days, so that is a wait of more than double the target time period. They then face another unacceptable wait for treatment. The latest figures available to us show an average wait time for treatment of 70 days, which is a jump from 57 days in 2018-19. After six months of having left the service, veterans then access mental health support through the responsibilities of the NHS, which of course face serious pressures and considerable waiting times. Ministers cannot ignore this issue or seek to outsource accountability and responsibility on matters such as these. Action needs to be taken nationally to deliver, and we believe the review established by new clause 4 would form a key basis for turning around the crisis in mental health services.

There are welcome steps in this Bill, but in delivering on the special responsibility we have to our armed forces personnel, we believe the Government can and should go further with this legislation. Labour believes that the armed forces covenant represents a binding moral commitment between the Government and our service communities. This legislation is an opportunity to strengthen and improve it and, through Labour's amendments, to go further and ensure that we tackle all areas of disadvantage.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock), the new shadow Minister, and I wish her well in her new role. I also empathise with much of what she said this afternoon, but of course the Government position is quite different, and I will explain why.

As Chair of the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill, I am probably more familiar with this Bill than most, and it is a good Bill. As before, with the armed forces covenant, I welcome the fact that it pays due regard to the placeholder, recognises rightful outcomes, and accurately reflects the unique sacrifices and obligations on HM forces, and that it places a legal obligation on the delivery of health, accommodation and local support from councils. It provides examples of good practice and pragmatic guidelines on how this is to be provided.

I note, with the Minister in his place, that prescriptive performance targets are still absent from the statutory guidance, but it may just be impossible to apply any meaningful metrics and tools to this area. I just do not believe that councils are in any doubt about what is expected of them after 10 years, but it may be that guidance is still needed on how they will be held to account if they do not meet their obligations, so I await that with interest.

I want to talk to just a handful of the amendments, if I may. New clause 1, as mentioned, is on the duty of care. It would require the Secretary of State to

"establish a duty of care standard in relation to legal, pastoral and mental health support provided to service personnel involved in investigations or litigation arising from overseas operations".

While this duty of care is one of the most important aspects of the Bill, and of the armed forces of course, applying a one-size-fits-all approach could lead to difficulties

in the future. Tailored welfare and mental support for those who have served is already very effective and is already offered to all personnel.

New clause 2, on dismissal for sexuality, requires the Government to conduct a comprehensive review of the number of people who are dismissed or forced to resign from the armed forces because of their sexuality or perceived sexuality, and to make recommendations on appropriate forms of compensation. As before, while there is no validation of this practice and the Government do see it as an absolute wrong, the Government have resisted this clause at this point in time, as indeed they did in Committee, owing to its complicating the MOD's efforts to address at pace this injustice. However, for the record, this does need to be done in due course, and I believe that the Government will do it.

New clause 3, on a representative armed forces body, would create a representative body for the armed forces, akin to the Police Federation, that would represent their members in matters such as welfare, pay and efficiency. But, once again, the Government have not been persuaded that there is a requirement or a groundswell of support for a federation along the lines that have been suggested. The interests of armed forces personnel, of which I was one, are already ably represented through a range of mechanisms, not least the chain of command. Furthermore, the service complaints ombudsman provides independent and impartial scrutiny of all service complaints.

I would talk to some more amendments, but actually my opinion of all of them is the same as it is of the new clauses: while they are laudable on their own, there are good reasons why the Government are resisting every one—reasons outlined at length in Committee, and indeed during the Select Committee stage. In the interests of time, let me just say that this Bill has been subject to repeated scrutiny at various stages. It is a good Bill, it remains fit for purpose in terms of what can be achieved now, and I will be voting it through tonight.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP) [V]: I start by paying tribute to members of the armed forces both for the work they do in ordinary times and for the work they have done over the last 15 or 16 months with their support for services during the pandemic. I also want to pay tribute to the organisations that have taken time to engage with Members during the passage of this Bill to ensure that we are fully informed about as many areas and as wide a range of issues as possible.

The Bill started its passage with Members on all sides keen to see real change for personnel in the armed forces. From that start with the very best of intentions, we have ended up with a disappointing conclusion, with non-controversial amendments being rejected without, I believe, any real attempt to make meaningful progress. We therefore find ourselves at this stage with a Bill that will make very little, if any, practical difference to those who serve. Of course, I do hope that I am proved wrong about this, but I have my suspicions that if, in a year's time, we were to ask personnel whether they knew of any difference this has made, the answer unfortunately would be negative.

As I have made clear throughout the passage of the Bill, it lacks the punch required. The Bill's commitment to the armed forces covenant falls far short of what it ought to be. Many stakeholders, including the Royal British Legion, have argued that the Bill should

[Carol Monaghan]

go further in strengthening the covenant in law, but many other areas have been missed out, such as visas for Commonwealth personnel, pay, Department for Work and Pensions issues, and proper representation for serving personnel.

For veterans who have suffered humiliation, dismissal and loss of pensions because of their sexuality, the Bill simply does not deliver. The Armed Forces Minister has previously spoken of his intention to make real progress in this area, so I look forward to working with him to deliver a just outcome for those individuals who have been affected in that way. This is an example of an issue that the Bill fails to address, and the SNP will be supporting Labour's new clause 2 on that.

The Armed Forces Minister has previously given us assurances on service accommodation, but accommodation issues are raised year on year by serving personnel. The recent National Audit Office report on single living accommodation describes a litany of neglect. Accommodation for families also falls far short of the standards we expect. It is therefore disappointing that the Bill as it stands will not strengthen the accommodation offer. The SNP's series of modest amendments, Nos. 3 to 6, asks that service accommodation match the standards set for civilian housing. This should be a matter of straightforward agreement across the House. We should not be asking service personnel, or indeed their families, to put up with accommodation that would be deemed unacceptable to non-military families. If we are talking about non-detriment, basic housing standards would be a good place to start. I am not expecting the Government to accept the SNP amendments on that today, but I hope this issue can be properly considered in the weeks and months ahead.

The SNP has for a long time advocated a far more comprehensive way of representing the interests of the armed forces. We look at the examples of many of our NATO allies, which benefit from armed forces representative bodies. We are used to hearing arguments from Members on the Government Benches about how it could not possibly work, because it could undermine the chain of command or encourage strike action. However, an armed forces representative body would be a federation like the Police Federation. It would not allow strikes and it would not impact on the chain of command, but it would give a voice to our personnel that, at the moment, is sadly lacking. I am therefore pleased to see Labour bringing an amendment forward again. If we are looking to ensure that the covenant is properly fulfilled, such an organisation would substantively carry out that role. It could advocate on housing, pay, terms and conditions and so on. However, I think the real reason for the Government's resistance is that it would actually give our armed forces and veterans a voice.

The time and effort spent on the Bill should have been an opportunity to significantly improve our offerings to the armed forces, but I am doubtful. Without the ability to enforce—without the teeth the Bill needs—the Bill will sadly fall short. If this is a once-in-a-Parliament opportunity, many of us will be disappointed, but the SNP will continue to engage with the Government and the Armed Forces Minister in the hope that we can make a real change for those who are serving.

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con) [V]: The substance of the Bill before the House today is access to justice and welfare and our wider responsibilities in the context of the military covenant. In supporting this Bill, I would like to draw the House's attention to the excellent work of some local authorities in relation to our service personnel and veterans, including the many who reside in Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner as a consequence of the numerous nearby military bases, including HMS Northwood, RAF Northolt and some of the historic ones in the area .

4.30 pm

I very much commend my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) for the work that he has done. I know that he was a resident of my constituency during his Army career. I am sure that, like me, he would commend the work of the London borough of Hillingdon, led by our armed forces champion, Councillor Sir Ray Puddifoot. For many service personnel, access to housing and to school places for their children can be a challenge. Hillingdon has, through its approach to the military covenant, sought to make that as straightforward as possible. Its housing allocations policy enables returning service personnel to be treated as though they had never been away from their home area. They are absent in service when it comes to applying for social housing. Targeted support has enabled a Gurkha community to settle and to play a fantastic part in the life of the local area. Support to enable the children of service families to secure school places quickly is also prioritised, ensuring that those who serve their country do not face having to sacrifice their family interest.

I very much encourage the Government and all those involved in the debate about the Bill to highlight these and many other examples of best practice within the military covenant, which are entirely in line with the aspirations that are set out in the Bill, to ensure that our service personnel are treated with the priority that they deserve. It seems clear to me that many of these things are not so much matters of law or of Government targets, but of ensuring that we have the relationships at a local level, the political will and the effective management so that the expectations set out in the military covenant, and set out with local authorities, health bodies and others, are fulfilled. I strongly encourage the Government, in supporting this Bill, to publicise the work of the best as the example to which others may aspire to ensure that we all fulfil our obligations.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I join other Members in thanking the Committee Clerks who have supported this Armed Forces Bill and in paying tribute to all the Members who have taken part in it, as we are now on the final stage. I was also going to pay tribute to the Minister's predecessor, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), but I do not think that I can because he is absent again today. He has taken such an interest in this Bill and in standing up for veterans that he cannot even be bothered to get off his beach in Devon to come to speak on their behalf when he has the opportunity to do so, but we will leave that there for now, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I rise to support Labour's new clauses. As I think I have said on a previous occasion, I have been on every single Armed Forces Bill for the past 20 years either as a Minister or a Back Bencher. As has just been said by the

hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), these Bills come round every five years. The Department does not deal with much legislation, so it is very important that, when we do have these five-yearly Bills, we ensure that we try to address all the issues that we can. Sadly, I do not think that we have done so with this Bill. As I have said before, that has partly been down to the intransigence and attitude of the previous armed forces Minister. The new Minister for Defence People and Veterans has been left to pick up the pieces at the end. One issue that has been left unresolved—I was tempted to table an amendment today, but I decided against it—was around investigations. It is outside the scope not only of this Bill, but of the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act 2021. If, as I understand it, the review is complete later this summer, when will those amendments and changes be put in place? Because I do not think that we can wait another five years for the next Armed Forces Bill. As I have said before, this is a missed opportunity. Such changes would have improved this Bill and certainly vastly improved the 2021 Act, which is a disappointment to say the least in terms of promising a lot, and delivering very little. It actually takes away rights from veterans, which is disappointing.

I wish to speak to some of the amendments before us, beginning with new clause 2. One great thing about the way proceedings on Armed Forces Bills are constructed is that we can take evidence from a wide range of individuals. I pay tribute to the people from Fighting With Pride for their evidence to the Select Committee on the Bill. They shone a light on something that has not been highlighted: the effect on those individuals who were dismissed from service because of their sexuality. Many of us thought that because the ban was overturned, that was somehow the end of the issue and things had moved on, but what shocked me and, I think, many Members on the Committee was the fact that those individuals who served their country with dignity and bravery but were then dismissed because of their sexuality still suffer the legacy of that. We heard evidence about an individual who, because it was classed as a sexual offence, is on the sex offenders register, and today, 20 years afterwards, that still affects his ability to get a job as, for example, a school caretaker. That urgently needs to be addressed.

I do not doubt that the Minister is committed to looking at the issue, but without new clause 2 the Ministry of Defence will go into its usual mode of thinking, “We don’t need to bother about this and how we’re going to do it for the next few years.” A study of the effects clearly needs to be done and the issue of criminal records needs to be addressed straight away. There is no justification for these individuals having a criminal record when if they had “committed the same acts” in civilian life they would not have a criminal record. That cannot be right.

I note the change from the Government in terms of asking about medals and making sure that people can apply for the medals that were stripped from them when they were dismissed from service, but we need clear guidance. People have to apply; some people have asked why the MOD cannot take a proactive stance and offer the medals out. For some unknown reason the data is not there, which makes me wonder whether a hard-enough effort has been made to find out about these individuals and address the situation. All three services must have

records on the individuals who were dismissed. It is important that those medals are reported. As I say, I do not question the Minister’s commitment, but I think that without the new clause he will come up against what we all do—as you know, Madam Speaker—in terms of the civil service system: the issue will just get pushed back and back. We have to make sure that that does not happen, and the only way we can do that is through the new clause.

New clause 3 would establish an armed forces federation. This idea always sets off end-of-the-world notions in some in the military and some on the Conservative Back Benches, as though somehow if we had an armed forces federation, the world would stop. If it is good enough for our main allies—the United States, Australia and many European countries—it is good enough for me. People ask whether we are arguing for a trade union; the hon. Member for Glasgow North West was correct to say that it is not about having a trade union for the armed forces. I understand the conservative—with a small c—nature of the military, but we are reaching the point where a federation is going to have to come in sooner rather than later.

Along with other members of the Select Committee on Defence, I have just undertaken an inquiry, ably chaired by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Sarah Atherton), into women in the armed forces. I will not say what is in our report, but when it is published, which I think will be next week, I think that people will be utterly shocked at the evidence and at what we have found.

A key point that comes out loud and clear is people’s reluctance to come forward and make complaints, and the chain of command’s reluctance to address the issues. We are not talking about employment disputes; in some cases we are talking about serious sexual assault and other issues that are just not being addressed. It is like a pressure cooker—we need something to let the steam out, but there is no system there at the moment, so all it does is build up. In some cases, that is because people in the chain of command are ignoring the issues.

There is still a cultural issue, particularly in the Army, that means that people’s issues are not being addressed, and I do not see any way of changing it other than what would seem a radical change. I would not support any sort of federation that could affect the operational effectiveness of our armed forces in terms of strikes—I would not go there—but what the ordinary man and woman in our armed forces need is a voice, and frankly I do not think they have one. People ought to read the Committee’s report; it saddened me that after all the changes in wider society, some of the old attitudes are still there. It will come round to such a change—whether it will be in the next Armed Forces Act, I am not sure—because those people need representation.

New clause 4 is about the provision of mental health. Has a lot of progress been made in the area? Quite clearly it has, but the same thing is happening now that came up when I was dealing with the matter in the Ministry of Defence: the transition and the disconnect between the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Health. I know that the present Government have tried, as I certainly did, to ensure a joined-up, seamless service, but it is still not working. Veterans are still falling through the gaps in provision, and the only way we can address that is to ensure a seamless, joined-up service. It has to be patient-led, and it has to be about the individuals.

[Mr Kevan Jones]

To reiterate something that the Minister has said on numerous occasions, I do not want to portray the average veteran as a victim, because they are not. Most of them are very active, constructive members of society who have no problems whatsoever, but we have a duty to care for individuals who do not have that positive life post service. How do we break down the barriers for them? Without a joined-up service, we will not have the proper system that I think we all want, across the House, and which is best for our veterans.

I turn to amendment 1. Hon. Members will have seen *The Times* this morning; the figures on rape and serious sexual assault are not pretty. Is that an issue with lack of commitment or resources? Possibly, but having worked on the Defence Committee's recent report, what saddens me is that some of it is down to cultural attitudes that have no place in a modern society and that need radical change.

The other issue addressed by amendment 1 relates to my earlier comments about investigations. With matters such as serious sexual assault and domestic violence, we cannot expect the military police to have the level of expertise that most forces would have because of their volume of cases. If someone is dealing with one case a year, their level of expertise in terms of being able to make it a priority, to gather the evidence and to make sure they have the strongest case possible is not going to be there. I am sorry, but this has to be taken out of the military justice system.

4.45 pm

Another issue I would like to touch on has been present throughout the Bill's passage, and that is the jurisdiction of the armed forces covenant. On the areas that have been excluded, the obvious ones for many veterans are pensions, employment, compensation, social care and criminal justice and there are others. Those are completely excluded from the legislation. We tried in Committee to work out why the Government wanted to just stick to quite a prescribed area. I have to say I am not really sure why, apart from that it was a good way of limiting things. If we really want to make the covenant meaningful in practice, it has to go wider.

The other thing that I am still not happy with in the Bill relates to the redress system and the idea that people can take a judicial review if they are not satisfied. What we needed in this Bill—it would have been the obvious thing, and we took evidence from the local government and social care ombudsman, who suggested it—was the right for people to take complaints to the ombudsman if they do not get what they think is redress; without any redress, this is going to be pretty meaningless. I do not want to see the armed forces covenant being seen as a label that is thrown around, but does not actually do anything in practice for our veterans community.

With that, I will draw my remarks to a conclusion. Is this a good Bill? No, it is not, really. We have missed opportunities. To be honest—I will end where I started—if we had had the present Minister throughout the passage of the Bill, we would have had a lot more changes. Ministers cannot be in a situation whereby they just will not accept anything and frankly treat Committee members and colleagues with contempt; that was not just to the

Opposition but to Members on the Government Benches as well. It is an opportunity missed. I look forward to the Minister replying. If we have missed these opportunities now and we have to wait another five years for the next Bill—if I am still a Member of the House, I will no doubt be on the Committee—I look forward to some of those things being put in. However, in the meantime, there are opportunities missed that will affect veterans and our armed forces community.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I find myself making a mental note to be fairly worried if the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) praises me, but we will gloss over that. I, too, would like to extend my thanks to the Minister. I was delighted to receive a telephone call from him to discuss this Bill a few days ago. I would have been much more surprised had I received a telephone call from his predecessor.

I will give credit where it is due. In our conversation, we discussed the fact that I would be very pleased, forgetting political boundaries, if the Minister or one of his colleagues would care to come to witness NATO's Exercise Joint Warrior, which takes place off the north-west of my constituency and in other parts of Scotland. It would be a tremendous shot in the arm for our military personnel to see a ministerial presence. I do not think we have actually seen a Government Minister there—certainly not in the lifetime of this Government. I cannot speak for previous Governments; I was not here. It would also be churlish of me not to express my thanks to all the organisations that have been in touch with me during the whole process of this Bill.

We are rather short of time, so I will keep my comments very brief. I want to talk about two things. The first is to say that my party will be supporting amendments 1 and 2. Further to the remarks of the right hon. Member for North Durham on amendment 1, the general public do not really understand why, if a member of the armed forces commits a truly terrible crime—murder or rape—they should be tried and dealt with differently from how someone not in uniform would be dealt with, in a civil court. As an MP, if I were to commit a crime, I would not have the right to be tried by my peers in this House. I would be up in court, in the dock, the same as any other citizen of this country. There seems to be an impeccable logic in amendment 1.

The right hon. Member for North Durham is correct, in that the military police do not have the resources to investigate in the depth that would get to the bottom of some of the most serious allegations that can be made in this land.

Finally on amendment 1, let me turn it around. If the Government cannot support the amendment, are they saying that, in fact, the civil courts are in some way inferior to military courts? Why would they not trust the civil courts and the civil police to get it right?

Secondly, I do not want to weary the Chamber on this, but it is a point I have made a number of times and, for the sake of the record, I repeat it. I have talked at some length about my concern that reducing the size of the Army will lead to the Army, and possibly the other armed services, being seen as not a terribly desirable career option for young people.

We have a massive recruitment problem. Going around the highlands of Scotland, going to the Black Isle show, the Dornoch show and my local Tain highland games,

in years gone by there would be a stall set up by the Army, the Navy or the Air Force, or perhaps two or three of them. The stalls were very popular, an attraction to the general public. They were one of the many reasons why people would go to these events, because people like to see the weapons on display and meet the armed forces personnel. Those events were excellent for recruitment.

I leave Members with a final thought. My thanks again to the Ministry of Defence, as I and others, including the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock), went to the Ministry to be briefed on what we have been doing with the United Nations in Mali. It was a most interesting briefing. One message came out. When a young person in my constituency says they are thinking of joining the Scots Guards, the Royal Regiment of Scotland, the Royal Air Force or the Royal Navy, if I can say, “If you opt for that career, you might get yourself involved in something like the peacekeeping effort in Mali,” I guarantee it will be a tremendous attraction. It is very different from doing an ordinary job—I do not want to do down ordinary jobs—a non-services job. That is one way of augmenting recruitment.

All of us in this place, regardless of our political persuasion—if we care about the defence of the realm, if we care about our armed forces, which I am sure everyone here does—have a duty, as Members of Parliament, to do everything we can to encourage recruitment by talking to our constituents and talking to what we call modern studies students in Scottish schools, to say, “Here is a career option you might like to think about.”

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I associate myself with some of the remarks of the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), especially those about the work he and the hon. Member for Wrexham (Sarah Atherton) have been doing in the Defence Sub-Committee on women in the armed forces.

As we discuss the Bill’s remaining stages, it is unfortunate to reflect that at no point in its journey has it received the attention I would hope for such an important piece of legislation, especially in a week in which we see the inevitability of the external factors that always pop up and seem to push armed forces welfare down the pecking order.

Today, unfortunately, it is international aid. I often wonder whether there are some in the defence establishment who see the aid budget as a golden goose whose slaughter would provide some sort of bounty for the armed forces, solving any funding crisis in the equipment budget. Although I do not want to say it, even if we were to cut the entirety of the aid budget, defence would still need reform.

That is particularly pertinent when it comes to the lack of progress on service justice in the Bill. I have seen it throughout my time on the Defence Committee, especially each year when we hear from the ombudsperson for the armed forces about how their role is stymied by a lack of investment and interest, and by byzantine regulation. Although excellent work is being done across the board by a plethora of armed forces charities, I cannot help but feel each time that the hugely divergent range of lived experiences of the 170,000-odd people in uniform—their geographical spread and divergent socioeconomic circumstances—means that charity, however well intentioned, often does not reach those who need it most.

In the case of both service justice and access to services for those in need, which are included in amendments this afternoon, we see a continuation—at least from my perspective and that of my party—of a two-tier system that enshrines class and social privilege, and ensures that the organisation itself will be unable ever to realise its full potential. The deficit in both service justice and access to services brings us to the case of Lance Corporal Bernard Mongan. This week, the Army’s report into his death in January 2020 was brought to wider attention. It admitted

“failings in the proper management of personnel”,

meaning that Bernard lay dead—undiscovered, in his bed, in his room in his barracks—for three weeks. I wrote to the Secretary of State about this case last year, and I have no doubt that the Ministry and the Army feel that his death was unacceptable and profoundly regrettable. However, there are other unsettling aspects of the case that speak to some of the challenges that we face in this Bill.

Lance Corporal Mongan came from a Traveller background. Although I do not want to go into whether that was a contributing factor in the bullying that may or may not have led to Bernard’s death, we must ask ourselves why it is that, time and again, those from our most marginalised communities are failed in this appalling fashion. This is precisely the moment when we should be ensuring that equality of opportunity and an armed forces who are representative of all communities on these islands become a reality. I can only, sadly, come to the conclusion that that is an opportunity that has been missed.

Although enshrining the armed forces covenant into law is welcome progress, a real legislative framework for armed forces personnel in this political state is, quite simply, long overdue. We can call it a bill of rights for the armed forces or an armed forces representative body, as has been my party’s policy for many years. I could even call it a trade union; I do not have a problem with the words “trade union”. We could at least start by giving members of the armed forces a contract that clearly states the obligations that their employer has to them and vice versa. Until we do, it is unlikely that we will be able to address the underlying issues that so many armed forces personnel face.

Finally, I feel that I should touch on something that is in a way connected to this legislation and which illustrates the knots into which the UK Government tie themselves to keep up appearances. I am currently chairing the Defence Sub-Committee on the subcontracting of MOD staff, which held its first evidence session yesterday. We will hear Ministers and other Members today make references to things such as “defence family”, “defence people” and “whole force”, but the demonstratable experience of many of those who make up the whole force, including my own constituents, is one of worsening conditions, lack of security and increasing alienation with the picture that is painted, I am afraid, by those who come to the Government Dispatch Box, including the Minister. We will undoubtedly hear all about the increase in the capital budget from the Government Benches today. I only wish that we might hear more about the day-to-day spend that is to remain stagnant over the next five years and what the Government intend to do to ensure that it is not the poorest paid in the armed forces who bear the brunt of this fiscal restraint.

[*Martin Docherty-Hughes*]

I have always believed that in life, just as in politics, the key measure of our character and our beliefs is how we treat those with the least power and agency. It is high time that we enshrined the rights and responsibilities of all members of the armed forces, and, indeed, all those who support them. I will never tire of saying in these debates, Madam Deputy Speaker, let us speak of them less as heroes and more like you and me, entitled to everything that you and I would expect. It is the very least that we can do.

5 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and hear such welcome contributions from the right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken so far. This Bill is something that is close to my heart, as a former Ulster Defence Regiment and Territorial Army soldier, and as an elected representative who has seen the way in which some of our troops have fared after service. I will make some comments in relation to the regular force: the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) referred to recruitment issues, which I also mentioned last time we spoke on this topic in the House, and I want to reiterate some of those comments if I can.

I believe that we must improve recruitment and retention. Each time numbers are cut, morale is dealt a blow, recruiting drops, and the three services become undermanned, which has a detrimental effect on those who are serving and those who maybe would wish to. I make these comments gracefully and try to do so in a respectful fashion, but we have two aircraft carriers, yet we only have crew for one. We have fewer tanks than most third-world countries, and we have a few highly complex fighter jets, but little ability to conduct expeditionary air warfare other than a reliance on Cyprus as a base. Future investment must be about growing the capability and capacity of the regular force. I know that the Minister is keen to do that, and we are keen that he should be supported in doing so, from both the Opposition side of the House and his own side.

If our regular forces can no longer punch at or above our new weight as an independent post-Brexit global player, I believe that we must reinvest in soft power. The last debate we had, which was on overseas aid, was about soft power: how we use it better to influence and help countries in which the potential for terrorism and extremism abounds, and how we get a reasonable level of GDP boost in those countries to ensure we can still bring some influence to bear in places where we cannot put boots on the ground, or indeed jets in the air.

When it comes to the reserve forces, I make a plea to the Minister directly: I know that he is interested in this matter and will wish to respond, but we continue to believe that Northern Ireland could make greater contributions to the whole force concept through greater opportunities in the reserve forces. Again, I urge the Minister to review the current reserve forces footprint in Northern Ireland, and consider expanding it to recruit a greater number of reservists from a wider footprint.

For example, Enniskillen uniquely gives its name to two very fine British Army regiments, the Inniskilling Dragoons and the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, both formed in the Williamite wars of the 1690s to defend

the town against Jacobite rebels. Today, that loyal town is only being asked to provide a few medics and an infantry company. Northern Ireland is able to, and wants to, provide more reservists, so how can we make that happen? This comes back to the issue of recruitment, which the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross referred to and which I want to speak about today, particularly in relation to Northern Ireland. May I remind the Minister, hon. and gallant Member that he is, that at the height of the cold war and in the midst of the so-called troubles there were 11 UDR battalions, two TA infantry battalions, an artillery regiment—which I belonged to as a part-time soldier—a signal regiment, an engineer regiment, logistics regiments, medical regiments, yeomanry regiments, military police and so on? Today, we are being asked for a fraction of that, yet the world is still a dangerous place. If we have the potential to recruit in Northern Ireland, we should be taking every step and every action to make sure that happens.

Very quickly, I will turn to veterans. I put on record the work of Danny Kinahan, the Northern Ireland veterans commissioner, and thank him for the impact that that post will no doubt have in due course. However, for some veterans in Northern Ireland, there is still precious little evidence of the impact of the armed forces covenant, or of other initiatives for veterans such as rail cards, guaranteed interview schemes and the veterans ID card. May I remind the Minister that this is a far cry from the desire to make the UK the best place in the world to be a veteran?

Respectfully, I make the point that Westminster can impose abortion laws and Irish language Acts from Westminster, but there is a real lack of pressure from London on Belfast when it comes to supporting our veterans. I would love to see more emphasis put on that if at all possible. I remain concerned about the scrutiny of the delivery outputs that flow from the armed forces covenant, so can the Minister be sure that all the promised action is being taken so that veterans are being housed, getting treatment with the priority they need, getting access to jobs and training, being supported by local and regional councils, and getting the recognition they are due?

Who are the eyes and ears at local and regional levels that are ensuring that all that can be done is being done? I urge the Minister to increase the assistance and get on with empowering the Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees in order that they can fulfil their remit of ensuring that the armed forces covenant is being delivered across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in its entirety.

I appreciate the sentiment behind new clause 4, to which the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) referred, regarding the duty of care on mental health. That is vital, and never has it been more important. I work closely with a charity in Northern Ireland called Beyond the Battlefield, which provides counselling, as well as practical aid for veterans. It has recently leased a property in my constituency, in the village of Portavogie, which provides en suite accommodation for 10 people. The intention is to use it as a respite facility for veterans from throughout the Province. It will be the first of its kind in the whole of the Province, and after the closure of the Royal British Legion facility in Portrush we will have dedicated facilities available for our veterans.

This venue will provide space for individual reflection, as well as having communal rooms and therapy areas. The charity has fundraised and done so much work, and there is much more to be done with this facility—it has been targeted by vandals in the past, so there is some refurbishment work to do. I know that the Minister will be keen to hear more, and I will be anxious to see how the MOD can sow into this facility that is designed to pick up the slack left by the Department. On behalf of Beyond the Battlefield, I extend an invitation to the Minister to visit when the refurbishment is completed, as we would be very pleased to have him over for that purpose. If he is able to do so at a time convenient for him and us, we will do that.

Another clause that has struck me is that on the armed forces federation. The hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) has referred to this regularly. It is one of the subjects he never misses on, and he did not miss on it today either. There is a principle at stake there that should be considered. I work with a wonderful charity called SSAFA—the armed forces charity, the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association. It is probably known to everybody in this House, and it is often called on to step into scenarios that an armed forces federation would be designed to step into. If this Bill is aimed at addressing the years of neglect, this is an important aspect of it. I also commend my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) for the work he has put into this Armed Forces Bill, and I thank him for it. Our party will be supporting amendments 1 and 2 if they are put to a vote.

I conclude by saying that the Bill has many pros and many cons, one of which is that soldiers who served in Northern Ireland are treated differently. That must be made right. I know the Minister wishes to do that, and it would be good to hear in his response that that will be the case. I anxiously await the Government holding to their word to ensure that every service personnel member, regardless of where they served, deserves the same treatment. I still believe we miss out on this. This Bill is to be welcomed, but improvements can and must still happen. I look forward to hearing from the Government, and from the Minister in particular, whom I look upon as a friend, as to whether these new clauses and amendments which would enhance the Bill will be acceptable.

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Leo Docherty): I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for their contributions, particularly the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock); I am grateful for her sincere and constructive tone. I think the whole House is united in our desire to support our armed forces, and I am confident that the Bill delivers for our armed forces. It renews the Armed Forces Act 2006, it improves the service justice system, and it delivers on the Government's commitment to further enshrine the armed forces covenant in law.

I turn first to new clause 1. As I said in Committee, the Government take very seriously our duty of care for service personnel and veterans under investigation. This amendment was debated at length in the other place during the passage of the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act 2021. Our servicepeople are entitled to receive comprehensive legal support, and a full range of welfare and mental health support is

offered to all our people, as laid out in the Defence Secretary's written ministerial statement of 13 April 2021. We have made clear our intent to provide a gold standard of care, and we will not deviate from that.

We resist the new clause because a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate. People have different needs, and we want to ensure bespoke provision—the right support at the right time. Furthermore, the difficulties of drafting such a duty of care would inevitably mean the involvement of the courts and additional litigation.

Turning to new clause 2, I am pleased to remind the House that the Government accept entirely that the historical policy prohibiting homosexuality in the armed forces was absolutely wrong, and there was historic injustice suffered by members of the LGBT+ community as a consequence. We are committed entirely to addressing that with urgency and humility, and our priority now is to understand the full impact of the pre-millennium ban. We are committed to finding an appropriate mechanism to address this injustice, but we resist the new clause because it may complicate or constrain the work already under way.

Mr Kevan Jones: As I said in my contribution, I do not doubt the hon. Gentleman's commitment to righting this wrong, but he is going to come up against a lot of resistance from his Department when it comes to issues around compensation in terms of pensions and everything else. I just stress that he must push back, and push back hard.

Leo Docherty: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's encouragement. I hear it, and I reassure him that we will address this matter with absolute resolve. It will be at the heart of the veterans strategy, which I will announce this winter.

Turning to new clause 3, let me reassure the House that the interests of armed forces personnel are already represented and protected through a range of mechanisms, including the Service Complaints Ombudsman, the pay review bodies, the annual continuous attitude survey, and more than 50 diversity networks operating within Defence at various levels, run mostly by volunteer members, with senior officer advocates and champions—and, lastly but most importantly, there is the chain of command. We therefore resist the new clause.

I turn to new clause 4. In June 2021, the annual UK armed forces mental health bulletin showed that the overall rate of mental ill health is actually lower among service personnel than in the general population, but of course we are never complacent. We are constantly striving to improve our mental healthcare support for service personnel and, indeed, veterans. We resist the new clause because it lacks utility and would merely add to the administrative burden of those seeking to support our service personnel. Indeed, a duty on the Secretary of State to report annually on healthcare provision already exists as part of the armed forces covenant.

Amendment 1 would give the Attorney General the role of deciding whether the most serious crimes are prosecuted in the service courts. We have already considered this issue carefully as a recommendation of the Lyons review, but we believe that enhancing the prosecutors protocol is the most effective way to improve decisions on concurrent jurisdiction, because it allows decisions

[Leo Docherty]

to be made early on, by independent prosecutors who have close working relationships with civilian and service police.

If the AG had to give consent, the process would be slower. The AG would effectively be asked to endorse decisions that had been made very early in an investigation, and it is hard to see what the AG would be adding. However, if the AG were to disagree with those earlier decisions and veto the trying of a case in the service justice system, there would be no easy way to transfer that case to the civilian system. That may have the undesired effect of making it difficult or impossible to prosecute the case in either system.

For that reason, we resist the amendment. We have a more pragmatic approach, because we want a workable, transparent and rigorous process for decisions on jurisdiction. We want cases to be heard in the right system, and we are confident that the service justice system is capable of dealing with all offences, whatever their seriousness and wherever they occur. We must bear in mind that the civilian prosecutor will always have the final say.

Turning to amendments 2 to 8, the covenant duty covers public bodies delivering healthcare, housing and education, because those are the key areas of concern for our armed forces community. We have ensured that the legislation can adapt to the needs of the armed forces community in future by making provision to allow the Government to widen the scope of the covenant by way of affirmative regulations. The Bill is evergreen, and if we need to expand it in future, we will.

5.15 pm

On amendments 3 to 6, they seek to ensure, again, that all service housing is regulated in line with the local minimum quality standard. That is unnecessary because, as I have said previously, 96.7% of MOD-provided service family accommodation meets or exceeds the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government decent homes standard. The amendments would introduce an unhelpful disparity across the UK and would not achieve the intended effect, as local authorities that fall within the scope of the covenant duty are not responsible for the provision of service accommodation. We therefore resist those amendments, but I can reassure the House that the provision of high-quality subsidised accommodation remains a fundamental part of the overall MOD offer to service personnel and their families.

Jim Shannon: I asked specifically about recruitment in Northern Ireland and what we could do with reserve forces. Can I have an assurance that recruitment is necessary in Northern Ireland to fill the gap for soldiers who can help the British Army? If we can do it in Northern Ireland, let us make it happen.

Leo Docherty: I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman that reassurance and put that on the record.

I thank the team of magnificently resolute and tenacious MOD civil servants in the Bill team, including Jayne Scheier, John Shivas, Caron Tassel, Tim Payne and Ben Bridge. I call on the House to reject the amendments. The armed forces always stand up for us; we must stand up for the armed forces, and I commend the Bill to the House.

Stephanie Peacock: It has been an incredibly thoughtful debate, and I thank all hon. Members who have taken part, including the Minister. Having listened carefully to what he said, I beg to ask leave to withdraw new clause 1, but I will seek to press new clause 4 to a vote, as well as amendments 1 and 2.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 4

ARMED FORCES MENTAL HEALTH CARE REVIEW

‘(1) The Secretary of State must publish a report containing a review of the mental health treatment provided to Armed Forces personnel through the—

- (a) Defence Medical Services,
- (b) Departments of Community Mental Health and the Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service, and
- (c) Reserves Mental Health Programme.

(2) The report under subsection (1) must be laid before Parliament within three months of the date on which this Act is passed.’

—(Stephanie Peacock.)

This new clause would require the government to conduct a formal review of the standards of mental health care available for serving personnel

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 272, Noes 361.

Division No. 50]

[5.17 pm

AYES

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

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

Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Girvan, Paul
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lockhart, Carla
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly

MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paisley, Ian
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar-Javed, Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry

Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard

Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jessica Morden and
Mary Glindon

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Ahmad Khan, Imran
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinanage, Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan

Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony

Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alistair
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw

Metcalf, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec

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

Tellers for the Noes:
Maria Caulfield and
Scott Mann

Question accordingly negated.

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

Clause 7**CONCURRENT JURISDICTION**

Amendment proposed: 1, page 4, line 27, at end insert—

‘guidance under subsection (3)(a) must provide for charges of murder, manslaughter, domestic violence, child abuse and rape to require specific consent by the Attorney General to be tried in court martial when the offences are alleged to have been committed in the United Kingdom, and

(b) if the Attorney General has not granted such consent, guidance under (3)(a) shall provide that charges as set out in section 4A(a) to be tried in civilian court only.’.—(*Stephanie Peacock.*)

This amendment would ensure that the most serious crimes—murder, manslaughter, domestic violence, child abuse and rape—are tried in the civilian courts when committed in the UK unless the Attorney General has specifically consented for such crimes to be tried under courts martial.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 274, Noes 360.

Division No. 51]**[5.27 pm****AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Bonnar, Steven
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clark, Feryal
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crawley, Angela
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Davies-Jones, Alex
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret

Fletcher, Colleen
Flynn, Stephen
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Furniss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Girvan, Paul
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Kate
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanna, Claire
Hanvey, Neale
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Linden, David
Lloyd, Tony
Lockhart, Carla
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
MacAskill, Kenny
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McLaughlin, Anne
McMahon, Jim
McMorris, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owatemi, Taiwo
Owen, Sarah
Paisley, Ian
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Powell, Lucy
Qaisar-Javed, Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Robinson, Gavin
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy

Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen

Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jessica Morden and
Mary Glindon

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Ahmad Khan, Imran
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara

Brokenshire, rh James
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishty, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo

Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren

Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cheryllyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny

Merriman, Huw	Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Metcalfe, Stephen	Simmonds, David
Millar, Robin	Skidmore, rh Chris
Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Smith, Chloe
Milling, rh Amanda	Smith, Greg
Mills, Nigel	Smith, Henry
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Smith, rh Julian
Mohindra, Mr Gagan	Smith, Royston
Moore, Damien	Solloway, Amanda
Moore, Robbie	Spencer, Dr Ben
Mordaunt, rh Penny	Spencer, rh Mark
Morris, Anne Marie	Stafford, Alexander
Morris, David	Stephenson, Andrew
Morris, James	Stevenson, Jane
Morrissey, Joy	Stevenson, John
Mortimer, Jill	Stewart, rh Bob
Morton, Wendy	Stewart, Iain
Mullan, Dr Kieran	Streeter, Sir Gary
Mumby-Croft, Holly	Stride, rh Mel
Mundell, rh David	Stuart, Graham
Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Sturdy, Julian
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew	Sunak, rh Rishi
Neill, Sir Robert	Sunderland, James
Nici, Lia	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Nokes, rh Caroline	Syms, Sir Robert
Norman, rh Jesse	Thomas, Derek
O'Brien, Neil	Throup, Maggie
Offord, Dr Matthew	Timpson, Edward
Opperman, Guy	Tolhurst, Kelly
Parish, Neil	Tomlinson, Justin
Patel, rh Priti	Tomlinson, Michael
Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Tracey, Craig
Pawsey, Mark	Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Penning, rh Sir Mike	Trott, Laura
Penrose, John	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Percy, Andrew	Tugendhat, Tom
Philp, Chris	Vara, Shailesh
Pincher, rh Christopher	Vickers, Martin
Poulter, Dr Dan	Vickers, Matt
Pow, Rebecca	Villiers, rh Theresa
Prentis, Victoria	Wakeford, Christian
Pritchard, rh Mark	Walker, Sir Charles
Pursglove, Tom	Walker, Mr Robin
Quin, Jeremy	Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Quince, Will	Wallis, Dr Jamie
Raab, rh Dominic	Warburton, David
Randall, Tom	Warman, Matt
Redwood, rh John	Watling, Giles
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob	Webb, Suzanne
Richards, Nicola	Whately, Helen
Richardson, Angela	Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Roberts, Rob	Whittaker, Craig
Robertson, Mr Laurence	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Robinson, Mary	Wiggin, Bill
Rosindell, Andrew	Wild, James
Ross, Douglas	Williams, Craig
Rowley, Lee	Williamson, rh Gavin
Russell, Dean	Wood, Mike
Rutley, David	Wragg, Mr William
Sambrook, Gary	Wright, rh Jeremy
Saxby, Selaine	Young, Jacob
Scully, Paul	Zahawi, Nadhim
Seely, Bob	
Selous, Andrew	
Shapps, rh Grant	
Sharma, rh Alok	

Tellers for the Noes:
Maria Caulfield and
Scott Mann

Question accordingly negated.

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

Clause 8

ARMED FORCES COVENANT

Amendment proposed: 2, page 18, line 28, at end insert—

“343AG Section 343AF: report

‘(1) The Secretary of State must lay a report before each House of Parliament no later than three months after the day on which this Act is passed, and thereafter must make a report at least once in every calendar year.

(2) The report in subsection (1) shall set out how the powers in section 343F (Sections 343AA to 343AD: power to add bodies and functions) will work in practice.

(3) Any report published under subsection (1) after the initial report made 3 months after this Act is passed must include—

(a) a statement detailing how the powers granted through section 343F (Sections 343AA to 343AD: power to add bodies and functions) have been used since the last report was issued,

(b) a review of the relevance of the listed bodies and functions in section 343F (Sections 343AA to 343AD: power to add bodies and functions) in relation to the Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report under section 343A of AFA 2006, and

(c) the outcome of a consultation conducted by the Secretary of State with the Armed Forces Covenant Reference Group on the bodies and functions listed in section 343F (Sections 343AA to 343AD: power to add bodies and functions) in regard to their appropriateness and relevance as part of the Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report.” —(*Stephanie Peacock.*)

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to set out how powers in the Bill could be used to widen its scope to address all matters of potential disadvantage for service personnel under the Armed Forces Covenant including employment, pensions, compensation, social care, criminal justice and immigration.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 272, Noes 358.

Division No. 52]

[5.34 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Buck, Ms Karen
Abrahams, Debbie	Burgon, Richard
Ali, Rushanara	Butler, Dawn
Ali, Tahir	Byrne, Ian
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Byrne, rh Liam
Amesbury, Mike	Cadbury, Ruth
Anderson, Fleur	Callaghan, Amy
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Cameron, Dr Lisa
Ashworth, rh Jonathan	Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Bardell, Hannah	Campbell, Mr Gregory
Barker, Paula	Carden, Dan
Beckett, rh Margaret	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Begum, Apsana	Chamberlain, Wendy
Benn, rh Hilary	Champion, Sarah
Betts, Mr Clive	Chapman, Douglas
Black, Mhairi	Charalambous, Bambos
Blackford, rh Ian	Cherry, Joanna
Blackman, Kirsty	Clark, Feryal
Blake, Olivia	Cooper, Daisy
Blomfield, Paul	Cooper, Rosie
Bonnar, Steven	Cooper, rh Yvette
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Brennan, Kevin	Cowan, Ronnie
Brock, Deidre	Coyle, Neil
Brown, Alan	Crawley, Angela
Brown, Ms Lyn	Creasy, Stella
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Cruddas, Jon
Bryant, Chris	Cryer, John

Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Girvan, Paul
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine

Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lockhart, Carla
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo

Owen, Sarah
 Paisley, Ian
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar-Javed, Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir

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

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jessica Morden and
Mary Glindon

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Ahmad Khan, Imran
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib

Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg

Clarke, Mr Simon	Graham, Richard	Lewis, rh Brandon	Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Clarke, Theo	Grant, Mrs Helen	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Richards, Nicola
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Gray, James	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Richardson, Angela
Clarkson, Chris	Grayling, rh Chris	Loder, Chris	Roberts, Rob
Cleverly, rh James	Green, Chris	Logan, Mark	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Green, rh Damian	Longhi, Marco	Robinson, Mary
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Griffith, Andrew	Lopez, Julia	Rosindell, Andrew
Colburn, Elliot	Griffiths, Kate	Lopresti, Jack	Ross, Douglas
Collins, Damian	Grundy, James	Lord, Mr Jonathan	Rowley, Lee
Costa, Alberto	Gullis, Jonathan	Loughton, Tim	Russell, Dean
Courts, Robert	Halfon, rh Robert	Mackinlay, Craig	Rutley, David
Coutinho, Claire	Hall, Luke	Mackrory, Cherylyn	Sambrook, Gary
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey	Hammond, Stephen	Maclean, Rachel	Saxby, Selaine
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hancock, rh Matt	Mak, Alan	Scully, Paul
Crosbie, Virginia	Hands, rh Greg	Malthouse, Kit	Seely, Bob
Crouch, Tracey	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Mangnall, Anthony	Selous, Andrew
Daly, James	Harris, Rebecca	Marson, Julie	Shapps, rh Grant
Davies, David T. C.	Harrison, Trudy	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Sharma, rh Alok
Davies, Gareth	Hart, Sally-Ann	Mayhew, Jerome	Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Davies, Dr James	Hart, rh Simon	Maynard, Paul	Simmonds, David
Davies, Mims	Hayes, rh Sir John	McCartney, Jason	Skidmore, rh Chris
Davies, Philip	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	McCartney, Karl	Smith, Chloe
Davis, rh Mr David	Heappey, James	McPartland, Stephen	Smith, Greg
Davison, Dehenna	Heaton-Harris, Chris	McVey, rh Esther	Smith, Henry
Dinenage, Caroline	Henderson, Gordon	Menzies, Mark	Smith, rh Julian
Dines, Miss Sarah	Henry, Darren	Merriman, Huw	Smith, Royston
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Higginbotham, Antony	Metcalfe, Stephen	Solloway, Amanda
Docherty, Leo	Hinds, rh Damian	Millar, Robin	Spencer, Dr Ben
Donelan, Michelle	Hoare, Simon	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Spencer, rh Mark
Dorries, Ms Nadine	Holden, Mr Richard	Milling, rh Amanda	Stafford, Alexander
Double, Steve	Hollinrake, Kevin	Mills, Nigel	Stephenson, Andrew
Dowden, rh Oliver	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Mohindra, Mr Gagan	Stevenson, Jane
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Holloway, Adam	Moore, Damien	Stevenson, John
Drax, Richard	Holmes, Paul	Moore, Robbie	Stewart, rh Bob
Drummond, Mrs Flick	Howell, John	Mordaunt, rh Penny	Stewart, Iain
Duddridge, James	Howell, Paul	Morris, Anne Marie	Streeter, Sir Gary
Duguid, David	Huddleston, Nigel	Morris, David	Stride, rh Mel
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Hudson, Dr Neil	Morris, James	Stuart, Graham
Dunne, rh Philip	Hughes, Eddie	Morrissey, Joy	Sturdy, Julian
Eastwood, Mark	Hunt, Jane	Mortimer, Jill	Sunak, rh Rishi
Edwards, Ruth	Hunt, rh Jeremy	Morton, Wendy	Sunderland, James
Ellis, rh Michael	Hunt, Tom	Mullan, Dr Kieran	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Jack, rh Mr Alister	Mumby-Croft, Holly	Syms, Sir Robert
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie	Javid, rh Sajid	Mundell, rh David	Thomas, Derek
Eustice, rh George	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Throup, Maggie
Evans, Dr Luke	Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew	Timpson, Edward
Evennett, rh Sir David	Jenkinson, Mark	Neill, Sir Robert	Tolhurst, Kelly
Everitt, Ben	Jenkyns, Andrea	Nici, Lia	Tomlinson, Justin
Fabricant, Michael	Jenrick, rh Robert	Nokes, rh Caroline	Tomlinson, Michael
Farris, Laura	Johnson, rh Boris	Norman, rh Jesse	Tracey, Craig
Fell, Simon	Johnson, Dr Caroline	O'Brien, Neil	Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Fletcher, Katherine	Johnson, Gareth	Oppard, Dr Matthew	Trott, Laura
Fletcher, Mark	Johnston, David	Opperman, Guy	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Fletcher, Nick	Jones, Andrew	Parish, Neil	Tugendhat, Tom
Ford, Vicky	Jones, rh Mr David	Patel, rh Priti	Vara, Shailesh
Foster, Kevin	Jones, Fay	Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Vickers, Martin
Fox, rh Dr Liam	Jones, Mr Marcus	Pawsey, Mark	Vickers, Matt
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Jupp, Simon	Penning, rh Sir Mike	Villiers, rh Theresa
Frazer, rh Lucy	Kawczynski, Daniel	Penrose, John	Wakeford, Christian
Freeman, George	Kearns, Alicia	Percy, Andrew	Walker, Sir Charles
Freer, Mike	Keegan, Gillian	Philp, Chris	Walker, Mr Robin
Fuller, Richard	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Pincher, rh Christopher	Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Fysh, Mr Marcus	Knight, Julian	Poulter, Dr Dan	Wallis, Dr Jamie
Gale, rh Sir Roger	Kruger, Danny	Pow, Rebecca	Warburton, David
Garnier, Mark	Kwarteng, rh Kwasi	Prentis, Victoria	Warman, Matt
Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Lamont, John	Pritchard, rh Mark	Watling, Giles
Gibb, rh Nick	Largan, Robert	Pursglove, Tom	Webb, Suzanne
Gibson, Peter	Latham, Mrs Pauline	Quin, Jeremy	Whately, Helen
Gideon, Jo	Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea	Quince, Will	Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Glen, John	Leigh, rh Sir Edward	Raab, rh Dominic	Whittaker, Craig
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Levy, Ian	Randall, Tom	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Gove, rh Michael	Lewer, Andrew	Redwood, rh John	Wiggin, Bill

Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy

Young, Jacob
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Maria Caulfield and
Scott Mann

Question accordingly negatived.

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

Third Reading

5.41 pm

Leo Docherty: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I want to reiterate my thanks to all hon. and right hon. Members for their thoughtful and constructive contributions today. I have been honoured to lead on this Bill that further enshrines the armed forces covenant into law. Ultimately, the Bill is for the armed forces, its serving personnel, veterans and their families, and I pay tribute to them for their bravery, stoicism and unflinching professionalism. We owe them an enormous debt of gratitude and this Bill is for them.

Our armed forces stand up for us and we must always stand up for them, and I commend this Bill to the House.

5.42 pm

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): Labour has said from the start that this Bill offered a once-in-a-Parliament opportunity to make meaningful changes to the day-to-day lives of our forces personnel, veterans and their families. During Armed Forces Week, I had the privilege to bring together veterans of D-day, the Falklands and the Gulf war with Royal Navy and Royal Marine cadets from across Portsmouth. This celebration of service past and present was a powerful reminder of our collective responsibility to keep society's promises to our nation's service personnel. That is why Labour worked with service charities, veterans and personnel, and colleagues from across the House, to get the very best for our armed forces from this legislation.

The increased scrutiny the Bill has received means the Government have had many opportunities to listen to the fundamental concerns raised, but Ministers have steadfastly refused to do so at every turn. The Government have let themselves off the hook in delivering for Her Majesty's forces. The provisions in the Bill do not apply to Government Departments, including, laughably, the Ministry of Defence itself, so while the Government claim the Bill will enshrine the armed forces covenant into law the reality is that they have outsourced the delivery of its important promises to others, and without any extra resource with which to do it.

Service charities continue to raise concerns about the Bill's narrow scope, which risks creating a two-tier covenant and a race to the bottom on standards in service areas left out. In practice, this means that long-standing issues facing forces communities, and frequently raised by service charities, will not be addressed. Employment, pensions, compensation, social care, criminal justice and immigration are all on the long list of areas we know will not be covered. Labour's amendments

forced Ministers to take responsibility and widen the scope of the Bill. Twelve of the UK's largest service charities, including the Royal British Legion, Help for Heroes, Cobseo and SSAFA, all wrote to Ministers last week backing these proposals, but the Government still voted them down.

On service justice, we welcome the creation of an independent Service Police Complaints Commissioner, and we hope to see Ministers get on with implementing this to ensure greater oversight and fairness in service justice cases. However, the Government refuse to improve access to justice for service personnel by trying rape and serious offences in civilian courts when they are committed in the UK. These proposals are backed by the Deepcut families, who have used their powerful and first-hand experiences of poor service justice investigations to call out the double standard of sudden deaths being handled by civilian police while rape and other serious offences are not.

Almost three quarters of sexual offences in the armed forces in 2020 took place in the UK, and between 2015 and 2020 the conviction rate for rape cases tried under courts martial was just 9%. The latest data available suggest the conviction rate was 59% in the civilian courts, with considerably more cases being tried each year. This issue is disproportionately affecting women of junior rank: more than three quarters of the victims were women, and seven in 10 victims held the rank of private. Ministers refuse to recognise the weight of evidence from these figures, the experts and campaigners, and instead have relentlessly backed a fudge that will leave personnel vulnerable. That will be on their watch.

Finally, the Government have rejected the golden opportunity provided by Labour to end the shameful scandal of eye-watering visa fees for non-UK service personnel. Ministers cynically cite the long-awaited and underwhelming plans currently under consultation as proof of progress on this disgraceful injustice, but we know that they will help just one in 10 of those affected. The truth is that Ministers are content with making these decisions, but personnel will pay twice to stay in the country they have fought for.

In summary, this is an Armed Forces Bill that provides absolutely nothing for actively serving personnel. It fails to address long-standing and well-known issues facing service communities. It willingly ignores the recommendations of a judge-led review on the service justice system. It reduces appeal time limits for serving personnel brave enough to make a complaint, and it does nothing to end the shameful scandal at eye-watering visa fees for non-UK veterans. The Tories will talk this up as a manifesto promise fulfilled, but by any measure this Bill does not match the high standards our armed forces display in their service and in what they demand of themselves. Tonight, personnel, veterans and their families will rightly be questioning whether this Government really are on their side.

It is Labour that has been working in the interests of service communities. The Tories have dogmatically opposed these efforts, but we will continue to support this Bill, despite its many faults, as the intentions and principles underpinning it are positive. However, we will do so knowing that this Government have fallen far short of delivering the very best for service personnel. This will not be the end of Labour's efforts to secure improvements for our armed forces communities. We will continue to

champion them, and we will work with others in the other place to ensure that the Government deliver on the covenant and in full for every member of our armed forces, veterans and their families. They deserve nothing else.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I will now suspend the House for two minutes to make the necessary arrangements for the next business.

5.49 pm

Sitting suspended.

National Health Service

5.51 pm

The Minister for Care (Helen Whately): I beg to move,

That the draft Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2021, which were laid before this House on 22 June, be approved.

As we head towards a winter where care homes may have to battle with covid and flu, the question we should ask ourselves is this: what more can we do? Over the last year and a half, covid-19 has sadly taken many thousands of lives, particularly the lives of older people and those with underlying health conditions, and particularly the lives of those who need the kind of care received in a care home. There have been more than 40,000 deaths among care home residents. They were mothers and fathers, grans and grandads, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. Sadly, we have lost some of our dedicated care workers, too: despite all the efforts that have been made by care homes and their staff, local authorities and by us in government to keep covid out, despite personal protective equipment, despite testing, despite isolation. Throughout the second wave, care homes used 26 million tests and—

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I raised a point of order earlier this afternoon about the lack of an impact assessment before the House, despite it having been referred to on 22 June as having been made available. I was informed during the course of that point of order that pressure was going to be put on the Government to explain why there was no impact assessment. It is therefore a source of great disappointment that the Minister has not started off her speech with such an apology and explanation.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Thank you for that point of order, Sir Christopher. The Minister is on her feet and she looks as if she may respond to that point of order herself, as it is not a point for the Chair.

Helen Whately: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was indeed intending to come to that point. I was commencing my speech by giving some further context, but I can respond to the specific point made by my hon. Friend. The impact assessment is being worked on. I will be clear with hon. Members. One of the challenges is that there is significant uncertainty about the level of behavioural change we may see in the weeks ahead from this and other measures, for instance the requirement for vaccination to travel to some countries, which we anticipate will lead to further vaccination uptake.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Helen Whately: If my hon. Friend will let me, I will cover his exact point.

I know that some hon. Members may wish to delay this debate, because they wish to review—

Mr Wragg: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. It states in the explanatory notes:

“A full Impact Assessment has been prepared”.

If it has been prepared, it cannot currently be in preparation. So where is it?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): That is not a point of order for me, but it could have been an intervention upon the Minister, so let us allow the Minister to give the full response to the points that have been made and perhaps she can include that one from William Wragg.

Helen Whately: As I said, the impact assessment is being worked on. That is the current situation. I was explaining one of the challenges in coming to an impact assessment that we can share with colleagues to inform them accurately. I really hear that hon. Members want to have the full set of information for this debate. We face a dilemma: the clock is ticking and each day we are moving closer to winter. I am going to come on to it in the detail of my speech, but one important feature of this proposed legislation is that it gives staff a grace period in which to get vaccinated. The longer we take on this, the more risk there is to having that grace period.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): Will the Minister give way on that point?

Helen Whately: In one moment. One thing I can share is evidence that we have on how this kind of policy is working in practice from a large care home provider that is already implementing a requirement for its staff to be vaccinated. It has seen the vast majority of staff get vaccinated, with less than 1% of its workforce choosing not to be vaccinated. We have committed—and the Minister for Covid Vaccine Deployment, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) committed to this earlier to the Lords Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee—to publishing an impact statement setting out the evidence we have in advance of the Lords debate.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Helen Whately: If my hon. Friends would allow to make a little more progress, I will absolutely take more interventions. However, I am conscious of wanting to set out the context and thinking behind this piece of legislation.

Mr Harper *rose*—

Helen Whately: I may well answer many of my hon. Friends' questions as I proceed, so I ask my right hon. Friend to let me make a little progress and I assure him I will take interventions.

As I was saying, throughout the second wave care homes used 26 million tests and 1.2 billion items of personal protective equipment, yet still we saw outbreaks in many care homes during the winter and 14,000 deaths from covid among care home residents. But there is one thing now making a huge and crucial difference, a major advance that is unequivocally saving the lives of care home residents and staff from this cruel and pernicious virus, and that is vaccination. I have spoken to residents who were in tears of joy and relief as they were vaccinated, as they at last had their own defence against this virus. So far, the vaccine roll-out to residents and staff in care homes has been a big success story. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation made residents and staff in older age care homes the highest priority as soon as vaccines were available, and the NHS hit its target of offering the first dose to all care homes by the end of January, which was a fantastic effort.

Sir Christopher Chope: Will the Minister give way?

Helen Whately: In one moment. Vaccination teams have made multiple visits to care homes since then and as a result 96% of those living in older age care homes have had their first dose and 93% have had their second dose. Some 92% of residents living in working age care homes have had their first dose and 87% have had their second dose. Take-up among staff has also been strong, with 86% of staff in older age care homes having had their first dose and 75% having had their second dose, and 83% of staff in working age care homes having had their first dose and 72% having had their second dose. Our vaccination teams have gone to great lengths to support and encourage those who have been worried about the vaccination, along with care home managers and care colleagues. I am sure that Members will join me in thanking everyone in the NHS, local authorities and care homes who have worked so hard together to achieve such levels of vaccination.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Helen Whately: I will take an intervention from my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper).

Mr Harper: I come back to the point about the impact assessment. The document prepared for the House says that a full impact assessment has been prepared. Ministers need to give accurate information to the House, so if that is not correct and is misleading, it should be corrected immediately. It is not good enough to say that something will come along afterwards; we are being asked to vote on these regulations today. There is no urgency—the regulations do not come into force for 16 weeks, until November—so it is perfectly reasonable for them to be taken away and for the impact assessment that has been prepared to be published. If there is uncertainty, share the uncertainty with the House. It is not good enough to expect us to vote on something that is difficult, controversial and complicated and not share with the House the information that the Minister has at her disposal. It is an abuse. It is not good enough.

Helen Whately: During the course of this speech, I will share as much information as I can with my right hon. Friend on the rationale behind this, but let me address his point about the timing. He says that it could be done later, but the problem is that, if we do it later, will we suggesting that it is too late for care home staff who have not yet been vaccinated? The point is to give care home staff the time between this being legislated upon and its being implemented in time for the winter, when we know that there is a greater risk of a combination of covid and flu, to get vaccinated, in the knowledge that we are generally seeing an eight-week period between doses.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): The Minister will appreciate that the provisions before us extend well beyond the care home staff. With respect to the 1% of those staff of whom she spoke, in the absence of the impact assessment, if their failure to be vaccinated results in dismissal, who will be responsible for the compensation?

Helen Whately: My right hon. Friend asks an important question about how things would work in practice, although I think he is presuming that there is a question

of compensation. I expect to see care homes being able to follow a process, and so long as they follow a fair process, there should be no need for the compensation that my right hon. Friend suggests. We will set out guidance, but the point is that there is a fair process in which, for instance, a care home can discuss vaccination with its staff member and, indeed, look at whether there might be an alternative role for an individual if they really do not want to be vaccinated, although I am realistic that there are not that many roles for staff in care homes that do not involve being in the care home. After that, if the situation is still that the staff member does not wish to be vaccinated, the care home must follow a notice period and make sure that it follows a fair process.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I want to help the Minister. We are having to make a decision this evening on the balance of risk, but we have not been given the data because the impact assessment has not come forward. The Minister is, in effect, asking us to make a decision on information that we have not yet been able to see. Would it not therefore be more sensible to withdraw this statutory instrument and ensure that we have the right data in front of us, so that we can then make an informed choice?

Helen Whately: We live in an uncertain world, but we know that covid is a killer for people living in care homes and we know that the winter ahead of us is going to be challenging both because of the ongoing circulation of covid and because of flu. The question we should put to ourselves today is: what are the steps that we can take to make people safer in the months ahead? This time last year—last summer—infection rates were low, but we did not sit back and say, “In that case, it’s going to be okay for the winter.” We in Government, working with local authorities and care homes, made preparations for the winter ahead. Thank goodness we did make those preparations. Although sadly there were many deaths, had we not put in place the personal protective equipment distribution system, had we not had the level of regular testing that went on in care homes throughout the winter, and had we not had the support with infection prevention and control, I fear that last winter would have been much worse. We know that the winter ahead is going to be another challenging one and we must prepare for it.

Mr Wragg: Will the Minister give way?

Sir Christopher Chope: Will the Minister give way?

Helen Whately: I will make some progress. As the Prime Minister and our chief medical officer have said, even when we are no longer in a pandemic, the virus will remain in some shape or form and we will have to learn to live with it. It will continue to circulate and potentially evolve into new variants, and there is a serious risk of a resurgence of flu and other seasonal infections. A combination of covid and flu may be unpleasant for many of us, but it will be life threatening for those who are most vulnerable.

Sir Christopher Chope: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Helen Whately: We must ask ourselves: what more can we do to protect those who will be most vulnerable?

Mr Wragg: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. To assist the debate, there is a discrepancy between the explanatory memorandum and the explanatory note on the back of the statutory instrument. The note states:

“A full impact assessment of the costs and benefits of this instrument is available from the Department of Health”.

It gives the Department’s address and indeed the website on which the assessment is supposedly published. So is the explanatory note in the instrument correct or not?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Again, this is not a matter for the Chair, but it is certainly a point for the Minister to address. I think it would be helpful if the Minister could directly address that particular issue, which many Members are now raising.

Helen Whately: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. There is not a great deal more that I can say on that point. As I have said, the impact assessment is being worked on and we will share it with colleagues as soon as we can. That is all I can say on that particular point.

Sir Christopher Chope: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Yesterday, I asked the House of Commons Library to inquire of the Department where this impact assessment was, and the Department informed the Library that it was about to present the impact assessment. It did not say that the assessment was still under preparation. The implication was that it was ready to be given to the House and it was just a matter of time—they said they would do it as soon as possible.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Again, I can only say what I have heard during the debate and apparently the impact assessment is simply not available. This is clearly not the best situation. We can see exactly what it is, but it is what it is.

Helen Whately: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies recommends that 80% of staff and 90% of residents should be vaccinated in any care home, at a minimum, to provide protection against outbreaks of covid. While the majority of care home workers have now been vaccinated, our most recent data has told us that only 65% of older age care homes in England were meeting that safe minimum level, and the figure fell to 44% in London. That is why the instrument is being put forward today. It means that, by November, subject to parliamentary approval and a subsequent 16-week grace period, anyone entering a Care Quality Commission-registered care home in England must be vaccinated unless an exemption applies. That will apply to all workers employed by the care home, those employed by an agency and volunteers in the care home. Those entering care homes to undertake other work, for example, healthcare workers, tradespeople, hairdressers and CQC inspectors, will all have to follow the regulations.

The introduction of this policy has not been taken lightly. We have consulted extensively, including with a wide range of valued stakeholders, and used their feedback to inform this legislation. We recognise that some people feel that workers should have freedom of choice about vaccination, while others do it as a duty of care to protect the people most at risk. I know from speaking directly to people who receive care and to those who

[*Helen Whately*]

have relatives living in care homes that, although they might not be sure about requiring all care workers to be vaccinated, they are sure that they, individually, want to be cared for by someone who has been fully vaccinated. Many people have little choice about who cares for them.

Mr Wragg: The Minister mentions feedback, but the draft explanatory memorandum states that “a majority (57%) of respondents did not support the proposal”. How, therefore, does the feedback show that there is support for it?

Helen Whately: We have reviewed the huge number of responses to the consultation. Not everybody who responded supported the proposal—as my hon. Friend says, 57% did not—but it was interesting that the picture in care homes was fairly even between those who supported it and those who were concerned.

One thing that we are already seeing is that some care homes are bringing in the policy themselves.

Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Helen Whately: I may pre-empt my hon. Friend’s point. I know that hon. Friends have asked why the Government need to bring in the policy if some care homes are doing it themselves. The problem is that we could risk a situation in which someone fortunate enough to be living in a care home that has required vaccination for its workers is highly protected against the virus, but someone less fortunate, in a care home in which far fewer staff are vaccinated, is unfortunately at much greater risk. That is not an inequality that any of us should be comfortable with.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): If we take a vote tonight, it will set a trend, set down a marker and point the direction not just for this place, but for the whole United Kingdom; I mention Northern Ireland in particular. Before we make the decision, may I ask whether the Minister has had any opportunity to talk to the regional, devolved Minister, Robin Swann, to gauge his opinion on how the legislation will affect us?

Helen Whately: The hon. Member is right: I know that other parts of the United Kingdom are watching what we are doing here in England. There are regular conversations between the Department of Health and Social Care in England and the other Administrations. Also relevant is the international situation: other countries have either done what we are doing or are looking very hard at it. In fact, France has just announced that it will require vaccination for health and social care workers on a faster timeline than the one we propose.

Never again do we want to be back in the situation of having covid outbreaks across hundreds of care homes, with those who live and work in them losing their lives to this virus. Vaccination is a safe and effective way of preventing the spread of covid. The majority of care home workers have already taken up the vaccine, and it is essential that all care home workers who can have the vaccine do so in order to protect those in their care.

The original scope proposed in the consultation was to apply the policy only to care homes that look after older people, but following the consultation it became clear that there was a compelling case to extend the obligation to all care homes that provide care to the most vulnerable, for example young adults with learning disabilities. There was also significant support for broadening the scope of the policy to include all those who come into contact with residents, and there was support for including all those who enter care home residences in any capacity.

Sir Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): Will the Minister give way on that point?

Helen Whately: I will proceed, and I may answer my hon. Friend’s question as I go.

We listened to the responses and made the decision to apply the policy to all people working inside care homes, unless they have a medical exemption or are not eligible for vaccination—under-18s, for instance. There are further exemptions, including people providing emergency assistance or undertaking urgent maintenance work, and family or friends visiting. Guidance will be published that gives more detail about the exemptions, which will reflect the green book on immunisation and clinical advice from the JCVI.

Sir Graham Brady: Can the Minister explain why the draft regulations do not distinguish between those workers who actually come into contact with residents and those who do not?

Helen Whately: My hon. Friend asks a reasonable question. We consulted on exactly that point. There are two reasons relevant to the breadth of the policy, which covers not only care workers, but others coming into the care home, such as hairdressers, health professionals and tradespeople.

When somebody, including a tradesperson, comes into a care home, they might spend significant time in the care home, move around and move from room to room, so they might be a significant infection risk to the care home. They might also move between one care home and another, particularly if they are a specialist who serves multiple care homes. We know there is a risk when individuals are moving between care homes, so there is a clinical case for the regulations.

We also heard from providers responding to the consultation that they want a consistent approach for people who enter a care home to work, and these regulations will make it more straightforward for them to implement that.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. On making sure there is equity, where does she believe the duty of care falls, given these regulations?

Helen Whately: My hon. Friend makes a really important point. Throughout the pandemic, the Government and I have felt our responsibility to protect those living in care homes from covid as best we can. We can try to do that by extending to them the protection of being cared for by people who are doubly vaccinated, knowing as we do now, from the increasing evidence, that being vaccinated not only protects the individual but reduces the risk of transmission.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Helen Whately: I will sum up, as I know other colleagues wish to make speeches.

I put on record my sincere thanks to care workers across the country, not just for their work throughout the pandemic but for all they bring to our health and care services. People working in care homes have played an incredibly important role in caring for those most at risk from this terrible virus. The vaccine is working, with more than 14,000 lives saved so far. It is only right that we take every possible step to protect those most at risk.

As I said at the outset, we must all ask ourselves what more we can do to protect care home residents, and these regulations are what we can do.

Mark Jenkinson: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your advice on whether the vaccination figures cited by the Minister, which are more than a month out of date, might have inadvertently misled the House. Her earlier figures on the vaccination status of care home staff and residents suggest it simply is not possible for the figures both to have reached the SAGE threshold and to be as low as the House was informed.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point of order. Obviously, I cannot comment on figures the Minister may or may not have used. I am sure she will have heard what he said and, if there is anything that needs correcting, will do so in her summing up.

6.18 pm

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): Since the start of the pandemic, our lives have all been deeply affected. Our key workers have experienced more than their fair share of grief, strife and sacrifice. Our care staff have truly been the best of us during the past 16 months, nursing our loved ones at the end of their life, being the person who holds our relatives when they are scared and confused, and facilitating greetings through windows and fences and across roads. They have been family to our vulnerable relatives over the past year, and for that I will be forever grateful. I do not think we will ever be able to repay that debt.

These are not the words of a politician or even a doctor; they are the words of a daughter who had to say goodbye to her father during the pandemic. I am eternally grateful for the care my father received, which went above and beyond what I could have expected. Carers showed my family and me what humanity truly is: changing their shifts to be with him, being on the end of the phone whenever we needed them, and facilitating whatever they could for us to be with him in his last moments. I can never repay my father's carers for the humanity that they showed him as his condition worsened while my family could not be by his bedside.

Carers were scared, and many still are. The idea of passing a deadly virus on to the people in their care tormented them, and that is why we are here today. The idea that care workers do not think about the day-to-day safety of the people they care about is an insult. From my own experience, I know that their residents are of the utmost importance to them. So often poorly paid,

they put in the gruelling work because they truly care. To argue that they do not neglect their fears. We want everyone working in a care home to take up the vaccine, which is safe and effective, but we are not inclined to support these proposals or the case for compulsory vaccination.

There are serious warnings from the care sector that the Government's plan could lead to staff shortages in already understaffed care homes. This would have disastrous consequences for the quality of care. It is vital that we examine the current reality of life on the frontline in care settings. During the pandemic, Unison surveyed its members, who shared that they were feeling more anxious and depressed than before owing to the fear of passing the virus on to their relatives and those under their care. Many felt that their management were not equipped to support their needs. Resoundingly, care workers just wanted people to listen to their experiences and the challenges they were experiencing without, and I quote, "fear of being singled out as a troublemaker".

Rachael Maskell: I am really grateful for the speech that my hon. Friend is making and obviously pass on my condolences to her. Does she agree that after all that our care workers have been through, what they need at this time is not only supported conversation about how they can progress with their own vaccination, or not, but to have the right people in place giving them that supported conversation?

Dr Allin-Khan: It is almost as though my hon. Friend has read the rest of my speech. I could not agree more.

We have to listen to our care workers today. For the young, pregnant carers worried about their next pay cheque, will these proposals make them more secure? For all those carers from communities who have lost trust in authority, will the threat of losing their jobs instil more trust? For all those carers who have loved and cared for their residents but have concerns about the vaccine and have not had anyone answer their questions, are they being told that their dedication is suddenly irrelevant?

To understand why there may be hesitancy among care home workers to take up the vaccine, it is important to understand the health inequalities that much of the workforce face. Ethnic minorities are over-represented in the adult social care workforce, with 21% of all care staff coming from a minority ethnic background. Negative experiences of a culturally insensitive health service, the higher rates of death from covid for people from black and south Asian communities, and a lack of representation of minority groups in vaccine trials and wider health research all serve to build distrust in the health system. These are some of the communities that have been hit the hardest during the pandemic.

The disproportionate use of coercive and restrictive practices on minority communities also, importantly, erodes trust in the system. Black people are four times more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 than white people, despite making up a much smaller percentage of the overall population. With trust so low, that creates hesitancy, but this can be overcome through effective communication and an understanding of the issues that have created it. Further coercion and punishment through the threat of being dismissed from employment only reinforces the reasons for hesitancy in the first place.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I hear what the hon. Lady is saying. My first instinct on persuasion, months and months ago, was exactly the same, but more than seven months on, it has not happened. I am tempted to ask, “If not now, when?”, to coin a phrase. What is her response to that?

Dr Allin-Khan: My response is that the Government have not gone far enough to have these conversations. A real effort has not been made to engage with the communities that have been hit the hardest and for whom vaccine hesitancy is at its highest. Trust being so low creates the hesitancy that I have just spoken of. This hesitancy can be overcome through effective communication, but that has not yet happened under this Government's watch.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Dr Allin-Khan: I am going to make progress, thank you.

These measures will disproportionately punish groups whose needs are already rarely reflected in mainstream health services or the labour market. Respectfully listening to concerns and offering practical support would not only tackle vaccine hesitancy; it would also help to rebuild trust in health services, which in turn could eventually lead to reduced health inequalities for all minority groups.

Let us be clear: vaccine hesitancy is entirely different from being an anti-vaxxer. Vaccine hesitancy is a challenge for the Government to tackle. It is harder work. There is no quick fix. The Government are trying to make an incredibly complex issue into a black and white one, and that does nothing to pay respect to the sacrifices that care workers have made since the start of the pandemic. More must be done to encourage uptake of the vaccine.

Dr Luke Evans: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr Allin-Khan: I am going to make progress, please.

The UK Government should learn from the fantastic work of the Labour-led Welsh Government, who are running the fastest vaccine programme in the world and have vaccinated a far greater proportion of their staff than England; yesterday's figures showed that almost 95% of care home residents and 88% of care home staff are double vaccinated. Wales has rejected compulsory vaccinations and instead chosen to work closely with the care sector to drive take-up, as well as valuing the workforce with a proper pay rise. That is the sort of leadership that is needed here.

A failure of leadership here will place the care sector in an even more precarious situation, with even fewer staff than at present. There are serious warnings from the care sector that the Government's plan could lead to staff shortages in already understaffed care homes. That would have disastrous consequences on the quality of care. More than 100,000 posts in the care sector are currently unfilled, with recruitment and retention already extremely difficult due to low wage levels for difficult and demanding jobs. Not only could this plan have a disastrous impact on those relying on care, but the stress and trauma placed on their relatives will affect so many across the country. We already have a social care crisis. Let us not deepen it.

These proposals are at odds with the Government's decision to throw caution to the wind by making social distancing and mask wearing optional and up to individuals to decide on. It makes no sense. Surely forcing workers to receive a vaccine is at odds with the individualism that the Government seek to promote at every opportunity. It seems odd that care workers are being singled out. Why is there a different rule for them? Are the Government hoping that the public will simply forget about their failure to protect care homes over the past year? Is that what is going on here?

Forcing carers to choose between losing their job and taking a vaccine that they are afraid of is inhumane. These are people who often work for less than the minimum wage. They are incredibly vulnerable people and their voices must be heard. Many of these people have lost multiple family members during the pandemic. They are being asked to put their faith in a vaccine that they are afraid of. The Government need to be doing more to tackle misinformation, promote the positive benefits of taking up the vaccine and support care home staff to do so. They have not been doing enough to support care workers who have done so much during the crisis. They should be focused on driving up standards and staff retention by treating care workers as the professionals they are, with improved pay, terms and conditions and training.

We have a moral imperative not to force people to take a vaccine that they are afraid of, so I urge the Government to listen to our care workforce. Surely they deserve at least that after the last year.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): This debate finishes at 7.19 pm and I need to bring the Minister in at the end. That means that if colleagues speak for between four and five minutes, everybody will get in. If colleagues do not speak for between four and five minutes, everybody will not get in.

6.29 pm

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan). I am delighted that the official Opposition share my view and that of many of my colleagues that these are bad regulations and that they should be opposed this evening.

Both the Welsh and Scottish Governments, as I understand it, are against this type of regulation. The Minister told us that other Administrations were watching, but this Administration should be watching what the other Administrations are doing and following their lead. I must say that this was probably the most depressing performance from a Minister that I have listened to in this House. She showed a cavalier disregard for the conventions and courtesies of this House, and, as she has admitted to, she completely breached the rules under the Government's better regulation framework, which is designed to inform decision making for regulations that affect businesses and individuals in this country. When criticised, the Minister's response is best described as dumb insolence, and that is just not good enough. One question that I would have liked to ask in an intervention was: what is the Government's rationale for not requiring care home residents to be vaccinated?

These regulations were laid on 22 June. There was an accompanying explanatory memorandum that expressly referenced a full impact assessment. It said:

“A full impact assessment of the costs and benefits of this instrument is available from the Department of Health and Social Care...and is published alongside this instrument and its Explanatory Memorandum”.

The Minister has not explained what has happened to it, whether it ever existed, and whether it contained information that she found embarrassing and has therefore been suppressed.

An impact assessment is not an optional extra. As the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee made clear in its report of 6 July: “An impact assessment is a fundamental tool for those who wish to scrutinise legislation before nodding it through”. Indeed, an impact assessment should be cleared by the Minister before the proposals are brought forward. The Government’s better regulation framework principles, set out in March 2020, say:

“Where government intervention requires a legislative or policy change to be made, departments are expected to analyse and assess the impact of the change on the different groups affected – which should generally take the form of an impact assessment.”

That has not happened. Why has it not happened? I put down some parliamentary questions about this, because I feared that we would not get the impact assessment, and those questions have received holding answers rather than substantive answers. One asked what estimate he has made

“of the number of employees in...England who will face dismissal from their employment as a result of the enactment of regulations ...and whether those staff will be eligible for compensation”.

There was not an answer to that, and there has not been one so far today. I then asked what estimate has been made

“of the number of staff employed in care homes in England who have not been vaccinated against covid-19 for (a) clinical reasons and (b) reasons of personal choice including religion, belief and conscience”.

Again, no answers—not even to parliamentary questions. How can we hold the Government to account if they will not even answer our questions?

My constituents are absolutely livid about what is being proposed. I will not quote extensively from a letter that I received from Mr Davis from Ferndown, but he says that it is completely wrong and unethical and that it makes no sense. An NHS consultant in Christchurch says that, “Mandatory vaccination would be crossing the Rubicon on medical choice, medical confidentiality and bodily autonomy.” These are vital elements of the right to privacy. A Christchurch care home manager to whom I have spoken has said that the whole proposal “undermines” the need for parity of esteem between care workers and NHS workers.

You may have seen, Madam Deputy Speaker, the article in the *British Medical Journal* on 8 July, which says that, while it may reduce the risk of transmission, vaccination

“is not a panacea for safety”.

Why are we not saying that people who have had previous infection and got immunity from that are exempt from these regulations? I think that this is an unnecessary, disproportionate and misguided proposal. I hope that, given what has happened in Scotland and Wales, we reject these regulations and put the Minister out of her misery.

6.34 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) [V]: I do not usually speak in the debates about statutory instruments on covid regulations as they apply only in England, but I feel I have to make a couple of points on the plan to make covid vaccination mandatory for all care home staff—the first mandatory vaccination legislation in the UK for well over a century.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on vaccinations for all, I totally support vaccination and I draw attention to our recent report, published in May, on how to improve the uptake of all vaccines. Virtually all our expert contributors highlighted the dangers of making vaccination legally mandatory because while it may force uptake among some, it tends to increase distrust and suspicion of vaccines and drive those who are hesitant to become vaccine refusers.

In Scotland, virtually 100% of care home staff are fully vaccinated with both doses, without mandating it. That has been achieved through three key policy approaches. First, as part of developing caring as a profession, care home staff in Scotland are now registered, which means we have information on who we are trying to reach. Secondly, when the Scottish Government became aware that care home staff were being deliberately targeted with disinformation on covid vaccines, they arranged expert webinars for staff with our chief medical officers and NHS director. Thirdly, as soon as the Pfizer vaccine became available in December, care home staff were vaccinated at the same visit as residents. That not only improved convenience, but created a strong sense of solidarity between colleagues and with the vulnerable people they care for.

The Scottish Government faced considerable criticism at the start of the year for spending so much time and effort on care homes rather than pushing ahead with mass vaccination centres, but it has paid off. We hear that in England, 86% of care home staff have received a first dose and 75% are fully vaccinated, although I understand that that hides a wide variation in uptake. While repeat visits have now been provided to care homes in England, that was not national policy at the start of the programme when many providers reported difficulty in accessing vaccine appointments for their staff.

The UK Government have never taken forward the principle of care staff registration and professionalisation in the care sector. As has been highlighted, staff in England are not even paid the real living wage. Care home staff have faced a very difficult time in the last 18 months and we all owe them a great debt of thanks. I still believe that locally targeted support, information and persuasion would be more successful in convincing care home staff than heavy-handed legislation, which threatens their jobs.

We all agree about the need to get the highest rate of vaccination possible to protect care home residents. The difference is in how to get there. Our APPG report makes it clear that the most important approach when dealing with communities with hesitancy is not to make assumptions about the cause but to listen to them and then act on what they are seeking.

Apart from my concerns about the principle of mandating vaccination, I call on the Minister to clarify that the legislation applies to England only. The Scottish

[Dr Philippa Whitford]

Government do not accept the principle of making vaccines mandatory, nor do they see the need for such an approach after the fantastic uptake by our care home staff.

6.38 pm

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I do not often say this, but it is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), who speaks for her party and, in this case, the all-party parliamentary group on vaccinations for all. I agree with almost every word—not necessarily about the Scottish Government—she said about the right way of persuading care home workers to get vaccinated.

I should say first, before I touch on the specific proposals in front of us, that I agree with the Minister when she says it is very important that we protect those who live in a care home setting. We have all seen the damage over the past year from covid, and it is fantastic that we can now vaccinate those residents, because we know that covid is a disease that is focused on wreaking the most havoc on those who are older and those with health conditions. It is fantastic, as the Minister said, that 96% of residents of care homes have had a first dose and 93% a second dose. That means they have very substantial protection against serious disease, hospitalisation and, tragically, death, and that is fantastic. Everyone in the House—I think I can speak for everyone—wants to make sure we protect people in care homes. This debate is about how we best do so.

Let me just take the arguments that the Minister set out. First, I agree with what the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire said in terms of persuasion. I have certainly talked to my local health professionals, and they very much advocate listening to staff who are hesitant, understanding the reasons and then trying to address those reasons. I know that the Minister has said that a significant number of healthcare staff have been vaccinated, but it is not consistent across the country. In some places it will be 100%; in other places, it will be much lower.

It seems to me that we therefore need to focus on those areas where take-up is much lower and understand what the barriers are, rather than insisting that people have got to do something that they clearly have some concerns about. That may be because they are from a particular ethnic minority, and we know there is differential vaccine take-up there, or it may be that they are a younger female of childbearing age, and they are concerned—I think erroneously—about things they read about fertility. We need to deal with those concerns. We cannot threaten somebody who is young and worried about fertility and insist that they take a vaccine they are worried about without dealing with those concerns. I think we all agree about that; this debate is about how best to do it.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that in some cases, seeming to threaten people will only worsen the problems of trust in authority from which people might already be suffering, causing them to be hesitant in the first place?

Mr Harper: I agree with my hon. Friend, and that is why I think these proposals are mistaken. Let me just step briefly through the proposals in front of us. First of all, I completely agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) said about the impact assessment. I have been a Minister; I have been through impact assessments, prepared them, signed them off and presented them to the House, and I am afraid it is not good enough.

The proposals will have a very significant impact on hundreds of thousands of people and many thousands of businesses—it is a significant step; it is the first time that we will have mandated in law effectively compulsory vaccinations—and it is frankly offensive that it is being debated in a 90-minute statutory instrument debate in the House. From the name of the regulations it does not leap out as to what they are, and I think many colleagues were unaware of the fact that we were being asked to vote on this measure today until it was drawn to their attention. That is the first point.

The second point is that if the information is available, even if it is imperfect—I accept that it will be imperfect and there will be things that we cannot be certain about—it is the Minister's duty, if she has that information, which one of these documents says she does and one of them says she does not, to put what she has in front of the House. She should sign it off—she is responsible for that—and allow us to see it before we are asked to vote on the regulations.

I am afraid it is an abuse of the House to ask us to vote without that information. If this was genuinely an emergency, that might be acceptable, but, as I have already said, these regulations, if passed, do not come into force for 16 weeks. That is November. There is ample time to complete the impact assessment and bring the regulations back before the House. Even if that was in September, we could then have a tighter deadline and still deliver the legislation before it is currently scheduled to become law. I think that would be preferable.

It is worth saying that I could have been persuaded, although I have reservations, to support mandatory vaccination for care home staff, if a good case had been made about the risk reduction to residents. I did not actually hear the case being made about the risk reduction to residents. It is not set out in any of the documents in front of us, and the Minister did not set it out in her remarks, but I remain open to that, which is why I would urge her to bring back further proposals later.

However, that is not at all what is in front of us. These proposals are incredibly broad: they apply to everybody who enters the premises of a care home. Even if they never see a resident or are there only for moments, the care home will be prohibited by law from allowing them to enter, and will have to ask them intrusive questions about their health status, perhaps including what health conditions they have that mean they do not have to get a vaccination. That care home will then have to ask the employer, and those businesses that want to transact with care homes will then have to ask those intrusive questions of their employees. The scope of these proposals is massive, and is particularly troubling given what the Government said yesterday in the House about domestic vaccine passports. Many of us are concerned that insisting that employers ask their staff intrusive questions about their health conditions, when there is no good reason to do so, is the thin end of a wedge.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a fantastic argument, as he always does in this place. I have interweaved these new regulations into where they would fit in the Health and Social Care Act 2008 and the 2014 regulated activities regulations, and have found that we are asking care homes to be the policemen of delivery people, plumbers and window cleaners with a possible £4,000 fixed penalty fine. I do not know whether my right hon. Friend was aware of the extent of the fine that backs up these regulations.

Mr Harper: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing that information to the attention of the House.

I will bring my remarks to a conclusion, because Mr Deputy Speaker wants to make sure that we get everybody in. My final point is that, coming back to the consultation that took place, it is very clear that most of the people responding did not support these proposals. They were very concerned about them; certainly, the care homes and those involved in the sector who I have heard from are very concerned about them. The proposals do not command wide support, so I say to the Minister that I would listen to the concerns that are being expressed, take these proposals away, and come back with some well-thought-through proposals to secure the support of the House. If she presses them to a vote today, I regret to say that I will be forced to vote against them.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I can guarantee that everybody will get in: there is a five-minute limit.

6.47 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), and I pretty much agree with everything he had to say. I wish to preface my remarks on these regulations by making it abundantly clear that I and my Liberal Democrat colleagues unequivocally and strongly support vaccination, and would urge everybody who is eligible to be vaccinated. We know that vaccines are safe, effective, and save lives, and for those on the frontline—whether working in social care or in the NHS—vaccination is critical. If I had a loved one in a care home, of course I would want maximum protection for them, and therefore would want all staff to be vaccinated. The question we as legislators have to grapple with is whether coercion is the answer, and what might be the unintended consequences of mandating vaccination for some of the lowest paid and most undervalued workers in our society, and for a sector that is on its knees.

As we have heard, the care sector is facing chronic staff shortages, and making vaccines mandatory has a real potential to exacerbate those acute shortages. The Government must do much more to convince and persuade care workers to get vaccinated. As many experts have said and as we have heard already, coercion is usually ineffective or, worse, counterproductive, and risks eroding trust in the sector. Indeed, the care sector has a long history of being overlooked and underfunded. Some 1.6 million social care workers earn less than the living wage; a quarter of the workforce are on zero-hours contracts; and there is a lack of any progression or career prospects. There is a real concern that those who are vaccine-hesitant may simply leave the profession rather than get vaccinated, particularly as we know that there are serious shortages in other sectors—such as hospitality—that are offering more competitive pay.

With 1.5 million older people currently not getting the care they need, already overstretched staff will become even thinner on the ground. Care providers, many of whom are already in a fragile state as a result of the pandemic, could find themselves having to deal with the costs of tribunals and legal challenges as a result of individuals losing their jobs. What support and resource is being provided to the sector to implement this policy?

Coercion is not an effective way to overcome hesitancy. Compulsory vaccination is a blunt tool for a complex issue, and research has highlighted that pressuring care workers can have damaging effects leading to the erosion of trust, worsening concerns about the vaccine and hardened stances on refusing vaccination. Indeed, digging into the detail shows that the rate of uptake may not be as bad in some places as it initially seems. The data is somewhat encouraging in that there is a significant disparity in the percentage of staff who have taken their first jab and not their second. For instance, Wandsworth has the lowest uptake rate, with 70% of staff having had their first jab but only 53% having had their second. This could indicate that Government and NHS initiatives are bearing fruit, and that mandating vaccination could therefore be premature. Alternatively, it might suggest there is a problem with trying to get care workers back to have their second jabs. This all suggests a much more complex picture, for which this blunt tool is not the answer. As others have said, we risk going down a slippery slope to chip away at people's rights and freedoms to make their own health choices. This decision sets a precedent and must not be taken lightly.

That leads me to my final point. In part, we have arrived at this situation precisely because the care sector has been overlooked for so long. It has long been a Cinderella service and a poor relation to the NHS, and yet again, we see that this legislation applies only to care home workers and not NHS staff, so it feels discriminatory to many in the care sector. I come back to where I started. I want to protect the most vulnerable, but I fear that these measures will do more harm than good and that we risk a mass exodus of staff from an already overburdened, overstretched and underfunded sector.

In March last year, when my Liberal Democrat colleagues in the other place and I were asking searching questions of Ministers about testing and PPE to protect care homes, there were no answers. The truth is that the tragedy we have seen unfold in our care homes throughout the pandemic resulted in thousands of excess deaths because the protective ring that Ministers talked about went in far too late. This legislation we are being asked to support is a reaction to Government inaction and failure to protect care homes, and they continue to drag their feet on reforming the sector properly. Coercion and an assault on fundamental rights and liberties should not be the response to this. We must encourage, empower and support people to make the right decision to get vaccinated, and we must pay and value our heroic care staff properly, rather than pointing the finger of blame at them.

6.52 pm

Sir Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) has said. I shall begin, as others have done, with the impact assessment—or the lack of one. I hope that the Minister will, on reflection,

[Sir Graham Brady]

accept that it is simply wrong to bring these measures forward without giving the House the impact assessment in advance. She still has the opportunity to do something about this by withdrawing these measures and coming back at a later date, and I hope she will consider that.

This is a very serious innovation. Imposing a legal requirement for people to undertake a medical intervention, maybe against their will, is a remarkable change in our law. As the hon. Member for Twickenham said, it sets a serious precedent, and it is a precedent that the Minister herself slightly alarmingly raised when she said that covid and flu would be a problem as the winter approached. As yet, we are not talking about compulsory vaccination for flu, but once we begin down that road, where does it end?

The scope of this measure is unnecessary. As I said in my intervention, insisting that people are vaccinated even if they will have no contact whatsoever with residents of care homes is entirely unreasonable. The application of the measure to a plumber who comes to fix a boiler, or to a trustee of a charity who may go to sit in an office but have no contact in any of the areas where residents would be, would be unreasonable. The measure is also inconsistent. Why does it apply only to care workers and not more widely in the healthcare sector?

Mark Jenkinson: We heard from the Minister about the 99% vaccination uptake where an employer had mandated it themselves. Would it not be the case, as in the case that my hon. Friend set out with visitors, that if this was in departmental guidance, it would be incumbent on the care home to take cognisance of it in the risk assessment?

Sir Graham Brady: I agree with my hon. Friend. There are perfectly rational arrangements that could allow particular residents to insist on only a vaccinated carer being in attendance.

I want to focus in the brief time available on a specific point: the importance of respecting religious freedom. Lime Tree House in Sale in my constituency is one of only two Christian Science care homes in the country. The rights of Christian Scientists were protected by the Labour Government when the Care Standards Bill was introduced in 2000. The then Minister, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, gave an explicit assurance in the House of Lords:

“Perhaps I may say right at the start that the Government have no intention of preventing or discouraging people from being cared for in accordance with the principles and practices of the Church of Christ, Scientist. The Care Standards Bill will not mean that Christian Science houses or their visiting nurse services will have to give medical treatment to their patients, or do anything else which would go against their religious principles...The Department of Health will consult and work with the Church of Christ, Scientist, to ensure that regulation by the commission is compatible with the church's principles and practices.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 28 March 2000; Vol. 611, c. 741.]

Christian Scientists responded to the consultation in May. Since then, they have written to the Minister and indeed the new Secretary of State—obviously, that was

very recently—but have not received a response. Clearly, there is no provision in the legislation to protect this important principle.

May I ask the Minister when she responds to give an absolute assurance that the principle of religious freedom will be respected by the Government, as it was by previous Governments? Will she undertake either to introduce an amended statutory instrument in the House or, if not, will she commit to including matters of conscience in the exemptions provided for in the measure? I am talking about two small care homes, a handful of residents and a situation in which both residents and carers might prefer not to have a medical intervention inflicted on them against their will, but a very big principle is at stake.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I remind Dr Evans that I will interrupt him briefly at 7 o'clock to put the motion on deferred Divisions to the House so that we can have live votes on this and on the terrorism motion.

6.57 pm

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I look forward to that, as it will give me time to catch my breath.

Like many hon. Members, I baulk at the prospect of mandatory mask certification or vaccination. I have made that clear privately and to my constituents who ask about it, as I did not think that it was ethically, practically or even medically reasonable. We should always be proportionate in our response. However, I have also made it clear that there are specific carve-outs aimed at those most at risk. Indeed, when it comes to healthcare and public health, this is a prime example, given the essence of who we are dealing with: the elderly and the vulnerable.

This argument boils down to rights versus responsibilities. There is a duty of care by the Government and internal providers both to patients and to members of staff. The House has to navigate the difficult path between limiting the risk to patients and residents from the spread of the virus while respecting the staff's rights and responsibilities. In the next minute or two, including the break at 7 o'clock, I will go over a couple of principles that are in practice, and some real-world challenges that we face.

According to the Care Quality Commission, when it comes to talking about vaccinations, there are three pieces of legislation that are important: the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974; the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (Amendment) Regulations 1992; and the Health and Social Care Act 2008.

We are obviously dealing with the latter, but the former two measures set a precedent of safe working environments, dealing with substances dangerous to health, putting responsibility squarely on organisers and providers to mitigate that for staff and users as best as possible.

I do not expect that it will be too long before we see a legal challenge, where a resident dies from covid and the finger is pointed squarely at the care home staff, or at the care home for not having vaccinated staff, given that we know the vulnerability of the elderly. There is a duty—

7 pm

Debate interrupted.

Deferred Divisions

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 41A(3)),

That, at this day's sitting, Standing Order 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply to (a) the Motion in the name of Secretary Sajid Javid relating to the National Health Service and (b) the Motion in the name of Secretary Priti Patel relating to the Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

Debate resumed.

Main Question again proposed.

Dr Evans: So there is a duty of care, and duty of care is a running theme. Currently, there is no law to say that vaccines are mandatory, so make no mistake: this is a departure from the legal precedent. However, it is not nearly as big or as wide a departure as the public or indeed this House may be led to believe, as, in essence, practically this precedent already exists in the NHS with the likes of TB.

Let us take the example of a medical student or a dental student. When a student joins a medical school, they have to have a TB check, an HIV check, a hepatitis C check and treatment to practise. While it is not a legal requirement, operationally it means that someone cannot do procedures, cannot do hospital placements and, in dentistry particularly, cannot progress. Why? A duty of care.

I do not recall a huge outburst about such concerns when the 2007 Department of Health clearance guidance entitled "Health clearance for tuberculosis, hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV", which was revised in April 2014, was widespread. Why? Because when people enter these professions, the overriding principle hammered in time and again is that there is a duty of care to patients, and medical schools and providers have a duty of care for their students.

Mr Steve Baker: Of course my hon. Friend is an expert in these matters, but he has conceded that, in the cases he has referred to, that is not a legal requirement but a matter of health and safety. Why is it that in this case, he wishes to cross the Rubicon and mandate that someone may not be in a care home—apart from the conditions—unless they are vaccinated? Why does he want to put it in law in these circumstances?

Dr Evans: My hon. Friend has pre-empted the rest of my speech, in which I will hopefully try to address some of that. It is about recognising the parity between professions. We heard the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) talk about the professional recognition we need for social care. That is imperative. We have covered that in the Health and Social Care Committee, and our report is very clear that we need that parity of professional standards. We have heard time and again that people have gone above and beyond in their duty.

I am a realist on this, and I want the Government to draw people's attention to the fact that there could be difficulties. It is going to cause a problem when there are 16 weeks' consultation, and there could be an exacerbation of problems with the workforce. I also urge the Government

to pick up on what other Members have said and encourage people to take up vaccination in the first place.

Fundamentally, however—perhaps this is what it comes down to for my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker)—this comes down to a duty of care to the looked-after. I ask Members to imagine that it was their grandmother, grandfather, father or mother being cared for. I would expect Members to say that they wanted the best possible protections for that individual in the institution where they were resting.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Sorry, we have to leave it there. Four minutes each. I call Dr Ben Spencer.

7.3 pm

Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): Controversially, perhaps, I think that much of this statutory instrument is uncontroversial. The reason behind that is my own experience of being recruited to go through medical school. As part of the recruitment process, it was made very clear to me that I had to have hep B testing and I had to be vaccinated for hep B, and that going through and getting involved in becoming a medical student just would not happen if that was not the case. I think that is fair enough.

We expect our health staff to have vaccinations for a variety of conditions—not just hepatitis B but things such as chickenpox for people who have not been exposed, and rubella—because we know the impact that those things can have on the patients we look after or the people we care for. We know the huge impact covid has on the most vulnerable in our society. Its lethality—its severity—is linked to frailty, and one of the most frail groups are people living in care. It is important that people are vaccinated so that, when they have asymptomatic covid, they do not unintentionally pass it on. We know that vaccination rates are not high enough to give the protection necessary to protect people in care homes, and on that basis it is an entirely reasonable and sensible approach to bring forward measures saying that people have to be vaccinated to work in that setting. However, although that might be a reasonable approach I realise that it is different from my personal experience as I have just described, because that was a pre-recruitment process that I went through, whereas what we are talking about now is a process for people who are currently in post—people who might have been working for quite some time and have a lot of years behind them—and if they do not go through with vaccination, ultimately they will be without a job. That is a big deal. It is also important to recognise that those who may decide that they do not want to be vaccinated are not evil people who should be shunned; they are people who make decisions for whatever reason about vaccination, and that is important and should be respected.

Fundamentally, this SI is about risk, and I see two risks here. One is the risk of covid to people living in care settings, and that risk is very clear: there is loads of data on that—loads of data on the impact and on fatalities, and also on the protection provided by vaccination for people at risk of covid and protection in terms of reducing transmission. So, that side of the equation is very clear, but the side that is less clear is the risk in

[Dr Ben Spencer]

terms of staffing, and that is a critical issue. Some people will decide that not being vaccinated is more important to them than working in the care sector. I am completely unclear as to how many people will make that decision and I do not think anyone knows what that population is going to be—what the numbers are going to look like. That is a concern as we already have staffing issues in the care sector and it has been a long-term problem.

Nevertheless, perhaps the only way to test this out is to bring it forward and see what happens. The 16-week run-in makes a lot of sense, but it is critical that it is monitored to see what happens with regard to staffing and retention, and if that is a big issue—if retention pressures start coming through—we will have to change course. When my hon. Friend the Minister sums up I would welcome her saying what she will do over the summer as this is being brought in to work with and engage with people in the social care sector on its impact. If there is a substantial impact, I hope that she will undertake to come back to the House after the summer recess with plans to mitigate this or change course.

7.7 pm

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Dr Spencer), and indeed the speaker before him, my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans). They are two learned medical practitioners who, with the underlying qualities that seem to attract to those positions, state their arguments in the finest tradition of the empirical method. As ever, I hope I can be forgiven for not being quite as rational as those two speakers.

I hope, too, that the House will indulge me because, frankly, I am in despair. We could perhaps have a painting next to me of Munch's "The Scream" to get a sense of how I feel about the conduct of Government business in this House. The Government are treating this House with utter contempt: 90 minutes on a statutory instrument to fundamentally change the balance of human rights in this country is nothing short of a disgrace. It is a disgrace, too, that no impact assessment exists. I contend that it does not exist, and if that is proven to be the case I am afraid my hon. Friend the Minister will be in a tricky position if she contends it does when it does not.

The measures before us are in themselves entirely impractical. We have heard already about concerns about the workforce. I have the utmost respect for my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge, as he knows, but if we were to follow his suggestion, I fear that it would be far too late to repair the damage done to the workforce of carers in this country.

It is an insult to care workers in this country that all they merit is 90 minutes on a motion that nobody here seemed to know anything about last week but which we are discussing this afternoon. Meanwhile, so many of our colleagues, presumably because of the proxy vote system and the fact that they find it generally inconvenient to be a Member of Parliament, will know nothing at all about the measures on which they are voting, and that

too should concern us a great deal. I will vote against these measures, if that had not been made clear from my remarks so far.

I believe that 1898 was last time vaccination was mandated in this country, and following that mandate, the rates of vaccination fell. That should tell us all we need to know. We will give succour to lunatics and crackpots who advance ridiculous theories about vaccination if we mandate vaccination. The triumph of the vaccination programme has been the act of kindness that people have felt towards their fellow citizens in doing so, and we will lose that good will if we mandate it.

A lady called me a week or so ago, and she was in tears on the phone. She has a condition that involves blood clots, and she associated the news about one or two of the vaccines with her condition. She is a care worker, and she was distraught. She now equates her illness and the vaccination—and the fact that she cannot get a GP appointment to discuss it, but that is a different matter—with losing her job. Is that what we are prepared to do to our fellow citizens as a Conservative Government? Absolute lunacy! We would expect this in a communist country, which partly explains why so many of our eastern European fellow citizens have the scepticism they do, knowing the nature of the state and how it can be perceived as being malevolent.

This instrument is an abomination. It should be withdrawn, and the Government should stop treating this House with contempt.

7.11 pm

Helen Whately: I thank hon. Members for their contributions and the questions they have put to me during this debate. I welcome the consensus on the importance of protecting care home residents. This debate is about how best we do that and the level of evidence needed in order for us to take the steps to best protect those vulnerable residents. The problem we face is that the clock is ticking towards winter, and to a potential combination of covid and flu to which we know care home residents will be extremely vulnerable. The problem with inaction and waiting for more time is that inaction costs lives.

I have heard—I assure my hon. Friends on this—the strength of feeling about the impact assessment, and may I say that I apologise to my hon. Friends for the error, particularly in the explanatory notes to the regulations? I have done my utmost, as I did in my opening speech, to set out for hon. Members the situation with the impact assessment, and there is nothing further I can say on that now.

Mr Harper: I do not know what other colleagues feel, but I find it offensive that, because we have expressed concerns about these regulations, it is somehow implied that we want to do away with or risk the lives of people in care homes. These regulations do not come into force for 16 weeks. There is ample time to take them away, review them, publish the impact assessment and get this House to make a decision, and protect people before the onset of winter. To suggest that Members want to do otherwise and that we are suggesting inaction that would put their lives at risk is offensive, and I urge the Minister to withdraw it.

Helen Whately: No offence was meant on my part. The problem with what my right hon. Friend is suggesting is that, if there is a substantial delay—for instance, in the autumn—in bringing through this legislation, that

leaves care workers who have not yet been vaccinated with very little time in which to get vaccinated, and that is why we are bringing this forward now.

Rachael Maskell: Will the Minister give way?

Helen Whately: I am sorry, but I am conscious of the time left.

Several hon. Members have argued that we should continue the current approach to increasing uptake and indeed do more. Of course, we will continue to support care workers to take up the vaccine, but, as flagged by my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), the question is: how long do we give that? The vaccination of care home workers in England began in December last year, about eight months ago. We did take a similar approach to that in Scotland mentioned by the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), where staff were vaccinated alongside residents in care homes. NHS teams went into care homes multiple times to offer the vaccination to staff. Indeed, we saw that that was effective and more staff took up the vaccination on subsequent visits. We also opened the national booking system to care home staff early on, before there was wider availability to everybody. We have worked with communities who have been particularly concerned and hesitant about vaccination. There have been materials in multiple languages. We have worked with faith groups. Local authorities have worked closely with care homes, alongside NHS vaccination teams, particularly care homes that have had lower vaccination rates. A huge amount has been done to raise the levels of uptake among care home staff.

We then have to ask ourselves the question: what more can we do? The No. 1 reason care home staff have given us for not yet being vaccinated is that they want some more time. Well, this gives them some more time through the summer in which to get vaccinated. Some care homes, as I have mentioned, are already doing this. One example is the Barchester care home group, which has over 16,000 staff. The vast majority, over 99%, have chosen to be vaccinated. Fewer than 0.5% have chosen not to be vaccinated. But the problem, if we leave it to care homes that are on the front foot to do this, is that others will be left behind and we will see inequality, where some residents are fortunate to be cared for in a care home where all the staff are vaccinated, and others will not be so safe. That leaves us with inequality for those care home residents, who will remain at greater risk. We know that the vaccination not only protects individuals, but reduces the risk of transmission.

Some hon. Members have raised the concern that care workers are being singled out in some way. That is not the case at all. This is about the setting of care homes, where we know there is the greatest risk and the greatest vulnerability to covid. This is about protecting individual residents in those care homes by requiring the vaccination of people who enter those care homes to work—so not only care home staff but NHS staff who enter care homes. This is about protecting residents in those care homes. Fortunately, at the moment, the rates are lower than they have been during peak times, but even in some of the recent outbreaks we have seen in care homes, the index case has been an unvaccinated staff member. That just emphasises the importance of us having high levels of vaccination among staff.

My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) asked me about the data I referred to earlier, the SAGE data on minimum levels and the extent to which that is being achieved by care homes. I shared the most recent data that I have. What we do know is that there are still hundreds of care homes that have not yet met that safe threshold, which is a minimum threshold for avoiding outbreaks in care homes.

I say to my hon. Friends that the question before us is: what more can we do to protect those who are vulnerable in care homes? This is what we can do and I commend the regulations to the House.

Sir Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I am afraid that the point of order will have to come after the Division. I am sorry.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 319, Noes 246.

Division No. 53]

[7.19 pm]

AYES

Adams, Nigel	Burns, rh Conor
Afolami, Bim	Butler, Rob
Afriyie, Adam	Cairns, rh Alun
Aiken, Nickie	Carter, Andy
Aldous, Peter	Cartlidge, James
Allan, Lucy	Cash, Sir William
Amess, Sir David	Chalk, Alex
Anderson, Lee	Chishti, Rehman
Anderson, Stuart	Churchill, Jo
Andrew, rh Stuart	Clark, rh Greg
Ansell, Caroline	Clarke, Mr Simon
Argar, Edward	Clarke, Theo
Atherton, Sarah	Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Atkins, Victoria	Clarkson, Chris
Bacon, Gareth	Cleverly, rh James
Bacon, Mr Richard	Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Badenoch, Kemi	Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Bailey, Shaun	Colburn, Elliot
Baillie, Siobhan	Collins, Damian
Baker, Duncan	Costa, Alberto
Barclay, rh Steve	Courts, Robert
Baron, Mr John	Coutinho, Claire
Baynes, Simon	Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Bell, Aaron	Crabb, rh Stephen
Benton, Scott	Crosbie, Virginia
Beresford, Sir Paul	Crouch, Tracey
Berry, rh Jake	Daly, James
Betts, Mr Clive	Davies, David T. C.
Bhatti, Saqib	Davies, Gareth
Blackman, Bob	Davies, Dr James
Blunt, Crispin	Davies, Mims
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Davison, Dehenna
Bradley, Ben	Dinenage, Caroline
Braverman, rh Suella	Dines, Miss Sarah
Brereton, Jack	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Bridgen, Andrew	Docherty, Leo
Brine, Steve	Donelan, Michelle
Bristow, Paul	Dorries, Ms Nadine
Britcliffe, Sara	Double, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James	Dowden, rh Oliver
Browne, Anthony	Drummond, Mrs Flick
Bruce, Fiona	Duddridge, James
Buchan, Felicity	Dunne, rh Philip
Buckland, rh Robert	Eastwood, Mark
Burghart, Alex	Edwards, Ruth

Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea

Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Largan, Robert
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Murray, Mrs Sheryl
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike

Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary

Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
David Rutley and
Maria Caulfield

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen

Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Cates, Miriam
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Coyle, Neil
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet

Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies, Philip
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Davis, rh Mr David
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Furniss, Gill
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Girvan, Paul
 Glindon, Mary
 Green, Chris
 Green, Kate
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth

Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Lavery, Ian
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lockhart, Carla
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Loughton, Tim
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCartney, Karl
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 McVey, rh Esther
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paisley, Ian
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Redwood, rh John
 Reed, Steve

Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Jeff
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stevens, Jo
 Stevenson, John
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond

Syms, Sir Robert
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Tracey, Craig
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Wilson, Munira
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Winter, Beth
 Wragg, Mr William
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:

**Sir Christopher Chope and
 Sir Charles Walker**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2021, which were laid before this House on 22 June, be approved.

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

Sir Charles Walker: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was the Chairman of the Procedure Committee for seven years. It is absolutely incumbent on Government not to mislead the House and to behave honourably at all times. This explanatory memorandum is a parliamentary paper laid many days ago. This has been well rehearsed in this Chamber, but it needs to be rehearsed again. It clearly states:

“A full Impact Assessment has been prepared and will be submitted”—

not is being prepared; “has been prepared”. Through your good offices, Mr Deputy Speaker, may I ask that Mr Speaker and the Clerk of the House conduct an investigation into this memorandum to ascertain whether the House has been misled by the Government and whether the Minister's conduct at the Dispatch Box was good enough this afternoon?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. As I said earlier, it is a totally unsatisfactory situation, irrespective of whether anybody has been misled by the statement in one of the official documents. Those on the Treasury Bench will have heard the point of order and will make absolutely certain that it gets through to the Department. I will, as the hon. Gentleman has asked, raise it with Mr Speaker at the prayer meeting tomorrow morning.

Sir Christopher Chope: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. It always used to be the convention in this place that if a Minister was unable to answer all the

[*Sir Christopher Chope*]

questions raised in a debate, they would offer to write to hon. and right hon. Members whose questions had not been answered in the time available. Bearing in mind the cavalier way in which Ministers seem to be treating the conventions of the House, I wonder whether it is within your offices to be able to put pressure on the Government to restore that convention as a matter of courtesy.

I look particularly at my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady), who had a pertinent question that could have been answered in two words. It was not answered and I am sure his constituents, on behalf of whom he speaks, will feel aggrieved about that. Why cannot this place restore some sense of reasonableness and good manners?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I have been a Member of Parliament for 29 years and many times, at the end of a debate, Ministers have said they cannot deal with each point that has been raised. We were under time pressure today, as has been pointed out by a number of Members, and therefore a number of questions have gone unanswered. Again, those on the Treasury Bench will have heard the point of order and will bring it to the attention of the Minister in order that she is able to answer the questions that went unanswered in her summing up.

Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism

7.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp): I beg to move,

That the draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Proscribed Organisations) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2021, which was laid before this House on 12 July, be approved.

This motion would ordinarily have been moved by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire), who sadly had to step down from his role as Security Minister a few days ago to assist in his recovery from serious illness. I am sure the whole House will want to join me in sending him our best wishes for a very speedy recovery.

This Government are committed to taking all necessary steps to protect the people of this country. Tackling terrorism, in all its forms, is a crucial part of that mission. This Government's concerns regarding extreme right-wing terrorism are well documented.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I reassure the Minister and the Government that my party fully supports the motion, but does he not agree that we must send an appropriate message that those on the extremes, whether on the left or the so-called right, must understand that the huge majority of this UK abhor what they do and will not tolerate it, and that there will be continual proscription of cells such as the one in today's motion? We should call them out for what they are: despicable terrorist cells.

Chris Philp: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. This House, and the whole country, is united in our disgust for terrorism of all kinds. It is right that we call out these organisations, whatever colour they claim to have, and that we are united in our total condemnation of terrorist acts wherever they may occur.

The use of hateful ideologies to prey on young and vulnerable people is abhorrent and we have a responsibility to do everything in our power to crack down. Terrorist groups can now recruit, radicalise and train individuals from a distance, distributing terrorist material at the click of a button. The use of the internet for these purposes has had a huge impact on the threat and on the way we respond to it.

There are 77 terrorist organisations currently proscribed under the Terrorism Act 2000. Four are far-right groups; the majority are Islamist groups. Thanks to the dedication, courage and skill of counter-terrorism police and our security and intelligence services, most of those groups have never carried out a successful attack on UK soil. I pay tribute to our security services for the work that they have done.

Proscription is a powerful tool for degrading terrorist organisations; I will explain shortly the impact that it can have. The group that we propose to add to the list of proscribed terrorist organisations by amending schedule 2 to the 2000 Act is called The Base; it is a predominantly US-based militant white supremacist group whose activities include seeking to train members with weapons and explosives.

The proscription power arises under section 3 of the 2000 Act. Under that section, the Home Secretary has the power to proscribe an organisation if she believes

that it is currently concerned in terrorism. Where that statutory test is met, the Home Secretary may then exercise her discretion.

The effect of proscription is to outlaw the listed organisation, ensuring that it cannot operate in the UK. It is designed to degrade a group's ability to operate by enabling prosecution for various related offences, allowing the removal of online material, underpinning immigration-related measures such as excluding group members from the UK, and making it possible to seize cash associated with the organisation. It is a criminal offence for a person to belong to, support or meet a proscribed organisation, and a criminal offence to wear clothing or articles that may arouse reasonable suspicion that that individual is a member of that group. Penalties include a maximum 14-year prison term and an unlimited fine.

The Home Secretary takes decisions on proscription only after great care and consideration of the evidence. Having considered carefully all the evidence in this case, the Home Secretary, informed by analysis by the joint terrorism analysis centre, believes that The Base is concerned in terrorism and that the discretionary factors support proscription. This abhorrent group, as I have said, is a predominantly US-based white supremacist militant group that seeks to radicalise and train people for potentially violent activities. It almost certainly prepares for terrorism. We believe that the training that it provides is highly likely to be paramilitary in nature and is possibly preparatory for offensive action.

We therefore believe that the statutory test is met and that the group should be proscribed. That will aid the police in their work to disrupt the threat that extreme right-wing terrorist groups pose to our national security, and will build on the robust action that the Government have already taken in the area, proscribing groups such as National Action, the Sonnenkrieg Division, the Feuerkrieg Division and Atomwaffen, which the House proscribed just a few months ago. It sends a strong statement of intent that their ideology is unacceptable and that the UK is a hostile environment for terrorism in all its forms.

Our message is clear: we will always take every possible action to counter the threat from those who hate the values that we cherish and who threaten our safety. The safety and security of the public is our No. 1 priority. I commend the draft order to the House.

7.38 pm

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): May I start by paying tribute to the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire), who has stood down as Minister for Security? Suffice it to say that he was everything that one would have wanted in an opposite number: he was courteous, he was co-operative and he was also combative. We wish him well.

The Opposition fully support the draft order and the proscription of the vile hate group The Base, which, as we have heard, is a US-based white supremacist group whose sickening ideology mobilises racism, division and violence in an attempt to advance its repulsive goals. We know, too, that it retains close links to other neo-Nazi and right-wing terrorist groups that are already proscribed and provides paramilitary training, resources and support to sustain far-right global networks of terror, giving them the capability to undertake terrorist activity and potentially inflict serious harm.

In a week where we have seen the repulsive targeting of three black English footballers, subjected to a torrent of vile, racist abuse, the spotlight is turned again to the ugly underbelly of far-right hate within this country. As ever, we welcome the clarity and purpose that this order will give to counter-terrorism policing, the security services and their partners, whose tireless work, much of which is done selflessly and behind the scenes, keeps us safe from those who wish us harm.

However, while we agree with this measure, I am sure the Minister will understand that I have some questions on such integral issues of national security. Last October, the new director general of MI5 warned that violent far-right terrorism was now a major threat, with eight of 27 serious terrorist plots stopped in the final stages in the past three years linked to neo-fascist and racist groups. The recruitment and exploitation of young people such as that found online via chat forums and in video games has reached unprecedented heights. The number of those under 18 among those arrested has almost trebled, and this demographic is showing a worrying increase.

This is the third white supremacist hate group that Parliament has had to proscribe in a year. I say gently to the Minister that it does all feel a little bit ad hoc. Is there a plan to address the clearly alarming rise in this genre, and can he do that without having a clear, coherent and robust strategy such as those that Labour Members have called for and still await? The Base was founded in 2018 and has been operational since. That was three years ago. There is a concerning pattern of delay. It seems that whenever we have the opportunity to discuss the proscription of a far-right group in this House, the time elapsed between its initial founding, the recognition of threats and its eventual proscription is a matter of years. What is the status of the proscription review group? How often does it meet? Does he think that it is doing its work proactively enough? Is the current process working? Does he agree that doing things seriously does not mean that we have to do them slowly?

Will the Government, as highlighted by the group Hope not Hate, whose work I pay tribute to, seek to outlaw the neo-Nazi organisation Order of Nine Angles, alongside other despicable far-right groups? I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) for the work that she continues to do on this as chair of the all-party Hope not Hate group. Clearly, proscription should mark the start and not the end of the process. As such, is the Minister happy with the level of enforcement against proscribed organisations and their members?

We fully back these measures, which send a clear message that hate and terror will never be tolerated in our country. The Minister has our support and, I am sure, that of the whole House. However, I gently say that it would be good to see more from the Government than reactive, retrospective action. The threat from the far right is a serious and growing national security threat, and it should be treated as nothing less.

7.43 pm

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP) [V]: I am grateful to the Minister for setting out the reasons for this order. Of course, we fully support the proscription of the US white supremacist group The Base, whose

[Angela Crawley]

message is abhorrent. We must do everything possible to tackle these far-right groups and their rhetoric. It is fitting that we acknowledge the racism experienced by three exceptionally talented English players this week and right that we call this out at every possible opportunity.

Will the Minister ensure that any and all necessary steps are taken swiftly, and will he outline any plans to strengthen these processes? Will he ensure that Members have the opportunity to scrutinise any new legislation whenever possible? We fully support proscription of this horrendous organisation, and pay tribute to all those who work hard to tackle and contain such groups and keep us all safe.

7.44 pm

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): I welcome the banning of The Base, which is a violent group of highly determined, hardened Nazis. Based in the United States, the group has access to weaponry and have actively been plotting terrorist attacks. Although it primarily operates in the US, its leader is living in Russia and its members are promoting their hateful calls for violence globally via messaging apps and other online platforms. Although I welcome the ban, I want to speak about the context in which it is being proposed.

As parliamentary chair of the anti-fascist campaign group Hope not Hate, I have spoken previously in the Chamber about the threat of far-right terrorism, which is substantial and rising fast. There have been numerous arrests of people accused of terrorist offences. Many of these people—usually men—are just in their teens. I pay tribute to the work of the police and intelligence services in apprehending these men.

I also want to take a moment to pay tribute to a man known as Arthur, who operated at different times to counter the far-right. Twenty-seven years ago this summer, Arthur, a committed anti-fascist, met Nick Lowles, who worked then for *Searchlight* and who now runs Hope not Hate. Over the course of 10 years, Arthur worked at the heart of the British National party. During more than 400 events—from rallies to campaign sessions and more—Arthur gathered information about the activities of this fascist party. Using that information, *Searchlight* and Nick Lowles were able to sow division within the party and wreak havoc on its London operation.

Arthur was the first source to link the London nail bomber to the far right and help the police to stop his murderous campaign. Arthur never saw any recognition and he even lost out on a huge reward in order to continue his infiltration. Even his own family thought he was a Nazi activist. Now his story is being told for the first time, and I want to put my thanks—and, I hope, the thanks of the whole House—on record. We owe Arthur a huge debt of gratitude.

Countering far-right groups today, just as we have in the past, is vital to protect our way of life and our democracy. Although I welcome the steady stream of banning orders against these Nazi groups, I remain concerned that the Government still have not acted with regard to the Order of Nine Angles. Hope not Hate has consistently provided a clear case for the proscription of the O9A. It is not a new organisation; it has been active since the 1970s. Its members make use of largely unmonitored, encrypted social media platforms to conduct

activities that are illegal under existing legislation and that warrant the group's proscription under the same laws—namely, inciting or inspiring people to commit acts of terror. Nazis with links to the O9A have been convicted of terror offences in the UK and strong evidence suggests that children as young as 13 are being groomed by the group. Figures associated with the group consistently promote content that seeks to incite acts of horrendous violence.

This is not the first time that I am asking the Government to respond to this urgent call. It is more than a year since I co-ordinated a letter from a cross-party group of MPs, calling for the O9A to be banned. The Government have previously, understandably, refused to explain their rationale for allowing this terror group to continue to be free of a proscription order, but does the Minister share my frustration that this deplorable situation continues to exist?

In previous debates of this kind, Ministers have consistently made two points: first, that they will not provide any commentary on which groups are or are not being considered for proscription by the review group; and, secondly, that the proscription review process is robust and working as it should. Does the Minister seriously consider a situation whereby the Order of Nine Angles can operate without being subject to a banning order suggests that the proscription review process is working perfectly? Does that process really have sufficient resources to ensure that it can move briskly enough? Given that the far right poses the fastest growing terror threat, is the Minister satisfied that the intelligence gathering is sufficiently strong to proactively consider groups that engage in activity close to the threshold for proscription? Is he happy with the level of enforcement against proscribed organisations and their members?

In the past, proscription was the culmination of a process against a group, whereas it should merely be the start. I again urge the Government to review the process fully and seriously to consider the proscription of other groups, such as the Order of Nine Angles, that have a clear and consistent record of spreading hate and conspiring to commit acts of terror.

7.49 pm

Chris Philp: I thank the Members who have contributed to this evening's debate. There is clear unanimity throughout the House on the importance of taking action against terrorist threats where they arise, regardless of the ideology that sits behind them. I assure the House that the process for seeking, identifying and reviewing organisations that might be subject to proscription proceedings is ongoing at all times, properly resourced and occurs on a regular and frequent basis. There is eternal vigilance among the counter-terrorism officers associated with the Home Office and the security services more widely. We take the threat of terrorism extremely seriously, as Members would imagine, which is why this is the second time in just a few months that I have come to this Dispatch Box to proscribe another organisation.

Stephanie Peacock: If the Minister cannot address the issue of the Order of Nine Angles in the Chamber this evening, will he agree to meet me to discuss it further?

Chris Philp: As the hon. Lady said in her speech a few minutes ago, we do not comment on specific organisations for obvious reasons of operational security. In the absence of the Minister for Security, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire), who has very sadly had to stand down owing to ill health, ministerial responsibility sits for the time being with Baroness Williams of Trafford, to whom I shall pass on the hon. Lady's request.

In conclusion, let me repeat how seriously this Government take action against terrorist organisations, regardless of their ideological motivation. We will leave no stone unturned nor any path untrodden in our ceaseless battle to keep our fellow citizens safe.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I now suspend the House for just one minute in order that preparations can be made for the next item of business.

7.51 pm

Sitting suspended.

English Votes for English Laws

7.53 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): I beg to move,

That Standing Orders Nos. 83J to 83X (Certification according to territorial application etc) be rescinded and the following changes be made to Standing Orders:

(1) in sub-paragraph (3)(b) of Standing Order No. 12 (House not to sit on certain Fridays), leave out "Consent Motions under Standing Order No. 83M (Consent Motions for certified England only or England and Wales only provisions) and of";

(2) in paragraph of Standing Order No. 39A (Voting by proxy), leave out "or in any legislative grand committee";

(3) in paragraph of Standing Order No. 51 (Ways and means motions), leave out "or, in the case of a motion to which Standing Order No. 83U applies, forthwith upon the announcement of the Speaker's decision with respect to the motion under that Standing Order";

(4) in Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of bills not subject to a programme order) leave out paragraphs and (6);

(5) in Standing Order No. 64 (Notices of amendments, &c., to bills), leave out "of Consent Motions under Standing Order No. 83M (Consent Motions for certified England only or England and Wales only provisions)";

(6) in Standing Order No. 73 (Report of bills committed to public bill committees), leave out "or the Legislative Grand Committee (England)";

(7) in Standing Order No. 83A (Programme motions), in paragraph (9), leave out "up to and including";

(8) in Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees),

(a) in paragraph (1), leave out "or in legislative grand committee or on reconsideration or consequential consideration" and

(b) in paragraph (5), leave out "or in legislative grand committee or on reconsideration or consequential consideration";

(9) in Standing Order No. 83C (Programming sub-committees),

(a) in sub-paragraph (5)(e), leave out "up to and including",

(b) in sub-paragraph (12)(b), leave out "up to and including", and

(c) in sub-paragraph (14) leave out "up to and including";

(10) in Standing Order No. 83D (Programme orders: conclusion of proceedings in public bill committee or in committee of the whole House, etc.),

(a) in the title, leave out " , etc.", and

(b) in paragraph (1), leave out " , in the Legislative Grand Committee (England) when exercising functions under Standing Order No. 83W(6)(a) (Legislative Grand Committees)";

(11) in Standing Order No. 83E (Programme orders: conclusion of proceedings on consideration up to and including third reading),

(a) in the title for the words "and up to and including" substitute "or",

(b) in paragraph (1), leave out "up to and including", and

(c) leave out paragraph (5);

(12) in Standing Order No. 83F (Programme orders: conclusion of proceedings on consideration of Lords amendments), leave out paragraphs to (11);

(13) in Standing Order No. 83G (Programme orders: conclusion of proceedings on further messages from the Lords),

(a) in paragraph (5), leave out " , subject to paragraphs (6) and (7),", and

(b) leave out paragraphs (6) to (9);

(14) in Standing Order No. 83I (Programme orders: supplementary provisions), in paragraph (1), leave out "or in legislative grand committee"; and

(15) in Standing Order No. 86 (Nomination of general committees) leave out sub-paragraph (2)(iv).

[*Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg*]

The motion in my name on the Order Paper would rescind Standing Orders Nos. 83J to 83X and make related changes across the House's Standing Orders to remove the English votes for English laws—EVEL—process from the legislative process.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Will the Leader of the House allow me?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My Lord, my right hon. Friend has come in very early! Yes, of course I give way to him.

Sir Desmond Swayne: Am I to assume from the motion that the Leader of the House does not have an answer to the West Lothian question? Or does he take the view that it does not deserve one and that it was impertinent of the late Tam Dalyell of the Binns to have asked it in the first place?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The West Lothian question has not had a very satisfactory answer since it was posed by Tam Dalyell, who was a most distinguished Member of this House, but if there were an answer, EVEL would not be it.

The EVEL measures were first proposed by way of a counterpoise to the extension of devolution, which saw further legislative powers handed to the devolved Administrations and their Parliaments in the wake of the 2014 once-in-a-generation Scottish independence referendum. The argument put forward then, as some Members may recall from a Chequers summit held at that time, was that an English votes for English laws process represented an honest attempt to answer the West Lothian question.

Proposals for Standing Order changes were not brought forward until after the 2015 general election, during which the potential influence of Scottish MPs on English matters featured especially prominently. Some Members may remember a rather marvellous election poster, depicting the then Leader of the Opposition tucked into the pocket of Mr Alex Salmond in the place of a pocket handkerchief. Once the initial excitement over the proposals' introduction had abated, it quickly became obvious that their practical implementation would prove unwieldy and—dare I say it?—even baffling.

The procedure amended the legislative process to provide MPs representing English constituencies—or English and Welsh constituencies—with the opportunity to have an additional say on matters that applied to England only or England and Wales only. The procedure also applies to legislation introducing a tax measure that affects only England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which must be approved by a majority of MPs representing constituencies in those areas.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman has been following.

Mark Tami: I represent a border area and many of the specialist hospitals that my constituents go to are on the English side of the border. Indeed, the Countess of Chester Hospital was built as a Welsh and English hospital to serve the residents of Deeside in Wales and

Chester in Cheshire. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it was unfair that I could not effectively vote or express a view on that whereas someone from the south-east of England, who had no interest in that matter, could?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As the majority of taxation is set on a United Kingdom basis and the Barnett formula ensures that the level of spending provided for services is proportionate to decisions taken by the Union Parliament, I do not think that is as unreasonable as the right hon. Gentleman suggests. Sometimes the West Lothian question's significance gets exaggerated.

Last week, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster told the House that the Government believe that the procedure has added complexity and delay to the legislative process. Slightly over 10% of all our Standing Orders are taken up with enabling EVEL-doing and its additional parliamentary stages, notably the Legislative Grand Committee, which is held on the Floor of the House between Report and Third Reading. In theory, that allows English MPs to veto provisions, but not to propose them. In practice, it has resulted only in short-lived and poorly attended debates that have always concluded with English MPs, or English and Welsh MPs, giving their consent to England only, or England and Wales only, provisions.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I know that the hon. Gentleman has been waiting with bated breath. His breath is now unabated.

Pete Wishart: Does the Leader of the House recall who has made the most contributions to the Legislative Grand Committee? Perhaps he could tell the House how many contributions that Member made.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I have a sneaking suspicion that we may get the accurate statistics from a careful consultation of *Hansard* that took place earlier this afternoon by the hon. Gentleman himself. May I point out that I made a speech on the matter in 2011, when I outlined all the difficulties that the system would have? I therefore predate the hon. Gentleman in that I opposed EVEL before it had even been proposed. As a good Catholic, I would be expected always to oppose evil.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend explain why the Government think that England uniquely of the four main parts of the United Kingdom should have no devolved powers at all?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am loth to disagree with my right hon. Friend, who understands these issues very well, and had a better scheme of his own, which would have been called EVEN—English votes for English needs—rather than EVEL. We could be having a very different debate this evening had EVEN been adopted rather than EVEL.

There is of course devolution within England, but it is different. It is not to England as a country, because England makes up 85% of the total of the United Kingdom. As far as I am aware, there is no federal system in the

world where one part makes up such a great proportion. The size of England—and of course the influence that comes from that—would unbalance any settlement we tried to create.

It is not just the ability of this place to legislate effectively that has been constrained. More fundamentally, the EVEL procedure has undermined the role of Parliament as the Union Parliament in which all parts of the United Kingdom are represented equally. The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) has made that point very eloquently, and I greatly agree with him that there should be equal representation of all Members. I have spoken elsewhere about the ways in which the UK Parliament has become a more important place in our national life following the return of powers from the European Union. Since our departure, we have once again begun legislating properly in areas touching on devolved matters, including trade, health and safety, employment laws and state aid. All of these are now powers returned to the United Kingdom, and we are able to legislate properly because all MPs are equal once again in a Parliament that considers the matters put before it from the broadest possible Union perspective.

Rather than returning to an unhappy, asymmetric answer to the devolution question, the evolving operation of this Parliament has made this much less of a black and white issue than it would have felt in 2014. That is good news, because it reflects the way in which Brexit has strengthened the Union. We have now restored authority in this Parliament to address the problems of voters in every part of the United Kingdom. That is in all of our interests, because our country is much more than the sum of its parts. Just as George III gloried in the name of Britain, so do I, for our global influence together is far greater. Take, for example, our security relationships; the nuclear deterrent, based in Scotland; our shared history as brothers in arms; the economic successes that we have had; or the global reach of the empire builders. One may visit Argyle Street in Hong Kong, the Glencairn suburb of Cape Town, the Aberdare national park in Kenya, or even sunny Cardiff-by-the-Sea in California to see our past shared influence writ large across the world.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): Will the Lord President give way?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Of course; it would be a privilege.

Harriett Baldwin: The Lord President is making a magnificent speech, as one would expect, but how would he feel if hypothetically, the outcome that was depicted back in 2015—with Alex Salmond having the shadow Business Secretary, the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), in his suit pocket—had come to pass, and the Lord President's constituents in North East Somerset faced a situation in which they were having laws made for them without there being a majority view in Parliament in England?

Mr Rees-Mogg: We are one country, and I accept that voters in Gloucestershire can have an influence on what happens in Somerset—that is a much greater thing for me to confess to than that voters in Scotland should have a say. We are one nation, and I accept the basic principle of democracy that the overall will of that nation must be observed. However, I put it to my hon. Friend that that poster had an effect in the campaign,

because it made people think about what the consequences of voting Labour could be, and they did not particularly want to be ruled by Alex Salmond.

I have mentioned all those places around the world that are named after places in the United Kingdom, and I have not yet had the chance to mention Belfast. There are many Belfasts around the world, but there are many English place names, too: there are 22 places in the United States called Somerset, in addition to the one in Wisconsin, and there is also a Somerset in KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Bermuda, and of course Pomeroy-Supenaam. There are Somersets everywhere; there are Scottish place names everywhere, Welsh ones and Northern Irish ones, as part of the success of our country as global Britain before the term “global Britain” was invented.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am sure that there are many places called Bath, and on that basis, I of course give way to the hon. Lady.

Wera Hobhouse: Can I remind the right hon. Gentleman that there are many streets in this country called Hanover Street, which is my home town in Germany?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady is absolutely right, and we should be very proud of all that the Hanoverians did in this country, not least providing us with a royal household that served with great distinction.

We have had great success as a United Kingdom across the globe, and after our EU exit, we can work together to do more to increase prosperity across the whole country. Members need look no further than the Subsidy Control Bill or the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 for examples of us making good use of competencies taken back from Europe. In that context, the tiresome and ineffectual EVEL process seems less of a priority, particularly given the ease with which Governments can make changes to Standing Orders of this kind to suit them—a point that will not be lost on those of us elected in 2010 or before, who are now spending time trying to unpick the poorly thought through constitutional changes made by previous Administrations. The Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 is already on its way to the knacker's yard.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving way, because he has made reference a number of times now to powers that are being repatriated subsequent to our departure from the European Union. Does he not accept that when it comes to matters such as agricultural payments and fisheries management, we now have the highly unsatisfactory situation where the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, for example, acts as a UK and an English Ministry? Does he not think that that makes the case for devolution within England?

Mr Rees-Mogg: There is a case for devolution within England, and that is part of the Government's approach—there are the mayoralities in London, in Manchester and so on—but no, we are also a United Kingdom. It is important that we operate as a United Kingdom and ensure that powers are used where they will be most

[Mr Rees-Mogg]

effective, and it is natural that most, though not all, powers that came back from the European Union should be used at United Kingdom level.

Mr Carmichael: The Leader of the House is being generous with his time. Surely the logic of his position is that if it is unsatisfactory for this House to be at the same time a UK and an English Parliament, the same thing must apply to the Executive.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I do not think that is quite what I am saying. I am saying that this Parliament is the Parliament for the United Kingdom and is therefore able to take a broad swathe of decisions. It also takes decisions that affect only England, and it has votes from people from outside England affecting them. The Ministers are United Kingdom Ministers who, like this House, also make decisions for England, but they are held accountable by Members from across the whole of the United Kingdom, and I think that that is a perfectly rational constitutional settlement, considering that 85% of the population of the whole of the United Kingdom live in England. They are not, however, necessarily English.

John Redwood: I want to try to clarify this, as the Leader of the House is saying that our Ministers are United Kingdom Ministers. When the Government are consulting the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Irish Government, who then speaks for England so that it is a fair consultation?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Ministers have their different areas of responsibility. Within Ministries some areas are devolved and the Ministers will obviously consult with devolved Ministers; it is important that we have a good relationship with them. Other areas are not devolved and remain the competences of the UK Government, and those matters are decided by the Ministers themselves on behalf of the whole of the United Kingdom. This system is quite well known and understood.

The House will be delighted to note that I am now coming to the end of my speech. The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) said that I was being generous with my time, but I am not really; I am being generous with the House's time, and I am aware that this debate is time-limited. The motion seeks to make the process of legislating on matters that deliver for everyone in the UK just a little easier, and it is on that basis that I commend the motion to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): There will obviously be a limit of three minutes on Back-Bench speeches, but as Members have already worked out, most will not have the opportunity to speak. I see that they are dealing with that by making interventions, which is fine because that is what a debate is all about.

8.7 pm

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Oh, it is so very hard to avoid starting this speech with the "I told you so" dance—which does actually exist—but alas, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is just making it too easy. In a written ministerial statement yesterday about English votes for English laws, which I will hereafter refer to as EVEL, he said:

"The introduction of the procedure in 2015 added additional stages to the legislative process in Parliament and in doing so introduced complexity to our arrangements and has not served our Parliament well."

He also said:

"It is a fundamental principle that all constituent parts of the United Kingdom should be equally represented in Parliament, and Parliament should deliver for the whole UK. The operation of this procedure—and the constraints on the role of certain MPs—does not support this aim."—[*Official Report*, 12 July 2021; Vol. 699, c. 1WS.]

Goodness me! If only somebody could have spotted this sooner. Hmm. Let's just see what my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Dame Angela Eagle)—who, incidentally, did warn me against using sarcasm in the Chamber—the then shadow Leader of the House and a fantastic role model for me, said in the July 2015 debate on the EVEL proposals. She said that

"as currently written, they are deeply flawed. We do not think that the Government's proposals are either wise or viable. Indeed, they are likely to put the Union at risk by creating an English veto rather than a voice, possible gridlock in Parliament, and two classes of MP."—[*Official Report*, 15 July 2015; Vol. 598, c. 949.]

My friend David Hanson, the truly right hon. and sadly not current Member for Delyn, said in that same debate:

"When Members walk through that door into the Chamber, they do so as equal Members."—[*Official Report*, 15 July 2015; Vol. 598, c. 1011.]

However, he and many others identified that the English votes for English laws provision would undermine that equality, and so indeed it has proved.

In the Leader of the House's recent appearance at the Procedure Committee, he said:

"It is of fundamental importance, constitutionally, that every Member of Parliament in this House is absolutely equal: Minister, non-Minister, spokesman for Opposition party"—

thank you—

"Front Bencher, Back Bencher, Privy Counsellor, well established, newly elected—there is absolute equality of the regions of the country they represent. That has been the most ancient constitutional principle, which EVEL contradicted to some extent."

I so agree. I am glad that the Leader of the House can now see the points that my hon. and right hon. Friends made so clearly and eloquently six years ago.

Then there is the contradiction between the two Houses. The written ministerial statement observes:

"The English Votes procedure does not apply to the legislative process in the House of Lords."—[*Official Report*, 12 July 2021; Vol. 699, c. 1WS.]

It is so hard to avoid that stricture from my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Dame Angela Eagle) not to use sarcasm at this point because, as David Hanson put it six years ago:

"Lord Thomas of Gresford in Wrexham, who has never won an election in his life in north-east Wales, will vote on these matters in another place, while I, who have won elections on six occasions in north-east Wales"—

I hope he will one day again—

"will not be able to do so."—[*Official Report*, 22 October 2015; Vol. 600, c. 1212.]

John Redwood: How can the hon. Lady defend the idea that her party believes in a single category of MP when there is a huge difference of powers, responsibilities and aptitudes between an MP representing a Scottish

constituency and one representing an English constituency? I cannot pass any comment here on health and education and so forth there, but they can pass any comment on that in England.

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I was expecting references to the West Lothian question. As the Leader of the House has said, we have different bits of devolution for different parts of the country. We have indeed a Labour metro Mayor of the West of England, who was elected quite properly by the people of the west of England. There are different elements of devolution across the entire country. That does not take away from the fact that in this place we should all be equal.

The then Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) totally failed to absorb the wise counsel from my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) on the subject of matters of interest involving the border between Wales and England. My right hon. Friend said:

“The Government like to tell us that English votes for English laws is a clearcut issue, but it is not—and we have heard today many reasons why it is not. Residents of Alyn and Deeside use healthcare services both sides of the border.”—[*Official Report*, 15 July 2015; Vol. 598, c. 993.]

My right hon. Friend has already referred to that and other issues today. I fail to understand why Ministers at that time did not understand what my hon. and right hon. Friends were saying. Now, wonderfully, they do, but why not at the time? We could have saved so much time and effort.

Also, what of the need to reform the constitution of this country? Does this procedure in any way add anything useful? Well, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey observed at the time:

“Labour Members consider that this issue should have been properly dealt with as part of a much wider process involving a constitutional convention to examine a range of issues in a more holistic way.”

That might have answered what the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) was asking. My hon. Friend continued:

“A genuine attempt should have been made to come to a cross-party agreement between the parties represented in this place, and with wider civil society.”

We could still try doing that. She continued:

“Proceeding in this consensual way, rather than in the blatantly partisan way the Government have chosen, would have hugely increased their chances of introducing a successful and sustainable change. No such attempt has been made.”—[*Official Report*, 15 July 2015; Vol. 598, c. 951.]

If only the Government had heeded her wise words.

Mr Carmichael: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way, because, in Scotland in the 1990s, her party and mine were part of exactly that: a constitutional convention. However, I remind her in the House that that was not about a question of national identity, as the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) suggests. It was about better governance, and it was about bringing control of affairs back closer to the people. So the question of who speaks for England is not the appropriate question. The question should be: who should be speaking for the various parts of England?

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that intervention, and I do so commend to all Members the Labour party’s constitutional convention work, which continues to this day. My hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey said at the time that there should be that attempt at a cross-party piece of work. If that had happened, perhaps the Government would not have had to admit yesterday that

“Parliament should deliver for the whole UK. The operation of this procedure...does not support this aim.”—[*Official Report*, 12 July 2021; Vol. 699, c. 1WS.]

As my friend, the sadly not current Member for Scunthorpe, the wonderful Sir Nic Dakin said in his winding-up speech:

“That is why we are asking the Government to learn from their mistakes and proceed in a genuinely cross-party way that allows all interests to be properly examined. We need to go back to the McKay commission report”.—[*Official Report*, 15 July 2015; Vol. 598, c. 1043.]

I interrupt that quote to explain for those who do not know that the McKay commission did indeed look at issues of devolution. It was commissioned by the coalition Government, and I urge the Government to go back and look at it. The report, Sir Nic said, examined the issue

“properly and thoroughly. That should be our starting point. As this issue has far-reaching implications for the way in which this Parliament operates, it is well worth seriously considering taking things forward through a Joint Committee of the Commons and Lords. That will be a proper way to proceed with a constitutional issue of such significance.”—[*Official Report*, 15 July 2015; Vol. 598, c. 1044.]

There are probably not many people in the House who would not agree with my friend, Nic Dakin. The Government cannot complain of a lack of constructive suggestions, either at the time or now. Will the Leader of the House tell us whether, having seen the error of their ways, the Government would now consider a cross-party non-partisan piece of work in which we do what we need to do to strengthen our constitution, make it fit for the 21st century for the United Kingdom, go back to the McKay recommendations and try to work out what we need to do to bring power as close as possible appropriately to people?

What of the words of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who was recently quoted in *The Times*? He said:

“Ultimately, it’s a convention which arose out of set of circumstances after the 2014 referendum, where you had a coalition government and so on. We’ve moved on now, so I think it’s right to review where we are on it.”

Dear, oh dear, this doesn’t half reek of partisanship.

At the time, it was dressed up as the democratic thing to do. The Government accused those who objected to it of being party political, but it turns out that the opposite was, in fact, the case. I am afraid that this rather looks as if the Tories will do anything to cling on to power, even if it undermines democracy and even if it undermines our Union of nations, which the EVEL procedure does by creating different classes of MP in the House, depending on the nation their constituency is in. The Prime Minister is always claiming that he is a strong supporter of preserving and strengthening the Union, but in reality he seems to be a cheerleader for Scottish independence. The more atrocious he sounds, the happier SNP Members seem to be, as that makes their case for them. Feeding their indignation helps them to make their case that their sole purpose for being here is to campaign not to be here.

[*Thangam Debbonaire*]

Creating two tiers has added to a narrative that does nothing to help preserve the Union. Poor legislation on constitutional matters seems to be a theme for the Government. For example, the Northern Ireland Secretary said last year that the new post-Brexit law was breaking the law

“in a very specific and limited way”—[*Official Report*, 8 September 2020; Vol. 679, c. 509.]

That is an extraordinary thing for a law maker to say about something as important as our constitution and the way in which we operate legally.

John Redwood: Will the hon. Lady explain why Labour told us that Scottish devolution would solve the problem of independence, but it led directly to an SNP Government and the demand for a referendum?

Thangam Debbonaire: Well, I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that that is democracy. There is a Scottish Parliament, and the Scottish people elect its Members. At the moment, Scotland is still part of the United Kingdom, and long may that continue.

If the Government want to reform the constitution, they are going about it in an odd way by doing things piecemeal. The Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 was repealed last week; the boundary review is happening at some point, when it may suit the Government to put it in the legislative timetable; and there is the outrageous, anti-democratic, totally unnecessary, using-a-wrecking-ball-to-crack-a-wholly-imaginary-nut legislation on voter identification. If the Government want to reform the constitution, perhaps they could return to the McKay commission report, and emphasise the need for a national consensus-building approach to constitutional reform.

Once again, the Labour party is happy to oblige the Government with news of our constitutional convention. Over the past 15 months, EVEL has been suspended. The Leader of the House himself said in an evidence session with the Procedure Committee that

“EVEL has been suspended for a year without any loss of effectiveness to the way the House operates, any loss to the constitution, or any loss to MPs’ ability to represent their constituents.”

I quite agree, and would go further in saying that I very much doubt that anyone outside the House has even noticed. He added:

“I think the EVEL Standing Orders take up more than 10% of all our Standing Orders, for a procedure that has not had an effect on our business once in the time in which it has been available.”

I really am struggling to avoid the “I told you so” dance. Given that the Government strongly supported EVEL six years ago and have now decided to think again, I have to ask the Leader of the House what changed? What have the Government learned about EVEL in the past 15 months that has led to this devastatingly obvious conclusion that the Labour party was, in fact, right all along? What plans do the Government have for developing devolution and constitutional reform within the context of a strong and united United Kingdom?

The most disappointing element of this whole completely pointless process is the disdain that the Government repeatedly show for the people of this country and for the concept of national identity and national pride. We have seen that very recently when many senior Cabinet Ministers so badly misjudged the public mood on the

England football team taking the knee in solidarity as a team with their black teammates and to show their opposition to racism everywhere. It is time that the Government looked at the leadership qualities shown by Gareth Southgate, so inspiringly set out in his incredibly patriotic letter, “Dear England”, which I have read many times, despite the fact that I have very little interest in football. It sets out a richly layered, values-based patriotism.

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Lady is rather digressing from the subject at hand in the 60 minutes that we have available. Will she accept that both the 2010 and the 2015 Conservative manifestos pledged to address English votes for English laws and that we are able to implement that because we won a majority in 2015? She talks about respecting democracy. She should respect that.

Thangam Debbonaire: I am entirely respecting it by helping to abolish EVEL right now. If we are talking about digressing from the subject, may I refer the hon. Lady to the Leader of the House’s very interesting geography lesson, which I rather enjoyed.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. No more digression. I understand that that was illustration not digression, but now we will conclude.

Thangam Debbonaire: Being English means being proud of our values, which are generous and inclusive and valuing our diversity. It does not mean petty pointless gestures that divide us and undermine democracy—a value that we all hold dear. In ending EVEL, I urge the Leader of the House to remedy the pointlessness of the entire sorry saga and commit his Government to a constitutional convention fit for the 21st century.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Chairman of the Procedure Committee is not able to speak this evening after all, so we will go directly to Pete Wishart.

8.21 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I am thrilled to be called to speak now, Madam Deputy Speaker.

May I start by setting something straight? There is an answer to the West Lothian question. Tam Dalyell and I actually came up with two answers some 17 years ago. One, Madam Deputy Speaker, as you know, is the Harthill services, and the second is salt and sauce. I will leave it to the House to determine which one is the correct answer.

What an utter humiliation this is for the Government. A flagship policy of the 2015 manifesto will soon be nothing more than a footnote in future constitutional history books, and, remember, it is just another Tory policy disaster. God knows what they were thinking about when they introduced this some six years ago. They were consumed with the notion that we, the unkempt Caledonian hordes, were somehow stopping them securing the democratic outcomes that they desired—us, the 59 Scots MPs out of 650 MPs, needed to be constrained and curtailed. EVEL was just about the worst solution to a problem that did not even exist.

Never before has a procedure come to this House that has divided the membership of this House into two different and distinct classes. Not only did it do that, it

did it by nationality and by geography. It is a procedure that barely anyone understands, that is a burden to the management and administration of the business of this House, that is entirely unnecessary, and that produces almost unprecedented resentment. Something that it will be remembered for more than anything else is what it has done for the cause of English devolved governance. This was the first serious attempt to create some sort of forum for English democracy. We actually agree with them. They do deserve their English Parliament. They should always get the outcomes that they want and deserve. We have even got a neat, practical and elegant solution to that, but, of course, they will not even start to look at that. There are myriad solutions to resolving this within the precious Union. The thing is that they could not be bothered doing the work. They could not be bothered rolling up their sleeves and designing a Parliament of their own. They decided instead to come here and to use the national UK Parliament of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for this doomed experiment. Imagine a quasi-English Parliament squatting here in the national Parliament. What an absolute and utter disgrace.

Mr Carmichael: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: I do not have time to give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

It satisfied absolutely no one. All it did was infuriate Scotland. Instead of securing the near federalism that was promised, Scotland instead saw its MPs become second-class Members in the Parliament that they had just been invited to lead. There were signs in the Division Lobby saying, "England only." They would have been better saying, "Scots out." That is what the Government did with this procedure.

The Government knew it would never work. From the first moment when they suggested this nonsense, we have told them again and again that it was madness and that, at some point, they would be here—as they are this evening—to withdraw it. Now under pressure from the SNP, EVEL is to be abandoned. This is a spectacular victory for the Scottish National party, and I congratulate all my hon. Friends on bringing down this nonsense. This is one victory that we have secured this week in the United Kingdom and, by God, we are going to celebrate like it is 1966. Believe me, we will be banging on about this for the next 55 years and we will enjoy every minute of it.

There is a part of me that will miss the entertainment of it all and the laughs that it gave us. It was designed to quell this tartan menace, but I ended up making the most contributions in the Legislative Grand Committee. With 57 contributions, not only was I the most committed and dedicated Member of the English Parliament but I beat all the English Members combined two times over.

Harriett Baldwin: Given the hon. Member's digression on to football, which team did he support on Sunday night?

Pete Wishart: I supported the best team on Sunday night. I enjoy my football, and I can say quite clearly Forza Italia.

English votes for English laws started its sorry and doomed journey just hours after the Scottish independence referendum result was announced. Instead of the

statesmanship and consensus required at a sensitive and raw moment in Scottish constitutional history, David Cameron announced that the English question should now be addressed. With that, as well as bringing us to this point, he ensured that the campaign for Scottish independence started once again almost immediately. That campaign will soon be concluded with a victory for the Scottish National party and a victory for Scotland.

We believe it is legitimate for English representatives to secure the outcomes they want, and SNP MPs do not vote on English-only legislation or business that does not affect Scotland. If it is not in the Scottish interest, we take no interest in it. If there are financial consequences or an inadvertent impact, we will represent our constituents—but it is us who will decide that, not the diktat of a Tory Government. We commit not to participate in legislation that does not impact on our nation, but, please, let us never, ever do anything like this again.

Instead of going on about KwaZulu-Natal, the Leader of the House should be apologising to the House for wasting hours of the House's time on a stupid experiment that went absolutely nowhere. Let us now work together to resolve this and ensure that our nations get what they want. We are on different trajectories and we want something different. Let us now give our nations what they want.

8.28 pm

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): EVEL was a genuine attempt in good faith to answer the long-lasting West Lothian question on the asymmetric nature of devolution. However, EVEL is a cumbersome and ineffective constitutional innovation that has won few friends in its short life. Its abolition would simplify our procedures and remove a source of resentment. It would reaffirm the fundamental constitutional principle that we are one United Kingdom with a sovereign Parliament comprising Members elected on an equal basis, representing every community in the land and able to make laws for the whole kingdom. It would be the Unionist act of a Unionist Government.

EVEL has introduced a layer of complex and time-consuming bureaucracy into the legislative process. It has also, as we have heard, given our nationalist opponents a pretext to degenerate the UK Parliament. Worse still, as the procedure is set out only in Standing Orders, it would provide no meaningful protection in a hypothetical situation in which a UK Government lack a majority of English MPs.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is the first Prime Minister to be Minister for the Union. He is abolishing EVEL on Unionist grounds. The principle underlying his decision to become Minister for the Union and underlying that this Government's whole approach to the Union matters is that this Government are for the whole United Kingdom, accountable to a Parliament representing the whole United Kingdom. This is a qualitative difference that separates the UK Parliament and the UK Government from the devolved legislatures and Administrations. On this basis, the Government have a constitutional and democratic mandate to serve the whole UK, as they do in the exercise of reserved responsibilities and through measures such as the UK Internal Market Act.

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): I am following the hon. Member's argument as closely as I can, and it seems to be that he is arguing that the Government brought in EVEL to strengthen the Union and now are scrapping EVEL also to strengthen the Union. Does he realise that this just makes it look like his Government are clueless, directionless and, when it comes to the constitution, simply making it up as they go along?

John Lamont: I do not accept the hon. Member's analysis. The introduction of EVEL was an attempt to answer the West Lothian question, which many people have struggled with for many years. But listening to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), it is very clear that he loves this place so much and wants to participate. I sometimes wonder whether he really does want independence for Scotland, given his great love of taking part in parliamentary activity here at Westminster.

The existence of a parliamentary procedure that separates English or English and Welsh MPs from Scottish and Northern Irish MPs offends this core principle of acting for the whole of the United Kingdom. As we have heard, it allows our nationalist opponents to misrepresent the treatment of Scottish MPs at Westminster as second class. In the very short time available to me, let me say that, however well intentioned, the severe limitations of the EVEL procedure are now very apparent for us all to see, and retaining it would serve no practical use whatsoever. The time has come to put it out of its misery.

8.32 pm

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD) [V]: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont), a fellow member of the Scottish Affairs Committee, as well as, before him, the Chair, the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart).

During the independence referendum in Scotland in 2014, I was not a member and indeed had never been a member of any political party. I would describe myself as a typical no voter in that referendum—which was in many ways a great demonstration of engagement with the democratic processes, but in other ways a divisive debate that pitted family, friends and colleagues against one another—in that I kept my views to myself. Would I had continued in that vein, some might say. If that sounds familiar in relation to the subsequent Brexit referendum, too, that is partly because a referendum—popular democracy—is on the surface an easy way to resolve a complex issue. But when it comes into conflict with our system of parliamentary democracy, as it clearly did post both votes, the shortcomings of such an approach become clear, and that has been the issue with English votes for English laws.

As I sat, on 19 September 2014, watching the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, snatch defeat from the jaws of victory by pivoting immediately to plan to introduce EVEL without acknowledging the need to properly reflect on how the UK had evolved and developed in advance of its parliamentary systems, it was easy to see—even for me, as a layperson then—that this was the wrong approach. Telling Scots, regardless of their vote in the independence referendum, that the first steps of their Prime Minister was to prevent their representatives in this place from participating fully and telling those in

other devolved nations that their voices would also be neutered, was giving the SNP and others an ongoing grievance publicity point at every single vote.

It is important to remember that, when we talk about a four nations approach, as we often do in this place—for me in all seriousness, for others perhaps less so—we are talking about Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the UK. It is right that those in England query how their views are best represented, and an increased prominence of regional Mayors during the pandemic perhaps suggests that the English are finally waking up to the democratic deficit that they experience. But creating a two-tier system in this place, where MPs held a mandate at 6 pm and had it withdrawn at the next vote at 8 pm, was never the answer. It certainly did not sound like all votes or constituents counted equally.

Where I agree with the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire and his party is that the systems here are broken and need to change. Where we disagree is that the answer to this broken system is to break away completely, causing economic and cultural damage to these islands—it is salt and vinegar. EVEL has been suspended now for an extended period of time and, frankly, no one has noticed because it has never been needed to offset the scenario for which it was put in place, because that scenario has never arisen. I hope that this is the first step by the Government to recognise political reality on these islands, but, frankly, I hae ma doots.

8.34 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): England deserves better, and England expects better. It is a sad occasion that this Government should wish to dismiss the only modest devolution ever offered to England, with nothing to put in its place. They leave instead Labour's lopsided and unfair devolution, a devolution proposed and forced through a previous Parliament, on a large majority, by a Labour party that said it would settle the constitution and unite the country behind the Union once and for all. It did nothing of the sort.

Surely this Government can now see that if they carry on, as Labour did, appeasing the forces that would pull the Union asunder, they will not bring the Union together but give those forces greater strength and a better platform. Instead of Scottish electors welcoming their devolved powers and deciding to continue in the traditional mould of two United Kingdom parties contesting power, they chose a party that wishes to pull the Union apart. Some of them chose that party because they thought the Government would give in to it, and so get a better deal for Scotland; and some of them chose that party because they genuinely wanted to pull the Union apart, although they were, of course, in a minority.

The Government and I treasure our United Kingdom. We wish this Union to work for everyone, but it has to be a fair Union and it will not be held together better by appeasing the SNP or by appeasing the EU over Northern Ireland, when we above all in this House should be speaking up for all the millions of Unionists in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and throughout England and Wales, who expect better and expect fairness.

One of the crucial values that our United Kingdom shares is that idea of fairness. How is it fair to have these totally different categories of MP, with different

powers, different responsibilities and different opportunities to influence how they are governed in their parts of the United Kingdom? Why is it that England, the home of many more millions of Unionists and more loyal to our country than anyone else in our Union, is the one part of the Union that gets no justice and no fairness from this Government or their predecessors?

Labour introduced policies that sought to break the Union in the name of keeping the Union. I want this Government to mend the Union, and that means standing behind all those people throughout the United Kingdom who believe in the Union, and to stop appeasing those who would pull it apart.

8.37 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I know the Leader of the House is enjoying delivering us from EVEL but, yet again, we have another debate and another attempt by the Government to disavow the work of their predecessors. This afternoon the 0.7% aid target was unceremoniously dumped, and now this evening another element of David Cameron's legacy is overthrown.

What was it about the EVEL Standing Orders proposed by David Cameron, introduced by Chris Grayling and overseen by John Bercow that made the Johnson regime so keen to get rid of them, I wonder? As my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Richard Thomson) said, they were introduced to strengthen the Union and they are now being abolished to strengthen the Union. We have Schrödinger's Standing Orders, strengthening the Union by existing and not existing at the same time, although the Union does not feel desperately strong to me right now.

Maybe it is more like the Schleswig-Holstein question: anyone who understood EVEL has either died, gone mad or forgotten what it was all about, although there were a few folk around here who had a sense of how it worked. We should recognise that and express our thanks to them for their support in navigating the system: Sir David Natzler, Sir Roy Stone, Ian Davis and many of the Clerks who supported the team of Deputy Speakers as they convened and unconvened the Legislative Grand Committee—not that any of them, least of all you, Madam Deputy Speaker, are dead, mad or forgetful, I hasten to add.

There is also Daniel Gover and the team at the Constitution Unit who literally wrote the book, or at least several scholarly articles, on EVEL. Maybe they will now get to write the history book, too. My hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart)—my right hon. Friend, as he should be—is going down extremely well with his many fans in Scotland's online community with his contributions to the English Parliament.

Tonight, Scottish MPs and all their constituents will rest easy in their beds, in the knowledge that never again will their right to debate and vote on matters affecting Kew gardens, the Non-Domestic Rating (Nursery Grounds) Bill or the Neighbourhood Planning Bill be denied. On all those issues and more, parity of esteem has been restored between Tory MPs from Scotland and their colleagues from the red wall in the north of England—but of course in the SNP we have already exercised a self-denying ordinance on such issues anyway. We did so tonight with the covid regulations, and that was kind

of the point: it should be up to us to decide what is relevant to our constituents, not a process, procedure or rule invented by the Government.

What is more insidious and more dangerous is that we might be losing English votes for English laws, but we are increasingly experiencing Tory votes for Scottish laws. Perhaps the Government are abolishing legislative consent motions in the English Parliament because they so routinely ignore legislative consent motions from the Scottish Parliament and the Senedd Cymru. I say to hon. Members on the Government Benches: don't think we can't see what you're up to.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire has said, we have an answer to the West Lothian question and we will be happy to put that proposition to the people of Scotland as soon as the opportunity allows. The answer is independence—and it is coming down the road.

8.40 pm

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC) [V]: In the 1990s, the status of England had not figured sufficiently in the world view of the Labour architects of devolution. "Home Rule all round" had been proposed in the 19th century. Indeed, it had appeared in the Labour party's policy for the 1918 election. In 1997, however, England was overlooked—it was excluded from consideration. It was all too complicated.

That devolution settlement has proved unstable. It was a fix, not a solution. English votes for English laws was an attempt to address this basic flaw in the post-devolution Union, but it too was a fix, not a solution. I think that EVEL was more of a symbolic concession to those Members who were constantly intruding English questions into devolution debates, and I do not think that it has ever delivered a meaningful voice for English voters, so I have some sympathy with the current proposal.

One advantage of EVEL, however, was that where it applied it gave an authoritative answer to the perennial question of some Welsh MPs: is this matter devolved, and is it Barnettable? EVEL told us. Now, as a consequence of this Government's recent, more explicitly hostile stance on devolution and the lawmaking powers of the Welsh Government, a further question has arisen: what consequential effects might Westminster's legislation have on Welsh law and Welsh Government policy?

My request to the UK Government Front Bench is not just that they reconsider the failed EVEL procedure—not just fix the fix—but that there be clarity as to what is devolved. Barnett has long been bust. In the medium term, we need a proper statutory duty on Westminster to seek devolved Government consent when introducing a Bill that might affect the laws or policies of the Welsh Government.

Abolishing EVEL will not address the growing problem of accommodating people in England within a post-devolution United Kingdom. Even the reforms that I have outlined very briefly would only place an additional check on what is a flawed system. What we really need is independence for Wales—and no more fixes.

8.43 pm

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con) [V]: I am coming to you from glorious isolation, Madam Deputy Speaker. Tonight, time and again, we

[*Andrew Bowie*]

have heard the Scottish National party's representatives conflate their party and its MPs with the nation of Scotland. I think it is quite clear that the SNP is not Scotland.

As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said, if the West Lothian question has an answer, EVEL is not it. In my opinion, English votes for English laws is the most ill-conceived, wrong-headed and damaging measure ever passed by any Government in modern times—well, possibly it comes a close second to the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011. I am grateful for the opportunity to outline why.

Devolution is often described as something that is new—as something that we are grappling with that has created an imbalance in how the UK is governed that has to be addressed. We have heard that repeated often, including today, but it is nonsense. Devolution has existed in the modern United Kingdom for more years than it has not existed. During this time, non-white boxers were barred from competing for a British boxing title. It seems impossible to believe it today, and it means that so many talented boxers were denied the right to compete for British titles purely due to the colour of their skin. Thankfully, progress was made with the lifting of that ban, and great strides have also been taken in other aspects of diversity through the nurturing of female boxing talent. I am sure that hon. Members will recall, as I do, their great pride in the first woman to win an Olympic boxing medal being our own Nicola Adams, back in London in 2012. Northern Ireland had a devolved Parliament from 1922 to 1972 and in that time no steps were taken to deprive Northern Irish MPs of their right to vote on areas that were seen to be devolved, even when those MPs deprived Labour of working majorities. And why? In the words of the then Conservative shadow Home Secretary Peter Thorneycroft, “every Member of the House of Commons is equal with every other Member of the House of Commons”.

Peter Thorneycroft and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House are right, but I have heard the heartfelt arguments from my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) that the actions today are appeasing the separatists. I understand exactly where he comes from—he is a proud and passionate English MP—but I fundamentally disagree with him. In this Parliament, our sovereign Parliament of the United Kingdom in which we are all privileged to serve, we representatives, drawn from across the whole of our United Kingdom, are equal and should be entitled to vote on every piece of legislation and at every stage of the passage of that legislation placed in front of us. As a Scot and a Unionist, I found it frankly offensive to be informed that I could not vote at certain stages of Bills on education or health, for example. As a Unionist, I care just as much about the welfare, health and education of people in Aldershot as I do about the people in Aberdeen. I have heard the arguments that EVEL does not prevent any MP from voting on a Bill before this House but only gives English Members the ability to veto certain legislation. We have already heard this evening that that is not true and in fact causes even greater issues.

As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said, there is no such thing as English-only laws thanks to Barnett consequentials. Almost every single measure

debated and voted on has financial implications for areas that appear on the surface to be wholly devolved. Therefore, EVEL is bad law. It does not work and it causes more problems than it solves. Let us have more devolution in England. It exists already through our regions and localities, but let us not divide even further down national lines. We are a proudly Unionist party and by repealing EVEL tonight, we are demonstrating that to the whole United Kingdom.

8.46 pm

Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie).

I speak in support of the motion. I acknowledge the good intentions behind the creation of EVEL and I recognise, too, the anxieties of some of my English colleagues. However, EVEL was born out of an imperfect devolved settlement, or, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) called it, a lopsided settlement. Of course, no settlement is ever perfect, but it was conceived at least in part in an attempt to balance inequities that arose for English voters as a result of the devolved settlement. As a corrective, however, EVEL did not address the root cause and could never therefore have been an enduring or satisfactory solution.

Parliament stands as the expression of the sovereignty of the British people. Therefore, it is not the appropriate vehicle for a particular form of devolution. EVEL diminishes the standing of non-English MPs and by extension, non-English Ministers. It also clouds the perception of our British Parliament, hinting at an English Parliament with non-English MPs strapped on. But that is something we are not.

Voters must know where the buck stops and who to approach for redress. Politicians must agree with one another about who is in charge, something we debate regularly here. A system without such clarity risks being pulled apart. I support the principle of subsidiarity, but standing here today I am clear that an effective and strengthened relationship between this Parliament and devolved and local Administrations, one which would address the worries of underrepresentation in Glasgow, Grimsby or Glanwydden, must be built on clarity and the clear premise that sovereignty lies with and flows from this Parliament.

For this country to thrive in perpetuity, we must never surrender the belief that there is a British people and that their voice is expressed here in this Parliament. We must never allow the principle of one Britain, one vote to be replaced by a precarious balancing act between competing nations. This is reason enough for me to support the motion today. English votes for English laws may have been for some, and for a time, a necessary EVEL, but today I hope its day is done.

8.49 pm

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): It is good to be one of only two representatives of middle England objecting to the proposals to abolish these Standing Orders. My 2011 private Member's Bill, the Legislation (Territorial Extent) Bill, put pressure on the coalition Government to set up the commission that put forward the EVEL proposals, and I well remember the Lord President of the Council—in those days he was merely the Member for North East Somerset—making

his speech. He is noted not only for being a great historian but now for being a seer and someone who can foretell the future, because he said that one day, a Government would be able to come in and simply abolish these Standing Orders. I very much regret that it is he who is doing it.

I think that we can all see the mood of the House this evening—we can all see that the motion is going to carry—but we must recognise that this was a pledge in the Conservative party manifesto in 2010 and 2015. It was a pledge that was there for a reason: because, at the time, our constituents were raising this on the doorstep as something they were very concerned about. A solution was put in place through the Standing Orders. As the Lord President said, it has not necessarily been needed in the interim, but it is not impossible to envisage a scenario in which its absence really would cause constitutional problems in this country. I regret very much that these Standing Orders are being abolished without a proposal for any kind of replacement to deal with that.

8.51 pm

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. and right hon. Members who have contributed to the debate—to my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont), who called for EVEL to be put out of its misery; my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), who reminded us that, for about 50 years, Northern Irish MPs had a vote in this House when they had a devolved settlement, without any complaint; and my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Robin Millar), who said that we needed clarity in our arrangements and should emphasise the sovereignty of Parliament, points with which I wholeheartedly concur.

I am also grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) and my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin). There are few people I listen to more closely than my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham. When he makes a point and raises concerns about the constitution, I think a wise Government listen, and some of the points he makes are extremely fair. Devolution was lopsided and the constitution has become unsettled, and it has had too many variations to it in recent decades that have not improved or enhanced the unity of the nation.

I do not agree with my right hon. Friend that removing EVEL is an attempt to appease the Scottish nationalists. I think, in fact, that it shows we have confidence in our Union Parliament. Perhaps I am most confident in returning status quos ante. That is to say, both by abolishing the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 and by removing EVEL, we are trying to restore the beauty and the uniformity of our constitution so that it will work properly.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire quite rightly reminded us of the debate in 2011. I also had an exchange with the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) when these proposals were put forward in 2015, when I said that I was very strongly against any idea of a divided parity of MPs and supported the measure only because we could repeal it—which, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are doing.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Standing Orders Nos. 83J to 83X (Certification according to territorial application etc) be rescinded and the following changes be made to Standing Orders:

(1) in sub-paragraph (3)(b) of Standing Order No. 12 (House not to sit on certain Fridays), leave out “Consent Motions under Standing Order No. 83M (Consent Motions for certified England only or England and Wales only provisions) and of”;

(2) in paragraph of Standing Order No. 39A (Voting by proxy), leave out “or in any legislative grand committee”;

(3) in paragraph of Standing Order No. 51 (Ways and means motions), leave out “or, in the case of a motion to which Standing Order No. 83U applies, forthwith upon the announcement of the Speaker’s decision with respect to the motion under that standing order”;

(4) in Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of bills not subject to a programme order) leave out paragraphs and (6);

(5) in Standing Order No. 64 (Notices of amendments, &c., to bills), leave out “, of Consent Motions under Standing Order No. 83M (Consent Motions for certified England only or England and Wales only provisions)”;

(6) in Standing Order No. 73 (Report of bills committed to public bill committees), leave out “or the Legislative Grand Committee (England)”;

(7) in Standing Order No. 83A (Programme motions), in paragraph (9), leave out “up to and including”;

(8) in Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees),

(a) in paragraph (1), leave out “or in legislative grand committee or on reconsideration or consequential consideration” and

(b) in paragraph (5), leave out “or in legislative grand committee or on reconsideration or consequential consideration”;

(9) in Standing Order No. 83C (Programming sub-committees),

(a) in sub-paragraph (5)(e), leave out “up to and including”,

(b) in sub-paragraph (12)(b), leave out “up to and including”, and

(c) in sub-paragraph (14) leave out “up to and including”;

(10) in Standing Order No. 83D (Programme orders: conclusion of proceedings in public bill committee or in committee of the whole House, etc.),

(a) in the title, leave out “, etc.”, and

(b) in paragraph (1), leave out “, in the Legislative Grand Committee (England) when exercising functions under Standing Order No. 83W(6)(a) (Legislative Grand Committees)”;

(11) in Standing Order No. 83E (Programme orders: conclusion of proceedings on consideration up to and including third reading),

(a) in the title for the words “and up to and including” substitute “or”,

(b) in paragraph (1), leave out “up to and including”, and

(c) leave out paragraph (5);

(12) in Standing Order No. 83F (Programme orders: conclusion of proceedings on consideration of Lords amendments), leave out paragraphs to (11);

(13) in Standing Order No. 83G (Programme orders: conclusion of proceedings on further messages from the Lords),

(a) in paragraph (5), leave out “, subject to paragraphs (6) and (7).”, and

(b) leave out paragraphs (6) to (9);

(14) in Standing Order No. 83I (Programme orders: supplementary provisions), in paragraph (1), leave out “or in legislative grand committee”;

(15) in Standing Order No. 86 (Nomination of general committees) leave out sub-paragraph (2)(iv).

Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority

[*Relevant document: Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, First Report of 2021, Appointment of the Chair of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, HC 407.*]

8.53 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that Her Majesty will appoint Richard Lloyd OBE to the office of Chair of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority with effect from 1 September 2021 for the period ending on 31 August 2026.

The Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has produced a report, its first report of 2021, in relation to this motion.

The chairman of IPSA is appointed under the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009, and candidates must be selected on merit, on the basis of fair and open competition. The name of any candidate must be approved by the Speaker's Committee for IPSA.

In this regard, a recruitment process for a new chairman was initially launched in the spring of 2020. That was paused and then subsequently started afresh. As is normal for these appointments, Mr Speaker appointed a panel, who conducted the longlisting, shortlisting and interviewing of candidates. The panel was chaired by Philippa Helme CB. The other members of the panel were Michelle Barnes, an independent panel member; Cindy Butts, a lay member of the Speaker's Committee for IPSA; and Sir David Crausby, former Member of Parliament for Bolton North East. The panel was asked to report to Mr Speaker with a list of candidates it considered suitable for appointment to the role. After carefully considering the panel's report, Mr Speaker recommended Richard Lloyd to the Speaker's Committee as his preferred candidate for the post. At its meeting on 15 June, the Speaker's Committee agreed to Mr Speaker's selection of Mr Lloyd.

Richard Lloyd is currently a member of the IPSA board and has been interim chairman since 2019. I must say that he has been very approachable and friendly to deal with in that role. He is also senior independent director at the Financial Conduct Authority, a council member of the Advertising Standards Authority, and vice-chairman and founding trustee of the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute. If the appointment is made, Richard Lloyd will serve as the chairman of IPSA for five years. I hope that the House will support this appointment and wish Mr Lloyd well in his important role. I commend the Humble Address to the House.

8.55 pm

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I do not intend to detain the House for long. The Leader of the House has laid out the process that was followed and I have pleasure in confirming both that I have met the new chair and that the care and attention that the Leader of the House describes was paid towards the recruitment process. The panel reported fully to the Speaker's Committee and we were able to scrutinise the decision properly.

I welcome Richard Lloyd to his post. I put on record my thanks to him for already being available to me and the willingness with which he has signalled that he is

able to hear and consider concerns that I may raise on behalf of colleagues across this House. I am pleased that he seems to understand the concern raised by many Members and staff about the time that is sometimes taken on dealing with IPSA matters, which of course takes away from the time when they are able to serve our constituents, who expect us, rightly, to account for our costs but also to be able to focus on them. I look forward to working with him closely and I am happy to support the Humble Address.

8.56 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Scottish National party Members of course have no objection at all to this post being given to Richard Lloyd, who has served with distinction as interim chair of IPSA for the past few months. He has an abundant and very recognised career in the private sector and I am sure he will bring some of his skills to bear. As the Leader of the House correctly outlined, the recruitment process was gone through in the proper way. Richard Lloyd has been approachable when it comes to issues to do with IPSA and I hope that continues. There is a saying in this House, "Let's not do an IPSA" when we are thinking about creating new institutions. The reputation of IPSA still has to be worked on, and I hope that the new chair will be able to take that forward. As regards the process and the appointment, we have absolutely no objections.

Question put and agreed to.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

ELECTRICITY

That the draft Electricity Capacity (Amendment) Regulations 2021, which were laid before this House on 21 June, be approved.—(*Tom Pursglove.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

INTERNATIONAL IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES

That the draft European Union and European Atomic Energy Community (Immunities and Privileges) Order 2021, which was laid before this House on 17 May, be approved.—(*Tom Pursglove.*)

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION (ELECTORAL COMMISSION)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 9(6)),

That the Motion in the name of Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg relating to the Electoral Commission shall be treated as if it related to an instrument subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 118 (Delegated Legislation Committees) in respect of which notice has been given that the instrument be approved.—(*Tom Pursglove.*)

COMMITTEES

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): With the leave of the House I will take motions 13 to 17 together.

Ordered,

EDUCATION

That Fleur Anderson be discharged from the Education Committee and Kate Osborne be added.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

That Taiwo Owatemi be discharged from the International Trade Committee and Tony Lloyd be added.

JUSTICE

That Paula Barker be discharged from the Justice Committee and Kate Hollern be added.

PETITIONS

That Chris Evans be discharged from the Petitions Committee and Christina Rees be added.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

That Olivia Blake be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Kate Osamor be added.—(*Stuart Andrew, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

Randolph Turpin

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Tom Pursglove.*)

8.59 pm

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for granting this significant debate. It may seem that to talk about Randolph Turpin is to talk about a parochial sporting hero, but I hope to demonstrate just how much he helped to transform British sport.

Seventy years ago this week, Randolph Turpin took the world of boxing by storm as more than 18,000 spectators packed into Earls Court in London to witness the great—the legendary—Sugar Ray Robinson end his European tour. The scene was set for Turpin to show the world what he was made of. After a pummelling 15 rounds, Turpin triumphed. He was the world middleweight champion—the first British fighter to hold the title since Bob Fitzsimmons some 60 years earlier in 1891, and the first ever black British boxer do so.

More colloquially known as the Leamington Licker—a title that many in the constituency are proud to recall—the local Leamington lad shot to international fame overnight. But Turpin's 1951 victory was not just a flash-in-the-pan event; his entire career was based on breaking records. He was the first and only man ever to win both the junior and senior British amateur boxing titles in one year, and his record stretched to a stunning 66 wins out of 75 fights. For some of that time, he boxed while serving in the Royal Navy at the end of the second world war.

Our knowledge of his achievements and their recognition owes much to the work of the Randolph Turpin Trust. I pay special thanks to its chair, Adrian Bush, whose dedicated work helped to lead to the erection of the statue of Randy that stands proudly in Warwick town centre. It took five long years to raise the money for the statue, and I commend the trust members for their perseverance. It was they who organised for proper recognition by those who understood his true achievement.

The fact that the statue was unveiled by some of boxing's greats—including Our 'Enry, the late, great Sir Henry Cooper—and attended by Earnie Shavers, Richie Woodhall, Alan Minter, Neil Simpson and Danny McAlinden, tells us everything we need to know about Randy Turpin, a sporting legend among sporting legends. It is the only statue that stands in the centre of Warwick, which is why I believe this Chamber is a fitting place to remind ourselves of and recognise and continue to remember Randy's legacy on the 70th anniversary of that momentous fight. I do not believe this country has fully appreciated what he or his brother achieved.

Behind every great sportsman is, of course, a dedicated, loving and supportive family, and Randy's was no exception. Born in Leamington Spa in 1928, Randy was the youngest of five siblings. He was the son of Lionel Turpin, who came to these shores from what was then British Guiana to fight in the first world war.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this debate to the House. Whenever anybody mentions the Somme, I am always reminded that it is a very special place for us in Northern Ireland. To know that Randy's father fought at the Somme tells us a lot about the person he was and the

[Jim Shannon]

person his father was as well. I want to say how pleased we are that the hon. Gentleman has brought this debate to the House to recognise not just Randy's sporting heroics but the bravery of his dad at the Somme.

Matt Western: Lionel was indeed courageous fighting in the battle of the Somme, but sadly he died some years later having sustained permanent damage to his lungs. Together with hundreds of others, he had been the victim of a gas attack. As is so often the case, his sacrifice is barely recognised, together with those of so many other nationals who served the British empire.

It was left to Randy's mother Beatrice to raise him and his four siblings, taking on part-time domestic work to provide for them. Beatrice was the daughter of a former bare-knuckle fighter and was by all accounts a feisty woman who would tell her children to stand up for themselves when they were subjected to racial abuse.

Sporting success in the Turpin family did not stop at Randy; indeed, his elder brother Dick Turpin, the first black British and Commonwealth middleweight champion in 1948, paved the way for black Britons throughout the country to compete on the same stage as white Britons for the first time. If we accept that Randy and Dick broke the colour bar in the boxing arena—as it was described at that time—the current success of British boxing owes a lot to their work.

When I talk of the successes of British boxing, I only need to mention Anthony Joshua, Chris Eubank, Lennox Lewis and others. None of those great athletes would have had the chance to reach the heights they did were it not for Dick and Randy Turpin breaking through the glass ceiling of race.

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for bringing Randy's history to Parliament. Does he agree that that history shows the need to have more funding for sporting activities for young people, so that we can get more diverse and more ethnic minority participation?

Matt Western: I totally agree; I will come to that shortly.

Despite Randy's momentous accomplishments during his sporting career, his troubled personal life and at times flawed character would lead to violence against some of those closest to him and others. He was financially cheated by those he trusted, his debts mounted up and he was declared bankrupt. Ultimately, alcohol would get the better of him. Most sadly, he took his own life; he was 38.

But it is for his sporting success that we and many people in my constituency remember Randy today. His extraordinary reputation, recognised more in the United States than here, led many to visit Warwick and Leamington to pay homage to the great man. In fact, even Muhammad Ali came to Warwick in 1983 as part of a visit to the midlands to pay his own homage and respects.

Randy's legacy in my constituency of Warwick and Leamington is clear. Only last week, I had the great pleasure to meet three talented young Asian boxers in Warwick, Serena Mali, Jaya Kalsi and Aman Kumar—to demonstrate the point made by my hon. Friend the

Member for Coventry North West (Taiwo Owatemi). We stood by the statue and chatted briefly with their coaches. The reputation of local boxing clubs is still inspired by Randy, Dick and Jack Turpin. Seventy years after that great fight, the legacy of boxing in Leamington lives on. There are six other clubs in Leamington that are powerful and important in our sporting community. Another fine boxer, Lewis Williams, who won gold in the 2018 GB elite three nations championships, may soon be the heir to the Turpin legacy. It is an exciting prospect that the future of heavyweight boxing may indeed reside in Leamington.

The successes of Randy and his brother as the first black world middleweight champion and the first black British and Commonwealth middleweight champion respectively spelt the beginning for inclusion in sport. With them, the tide turned, although—let us be honest—not completely. It took more than 25 years after Randy Turpin's victory over Sugar Ray Robinson for Viv Anderson, the first black man to play football for England, to put on a white shirt and proudly sport three lions on his chest. It is unimaginable now to think that it should have taken that long for a black man to represent his country in our national game, but therein lies another piece of history. In truth, a black player would have represented his country as far back as 1924, but was denied the opportunity—not on talent, but by the colour of his skin, for it was only when Football Association officials learnt that Jack Leslie was black that he was deselected from the England squad. Leslie is the fourth highest all-time goal scorer for Plymouth Argyle football club, but racial stigma spelt the end for his international career. As we know, sadly, even today that undercurrent of racism persists in sport. I hardly need to remind Members of the abhorrent racist abuse endured by some members of the England team following the final on Sunday. The national team and their manager brought about great pride and unity across our country, and the racism that continues to haunt those who represent England on the field or in the ring should be called out for what it is and condemned as totally unacceptable in 2021.

Alongside the new-found recognition, we need to invest in our local communities for the next generation of English sportspeople. In writing and researching this speech, I was reminded of some brilliant and talented sportspeople, in particular boxers: Cooper, Bruno, Khan, Benn, McGuigan, Minter, Ahmed, Hatton, Lewis, Calzaghe, Eubank, Honeyghan, Buchanan, John Conteh—all names I knew, even though I was not a major fan of the sport. I also remember Nicola Adams and her great success, and now Joshua and Fury.

When I was growing up, of course, I knew about Our 'Enry, but I was captivated by the great bouts between Ali and Frazier, and then Norton. One of the things I remember most is how Henry Cooper and others were described as “the great white hope”, an expression dating back to the early 1900s when heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson, who was black, seemed invincible. The term would be used for any white opponent who might defeat him. When he decisively beat James Jeffries, put up against him and nicknamed the great white hope, Johnson's triumph ignited confrontation and violence between blacks and whites throughout the United States, leaving around two dozen people dead, almost all of them black, and hundreds injured.

Thankfully, today we do not think in those terms—or rather, I hope we do not. I would like to think that we consider only a sportsperson's ability and who can better another opponent rather than their race and colour of their skin. Everyone loved Henry Cooper. I did. He was knighted in recognition of his boxing and wider contribution to sport and British life, but he was never a world champion, let alone undisputed world champion. Randy Turpin was an undisputed world champion. To repeat: he beat Sugar Ray Robinson, one of the all-time greats, to claim that particular pinnacle of sport. I hope that he will one day get the national recognition he deserves for boxing, but arguably more importantly, for what he and his brothers did in punching through the glass ceiling of being barred through their race; for breaking down the racial barriers that ultimately led to the Anthony Joshuas, the Nicola Adamases, the Naseem Hameds, the Viv Andersons, the John Barneses, the Raheem Sterlings, the Marcus Rashfords, the Jadon Sanchos, the Bukayo Sakas and so many others being among the best of British sport. For that reason, I ask the Minister to meet me to discuss how this country can rightly honour Randolph Turpin.

Given recent events surrounding the England football team, I suggest that recognition of our first black British world champion is long overdue.

9.11 pm

The Minister for Digital and Culture (Caroline Dinenage):

I congratulate the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) on securing the debate to highlight the noteworthy anniversary of Randolph Turpin's middleweight title 70 years ago.

Anyone who reflects on the important moments in British boxing history, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s, will no doubt cite Randolph Turpin's stunning win over the great Sugar Ray Robinson for the world middleweight title those 70 years ago. As the hon. Gentleman said, he was widely known through his nickname of the Leamington Licker. He was born in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, in June 1928 after his father moved to England from Guyana during the first world war, as we have heard. His amateur boxing career began at Leamington boys club alongside his three brothers, where he showed so much promise and became the first black boxer to win a senior Amateur Boxing Association championship. After making his professional debut in 1946, Turpin went on to win the British middleweight belt in 1950 before that momentous title win on 10 July 1951. That was a truly outstanding achievement given Robinson's fame, prestige and competitive record. He had previously amassed 129 victories, just two draws and one loss, which is incredible.

As the hon. Gentleman said, Turpin's story is not only significant because of his outstanding achievement—and it was an outstanding, world-class sporting achievement. It also shines a light on some of the key issues that we are still battling today. In fact, the anniversary could not be more timely. How we promote diversity and inclusion in sport; how we tackle the abhorrent racism we have seen in recent days; the long-term impact of concussion and head injury on our sportsmen and women; how we support people who are struggling with mental ill health and depression, and indeed, how we prevent domestic violence are all topics that come of Randolph Turpin's story.

Today, British boxing is one of our most diverse sports. Most of our high-profile sporting stars are boxers from ethnically diverse backgrounds. The hon. Gentleman named a few of our great heroes. However, for the first part of the 20th century, the social inequalities in society were reflected in that sport. It is hard to believe that from 1911, boxing rules stated that, for a British title, both contestants needed to have been “born of white parents”. That rule remained in place until 1948. During this time, non-white boxers were barred from competing for a British boxing title. It seems impossible to believe it today, and it means that so many talented boxers were denied the right to compete for British titles purely due to the colour of their skin. Thankfully, progress was made with the lifting of that ban, and great strides have also been taken in other aspects of diversity through the nurturing of female boxing talent. I am sure that hon. Members will recall, as I do, their great pride in the first woman to win an Olympic boxing medal being our own Nicola Adams, back in London in 2012.

Of course, boxing is a sport that is accessible to people from all economic backgrounds. We continue to invest in community boxing clubs through Sport England and funding through the National Lottery Community Fund, and we support our elite boxers through UK Sport. However, no sport can afford to rest on its laurels: we must take steps to ensure that discrimination and inequality are identified and addressed. Like many other sports, boxing continues to look at what more it can do to promote inclusion and diversity, and England Boxing has been conducting a review of its operations from board level to grassroots in order to increase diversity at all levels. So far, that work has resulted in additional training for coaches and support staff and in anti-racism workshops, but I understand that more activity is in train.

This comes against the backdrop of the code for sports governance, which UK Sport and Sport England launched four years ago. That code sets out the standards that all sporting organisations must meet in return for public funding. It has proved very successful in setting clear expectations around good governance and diversity, but UK Sport and Sport England have just announced that the code will be updated later this year to ensure that sporting bodies in receipt of substantial public funding have a detailed and ambitious diversity and inclusion action plan for diversity right across their organisations, which is another positive step forward.

Of course, there is another part of Randolph's life that we should reflect on, which is the impact that concussion sustained in the ring may have had. Today, we know a lot more about brain injury, but there is still much more to know, to understand, and to do. The important issue of concussion in sport is a priority for my colleague and hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston), the Minister for sport, who is working with the national governing bodies that are responsible for the regulation of their sport and putting in place appropriate measures to protect participants. We continue to consult very widely with various stakeholders, including representatives from boxing with whom the Minister for sport met very recently, and are assessing what role Government can usefully play in convening research and improving education around concussion and supporting technological advances.

[Caroline Dinenage]

However great Turpin's achievements were in the ring, it is also worth reflecting that throughout the 1940s and 1950s, multiple women accused him of significant violence and domestic abuse. The Government are determined to tackle crimes that affect women and girls, but in fact domestic abuse impacts men as well. That is why, earlier this year, we achieved a historic milestone when the Domestic Abuse Bill received Royal Assent and became law. For the first time in history, there will be a general purpose legal definition of domestic abuse that incorporates a range of abuses beyond physical violence, including emotional, coercive or controlling, and economic abuse. That will help the millions affected by these crimes by strengthening the response of all agencies, from the police and courts to local authorities and service providers.

Another key concern for the Government as we navigate our recovery from the coronavirus pandemic is grassroots sports participation. It is truly vital for the preservation of our national sporting excellence that we help feed the elite level with the grassroots base, which is why the Government's strategy, "Sporting Future", puts increased participation at the very heart of the long-term direction of sport in this country. Since 2017, Sport England has provided a range of grassroots funding to boxing totalling more than £8.2 million, and this significant funding includes £3.2 million to grassroots boxing projects, £4.25 million to England Boxing across the 2017 to 2021 cycle, plus an additional £999,000, to be precise, in covid roll-over funding from 2020-21. Grassroots facilities in the hon. Gentleman's constituency have also benefited from the Government's £100 million national leisure recovery fund for local authorities, with Warwick District Council awarded £277,851. This emergency funding package has supported public sector leisure centres to reopen to the public, giving the sport and physical activity sector the very best chance of recovering from this pandemic.

In conclusion, I am really grateful to the hon. Gentleman for bringing to the attention of the House the story of his prestigious and incredibly memorable constituent. It is always refreshing to reflect on how constituency matters have a wider impact on the world of sport and on the global impact of one of his constituents. I thank him for securing the debate. He asked whether I would be prepared to meet him. I am not the Minister for sport but I will certainly pass on his request to my colleague who is. I am sure he would be very happy to accept that request.

Matt Western: I understand and appreciate that. I just want to stress the point that Randolph Turpin had many battles, as the Minister has mentioned, but he was the first British world champion of the 20th century, he fought through the bar on colour and he beat one of the finest boxers ever, but there is no national recognition for this person. It would do a great deal for social justice in this country if he had some recognition at long last, so I hope that that invitation will be taken up by the Minister.

Caroline Dinenage: Yes, I absolutely agree. I have to admit that until this week I had no previous knowledge of this story and it is a shame that such a significant figure in the history of British boxing is unknown and is not a household name in the way that Henry Cooper is. I am sure that the Minister for sport will be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss how that can be rectified.

Question put and agreed to.

9.21 pm

House adjourned.

Members Eligible for a Proxy Vote

The following is the list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy:

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con)	Andrew Mitchell
Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
James Brokenshire (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudon) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Con)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD)	Wera Hobhouse
Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD)	Wera Hobhouse
Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD)	Wera Hobhouse
Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Courts (Witney) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jon Cruddas (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
James Daly (Bury North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)	Wera Hobhouse
Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Davies (Grantham and Stamford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mims Davies (Mid Sussex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Sir Jeffrey M Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ms Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP)	Ben Lake
Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD)	Wera Hobhouse
Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance)	Wera Hobhouse
Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew
Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)	Owen Thompson

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
John Glen (Salisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Green (Ashford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sarah Green (Chesham and Amersham) (LD)	Wera Hobhouse
Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kate Griffiths (Burton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Grundy (Leigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP)	Ben Lake
Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba)	Kenny MacAskill
Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
James Heappey (Wells) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Darren Henry (Broxtowe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Antony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Howell (Henley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD)	Wera Hobhouse
Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David Johnston (Wantage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Langan (High Peak) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Kim Leadbeater (Batley and Spen) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brandon Lewis (Great Yarmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Chris Loder (West Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Logan (Bolton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John McNally (Falkirk) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alan Mak (Havant) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con)	Andrew Mitchell
Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West)	Owen Thompson
Damien Moore (Southport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD)	Wera Hobhouse
Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jill Mortimer (Hartlepool) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD)	Wera Hobhouse
Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Priti Patel (Witham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con)	Peter Aldous
Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anum Qaisar-Javed (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Will Quince (Colchester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dean Russell (Watford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Gary Sambrook (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC)	Ben Lake
Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Grant Shapps (Welwyn Hatfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Spellar (Warley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)	Wera Hobhouse
Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Rishi Sunak (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Elizabeth Truss (South West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Matt Vickers (Stockton South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ben Wallace (Wyre and Preston North)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Warburton (Somerset and Frome) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Whittingdale (Malden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC)	Ben Lake
Gavin Williamson (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD)	Wera Hobhouse
Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 13 July 2021

[SIR CHARLES WALKER *in the Chair*]

Fisheries Management

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Order, 25 February).

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

9.25 am

Sir Charles Walker (in the Chair): Okay, everybody, you know what the rules are. Mr Carmichael will lead off. The three Front Benchers have 10 minutes each, and there will be two minutes at the end for Mr Carmichael as well.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered fisheries management after the UK's departure from the EU.

It is, as ever, a pleasure to serve under you in the Chair, Sir Charles. First, I place on the record my gratitude to the Backbench Business Committee for allowing time for this debate.

Before turning to the business of today's debate, I want to say a few words about the recent and very sad passing of David Linkie, former editor of *Fishing News*. David's work on *Fishing News* was more than just journalism; it was a mission to give a voice to the fishing industry and to the communities that depend on it. I will not claim to have agreed with every word he ever wrote, but we do not have to agree with someone to acknowledge their passion, sincerity and commitment, and in David, all that and more shone through. His contribution will be missed, and I am sure that hon. Members from all parts of the House will want to send condolences to his family.

I hope that David would approve of what today's debate is about, which is giving a voice in Parliament to our fishing industries—industries that were promised so much by politicians, from the Prime Minister downwards, and that now look to him and them to deliver on what they promised. When the holding of today's debate was first announced, I put out a call for evidence to hear the views of people in the industry and its associated sectors. I anticipated a healthy response, but even so I was astonished at the volume and content of what I received. The emails came in from all around the coast, from catchers, processors, engineers and traders, and all with the same message: the deal struck by the Prime Minister on Christmas eve is not what they were promised and, six months into its first year, it is causing massive difficulties.

One Shetland skipper spoke for many when he wrote:

"I run a small wooden 22-metre trawler around Shetland. We have a ridiculously small cod quota and we find it impossible to avoid cod, there is more cod around Shetland right now than at anytime in living memory but our quota is minuscule. It has been said by skippers recently that you can catch your year's quota in one day! There are also plans to cut the cod quota further in 2022, so it begs the question why are we still using the broken quota system the EU put in place now that we are an independent coastal state?"

Magnus, a 19-year-old fisherman from Whalsay, who has plans to buy into a whitefish boat with a few close friends and so is the future of this industry, asked:

"Why is the fishing industry having to fight their own Government for survival? Why do their advisory boards have no qualified fishermen or ex fishermen or fish processors advising them? Why are they allowing uncontrolled fishing by foreign vessels in our waters?"

From Cornwall, at the other end of the country, a skipper wrote to me as

"someone who has fished for 40 years from my home village of St Mawes in Cornwall."

He said:

"There were 18 boats worked here when I started, all with 2 or 3 crew and now we are down to the last 2 trawlers, both working single-handedly due to the constant negativity surrounding the industry. With Brexit we had a golden opportunity, the one and only chance to keep these vessels out to at least 12 miles, the meridian line would be the next goal but no, an unbelievably weak Government has put us in a worse position than before."

In coastal and island communities around the country, the anger and frustration felt by fishermen is almost palpable. They feel let down and used, and they want answers. At the start of the year, we saw catastrophic gridlock as exporters seeking to take advantage of what would traditionally be the busiest week of the first quarter were unable to get their fish to market in continental Europe. Promises were made then that British businesses would be compensated for their losses, and I spoke to one local exporter in Shetland who was looking at a loss in the region of £50,000; he was not alone. The Minister and the Secretary of State made big promises about compensation schemes, but how did that work out? I spoke to the same person again yesterday. He had sought to mitigate his loss by selling his fish at a much lower price on the domestic market and, in doing so, he managed to limit his loss to £20,000 rather than the £50,000 loss that he had originally faced. When he applied for help to meet that restricted loss, he was told that because he had sold his fish—he had done the responsible thing—there would be no assistance for him. If, when the Minister promised in January to help exporters, she had meant that to qualify for that help, they would have to leave their fish to rot, she should have said so. Will she revisit how that compensation scheme has worked?

Processors have been badly hit as a result of their inability to source the labour that they need to run their businesses. One major processor in Peterhead told me a few weeks ago that he was constantly at least 10% down on his required staffing levels. That means that either he is paying overtime to his staff, or he has to restrict the range of work that he takes on; either way, it has a massive impact on his profitability. What is the Minister doing to bring home to our colleagues in the Home Office the need to ensure that the processing centres have access to the skilled labour that they need?

The Prime Minister's deal was deficient in many respects. For the catching sector, one of the most dramatic of those was the loss of easy access to in-year quota swaps. The Secretary of State assured us that those could easily be agreed on a Government-to-Government basis. However, as we enter the third quarter of the year, having only recently and finally established the quota entitlement for this year, we still do not know how these in-year quota swaps are going to work. Can the Minister tell us when the industry might expect to be told how it

[Mr Alistair Carmichael]

will get access to the extra quota that it needs? With every week that passes, this becomes more urgent.

Another theme that came through loud and clear from fishermen in every part of the country was their unhappiness at the inequality of treatment when it comes to sea boardings by fisheries enforcement officers. In Scotland, that is the responsibility of Marine Scotland. Marine Scotland figures released under the Freedom of Information Act show a massive disparity between the approach to UK boats and to the French and Spanish fleets, which are allowed to go about their business virtually unmolested. Why is that? Is it, as was suggested to me, because fisheries protection officers do not have the same access to real-time catch data from foreign vessels as they do for UK boats? Again, the complaint is the same around the coasts; it seems that what is true of Marine Scotland is true also of enforcement agencies south of the border.

The Minister has heard me speak before about the practice of gillnetting off the west of Shetland. This practice is environmental lunacy. It is just about the most unsustainable form of fishing imaginable: it contributes massively to the problem of plastic pollution in our oceans and means that for several square miles of water at a time, local boats are excluded from fishing areas that they have traditionally seen as their base grounds. For years, we were told that this was something that we had to live with as part of the common fisheries policy. That no longer applies, so why do we still allow it?

The Minister also knows, because I have told her, of the friction between local boats and gillnetters. When the Fisheries Act 2020 passed into law, I urged her to give the Maritime and Coastguard Agency powers to police the waters in our exclusive economic zone, between 12 miles and the 200-mile limit. She knows how close the Alison Kay came to disaster in her encounter with the Spanish gillnetter *Pesorsa Dos*. I have to tell the Minister, though, that the situation continues to be bad, and that in fact it is getting worse.

On Monday 28 June, Ross David Robertson and his crew, in his trawler *Mizpah*, were operating in traditional grounds north of Shetland when they were confronted by the *Genesis FD 19*, a 30-metre, 298-tonne longliner. It crossed the bow of the *Mizpah* and came within three metres of hitting it. Ross David Robertson told *The Fishing Daily*,

“‘We are trying to fish on grounds to suit our quota allocation but can’t get fishing because of these vicious wolf packs chasing us off. The seamen ship off these guys are totally horrendous. Put the fishing to the side on this matter, it’s the danger they put both vessels in that’s totally against the law,’ says Ross. Asked if he has experienced this before, Ross says that he has, and it is a growing concern for him and skippers across the fleet, but they are afraid that the authorities are not doing enough to protect the fleet and one day it will lead to a tragedy. ‘Yes, it’s happening too often,’ he said. ‘Last year another vessel did the same to us and I reported him to the Coastguard and MAIB but I didn’t hear any outcome, so I just presumed it was a waste of time.’”

I have met the Minister and officials from her Department and others about this, and they all come out with lots of good and detailed reasons why it is awfully complicated and difficult to fix. These reasons no longer hold water, however. Will it require a boat to go to the bottom of the sea before somebody takes responsibility and acts to end this irresponsibility?

I am aware that I have already taken quite a lot of the time given to today’s debate. I have a lot more to say, but I am afraid that that must be left to others. In January, I asked the Secretary of State if he would meet me and industry representatives to discuss the problems facing the industry. He ignored the request then and has done so since, so I make it again today. Will the Minister sit down with Members of this House and industry representatives? Will she listen to us and engage? If not, I fear the anger and frustration in the industry will only grow. Our fishing industry still has enormous potential, but to realise that potential requires political will. Do the Minister and her colleagues have that political will, and will they use it for the benefit of our fishing industries and the communities that rely on them?

Sir Charles Walker (in the Chair): The right hon. Gentleman said that he would speak for 12 minutes, but has actually spoken for 11 and a half, so he is top of the pops. I call Mr Neil Parish. There is a four-minute time limit on contributions.

9.36 am

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate arranged by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), for which I thank him. I am standing right next to the Minister, so I will try to be nice to her. It is not an easy job being a fisheries Minister at the moment, because there are many problems to sort out. I will get through all the problems as quickly as I can, and I hope that there may be some solutions.

First, on fishing in Norway, can we apply a temporary trade remedy with Norway to try to get our boats access to these waters? Naturally, we fish for cod in Norwegian waters. As far as shellfisheries are concerned, we still have major problems on the west coast, Wales and others, where we are still unable to trade from class B waters. We have been trying to sort out the different waters, but that seems to be hitting the buffers as well. This really needs to be sorted. It is not all the Minister’s fault. The European Commission could have been, and needs to be, much more amenable to get this to work. We must not be held up as an example to others that may leave the European Union. I rather fear this is where we are with shellfishing.

On international quota swaps, the lack of international swapping has left some companies with less quota than they had before Brexit, and it has left all companies with less flexibility over their quota management. Quota swapping is a key tool in compliance with landing obligations. English fish producer organisations collectively would like, believe it or not, a system that stays as close as possible to the previous one, so that swaps brokered by the producer organisations can be checked and signed off by all devolved Administrations and the swaps can occur at any point during the year. Otherwise, they cannot land the fish they catch. We have worked so hard on this over the years to try to ensure that we stop discarding fish.

The key principles are that whichever devolved Administration donates the quota should receive the incoming quota, and the organisation donating the quota should receive the full incoming quota, so that the levels of quota are kept where they are. There is no fisheries Minister for England, which means that English

viewpoints are under-represented in the fisheries discussion. The process for Scotland should not necessarily be adopted for England if other processes would be better for management of English quota.

There are many things for the Minister to do. My final point is probably more for the Chancellor, and I have talked about this before. We must make sure that we give new fishing boats the same capital allowances of 18% a year so that our fishermen can have new boats, new gear and much better safety. That would be much better for the environment and much safer for our fishermen. At the moment, they get only 6% on a new boat and 18% on an old boat. The boats could be made in the north of England. We could have a north-south divide in so far as we could provide the north of England with great employment, and we could have fishing boats all around the country. It is up to us to now develop our fisheries, and I believe that we can.

Once the Minister has flattened out all the little local difficulties with the European Commission, we can get on and actually benefit from leaving the common fisheries policy, because environmentally it was disastrous. We will need to get stuck in so that our fishermen can get back to being able to fish and land what they catch.

Sir Charles Walker (in the Chair): Mr Parish, you were four minutes exactly. I am sorry, colleagues; these things are a nightmare to chair because other colleagues pull out at the last minute, but I can now up you to five minutes until further notice. [*Laughter.*] Seriously, if you put in for these debates, do try and turn up. As you have just seen, a colleague has been discriminated against because of another colleague's failure to show. I call Angus MacNeil.

9.41 am

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Charles, and to hear that we are getting an extra minute. I recall that you and I entered Parliament at the same time, so it adds to the joy. As a co-sponsor of this important debate, along with the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing it. I associate myself with his words about David Linkie, the *Fishing News* editor, who seemed to be ever-present at fishing exhibitions in Glasgow whenever I went there over the years.

Before I go much further, I would like to mention the Norwegian fishing deal and UK fisheries. I have a letter from Sir Barney White-Spunner, who points out:

"The recent...deal with Norway heaps more pain on an already hamstrung distant waters fleet. At the same time that Norway removed our right to fish for cod in its waters, the UK has given them the right to sell the self-same cod without any tariff at all to UK chippies. In effect the UK government has given the Norwegians the greater part of our market overnight and achieved nothing in return for English fishermen. We are calling on the government to apply a temporary trade remedy to bring the Norwegians back to the negotiating table."

That deserves to be highlighted and brought to the fore in this debate. Many in the fishing industry in all parts of the UK are suffering quite badly.

I do not want to mention too much—I know I have been given five minutes, but I hope I will be under that time—but I want to talk about the cost and bureaucracy

involved in fisheries at the moment. Before Brexit, three quarters of Scottish fishermen's exports went to the European Union, but there has been an almost exponential rise in costs. Barratlantic, a local fish factory in my constituency, tells me that whereas a mere delivery note used to suffice, it now needs a catch certificate, packing lists and commodity codes, scientific names on consignments, a commercial invoice and an import and export declaration form. It pays the French Government VAT at 5.5%, and it also needs a health certificate. With the health certificate and all the rest, it needs to bring to the fore about eight pieces of paper before it starts exporting, whereas a delivery note once used to suffice.

The upshot is that the export cost to get a product to the continent has trebled from 32p per kilo to around £1 a kilo. Whereas consignments could be sent in three to four pallets, they now have to be sent in pallet loads of 10 to make matters viable and economical. Obviously, that affects the bottom line of many businesses. The Government really have to look quickly at ways of streamlining.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport, the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland and I have been in touch with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on several occasions to try to get these matters streamlined so that multiple data entries and paperwork are not required. Some things could and should be digitised to enable the transfer of data from one place to the other without the onerous time. The eight pieces of paper that I have mentioned translate into a lot of hours and cost for people who need to get their product to the important markets where we export three quarters of our product.

The final thing I will mention is the £100 million scheme that was promised in January, although apparently the Scottish Government are still waiting for details of that compensation for fishing. Hopefully, the UK Government will be awake and quickly moving on that, because six to seven months has passed and things in Government often move slowly. However, the big promises were there and the big promises should be delivered. The promises were there because of the incompetence that was rained upon those selling fish produce to continental Europe as a result of Brexit and the deal that was struck, which meant all that bureaucracy had come into play.

9.45 am

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Sir Charles, and I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this debate, which I believe is the first fisheries debate that has been held since the signing of the trade and co-operation agreement at the turn of the year. Taking into account the fact that fisheries was centre stage in the Brexit debate, it is long overdue.

Normally, we have fisheries debates immediately before the annual fisheries negotiations with the EU; straight afterwards, there is invariably a statement in the main Chamber when the Minister announces the outcome of those negotiations and Members have the opportunity to ask questions on behalf of their communities. This year, these particular negotiations, which were historic because they were the first conducted by the UK as an independent coastal state, were understandably concluded only last month, yet it appears that they have been

[Peter Aldous]

conducted behind a wall of silence. There was no opportunity for colleagues to raise concerns beforehand and there has been no formal and full Government statement since.

The main headline seeping out of the negotiations is that it was agreed that the tonnage limits for the total allowable catch for non-quota species would not be enforced this year. That primarily advantages the EU fleet, it will lead to increased effort in fishing grounds that are already under enormous pressure and it will damage the English inshore fleet. That is hardly an auspicious start to the management of our own waters and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will address that concern in her summing up.

Brexit provides an opportunity to manage our waters in a better and more responsible way, for the benefit of both the marine environment and local people in coastal communities, such as Lowestoft. Around the UK that can play an important role in levelling up, and internationally we can be a global exemplar.

In East Anglia, the fishing industry came together with local councils, Seafish and the New Anglia local enterprise partnership to produce a report—the Renaissance of East Anglian Fisheries study, or REAF. The recommendations of that report have been adapted as a result of the disappointing outcome of the Brexit negotiations and I shall briefly highlight some of the revised proposals.

First, it is important that our fishing stocks are sustainably managed to bring economic benefits to local coastal communities. In the short term, the management of the under-10 metre pool system should be improved to better support the inshore fleet. That requires the Marine Management Organisation to change its approach to trading and valuing quota for the pool.

Secondly, the Government must ban bottom-trawling in marine protected areas, especially on the Dogger Bank. They should also look to restrict engine power in MPAs, which would not only safeguard our fisheries for future generations but reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Thirdly, the southern North sea should be managed as a mixed species fishery, with quota allocations and catch limits in line with the requirements of the discard ban. Funding and practical support should be provided to enable fishermen to trial new types of gear designed to minimise by-catch.

Finally, we need to make more use of data to better manage conflicts between fishing and other marine activities, such as wind farms. That can lead to arrangements that better manage the impact of displacement, which can have devastating impacts on local communities.

In conclusion, we have the opportunity—a golden opportunity—to put in place a world-class system of fisheries management. We have not yet grasped that opportunity. However, I hope and anticipate that, in her summing up, my hon. Friend the Minister will lay out the route map that will enable us to do that.

Sir Charles Walker (in the Chair): Just for the record, the next speaker on the list, the hon. Member for Gedling (Tom Randall), was added in error; he is not a withdrawal. He is due to speak in a debate later today.

9.50 am

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr iawn, Sir Charles; it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I thank the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) for securing today's debate. The comments by the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) were extremely pertinent—I am very much aware that he is in the party of Government and I am in the party of the Opposition, so perhaps I can express things in slightly different way, but I think his comments were very useful.

Having now come on to the theme of being in one of the Opposition parties, I hope that the Government will apologise to the UK fishing community for the disruption that has marked our departure from the EU, from the start up to the present day. There was, of course, no oven-ready deal. The Government left our fishing industry, and especially the Welsh shellfish industry, high and dry. Overnight, Welsh producers were cut off from their main export market, and that debilitating uncertainty is ongoing. Questions remain about how water is classified and the impact of that on the shellfish industry, particularly in England and Wales.

After years of promising control over our seas, the UK Government folded on the issue of access to UK waters. With asymmetrical interests within the UK fishing industry on access, perhaps one obvious route would be to better involve the Welsh Government in negotiations with the EU, so that we can ensure equitable and sustainable access to Welsh and European waters. However, I understand that the UK Government have seen fit to include the territorial waters of south Wales in an access region stretching from Grimsby in Lincolnshire, around the southern English coast and Cornwall, to Fishguard. Historically, only 10 EU vessels were licensed to operate in south Wales's waters under the old area regime system. This huge new region opens up Welsh waters to 120 licensed EU vessels.

There is a series of questions here. Could the Minister explain why Wales's devolved control over our territorial waters appears to have been swept aside? Were the Welsh Government consulted? Did they give up the means to manage conservation of Welsh fish stocks voluntarily, or did the Minister's Government impose this action without consultation or consent? In addition, what assessment has the Minister made of the potential effect of displacement on Wales, especially on non-quota species, as the UK Government introduce marine conservation zones and highly protected marine areas around England?

If English vessels cannot fish locally, there is a real risk that they will put unsustainable pressure on Welsh stocks because of the Government's actions. Equally pressing is the challenge of displacement facing our fishing communities as a result of a combination of measures, including a huge expansion in the area devoted to offshore wind farms and improved protection for marine environments. While the Welsh Government have control over marine protection—allegedly—they do not have control over the seabed on which offshore wind developments depend.

One solution would be devolution of the Crown Estate to Wales, as has happened in Scotland. That action would further holistic fisheries management in Wales and support not only our decarbonisation efforts,

but the viability of our fishing industry. While I welcome the co-operation between the UK and devolved Governments on joint policy statements, it is essential that such co-operation is grounded in dialogue.

I cannot overstate this: the fishing industry has the knowledge and the vested interests to make conservation work, not from a distant office, but from the living environment of the sea. That would prevent a repeat of the key flaws within the common fisheries policy, such as the landing obligation, and would ensure that fair and sustainable practices were supported across the UK industry. I would particularly welcome any comment by the Minister on how the UK Government are addressing the issue of unlicensed fishing in UK waters, and what support they are offering to the Welsh Government on that issue.

I hope that today's debate will improve the UK Government's awareness and responsiveness to the challenges facing both the Welsh and the UK fishing industry, and I would welcome the opportunity to take these matters further in a meeting with the Minister. Diolch yn fawr.

9.54 am

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Charles. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing the debate. He and others have outlined the challenges faced by the industry, which impact communities across the UK, including the East Neuk of Fife in North East Fife, which I represent.

There is no doubt that fishing has faced and is facing a number of issues. Some of them are longer term, such as changes in consumer taste, the impact of overfishing and the climate emergency. I echo the comments of the right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts), expressing her faith in the expertise of the industry to help tackle that climate impact. We know that the short-term and more acute factors are covid over the past year and a half and Brexit. If we look to future management—the topic of the debate—it is clear that those two are the most critical and acute.

Alongside the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock), who will speak later, I serve on the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, which has had three sessions, since the UK's withdrawal from the EU, specifically focused on food and drink and fishing. At the first session, in February, attended by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) in his role as Chair of the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, representatives of the industry outlined a profound sense of disappointment, anxiety and betrayal about how the Government had handled the UK's departure from the EU in respect of the industry.

The only hope for the future expressed by those representatives at that first session was for the negotiations in 2026 to be handled differently. It was clear that the impact on the industry was now acute and distressing, and that the Government are wholly to blame for that position. Export areas such as groupage have been impacted, which suggests that there has been no assessment of the impact, and that the fishing industry has been

made lots of promises but left to fend for itself. No grace period was granted, despite requests. The industry had less than two weeks to respond with a plan related to the EU agreement.

At the second session, in April, I asked Donna Fordyce whether the Scottish and UK Governments were doing enough to progress electronic transmissions—to help move bulk market exports—and streamlining, which would reduce those errors. We again raised the issue of longer-term plans, particularly around funding. I echo the request to the Minister by my right hon. Friend the Member for Orkney for more detail on what funding might look like. Elspeth Macdonald pointed out at that session that 60% of landings are in Scotland, and that that needs to be reflected in funding.

As others have outlined, having left the common fisheries policy, the industry still seems to be impacted by that, plus further restrictions brought about by our third-country status in relation to the EU. For example, regarding the haddock quota that we had under the common fisheries policy, the 57% that the Government obtained during the Brexit deal as a result of in-year quota swaps was a 5% cut in quota for that type of fish. We clearly need progress on in-year quota swaps, not just for this year but moving into 2022, so that the industry does not make further losses.

Although agreement has been reached in 2021, it is clear that a lack of progress for future years is critical. What is the progress for 2022? The likely risk is a knock-on effect. Will negotiations for that start next month, as discussed and expected at the Scottish Affairs Committee?

Hon. Members will have often heard a famous quotation by the American poet Maya Angelou, which is usually very motivational:

“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

I would ask the Minister and the Government to reflect on how the fishery industry is feeling as a result of the past 18 months.

Sir Charles Walker (in the Chair): The next speaker withdrew with plenty of notice, so did not secure the ire of the Chair. We now move to Mr Stone.

9.59 am

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Charles. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this highly important debate—one that is very important to my constituents. As an aside, I have to say that I am personally very grateful that my right hon. Friend is where he is, because he has a considerable knowledge of fisheries from his constituency and that is very helpful to me. I do not have as great a knowledge, which is why I am glad that he is where he is.

I want to use three examples to underpin what I am about to say. The first is that of a gentleman whom I have mentioned before in this place. I had a conversation with him this morning. He is Mr William Calder, the owner of Scrabster Seafoods—the Minister and I have spoken about this gentleman. Today, Mr Calder has put it to me pretty starkly by saying that the cost of getting

[Jamie Stone]

a 30 kg box of fish, such as monkfish, to his market in Brittany has just about doubled, and that is really eating into his business. It is a local business that employs locally, and it has been in existence for some time. By coincidence, yesterday he had an email from one of his hauliers, saying, “I am really sorry. Because of the situation and the way business has dwindled a bit, we are going to have to up our prices to move your fish from A to B.” Then there is something that I have mentioned several times: every hour and every day of delay cuts into the product being sellable at the end of it all, because absolute freshness is key. So that is Mr William Calder, my good friend, and anything that we can do to help him would be very welcome indeed. I shall return to him in a couple of minutes.

The second person I want to mention is my friend Mr Peter Sinclair, whom I have mentioned to the Minister before. He is the owner of a fishing trawler called the Reaper, and he has made the point to me that a boat owner is more likely to be inspected if they are British than if they are a foreigner. By means of a freedom of information request, my party has established that the stats say that a British boat owner is five times more likely to be inspected than a French or Spanish owner, which is not good.

That takes me to my third gentleman, who has had considerable newspaper coverage, not least in the Thunderer—*The Times*. Mr Ian Mackay is the skipper of the Loch Inchard. At the beginning of June, he rightly highlighted a most unfortunate incident—the sort of incident that my right hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland has referred to—whereby he went to his fishing ground expecting to be trawling, only to find that French boats, and sadly some boats flying the British flag, had established long lines. That meant that they pretty abruptly told him to get out of it and that he could not trawl, because he would damage their fishing gear. Eventually, after much aggressive toing and froing, he established an area of the ocean where he could trawl, but that sort of aggressive behaviour is simply not on.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland said, where is this going to end? Mr Mackay had boats cutting across his bows. We could well end up with deaths at sea, and that is something we cannot possibly countenance. I return to Mr Peter Sinclair, who has suggested to me that we should look seriously at some form of penalty for boats that have indulged in that sort of behaviour. Possibly an effective penalty would be to ban them from landing their fish in a British port. That would need to happen only once, and they would soon learn their lesson.

If we could have a meeting with the Minister, that would be very helpful indeed. I compliment the Minister on having had conversations in the past—I give credit where it is due—but promises were made to the fishermen about compensation and trying to sort out the problems, so I echo others’ call for a roundtable meeting involving the industry. That would be best. I have mentioned Mr Sinclair, Mr Mackay and Mr Calder because I know them personally from face-to-face discussions. If we have a roundtable discussion, it is absolutely important that they are at the table and are not just being spoken to remotely by an agency. I am afraid that Marine

Scotland can seem a little remote in the way that it deals with fishermen. I am not aware that it has too many face-to-face conversations. I hope I am wrong in that; if I am wrong, I apologise, but that is the impression I get.

For your amusement, Sir Charles, I come from fisherfolk from the Black Isle on the highland side of our family. I think I might be the only Member in this place who actually once worked in a fish factory—I spent a winter in the Faroe Islands. We are a maritime nation. Salt is in our blood. Fish is good for the health of the nation. For hundreds of years we have taken our fisherman very seriously and we feel we owe them a debt. Now is the time for us collectively to pay that debt to them and show just how much we value them. They are brave people doing a difficult job. We do not want their lives to be made any worse.

10.5 am

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): It is a pleasure to be able to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Charles. Let me start by congratulating the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael); we have a good tradition of following one another in debates, and it is always a pleasure to hear him speak with such knowledge on this issue.

I recently arrived at Westminster and am privileged to represent Brixham, Salcombe and Dartmouth, which have fine fishing fleets and a fine fishing tradition, which I hope I will ably represent in this place. I also pay tribute to David Linkie; I did not know him, but I did see his work and I know how much he meant to the industry. On that note, I also pay tribute to Jim Portus, who has stepped down as the head of the South Western Fish Producer Organisation, and I wish Juliette Hatchman the best of luck in taking on that new role. She will certainly have a number of us to deal with in the south-west.

I take the right hon. Gentleman’s point that there is an opportunity for the fishing industry and there must be political will. At the same time, we must ensure that we are not playing party politics with this issue, because there are opportunities in leaving the European Union, one of which has recently been recognised. The Minister knows that all too well because I have been knocking on her door almost daily about it. It relates to bivalve molluscs and the gradations of our waters, and the fact that the Food Standards Agency has moved significantly in the last eight months to allow us to challenge anomalous results. Each of our constituencies will be impacted differently by that, but it is extremely welcome to see how we can move at pace. After organisations have been asking for those changes for 30 years, we have managed to see some of them come through in eight months. I hope we might see a little bit more of that approach. We can never give certainty, but we can look at reforming our domestic legislation and providing opportunities for the fishing fleets in our coastal communities.

The second point I would like to make is about highly protected marine areas and the Benyon review. I understand the point that Lord Benyon is making in the review, but we must also have faith in our fishermen to look after their waters. They want future generations to be able to make money and have a business and a livelihood; they want to look after their waters and their coastlines as

much as we do. Whatever we do with highly protected marine areas, we must make sure it is in conjunction, co-operation and discussion with the fishing fleets.

I hope the Minister and the team at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will engage with as many people in this place and outside Westminster to find the right balance, so that we can operate in highly protected marine areas in a way that will work. There is also a move on the environmental side of offshore wind farms, which are also heating up.

In a rare moment of cross-party unity, I find myself in agreement with the Chair of the International Trade Committee, the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) about the maritime fisheries fund, which I believe has now been replaced by the fisheries and seafood scheme—FaSS—about the £100 million. DEFRA has been generous about that, but it does not mean anything until it is produced. I appreciate that the Department has to jump through hoops with the Treasury, but a lot of people have been waiting close to seven or eight months to hear when that will happen.

Speaking of certainty, we have a transition period. We have an opportunity to provide a degree of certainty to the industry about what our future relationship with the European Union will be after 2026. I hope we can begin that process of reassurance, build up the opportunity to develop our fleet in our coastal communities and ensure that people understand where we are going and why the trade and co-operation agreement we have now is what it is. There is room for opportunity.

The Minister was very kind and gracious to come down to Brixham; unfortunately, I was not able to be there, but I know she met a number of my constituents. She will have heard a great deal about non-total allowable catch species. We need further discussions about what goes beyond 2021, because right now there is uncertainty. The disparity between what EU vessels can catch in our waters and what we can catch in their waters is of grave concern. There is a lot more we can do.

Two specialised trade committees have been established that will be linked to fishing: the first is on sanitary and phytosanitary measures and the second is on just fishing. How will those committees be set up, who will be put on them and what representation will there be from Westminster and DEFRA? The committees offer us an enormous opportunity to streamline the process of ensuring that we can get our exports up to where they need to be, which so many other Members have raised as a point of concern.

To end on a positive note, I received the statistics this morning from Brixham fish market. It is now earning £800,000 per week. In previous years, it was £300,000 to £400,000. It is selling 40% up on previous years. It is looking forward to a very prosperous summer. I know that is not the case universally across the United Kingdom, but it is worth noting that my fishermen in Brixham, England's most valuable fishing port, are painting a very positive picture. I was asked the other day what they were doing on 5 November and they said: "We built the effigy of you, but we are just deciding whether to burn it." I have been told they are not intending to quite yet.

Sir Charles Walker (in the Chair): There is plenty of time for them to reconsider that, though, isn't there?

10.10 am

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in your place, Sir Charles, for this morning's important debate. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing it.

Since 2016, the Government have repeatedly told fishing communities that there is a post-Brexit bonanza waiting for them, famously describing it as a sea of opportunity. In preparing for today's debate, I contacted four fishing businesses in four different parts of my Argyll and Bute constituency to ask them exactly what that sea of opportunity had delivered to them. I spoke to Jonathan MacAllister, a trawler owner and skipper who fishes out of Oban; Connie Macaskill, the office manager of Easdale Seafoods; Fiona McFarlane, director of Islay Crab Exports; and Jamie McMillan, the owner of Lochfyne Langoustines. From Oban in the north to Islay in the south, they all tell a story of an industry struggling with falling prices and loss of markets, an industry drowning in bureaucracy and red tape, and one struggling to cope with labour shortages and facing huge transport and logistical problems. That is an existential threat to the industry in the west coast of Scotland.

Jonathan MacAllister has seen the price he gets for his catch fall by a third since 2019. The routine of landing his catch at Kilkeel in Northern Ireland is now time consuming and wrapped up in customs paperwork and red tape. That is assuming he can get a crew to go in the first place, as the new skilled worker visa is actually more of a hindrance than a help in recruiting non-domestic crew. He now struggles to get spare parts for his boat. The engine is American, it is distributed via Holland, the refrigeration unit is German, the condensers are Italian and the boat's electronic control unit is manufactured in Denmark. He can no longer get vital spare parts quickly and cost-effectively, while the cost of delivery has soared too.

A few miles down the road at Easdale Seafoods, Connie Macaskill's office manager job now requires a forensic knowledge of French customs and VAT regulations. Like so many other small exporters, Easdale Seafoods has had to adapt quickly to change its practices and has spent an awful lot of money just to stay afloat in this sea of opportunity. Although fish are zero-rated for VAT, Easdale Seafoods still has to pay VAT in advance and then reclaim it from the French authorities, which use the single euro payments area business-to-business scheme. However, very few banks in the UK are set up to use SEPA B2B and currently, this very small Scottish company has thousands of euros tied up with the French VAT authorities and has no idea when it is getting them back.

Like many Scottish seafood exporters, the shortage of qualified heavy goods vehicle drivers has added another layer of complication for Easdale Seafoods. It is the same on Islay. Fiona McFarlane's company, Islay Crab Exports, is suffering from the lack of qualified HGV drivers, but that is just one of the Brexit-related problems facing the business. More pressing is a shortage of workers. Jobs that were once filled by EU nationals now lie unfilled and the business needs double the number of processors that it currently has. Fiona told me yesterday: "We have worked hard building our business and have invested in the future. I desperately need people to work. There are people who want to come and work, but it is just not possible."

[Brendan O'Hara]

We live in an economically fragile constituency, and the situation is unsustainable. It was laid out starkly by Jimmy McMillan of Lochfyne Langoustines. He employs 23 people in the village of Tarbert. He exports about 40%, the cost of getting that to market has soared and three hours of every day is spent dealing with Brexit-related paperwork. His costs are £300 to £500 a day in customs fees alone. That is the reality of Brexit for the fishing communities of Argyll and Bute. That is the reality of the “sea of opportunity”. That is why we voted against Brexit.

I will leave the final word to Fiona MacFarlane:

“If people had all the information and knowledge of what Brexit really meant, they would have voted differently. Someone should be held accountable to the country for misleading the people.”

She is absolutely right.

Sir Charles Walker (in the Chair): Last but not least from the Back Benches, Mr Jim Shannon.

10.16 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Sir Charles, and I thank the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) for setting the scene.

I am pleased to speak in a fisheries debate. I represent the village of Portavogie in my constituency. I am familiar with it. At the advice centre there fishermen give me their updates every month on the issues that are hurting them and the fishing sector. I am also pleased to speak on behalf of many fishermen across Northern Ireland—not just those in Portavogie but those in Annalong, Ardglass and Kilkeel as well—because they come to me with those issues through the fishing organisations.

Some good news to start with reached Northern Ireland on Friday afternoon: an email from the Marine Management Organisation advised fishermen that access to Ireland's inshore waters—those between nought and six nautical miles off shore—had been restored, thus reflecting their traditional fishing patterns around the island. Some 140 fishing vessels from Northern Ireland and some 190 fishing vessels from the Republic of Ireland have been licensed to fish in each other's waters. That is just getting things back into line again on that one issue.

I always start with the good news, before any other news, which is perhaps not as positive. Part of the hard sea border erected against our fishermen has been removed, and we are grateful for the efforts of all involved in securing that. We must now redouble our efforts to restore access for all Northern Ireland and southern Irish fishermen to territorial seas round the island of Ireland, especially between six and 12 nautical miles offshore.

An irony of the trade and co-operation agreement, the TCA, is that access to territorial waters inside the 12 nautical miles for EU fishermen was written into the agreement in an area stretching from the Humber to Saint David's head in Wales. Mutual access is not available for UK fishermen to access waters off the County Cork coast, in waters known as ICES—International Council for the Exploration of the Sea—sub-area 7.g. Regardless of the historical nature of the fishing industries in both parts of the island of Ireland

and the call to avoid a hard border on the island, access for our fishermen in Northern Ireland—from my port of Portavogie, and Ardglass and Kilkeel—has been denied.

Last Friday's announcement, therefore, was a partial fix and I repeat calls to the Minister. I have the utmost respect for her and—I say this honestly—she is very responsive to the issues that I bring to her attention, and to the fishing organisations, and we really appreciate that. I want to put that on the record. I again call on the Minister to seek a resolution. I ask her to make this matter a top priority at the UK-EU specialised joint committee on fisheries.

What we are seeing in the Irish sea as a result of the hard fisheries sea border is displacement of fishing effort. Geographically speaking, the Irish sea is a small area and increasing competition for space is bringing all kinds of pressures to bear. At least 80% of the UK's fishing effort throughout the Irish sea emanates from Northern Ireland, but sometimes, regrettably, at least a perception exists that there is a communication problem between the statutory authorities in England and the fishing industry in Northern Ireland. Again, I call on the Minister to ensure that the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Natural England and the marine planning division of the MMO all fully engage with industry representatives in Northern Ireland.

I again wish to commend the Minister for being in contact and working with the Northern Ireland Fishermen's Federation, in particular Alan McCulla and Harry Wick under the NIFF banner. It is a good relationship, which is working, although perhaps we need to tighten it up a wee bit.

I also call on the Minister to encourage our officials in the various statutory authorities to give more than simple lip service to terms such as “adaptive management” or “co-management scheme”. Nature is an evolving ecosystem and its management must not be set in concrete for generations to come. I want to reflect on what was said earlier about the management of MPAs, which complicates fisheries management, as does the construction of offshore wind farms. Increasingly, the eastern Irish sea is presenting itself as one giant offshore energy generation scheme. The Crown Estate's fourth round of offshore leasing reinforces a squeeze on fishing operations in the Irish sea. There is a real danger that these developments are impinging on fish spawning and nursery grounds. It is not good enough to tell fishermen to reduce or move their fishing activities through the MPA process, when that creates a sense that they have been told to move on to make space for windfarm developers.

Over the past few years, ICES set out to track ecosystem interactions in the Irish sea, through its WKIrish programme—the workshop on an ecosystem-based approach to fishery management for the Irish sea—without, it would seem, any further discussion on how the ecosystem model could be incorporated into fisheries management. This point was raised last week at the UK sea fisheries science panel, with reference to an annual briefing to industry and other stakeholders about the ICES fisheries science advice for 2020. Perhaps the Minister could respond on that point as well.

Fisheries management boils down to livelihoods. We talk about the quota system. How that dividend is allocated within the UK has not been finally settled. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will soon be launching a further consultation on

the allocation in 2022. Fishermen in Northern Ireland were let down by the allocation methodology used in 2021. We know that the Secretary of State is supportive of zonal management, but, like him, the Minister is well aware that that would penalise Northern Ireland because our maritime economic zone is small. I suggest to the Minister that, if special cases can be made for other parts of the UK—for example, Wales; I welcome that—a similar case should be made for Northern Ireland, given its relatively small part of the UK quota share.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) spoke about Norway. I will not repeat that, as time does not allow. Will overfishing of mackerel by Norway result in reduced catches for UK fishermen? That is practical fisheries management in action.

Sir Charles Walker (in the Chair): We now have 10 minutes each for the Front-Bench spokespeople. We start with Deidre Brock for the SNP.

10.22 am

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP) [V]: It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Charles. I commend the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) for securing this timely debate today, in which I am very pleased to participate. He began by setting out the staggering number of problems that fishing organisations are experiencing. He spoke of the promises made, by the Prime Minister downwards, to the fishing industry—promises broken, with little regard for the impact. He posed a question from a young fisher of his acquaintance that I found particularly telling—why is the fishing industry having to fight its own Government to survive? That is a very good question.

Numerous Members have outlined details of the great difficulty being experienced by those in the fishing industry. As the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland commented, the anger and frustration felt by fishing communities is palpable. It certainly is among those representatives who have been in touch with me.

The hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) made some interesting points. As he said, this debate has been a long time coming, and there has been a lack of transparency around this year's negotiations—in comparison, ironically, with what happened when the UK was still part of the EU. I would be pleased if the Minister could address that issue.

The right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) called for apologies to the fishing industry and commented on Wales's devolved control being swept aside, which is something we are certainly familiar with in Scotland. I note her calls for devolution of the Crown Estate to Wales, as has occurred in Scotland. My understanding from industry representatives is that relationships have improved considerably since that happened in Scotland, so I would certainly encourage her to pursue that aim.

My hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) made an excellent speech. He spoke of an existential threat to the fishing industry. His words were brimming throughout with a deep knowledge of the problems being experienced by businesses in his constituency and the harshness of the impact of Brexit on those businesses.

What of the sunlit uplands of Brexit? What a mess has been made of people's lives in the name of taking back control. It was a nonsense, pursued by an unthinking herd of populist and arrogant politicians. It is causing massive damage. Some of us predicted damage, but I do not think any of us grasped just how bad it would be.

It has been particularly bad for Scotland's food and drink industry, as we have heard, and for smaller producers, especially, who have seen their overseas markets disappear. Fishing got a huge skelping and it is not really feasible to transport fresh fish halfway round the world to sell into the Australian market, no matter how fabulous a deal the Government think they have done.

Fishing is, of course, a far more important industry for Scotland than it is for England, so it was a prime candidate for the flinging-under-the-bus treatment during the Brexit negotiations—and that is what happened. Now, there is no sea of opportunity, no easy access to the EU markets and no help from Government. They will say that there is £100 million available, but where is it, how is it being distributed and how come we are not getting any details? Even more importantly, do the Brexit Government think that that is enough to compensate for the damage that is being done to the industry?

When damage is done to the industry, it affects not just the crews on the boats but the communities back on land, many of which, certainly in Scotland, are sustained by fishing. Removing the industry will remove the lifeblood from those communities. Scotland's coastal communities could be facing the same devastation in the 2020s that Thatcher's Governments visited upon the industrial towns of Scotland's central belt.

I am aware that this Government will not listen to the voices calling for action. We are well used to the sneering contempt from the Leader of the House, the airy-headed enthusiasm of the International Trade Secretary and the blank refusal of the DEFRA Secretary to acknowledge problems. Week after week, we hear the Prime Minister refusing to acknowledge the problems that are so evident to the rest of us.

Before Brexit, three quarters of Scotland's seafood exports went to the EU, bringing in revenues of over £600 million in 2019. Since Brexit, those exports have been held up by red tape and logjams at the ports. Our fleets are still subject to the common fisheries policy, thanks to the atrocious deal negotiated by the UK Government. Members do not have to believe me that it is a terrible deal; they just have to ask the guy who negotiated it. Lord Frost thinks it is a terrible deal, too—that is one bowl of Frosties that is anything but terrific.

The Food and Drink Federation has produced figures showing that EU sales have all but halved—a £2 billion loss to the UK economy right there. These are not teething troubles. They are disasters happening in real time under the view of a Government that do not give a damn. It is clear that the Government had no idea what Brexit would bring and had not thought about the difficulties that would be put in the way of traders. They gave no consideration to the complex administration that takes hours of extra time—hours precious to the small and medium-sized enterprises that make up the bulk of the sector—or to the need for customs agents, health certificates and battling miles of bureaucratic red tape, the extra costs fishers now bear for fishing gear supplies, or the delays and extra costs of now exporting

[Deidre Brock]

not just to the EU but to Northern Ireland. I now hear that Danish and Irish sectors are, unsurprisingly, picking up the lost UK market and that they are seen as more stable suppliers after confidence in the UK drains away.

We should not allow the Government to forget the difficulties that their hostile environment approach to immigration is causing the sector. Non-domestic crew who are brought over to Scotland under the new skilled worker system are being sent back because they fail the advanced English exam required of skilled workers, which comes at a great cost to skippers, who are left with no crew. The UK Government must look urgently at where they can usefully intervene to resolve that issue.

In September 2020, I remember being shouted down by virtually every Member present on Second Reading of the Fisheries Bill for daring to say that it was in no fit state to be passed any time soon. I gave a number of reasons, the primary one being that we had no idea what sort of deal the UK's Brexit negotiators would arrive at or what the fall-out would be. Well, we ken noo, as they say in my neck of the woods.

I read again the Secretary of State's speech at the start of that debate. It was stirring stuff—some would say a triumph of starry-eyed optimism over actual knowledge and foresight—pummelling once again the CFP punch-bag, though forbearing to mention the many advantages the EU brought in the way of open markets and easy access, and, ironically, lambasting it for its

“anachronistic methodology for sharing quota”,

which we are still largely subject to, and the

“uncontrolled access to UK waters for EU vessels.”—[*Official Report*, 1 September 2020; Vol. 679, c. 65.]

Which, again, we are still basically subject to.

We were told that the Bill gave the UK powers that were needed irrespective of the Brexit outcome—powers that have ultimately come to nothing as fishing interests were sold away in those negotiations. I look forward to reading in years to come the close analysis of those deliberations and exactly how hard the negotiators fought for our fishing communities' interests. That information will surely come out, as will, perhaps, a published account of the meeting between the Secretary of State, his officials and several blazingly angry fishing representatives after the truly terrible outcome of the Brexit agreement was finally made public.

It is actually quite useful to go back over that Second Reading debate to remind myself of the deception practised on our fishing communities by the Government and many of their MPs. Were Back Benchers really as convinced as they sounded then of the benefits of Brexit? I remind hon. Members of what one Conservative Member said during that debate:

“Only the SNP could take a sea of opportunity and turn it into an ocean of division.”—[*Official Report*, 1 September 2020; Vol. 679, c. 93.]

I will return the favour now and say that only the hated Tories, with their hearts of stone, could pledge to the fishing communities of Scotland a bonanza, and then just shrug as it turned into a sludge of mendacity.

10.30 am

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) for the way he introduced this debate. This is a deeply political area. It genuinely matters, and it is important that we do not take cheap shots because people's livelihoods depend on it. The way in which the right hon. Gentleman introduced this debate shows why he is held in such high regard by Members on both sides of the House.

I would also like to pay my respects on behalf of the Labour party to the friends and family of David Linkie. It is really important that we have robust journalism on fishing at this time, especially because so many promises have been made and so many promises have been broken. It is important that those people who serve fishing communities, both in this place in elected roles and in journalism, are as professional and thorough as David was, so I pay tribute to him.

As this is a fisheries debate, although not the annual fisheries debate that the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) from Waveney mentioned, I would also like to pay tribute to all the fishers who go to sea every single day to catch our food—it is the most dangerous peacetime occupation and they deserve our thanks—as well as organisations such as the coastguard and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, which exist to save lives at sea. I support all efforts to continue allowing them to legally save lives at sea. If someone is drowning in the channel, they should have a legal right to save them. Sadly, that is not the Government's current position with the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill, and I hope that the Minister, in support of saving lives at sea—something so important for this debate—will have words with the Home Office to say that saving lives, wherever they come from, is the right thing to do.

Anthony Mangnall: I think the hon. Gentleman has overlooked the National Coastwatch Institution, which is made up of thousands of volunteers, has extraordinary stations and does so much of the good work he has mentioned.

Luke Pollard: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to say thank you to my stepmother, who is one of those officers along the coast in Boscastle in North Cornwall. I thank him for that.

This is a debate that has been prompted by Brexit. It is because of the promises made by Ministers about fishing—the sea of opportunity, the additional fish—that we are here today. It is interesting that those who attended these debates before Brexit have not always done so after Brexit. Having made the case for Brexit, and then made the case for a harder form of Brexit, many of them are not here to stand up for their fishing communities in the way that those communities now need. As a small but perfectly formed representation of the south-west, we know that that is really important and we need to do it.

The betrayal of the promise on the six to 12 nautical miles is something that fishers find unforgivable. The hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) was right to say that we should assess this on how fishers feel. Well, let me tell you: fishers feel betrayed, they feel abandoned and they feel lied to. That is

because they have been betrayed, they have been abandoned, and in many cases they were lied to by prominent people whom they respected because of the offices they held and whom they believed would tell the truth, when that was not always the case. That is why the Members in this room, whom I genuinely believe care about their fishing communities regardless of which party they are in, must now clear up the mess that has been made by the Prime Minister and his botched Brexit deal. If we do not, fishing businesses will go under, and that is simply unforgivable.

I want to address a number of issues and to pick out others that have been raised by colleagues. The first is the plight of small boats. Throughout this debate, hon. Members have alluded to the extra difficulties for those people who work on our small boat fleet—the backbone of the British fishing fleet. In 2019, the Seafarers UK report, “Fishing Without a Safety Net”, found that many of those small businesses were struggling to afford the vital safety equipment that has been put in place. I very much enjoyed the Minister’s foreword to that report, which said:

“Small-scale fishing is a cornerstone of local coastal communities around our shores.”

She was right then and she is right now, but that is why I am so confused about why so much of the support provided by the Government throughout the covid period went to large fishing companies and not to the smaller fishing companies. So much potential help for those small businesses escaped them because of technicalities and because the people who sat on those boards did not value sufficiently those small boats and initiatives such as the brilliant Call4Fish, which came from Plymouth and helps provide those small boats with a domestic market. As we heard from the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland, those small businesses were subsequently penalised because of how those rules were drawn up. I do not think that that is right. The hon. Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) is right to say that the delays in bringing forward that money are unacceptable. The Minister and I will no doubt pick that up when we discuss the statutory instrument on MMO funding tomorrow morning. It is unacceptable that, eight months after we left the European Union, fishers have not been paid the money that was promised to them. Ministers need to sort that out pretty fast.

Ministers have been speedy to enforce on those small boats the catch app—a needless piece of home-grown, Conservative digital bureaucracy that is sinking many of those businesses. The catch app requires fishers to weigh their fish before they are landed, on scales that do not exist on small boats and that are not marinised. When those same fish are landed and get put through a grading machine, the same information is provided. We know that handling fish for extra time reduces their quality and price, yet the Government are forcing needless Conservative digital bureaucracy on fishers. It is simply nonsense, and I encourage the Minister to please look at that again.

I am also really concerned that much of the so-called windfall stock—the uplift in fish quota—does not exist. They are paper fish, deliberately enhanced and inflated in the stock assessments leading up to Brexit. We will not get them. I am not convinced that we are getting those extra fish; indeed, because of problems with quota swaps and with the science, many of our

fishers up and down the coast are now seeing reduced quota. It is not the sea of opportunity that they were promised.

The hon. Member for Waveney, who knows that I am a big fan of his, praised his REAF initiative, and I would also like to praise it. It is a great example of what happens when communities come together. There are similar examples around the country and he does a good job of promoting his.

I would like briefly to pick up on shellfish. We are facing the potential collapse of the shellfish industry because the Government failed to negotiate a proper export arrangement for our shellfish. Live bivalve molluscs are a really important part of the industry not just in the south-west and in Wales but right across our coast. It is simply not acceptable that they were excluded and that a solution has not been put in place. Simply blaming the EU was the tactic before we left the EU. We now need solutions, not blame. Simply reallocating class B waters does not make those waters any cleaner or any better. If anything, the Government are opening themselves up to legal risk by saying that these waters are no longer as dirty as they were. We need a proper solution to the issue of the export of live bivalve molluscs. If that does not happen, businesses in the south-west and around the country will go bust within months. That simply has to be addressed. I encourage the Minister to listen very carefully to Conservative, Labour and other party Members who represent coastal areas.

Anthony Mangnall: Will the hon. Member give way?

Luke Pollard: I will not at this time, I am afraid.

I had hoped to be able to raise a number of points. In the spirit of praising people when they get it right, I want to thank the supermarket Aldi for stocking British fish. They are mainly Plymouth-caught fish. Whenever we go down the meat aisle at a supermarket, we see flags aplenty—we see the heritage of where that meat comes from—but we do not see that down the fish aisle. Why is that? It is because we mainly export the fish we catch and import the fish we eat. At a time when the Government have made importing and exporting more complicated, more costly and more difficult, we need to buy and eat more of our own fish. Well done to Aldi for taking a punt on that. I encourage other supermarkets, which will no doubt have their monitoring alerts for this, to stop ignoring British fishers and to put British fish on their shelves.

The plight of the distant water fleet is often ignored. It is a sector of our economy that has been hugely betrayed. I pay tribute in particular to the Labour MPs in Hull, who have fought the case on behalf of our distant water fleet. Those fishers are a living, breathing example of the betrayal that has been perpetrated against them.

The Minister will know that Sir Charles, I and other Members of Parliament have an interest in the bluefin tuna catch-and-release trial, which will ensure that those wonderful, amazing fish are not simply caught and eaten when they are in our waters, but can be used to propel and support the recreational fishing industry. The announcement that the Minister was hoping to make about that is a few months overdue, so I would be grateful to her if she could touch on it.

[Luke Pollard]

We have not spoken much about non-quota species in the debate, but it is a really important area. Non-quota species are the financial foundation of our entire fishing sector, and the Government's deal allows EU fishing boats to take and exploit our non-quota species. They have failed to negotiate a real-time transfer of data, so we cannot even see to what extent they are doing it. That needs to be resolved urgently, to support our small boat fleets.

On a point that I hope everyone in the House will welcome, the Minister for Digital and Culture, the hon. Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinenage), made an announcement today that will be a real boost for Plymouth. The campaign to have Plymouth Sound designated as the UK's first national marine park—a campaign launched by a Labour MP, supported by the then Labour council, and now supported by a Conservative council—now has the support of the Government, with a £9.5 million boost that will support marine jobs and help bring our oceans and seas closer to people living on land. If we have learned anything from the debate, it is the fact that what happens at sea matters. We need more people to understand the fantastic array of marine life at sea, the importance and fragility of marine coastal habitats, and the importance of those jobs.

I want a proper debate on fisheries on the Floor of the House when we come back from the recess. I want to see proper, robust scrutiny ahead of any annual negotiations, which were mentioned by MPs on the Government side. Most of all, with an impending reshuffle and uncertainty about whether the Environment Secretary will still be in his place, I want the Prime Minister to apologise to fishers for the poor deal. I want him to take a personal interest in ensuring that those businesses do not go bust and in protecting the future of this industry. It is a brilliant industry and full of fantastic, innovative people. They deserve a proper plan to support their sector.

Sir Charles Walker (in the Chair): And we shall support Aldi. Victoria Prentis, can you leave two minutes for Mr Carmichael at the end?

10.42 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis): Of course, Sir Charles. It is always a pleasure to take part in a fisheries debate, and I thank the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) for organising it with our friends on the Backbench Business Committee. I thank all who have spoken today. If I may class them together, they are a group of colleagues with whom I deal very frequently on fisheries matters—I would include you in that as well, Sir Charles. It is always good to hear from colleagues, and my door is always open. We have had many bilateral and trilateral meetings over the last few months, and I encourage colleagues to continue to get in touch on behalf of their fishing industries.

I pay tribute to the fishing industry for its resilience, and to all who work in the seafood supply chain. I am reminded of that by my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid), who represents Peterhead and who is sitting in the Public Gallery. It has been a very difficult 18 months for the industry. The

pandemic forced the closure of hospitality both at home and abroad, which has led to an abrupt loss of our markets. As we have heard again and again, exporters have had to adapt to the new conditions that we were subject to as we left the single market. On recent visits to Brixham—my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) was kind enough to mention that—and Grimsby, I met many people, including the great Jim Portus, who were really impressive and dedicated to this industry. Their expertise and knowledge will allow us to manage our fisheries in a way that is flexible and sustainable, and that enables us, I hope, to take advantage of our new opportunities.

On the future of fisheries management, there is a great deal to do about the administration. The 2018 fisheries White Paper laid the foundations for devising our new fisheries management rules. The Fisheries Act 2020 provides the regulatory framework. The TCA recognises the UK's regulatory autonomy and that means that each of the four Administrations can reform fisheries management.

Fisheries management plans will allow better spatial management within a very complex marine environment, identifying where fishing can take place in an area while minimising environmental impact. We will start to develop our first fisheries management plans in England this year. We are also preparing a full list and timetable for the implementation of fisheries management plans in the joint fisheries statement that we plan to consult on in the autumn.

Quota was mentioned by many hon. Members, including the Chairman of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton. We have put in place a new method to apportion additional quota between the fisheries administrations. In England, we have allocated additional quota in 2021 based on a new method that gives the fleet segments of quota in the stocks that are important to them and also takes into account their capacity to fish that quota. My hon. Friend represents England very well, if I may say so—as do many hon. Members in this room and outside it—and he need have no fears on that front.

Quota swaps, which were also mentioned by many Members, are important. That is why the TCA provided for an in-year quota exchange mechanism, which will be established by the Specialised Committee on Fisheries. In the future, we expect quota exchanges just to be part of annual negotiations. I am very pleased to say that we have now agreed with the EU an interim basis for fishing quota transfers, before the specialised committee establishes a longer-term mechanism.

The details are still being worked out, but we expect an exchange of lists to take place next week on 20 July, when the UK and the EU co-chair the first meeting of the specialised committee. Lord Frost has assured me and others that the devolved authorities and Crown dependencies will be fully involved in the process, which obviously matters to them. I am pleased to say that we have now got to a point of real resolution on this issue, and I know that many people within the fishing industry are working up—PO to PO—the details of exchanges at the moment.

On control and enforcement, which was also raised by many Members, we have a 24/7, effective and intelligence-led enforcement system, which is co-ordinated by the Joint Maritime Security Centre. In English waters, we have really increased resource dedicated to fisheries

protection and we continue to work on this. We have made additional Government investment of £32 million in this space over the last three years. The MMO has doubled the number of marine enforcement officers since 2017, and it has two dedicated offshore patrol ships at sea and increased aerial surveillance. All this complements the existing electronic monitoring system. In terms of landings to inspect at sea, in the first six months of this year there were 228 inspections by the MMO at sea, of which 131 were on EU vessels.

The safety of the UK fleet remains our highest priority; the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland has raised safety with me repeatedly and rightly, and I am always very keen to hear from him on it. We continue to monitor the presence and activity of vessels across our waters. I am aware of recent reports raised by the right hon. Gentleman and others of UK vessels being subject to bullying behaviour. It is really important, and I have stressed this to the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) and others in the past, that any such incidents are reported in real time, whenever possible. It is true that there is an area where, if the threshold for criminal activity is reached, UK police require, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, the consent of the Home and Defence Secretaries and the flag state to take action. However, that does not preclude communications going straight to the vessel immediately, nor the gathering of evidence, which can be done by MMO officials, Marine Scotland officials or the police. That is why it is so important that these incidents are reported immediately.

That is a matter of great concern to both me and ministerial colleagues. I speak regularly about it to colleagues at the Department for Transport; we met at the end of last year to discuss it. We continue to work on a long-term solution. Last week was Naval and Maritime Security Week, which is a reminder that we need to continue to focus on this important issue. We work with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Seafish and the Fishing Industry Safety Group to lower the number of preventable accidents and deaths at sea.

I turn to funding. This year, the Government have spent £23 million on emergency compensation and £32 million on the replacement scheme for the European maritime and fisheries fund. We have also announced new funding, aligned with our reform of fisheries management.

The £100 million announced by the Prime Minister at the very end of last year will support investment to modernise and develop the seafood sector. It will focus on three pillars: infrastructure projects for the development and modernisation of ports, harbours and landing sites across the UK; the advancement and roll-out of science, innovation and technology across the catching and processing sectors; and projects that develop tailored training and qualifications. We will be hearing future announcements about that investment—probably starting with the science, innovation and technology strand, or pillar, of the £100 million—very shortly, certainly this summer. A large amount of money is involved and it is important that we get this right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes raises the issue of live bivalve molluscs with me several times a day. I am as angry as any colleague present that the EU changed its rules on the importation of our class B molluscs; I take that up with it at every opportunity and

will continue to do so. We are looking at a number of options to support the industry, including grant funding in England to facilitate business adaptation through the fisheries and seafood scheme. We are working on securing access to new markets, promoting domestic seafood consumption and reviewing the classification of shellfish harvesting areas while—of course—protecting public health.

Neil Parish: How quickly can the money be got to the shellfishing industry? That is really important because otherwise many will go out of business.

Victoria Prentis: The fund is already open and we are debating a statutory instrument tomorrow that will facilitate the spending of that fund. The money will in the longer term help people adapt their businesses to help with depuration or possibly canning, but it will not help everybody. One of the solutions that I have just outlined ought to be helpful to all our live bivalve mollusc industry. I continue to work closely with colleagues from around the country on this and to bring the matter up with the Commission whenever we have the opportunity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) made a powerful speech; he is keen, as ever, to support the inshore fleet. He is right that there is not a one-size-fits-all management approach, which simply would not work. We need to draw on local knowledge to make sure that our fisheries management plans are suitable going forward.

I would be delighted to meet the right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts). Access is a reserved issue; the Welsh Government had to consent to the licensing of EU vessels in Welsh waters. We are not concerned that all those vessels will go and fish in Welsh waters, but we are concerned, for example, about valuable non-quota stocks such as scallops. We are working closely with the scalloping industry on the protection of those stocks and with the Welsh Government on management measures. I will be happy to fill the right hon. Lady in on any point.

Sir Charles Walker (in the Chair): Minister, I am sorry but it is time.

Victoria Prentis: I am sorry too, Sir Charles. I was going to talk about digital solutions, on which we have all worked together, and about Norway and the Faroes. Finally, we have had an 11% uplift in domestic consumption this year. There is a bright future ahead.

10.54 am

Mr Carmichael: Thank you for chairing what has been an excellent debate, Sir Charles; we have covered just about every sector and geographic area possible. It is unfortunate that nobody from Cornwall made it on to the call list. That was one notable omission.

Essentially, we can pull two strands from this debate. The first is how very different things could have been if we had had the implementation period, for six months or so, to bed these arrangements in. We said we needed that, but we did not get it.

Secondly, as we have heard from the different examples around the country, the worst fisheries management has always been the most centralised. If the Minister takes nothing else from this debate, she must take back the

[Mr Carmichael]

need to engage with the industry, devolved Administrations and local communities as widely and effectively as possible.

When the Backbench Business Committee offered us 90 minutes on a Tuesday morning, they asked whether that would be good enough. I replied, "Consider your hands duly bitten off!" I hope that they will feel that we have made good use of the time this morning. I want to see this subject back in the Chamber with a longer debate because this is really just the tip of the iceberg.

Sir Charles Walker (in the Chair): Thank you, Mr Carmichael. You and other colleagues have used the time extremely well; perhaps you could have done with a little more.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered fisheries management after the UK's departure from the EU.

10.55 am

Sitting suspended.

Aquind Interconnector

11 am

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the proposed Aquind interconnector project.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Charles. I am pleased to have secured a debate on this crucial issue, which is of great importance to residents across my city of Portsmouth, as well as many other areas impacted by the Aquind interconnector project or concerned by its relationships with Government.

Since becoming the Member of Parliament for Portsmouth South, I have consistently represented the opposition of local people to this development, deemed a national infrastructure project. Many of my constituents have told me that they have been ignored by the developer and felt shut out of the planning process and, as Government get closer to making their decisions, they do not feel listened to by Ministers. That is why, in the limited time available, I wish to put on the record, first, my constituents' concerns about the impact that the development would have on Portsmouth, its surrounding communities and its precious natural environment; and secondly, the concerns over the company's relationship with a string of Government Ministers, some of whom are directly responsible for making decisions about whether the scheme goes ahead.

Whatever the alleged merits of the scheme may be, to ignore the overwhelmingly negative impact that it would have on Portsmouth residents, its businesses and the environment would be a dereliction of duty. I have heard from hundreds of constituents via my own survey work, through day-to-day correspondence or as a result of my engagement, alongside council planners, the local authority and community campaigners, to oppose these plans for Portsmouth and the surrounding area every step of the way. I have also summarised our concerns in submitting formal evidence to the examining authority and in raising key issues in written and oral questions in the House. I have written separately to successive Secretaries of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, on several occasions, with the views of my constituents. More recently, I launched a public petition, alongside Portsmouth's local Stop Aquind campaign, to ensure that they are given a direct voice to share their objection to this disastrous project. Today I want to reiterate residents' concerns, as well as those of other interested bodies in my city, such as the local authority, the university and Portsmouth's small businesses.

The construction of the proposed interconnector would take up to seven years and would cause untold damage and disruption to people in Portsmouth, businesses and our local environment. The proposed corridor where trenching is due to take place threatens to disrupt key elements of transport infrastructure, including highways that act as vital arteries to our city. The city council believes that there will be significant disruption to residents, ranging from noise at antisocial hours to dust and loss of natural light, in a wide-ranging area from Farlington Avenue, in the north of the city, to Fort Cumberland Road, in my constituency.

That belief has certainly been reinforced by constituents whom I have spoken to. One constituent has told me:

"If this goes ahead then I'm in danger of not being able to drive out of the road I live in to commute to work. Why should I suffer"

this impact on

"my livelihood for something that most probably would never benefit my family or our community?"

Another said:

"How can I look at my daughter and the future generation and say we did nothing and allowed business to come before saving our precious green spaces and protecting our ocean environment?"

I have example after example of constituents raising these points. I will happily share these with the Minister following the debate.

The congestion and disruption will inevitably have a detrimental impact on local traders, who have already endured 18 months of lost revenue and unprecedented uncertainty. I know that Aquind will also cause long-term disruption to Portsmouth's valued open spaces, with the unmitigated loss of recreational space at Milton common and Farlington playing fields. A season or more of play could also be lost at Farlington, Baffins and the University of Portsmouth, with few alternatives in the meantime. In addition to the air pollution created by construction, there is a risk to our city's precious wildlife at Milton common. I have raised before, during the planning process, the threat that the development poses to the Eastney and Milton allotments, which have been a lifeline for those who tend them, particularly during the pandemic. As it stands, the planning applicant has been unable to demonstrate to the people of Portsmouth any positive benefit that the project would bring to the city.

Throughout the process, there have been concerns about the transparency of the applicant and its apparent inability to disclose the information necessary to fully assess the impact of the proposed development. I am aware that changes have been made to the proposed route, but I remain concerned that more could be done to engage with those impacted by the construction and to avoid the worst of its effects.

Constituents also continue to be troubled by reports of the applicant's previous donations to the Conservative party, and by the project company's financial and domiciliary arrangements. In August 2020, *The Times* named Russian oligarch Viktor Fedotov as the ultimate owner of Aquind, but until then he had been able to remain anonymous by using a rare exemption in corporate transparency rules. The exemption can be made only if the individual successfully argues that their security is at risk. Yet sources told *The Times* that security and law enforcement agencies have no concerns that Mr Fedotov is at risk. If that is the case, why is Mr Fedotov so keen to hide his identity and his ownership of Aquind? Does that not concern the Minister? Will he set out what due diligence has been done on the project company and its directors?

The project's financing is also unclear. Aquind's annual accounts confirm that funding for the project is coming from loans from OGN Enterprises Ltd, which is based in the British Virgin Islands. Very little is known about that company, other than that it is linked to Offshore Group Newcastle, a previous venture of one of Aquind's senior leaders, Mr Temerko, and that it collapsed into administration. We do not know where this money is coming from, who is providing it, or whether there is a complex financial structure behind the company in other secrecy jurisdictions.

Elements of the project give rise to further security concerns. Aquind plans to lay one of the largest data pipes in Europe alongside the electricity interconnector. It will hold 180 fibre-optic pairs, many of which will be available for hire by third-party clients, which could include telecoms companies, technology firms and banks. That raises similar concerns to those about the UK's 5G network and Huawei.

In the light of the significant contribution that the project is expected to make to our national infrastructure, why have the company's structure and finances been allowed to avoid rigorous scrutiny? Perhaps it is because Aquind has mounted a shady campaign to lobby successive Conservative Ministers behind closed doors, backed by heaps of cash. *The Times* reports that since 2012 the Conservative party has been given £1.6 million by Temerko or companies that he has directed, and £55,000 by Aquind since last August. That includes direct donations to a string of Tory Ministers. Just last week, the Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan), recused herself from speaking on the matter during BEIS questions because the Northumberland Conservatives had received funding from one of the company's directors.

The Times has also uncovered a string of letters and meetings between an Aquind director—a Soviet-era oligarch—and Ministers past and present in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The right hon. Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma) also recused himself from handling the issue when he was Secretary of State after it was revealed that he, too, had received a donation and had shared a table with the same Russian-born businessman at the Tory black and white ball fundraiser.

In addition, letters obtained through a freedom of information request have revealed that the current Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng), stated the Government's ongoing support for the controversial project and agreed to lobby French officials to support it on their side of the channel. He has even taken to signing off his letters with affectionate handwritten notes. One October 2019 letter said:

"Excellent to see you at conference this year!"

All that makes a total mockery of the Planning Inspectorate's independent examination and reinforces the points that the Labour party has made about this Government's developer's charter, which rides roughshod over local communities and prevents them having their say about developments in their area.

Despite the Government's unashamed downplaying of the revelations, it is the Business Secretary who will make the final decision to give the project the green light. Any suggestion that the right hon. Gentleman is able to make an impartial decision about the project is now a total fantasy. Any decision that he does make will be tainted by accusations of cronyism. Given the significance of the project to the city of Portsmouth and the country at large, we should not have to drag the truth out of Ministers kicking and screaming. As one constituent put it:

"To proceed with this project in the face of overwhelming opposition would send a message that the interests of your rich Russian donors matter more than the people of Portsmouth and local democracy"

On behalf of residents across Portsmouth, I want to place on the record our fundamental objection to the project. I want to make it crystal clear to the Secretary

[Stephen Morgan]

of State and the Minister today that the project must be rejected. In the meantime, I wish to ask the Minister some questions. Will he commit to immediately publishing all correspondence with Aquind? Will his Department conduct a further independent review of this deeply controversial project to drag the truth into public view? Beneath the cosy relationships that Ministers have with their billionaire donors are choices that affect the day-to-day lives of people in Portsmouth. They deserve total transparency from the Government and a real say in decisions about the project.

11.11 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Charles. I congratulate the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan) on securing this important debate.

Great Britain currently has 6 GW of electricity interconnection with Belgium, the Netherlands, France and the island of Ireland, supporting our security of supply, keeping consumer prices low and supporting our decarbonisation goal of net zero emissions by 2050. Interconnectors widen the energy markets and thus make them more efficient, transporting electricity from where it is cheaper to higher-priced regions. That predominantly leads to imports of cheaper electricity to Great Britain, delivering benefits to consumers, but in future it will allow us to export renewable energy to the rest of continental Europe.

Interconnectors also act as a source of flexibility, helping the system rapidly respond to changes in demand and supply, which is crucial when helping integrate intermittent renewable energy sources, and reducing curtailment, thus supporting decarbonisation. A study commissioned by the Department, and published alongside the energy White Paper, illustrates the decarbonisation that could be facilitated in Great Britain and the European Union by an increased level of interconnection to 2050. Interconnectors can contribute to security of supply by providing access to a wider pool of generation. They can also currently participate in the capacity market and can be available at times of system distress. They provide additional options to system operators, helping ensure system stability and security.

The Secretary of State has three months to take his decision on receipt of the Planning Inspectorate's report, meaning that he has to make his decision on the Aquind interconnector on or before 8 September 2021. That decision will be taken in line with Government propriety guidance. Given the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial role in determining the application, I cannot comment on specific matters regarding the proposal as that could be seen as prejudicing the decision-making process, but I can say something about the planning process for nationally significant infrastructure projects.

I want to make it clear that the system absolutely recognises how important the views of local people are. Indeed, the hon. Member for Portsmouth South talked about the potential adverse impacts on local communities. Clearly, that would be given appropriate consideration in the planning process, and therefore also in the Secretary

of State's decision-making process. When the developer makes an application to the Planning Inspectorate, the developer has to demonstrate that it has complied with all of its consultation requirements and that it has regard to consultation responses that it has received. At the pre-application stage, the developer has to prepare that consultation strategy and must carry out a pre-application consultation with the local community, in accordance with that strategy.

The developer has to explain how the application was informed and influenced by those responses, outlining any changes that were made as a result, and provide an explanation as to why responses advising on major changes to the project were not followed out. The Planning Inspectorate will also ask relevant local authorities whether the consultation was adequate. The Planning Inspectorate will consider the local authorities' view on the consultation before deciding whether to accept the application for examination.

The application consultation with local communities cannot be taken lightly by developers. If the application is accepted for examination, an examining authority is appointed to examine it. People with an interest in the project can then register as interested parties and will have an opportunity to make written representations on the project. There may also be open-floor hearings, as well as hearings on specific issues, where interested parties can make formal submissions to the examining agent. I understand that during the Aquind examination there were two open-floor hearings, as well as issue-specific hearings on matters including traffic, air quality and the environment.

After that examination closes, the examining authority will write a report to the Secretary of State, containing its recommendations for the project. In the case of Aquind, the Secretary of State received the examining authority's report on 8 June. As I have said, the Secretary of State then has three months to decide whether to grant or refuse development consent. For Aquind, the Secretary of State has until 8 September to make a decision. That decision must be based solely on the planning merits of the proposal.

Although it is not possible to comment on specific projects in the planning process, the Government are supportive of interconnection generally, as a core part of our energy strategy, due to its benefits in helping to provide an electricity supply that progresses towards our net zero decarbonisation goals in a low-cost and secure way. In last year's energy White Paper, we committed to work with Ofgem, developers and our European partners to realise at least 18 GW of interconnector capacity by 2030, which is triple the current capacity.

In conclusion, I can assure the hon. Gentleman and the residents of the proposed area that the Secretary of State will take into account both sides of the proposal. He will base his decision on the work of the Planning Inspectorate and the quasi-judicial process that he has in front of him, rather than any of the accusations that have been thrown at him to influence his decision either way.

Question put and agreed to.

11.17 am

Sitting suspended.

Oxford-Cambridge Arc

[SIR EDWARD LEIGH *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

This is a subject of the most profound importance to the whole of Buckinghamshire, so I am grateful for the opportunity to lead the debate. I convey apologies from my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith), who is of course on paternity leave. I am sure we all wish to congratulate him on the birth of a child. This is, however, a matter of great importance to his constituents and he has given me a statement, which I hope to get to later. Likewise, I have apologies from my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Rob Butler), who is applying his considerable expertise to justice matters in the relevant Select Committee. I also have a statement from him.

I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey) in her place, and I look forward to hearing from her later. For the record, although my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), as a Minister, cannot speak, he is present, because the matter is of close interest to his constituents. We should be in no doubt that the Milton Keynes arc—I have renamed it for him already; I mean the Oxford-Cambridge arc—could transform Buckinghamshire and the other counties that it touches. The principles at stake are of importance to the whole nation.

To give some background, in 2017 the National Infrastructure Commission launched “Partnering for Prosperity: A new deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc”. Although the report initially focused on economic development, its focus was moved so that it referred to 1 million new houses as a key enabler for a new geography known as the arc. That would, of course, be a profound quantity of houses to put in that area.

There has never been satisfactory clarification of the requirement for 1 million houses mentioned in the report, or any further details about potential housing targets. I am told by my county council that the housing numbers that the Government linked to the arc have not been informed by local discussion or input, and that has contributed to local concerns about a lack of autonomy and local determination. In addition, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government commissioned AECOM to produce work to show where land was unconstrained and new settlements could be built across the geography. That work, again, did not seek local input from councillors or MPs, and it has not been formally shared or published.

The National Infrastructure Commission report shifted the emphasis on regional collaboration away from an economic driver to introduce housing as the focus; that is the real sense in Buckinghamshire Council. It crossed over the work that was already under way from England’s Economic Heartland, a collaborative strategic regional body focused on connectivity and economic growth, although the NIC arc covers a slightly different geography that is narrower than the area considered by EEH, which also includes Swindon and Hertfordshire. The key

concern, however, and the thing to which I draw attention, is the prospect of 1 million houses coming into our counties.

I turn to engagement with local authorities. An arc leaders group was established in about 2017 as a coalition of the willing, although it went on to endorse joint declarations with Government that were signed by its chairman and announced without discussion with its membership. In the spring of 2020, changes to the governance of the leaders group were announced, shifting decision making to a majority-rule approach and away from the unanimous consensus under which the group had been established. That puts Buckinghamshire at a significant disadvantage. As a unitary, it has just one vote among 25 other local authority votes across the area. Oxfordshire, as a county council with five district or city councils, would have six votes.

Alongside those challenges in governance, the leaders group, without the endorsement of all the relevant local authorities, pushed through a measure to develop a regional spatial strategy, which is now frequently referred to as a spatial framework. Although that framework was set out as non-statutory, it has been made clear that Government intend to publish it and that in local planning decisions, similar weight is to be attributed to it as to the national planning policy framework. The arc spatial strategy would be a material consideration in the development and examination of local plans, and that raises concerns that it could be used as a vehicle to dictate housing growth in a way that undermines local decision making.

Of course, the initial attraction of all that was the prospect of central Government investment in infrastructure—that is needed in our area, as it is in so many places—but there are significant concerns. In August 2020, Buckinghamshire informed the Government that it could not continue to be part of the arc. This withdrawal was supported by and followed by the Buckinghamshire local enterprise partnership and the Buckinghamshire universities. Buckinghamshire has instead pursued a policy of developing its own more focused and ambitious recovery and growth proposal, which builds on the place-based approach, with the coterminosity of the council with its LEP, the business representative organisation Bucks Business First, the NHS clinical commissioning group, the hospital trust, and the voluntary and community sector. The point is that we have a county and it works—including Milton Keynes, at times—and we are very proud that it does so.

I will go through four of the key concerns before I turn to statements from my hon. Friends the Members for Aylesbury and for Buckingham. First, the political case for the arc has not been made. The initiative to establish the arc was not agreed locally; it has always been driven from the top down and there is significant local opposition, not just from Buckinghamshire communities but from community groups throughout the arc. Democratically, communities across the arc have made their views known in recent elections. In some cases, I am sorry to say, where candidates have run on an anti-arc platform, local authorities have flipped from the Conservatives to the Liberal Democrats, including several authorities in Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire, and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Does my hon. Friend accept that the Liberal Democrats are up to their necks in the arc? They have people on standing committees, they have England's Economic Heartland and they have the control of this process, and they have nothing more to offer than anyone else.

Mr Baker: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. Although he tempts me to elaborate on the points he makes, I hope that he will forgive me if I do not especially attack the Liberal Democrats in the absence of anyone to reply on their behalf—but I note their absence from this debate. Two months ago, communities in Chesham and Amersham notably sent this message in a startling by-election result. The point is that the Government are taking a top-down approach in imposing the arc, and they seem to be doing so without the effective engagement of the people in the area. Those people are pushing back, and quite right, too. I recall that in 2010, when some of us were elected and the Conservatives came to power, we abolished regional government. This is perhaps a point I will return to: having abolished regional government, we now seem to be, in a sense, reinstituting it through the arc.

Secondly, there are profound issues with local democratic accountability. Our council could find other local authorities and partners taking important planning decisions that are of the most acute interest to our residents, and imposing them on Buckinghamshire. Those decisions have the potential to be significant, generational and, crucially, permanent ones, such as on the suggested new settlements in Bucks, on the imposition of local development corporations and on the imposition of major new and unwanted infrastructure, such as the recently withdrawn expressway. That is the second key point—local accountability.

Thirdly, there are top-down housing targets. I have perhaps said enough about the idea of 1 million houses, but it seems to us that there is now pressure for overflow from London. What is to become of our area and our beautiful region? My constituency consists of areas of outstanding natural beauty where it is not built on, plus the airfield. These are beautiful parts of our country. Enormous amounts of housing being put in there as overflow from London will cause major protests from the public, and quite right, too.

Fourthly, the spatial strategy for the arc appears to sit above local plans developed by the local planning authority. The interrelationship of the spatial frameworks with existing planning responsibilities is unclear, but it appears to insert this additional and more regional layer of government over what local authorities are doing. Framework proposals would need to be incorporated into new local plans or the plans could risk being found to be unsound, which would have real meaning for the ability to carry forward plans that met with democratic consent.

Those are my four key points. Colleagues have said to me in passing—perhaps some will say this in detail today—that there is a real problem of co-ordination. Before I come on to my colleagues' statements, I say in passing that of course there is a problem with co-ordination. With great respect to the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), whom I will call my hon. Friend as he is sitting on my side of the House today, whenever big Government choose to plan society and the economy and to impose

conditions and development top down, there is always a co-ordination problem. That is why some of us believe in the spontaneous order of the market, but that is not the fundamental point of today's debate.

I want to put on record a statement from my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham, who says:

"Buckingham is well-placed to benefit from the Arc's potential. But we, like our neighbours, must first address the rapidly deteriorating state of our local infrastructure. We have been hit hard by the construction of HS2 and multiple housing developments. Central government must realise and compensate for the damage that HS2 and other high-volume construction projects are causing.

The success of the arc locally depends on the delivery of ongoing local infrastructure projects—above all the Aylesbury Spur of East West Rail. With continuing uncertainty surrounding the spur's implementation, my constituents and local businesses are growing increasingly anxious. A fast and efficient connection to both the county town"—

I should just add that I have always felt that High Wycombe was the county town, but I am advised otherwise—

"and beyond, is pivotal for realising the economic growth inherent in the Arc's strategy. The Aylesbury Spur of East West Rail must therefore be built.

It must also be said that we have taken our fair share of housing. Housebuilding targets must be spread fairly and must take into account the tremendous amount of available brownfield land."

That is the statement from my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham. My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury has asked me to say:

"Buckinghamshire has withdrawn from the Oxford Cambridge arc and has presented to MHCLG an ambitious recovery deal based on local devolution, which I wholeheartedly support. The council in conjunction with the Bucks LEP believe this deal will achieve the benefits of the arc but with local decision making remaining in local hands.

The proposed spatial framework has caused considerable concern in Aylesbury for an area already saturated with strategic infrastructure projects and housing development. By retaining decision making in Buckinghamshire, the recovery deal would represent the strategic aims of MHCLG and ensure local democracy."

Saving the contribution that my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield will make in a moment, I come on to our ask as Buckinghamshire MPs and for the council. We are not anti-growth; of course we accept that housing growth will continue at already high rates, and I particularly want sympathetic development for people in my area who desperately need a home to own. However, it must have local consent, and the targets must be determined and led locally.

In conjunction with our partners, we have already put forward an ambitious recovery and growth proposal to the Government, as I have mentioned. We urge the Government to work with Buckinghamshire Council to progress this bottom-up, democratically driven approach to creating jobs and economic growth, rather than the top-down targets imposed within the structure of the arc and its strategic spatial strategy.

I conclude by saying how much I look forward to this debate, which is overwhelmingly among hon. Friends. I hope my right hon. Friend the Minister will not mind me saying that I look at the matter with a spirit of some disappointment. He and I were elected to this place in 2010 enthusiastically looking to reform the planning system and to abolish regional government, so I hope he will not mind me pointing out that we now seem to be reinstituting it by other means. I do not think this is going to meet local concerns at all.

As somebody who represents a constituency adjacent to Chesham and Amersham, I really do think this is a moment to think again; to respect the rights of property holders in our area and the needs of those who would like to buy a house; and to make sure that people have incentives to say yes to development, but also the opportunity to say no. I look forward to a think-tank paper, which I hope I have catalysed, which will set out those ideas in more detail, and I hope in due course my right hon. Friend will feel able to look at it.

2.44 pm

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) for securing this debate, which is very appropriate for not only those from our county, but those from adjacent counties as well. I pay special tribute to the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), who is here to show solidarity and concern for his local residents. He is an MP, and our only Minister, who continues to put the needs of his residents first. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Rob Butler) and my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith) for their contributions.

May I start by inviting the Minister for Housing, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher), to take a special trip to south Buckinghamshire? There is no better way to understand the complexities of what we are discussing in this debate than to visit and see at first hand what things are like in places such as Denham, Iver, Beaconsfield, Gerrards Cross and Marlow. We would love to have the Minister, and I think he might enjoy the trip.

In addition to what my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe has already alluded to, I would like to speak about the Oxford-Cambridge arc, the spatial framework and what appears to be a top-down housing target. Housing numbers are clearly the primary objective for establishing the arc and a token account is paid, through various vision documents, to innovation, environmental improvements or other place-based factors. However, it is unclear why the arc would be a key enabler for these in preference to working on a cross-boundary basis with existing strategic authorities, as initiated by England's Economic Heartland.

I mention England's Economic Heartland because Bucks, and particularly south Bucks, has the highest level of entrepreneurs, small business owners and self-employed people in the whole country. We are an economic powerhouse, and we will be so particularly after covid and the covid recovery. We are very focused on economic growth, job creation and vital infrastructure in Bucks. The housing will follow that, but we need to get the fundamentals right.

Local communities fear—as do I, as the local MP—that when that is combined with the changes to planning regulation, proposed planning regulation or the use of the old housing need algorithm, we will not be able to cope with the housing numbers that are placed on us. That is true of places across my constituency, but Bourne End and other towns have already seen the effects of over-development where all strategic green space and common land have already been given over to developers.

The spatial framework is something that I object to. With the existing planning responsibilities, it is unclear, as it appears to insert an additional layer of Government direction on housing and potential economic development. The framework proposals would need to be incorporated into new local plans, or the plans would risk being found unsound. Without a democratic mandate and with the possibility of facing strong opposition from local groups and planning authorities, it is unclear how these proposals would move forward. We do not have the strategic oversight of the London plan or a mayoral structure that has devolved power, so who would be accountable for this democratically unelected right to impose on us?

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): My hon. Friend has put her finger right on the heart of it. In other areas where they have these grand regional plans, there is a regional identity and a democratic personification of that in a regional Mayor. We do not have that in the Ox-Cam arc, do we?

Joy Morrissey: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Although I am not advocating any more devolved power, if people in London and the west midlands do not like the strategic framework, they can at least vote the Mayor out. That is not the case here, and we have some of the most economically valuable land in the country. Covid has only shown how valuable and desirable our part of the country is to live in. People want to move from London to south Bucks. My fear is that the housing numbers and the algorithm set will just meet the housing demands of London rather than meeting the needs of local residents, who are desperate for more infrastructure, GP surgeries, better roads, better wi-fi connectivity and the basic amenities already afforded to London residents. Again, I would welcome the Minister visiting and touring south Bucks to see the unique perspective and challenges that we face.

I ask the Minister and the Government to support the alternative Buckinghamshire approach. Buckinghamshire and its council are not anti-growth. It is accepted that housing growth will continue at already high rates. However, those targets should be determined at local level. Bucks, in co-operation with its LEP, Buckinghamshire Business First, and health partners already put forward to Government an ambitious recovery and growth proposal. Discussions on that have commenced.

We urge the Government to work with Buckinghamshire Council to progress this bottom-up, democratically driven approach, to accelerate jobs, infrastructure and economic growth, rather than follow top-down and imposed targets within the structure of the arc or strategic framework, without democratic accountability. We have seen examples of how well we can work together, because every single week those partners were working and talking together during covid, to deliver the covid response effectively for Bucks residents. I believe we can move forward with an economic recovery plan for Bucks and Milton Keynes.

I have a few questions for the Minister, based on concerns residents have continually raised with me, about housing numbers and demands. The concern from residents across south Buckinghamshire is that more people from London will come to Beaconsfield, Marlow and Gerrards Cross, and the vital housing of bungalow-style, single-storey homes for older residents or the children of Bucks

[Joy Morrissey]

residents who are desperate to get on the housing ladder, will not be provided. If a percentage of housing were allocated only to Bucks residents, that would go a long way in securing more local support on the ground.

Do the millions of homes mentioned as part of the arc factor into the existing extremely high housing numbers already proposed in Buckinghamshire, or will they be additional numbers imposed on us at some point? How up to date are the data that inform the supposed need for the arc in the first place, given that covid and Brexit have changed the numbers and demands for inner London, outer London and surrounding green-belt areas? Is the demand still the same as it was before?

With yet more pressure being put on Buckinghamshire, we require more protection for our green spaces, which have been left, unlike in London, without the expected levels of protection. My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe has AONB land, as has the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sarah Green). I have nothing, apart from Burnham Beeches, which is run by the City of London. I do not have a lot of common land that is protected. We do not have metropolitan open land, because that is an inner green belt protection.

There are basic statutory protections for existing green space that we do not have in my constituency. Most of our green-belt land is agricultural green-belt land, which is owned by independent farmers or the council. That is problematic for development because it can be sold off piecemeal, and whole areas of biodiversity and vital areas of green infrastructure will be lost for ever, because there is not strategic oversight or protection put in place on that land.

Many other members of the arc have that protection, but south Buckinghamshire does not. As the local Member of Parliament, I want to fight to ensure that existing green spaces, biodiversity and protection for the lungs of London are in place for future generations. The relentless expansion of development into the lungs of London will have a dire consequence, not only for Buckinghamshire but anyone in outer London who values decent air quality, lower carbon emissions and a better quality of life.

Mr Steve Baker: My hon. Friend reminds me of a discussion we had about the way that housing is built. Will she agree that it is really important that, when housing goes in, sufficient green space exists through developments, so that people can still feel that they are getting the benefits of the environment and an environmental amenity, even in the places right where they live?

Joy Morrissey: I thank my hon. Friend for that excellent point. I thank the Minister and Government for initiating new nature reserves and the rewilding of areas such as Buckinghamshire, where we need to preserve green space, while adding strategic housing development. I welcome those excellent proposals and I am looking forward to working with the Minister on how we can take them forward in the county.

I would like to see a focus, particularly in Buckinghamshire, on biodiversity and on protecting the wild spaces, waterways, ancient woodlands, marshlands and meadows of south Buckinghamshire. The economic,

ecological and environmental vandalism of proposals, done piecemeal, by predatory development, forgets the key and most beautiful part of living in south Bucks—the green space, the rolling hills and the quality of life that residents choose to have. Perhaps it is further from London and a longer commute, but residents are paying the price because they want to have that green space. I cannot express the value that every resident in Buckinghamshire places on that green space. They will fight to the death to maintain it and save it, not only for their community but for future communities. I as their MP will do the same.

I hope that the Minister will continue to look at alternative ways of incorporating new innovation that the Government is proposing for environmental biodiversity. First, the Government could perhaps include the Colne Valley Regional Park and Burnham Beeches in an expanded AONB or a national park, or they could find another way of providing additional protection when more housing demands are being put into the local area. If those things can be done in tandem with a locally led approach that values the opinions of residents in the county, we can move forward in a positive way, meeting the demand for housing but also preserving our green belt and green space and to build the infrastructure that we vitally need for the future.

2.56 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) for introducing the debate. It might be understood from his opening remarks that Buckinghamshire is the only place that is affected by and concerned about the arc, but that is not true. Oxfordshire is just as affected by it and just as concerned about it.

I want to start off with the example of the Oxford to Cambridge expressway, which was an essential part of the arc. That major infrastructure project was handled in the most abysmal way that I have ever seen. From the very beginning, nobody was consulted about it. In my own area, which had a large part of it, I was the first person to bring consultation on the arc to the parish councils in my area: I invited my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) to come with me and address them all at a meeting. By that stage, it was already too late. People had already formed their opinions on the expressway, based on misconceptions and information that came from nowhere. Most of that was wrong, as my hon. Friend was able to point out, but by that stage it was too late.

The other thing that I particularly stress about the expressway shows what could happen with the arc: from one end of the expressway to the other, from the Cambridge end to the Oxford end, there was an enormous difference. At the Cambridge end, most people accepted the need for an expressway to carry the traffic. From Milton Keynes to Oxford, there was no acceptance; there was a completely different attitude. Not once did I hear the Department for Transport, which was responsible for it, making sure that that distinction was well understood. If we are not careful with the arc, unless we go out of our way to make sure that we do things in a different way, we will end up facing similar problems. There is no doubt that road traffic is an issue that needs to be addressed.

With the expressway, we had the ridiculous situation that the whole project was initially paused. That created enormous problems for me electorally. What is the difference between pausing something and abolishing it? It did not make any sense. People were saying that they did not believe it had just been paused; they thought it was just temporary, to take the election into account. It was very difficult to overcome those objections at the time.

The expressway has now been cancelled and the explanation given by Highways England is that it needed the information in order to be able to look at other projects in the area. Why could it not have said that at the very beginning? Why could the whole of the project not have been dealt with in a different way?

I turn to some of the points that have been made about the arc. What is the arc? In the Government's paper on the arc, it notes that the body that is being put together to try to push it through is made up of three county councils, 17 district councils, six unitary authorities and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. That is before we take into account any involvement of different Government Departments. The Minister is an excellent Minister, but he cannot handle all Government Departments at the same time. There needs to be involvement from other Government Departments to make sure that the project works, but that means that the body becomes overwhelmingly large and very difficult to control, which goes completely against the project with which I was involved when I first joined the House—our localism agenda. I still think that localism and involving local communities in the development of projects is a good place to start.

I have been critical of the arc project, but I see the potential in joining up 10 universities or colleges along the route of the arc. I see the potential in joining up things such as Harwell in Oxfordshire with the equivalent in Cambridge and I see the enormous benefit in trying to line up the fusion project in my constituency at Culham, to hopefully provide the energy and critical science that comes from that across the whole of the arc, but I go back to what I said about the expressway—there is no common identity across the whole arc on which a common strategy can be based, which makes it very difficult.

On the 1 million houses, it would be nice to hear from the Minister how that number is made up. At the time the plan was put forward, I tried to analyse where those 1 million houses were going to come from. Some—in fact, the vast majority—are already in local plans; it is not a million new houses that are being imposed on the area, but a million houses in total, some of which are already there and about to go for planning permission. How is the number made up? What additional housing is left and how will that be dealt with?

I do not take the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe that most of the housing is directed towards London. There is a very good aim in trying to make sure that most of the housing picks up local development and local growth. The risk is that it will become so attractive to people from London that it will be very difficult to keep that aim going.

I want to ask a little more on the spatial framework. How is it going to work? What rights will local people have to be able to assess the projects that are being put forward? What criteria will they use to judge them?

Who will make the decisions about planning issues and what sort of consultation will they have? Without those things, we will have lost a huge element of our localism agenda, which, for me, would be a great loss. I have put a lot of effort into that agenda over however many years have passed—it is a long time—since I first started, so it would be nice to know whether we are keeping some of it and can use it as the basis to make something happen going forward.

To conclude, I see potential in establishing a brilliant arc of science and engineering across that part of the UK, but we need a properly balanced assessment of what that will involve and of the losses that will come out of it for people. As my hon. Friends have already mentioned, these are some of the most sensitive and beautiful landscapes in the country. Think of how Buckinghamshire rolls into Oxfordshire: it is a seamless entity of nothing but beauty. We trash that at the risk of our future as a Government in this country.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): We now go to the leafy glades of Northamptonshire to hear from Andrew Lewer.

3.6 pm

Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con) [V]: Thank you, Sir Edward. I thank my good and hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) for proposing this timely and important debate on an issue that will have significant implications for Northampton, the town that I represent.

Northampton, and indeed Northamptonshire, are a key part of the Oxford-Cambridge arc. Although Northampton may not have the international kudos of Oxford or Cambridge, let alone High Wycombe, it is none the less a vital component of this overall ambitious investment plan.

The Oxford-Cambridge investment arc has, at least, the potential to boost recovering growth in my constituency. Covid-19 has underlined the UK's position as a global leader in the life science industry, and the Ox-Cam arc could be the investment accelerator that will help to create the infrastructure to prevent it from being strangled by its own success. Northampton is the home of Francis Crick, the co-discoverer of DNA. It is within a 75-minute drive of the great universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and Cranfield, which I was privileged to visit just last week to meet the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership, another critical piece of the structural jigsaw.

Northampton is a prime location, at the hub of the British strategic supply-chain network, for life-science and engineering businesses. The arc programme provides an opportunity to further realise that and, critically, to address the levelling-up agenda that the Government are championing. Northampton has a rich industrial heritage with great past glories—of which, incidentally, shoes and footwear were just part—and we must now focus our attention on the future of the industries that we do so well here, such as life sciences and high-performance technology. We do not just want the houses therefore; we want the business and the infrastructure from the programme as well.

The all-party parliamentary group on devolution, which I chair, recently produced an inquiry report on levelling up and devolution. Although all that I have heard about the Ox-Cam arc programme—including

[Andrew Lewer]

from my right hon. Friend the Minister—marks it out as ambitious and far reaching, it can also be complex and difficult to navigate, with its plethora of overlapping decision-making bodies—councils, LEPs, the central area growth board and the arc. How, where and with what legitimacy the programme's decisions are made will be critical to its success. I say that with particular feeling as the first elections for the new unitary authority of West Northamptonshire, under the leadership of Councillor Jonathan Nunn, have just taken place. In our APPG's report, we concluded that the UK is:

“one of the most fiscally centralised countries in the world and we should look to learn lessons from our international partners, many of whom are governed successfully with a more decentralised model. The UK also has one of the most regionally unequal economies in the world. Greater devolution of responsibility for local economic growth has long been necessary, but it is now extremely urgent.”

There is an opportunity, therefore, to use the Ox-Cam arc not only to recalibrate our economic fortunes but to rewire and improve the way that we make those decisions. To me, that means powers from Whitehall and those formerly held at Brussels—as my years on the European Committee of the Regions followed by years on the Committee on Regional Development of the European Parliament as an MEP have informed me—coming down closer to the people of the area. If that is what this means, then it is generally welcome. However, if it also means powers taken away from local government upwards and outwards to new regional structures—again, informed by my past as a county council leader, regional assembly member and a founding director of a local enterprise partnership—I would be much less happy about that.

The formal consultation on the Ox-Cam arc is about to begin. Details of the levelling-up agenda are about to emerge, into which the promised devolution Bill has either been folded or—let us hope not—buried. So my challenge to Government is to bite the bullet and transfer some of those distant Whitehall decision-making powers into the hands of local leaders, and that way unleash the potential of the Ox-Cam arc into something far more wide-reaching that will truly power the pistons of the levelling-up and devolution agendas in our country.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): I call Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi. Sorry, I call Richard Fuller. I apologise. How could I miss you out?

3.11 pm

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): Very easily, Sir Edward. It is a pleasure to have a chance to contribute, and to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) on securing the debate. If I may, I shall start with one of the points that he raised. Coming in as a Member of Parliament in 2010, we thought we were burying regional development agencies in the east of England, one of which was the East of England Development Agency. However, if one looks to the origins of the Oxford-Cambridge arc idea, essentially it is a regional development corporation idea: it stems from 2003, during the Blair period. It was given body and voice by the 2017 National Infrastructure Commission report by Lord Adonis—another leading figure of that period of government.

The first—and fundamental—question that has been raised by other Members during the debate is that this is a plan for an area that has no cohering identity. I almost feel like an interloper, Sir Edward. Before your inclusion of me in the debate, I felt like an interloper anyway, given the strong Buckinghamshire feeling about the debate—and all praise to Buckinghamshire. I am proudly from Bedfordshire and represent North East Bedfordshire. However, that makes the point, does it not? Essentially, this is not some grassroots, built-up, passionate call for helping our region to develop and unifying us into an identity that can have meaning for people on the ground—our local residents. No, no: this is a Blairite top-down plan, to be imposed on people in the region whether they like it or not.

I say “whether they like it or not” because, rather sadly, the spatial framework, which my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey) spoke about, takes that additional step forward. It says that the arc's 23 local planning authorities cannot continue to plan separately because

“planning at the local level for homes, business space, infrastructure and the environment is not integrated, and is unable to take an Arc-wide view.”

Well, my constituents do not want local planning to take an arc-wide view; they want it to take a local view—a neighbourhood view. The Government need to understand that the question that has been posed today is, how is that going to work when there is an absence of democratic accountability?

It is worse, because the spatial development framework goes on to say that all local plans must conform to the spatial framework, including the requirement that housing needs are met in full. Out of the window goes any discretion on housing growth targets. They must be met in full. For local authorities in my constituency, who are already achieving growth rates in housing well above the national average—my constituency is already growing at three times the national average—having a top-down target imposed with no discretion on local authority housing growth seems to me to raise major questions about democratic accountability.

Let us go to the two fundamental points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe. Where did this come from? Was it a plan for housing or a plan for economic development? If it was a plan for housing, let us get to the rub of the 1 million houses. I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister will say in a few minutes that the 1 million housing target is not a target. I know he will say that, because he has told me that in a debate, and it will be welcome to hear. The truth of the matter is that that target at the time included more than a quarter of a million extra houses that were going to be placed into the Oxford-Cambridge arc because that aspiration could not be met in London. It is an important point of principle of this Government to ensure that the housing needs of areas such as Greater London are met by regional authorities themselves and not displaced to other areas.

On housing growth, I would like to hear from the Minister what balance the Government will be able to provide for housing growth with the pieces of infrastructure that people care about. We have heard about expressways and railways, but what people care about in terms of infrastructure is: can I get an appointment with my doctor because my child is sick? Can I get my son or my daughter into a good local school? That is what people

want to hear across the Ox-Cam arc and in the rest of the country. I know that the Minister and the Government are committed to that, but that is where our priorities should lie when we think about what to do with this particular region.

If the plan is an economic one, let us remember what the basis of it was: that somehow, by connecting or improving the connections between two major universities and other universities—of course, I would say Cranfield is also a major university, but let us say Oxford and Cambridge—we would unlock economic growth. That is the state-driven answer to how we unlock growth: “We can connect it.” So let me ask the Government: where is the international example of that having worked in practice? Can they name one example anywhere in the world where countries have joined universities to create economic growth? I bet they cannot, because most countries understand that we create economic growth around centres of educational excellence. We focus on the centres of educational excellence and build out that network of localities and business parks and innovation around where that core of academic excellence is. That is already happening in Cambridge, it is happening in Oxford, and it can happen around Cranfield. That is where the Government’s focus with the Ox-Cam arc should be moving.

There are some shared interests. There is the opportunity for more growth in housing. The Minister is absolutely right to focus on the core fundamental Conservative principle that everyone at every age should have the opportunity to own a home. That is something that we all want to do, and we want to do it in a way that is supported by local communities.

On the infrastructure, my colleagues from Buckinghamshire have already said bye-bye to the expressway, so we will have an expressway from Cambridge through Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes, and then we can stop off and get on—I do not know what they have in Buckinghamshire—perhaps a dirt track until we reach Oxfordshire, and back on the expressway again.

Heaven knows what will happen to the railway line. I know that the people of Cambridge are up in arms about it, and I know there are questions in North East Bedfordshire about it. If those transverse cross-country pieces of infrastructure are called into question, should we not have a rethink about how this interlacing, connecting Ox-Cam arc strategy would better be replaced with a central specific focus around certain areas for development there? There is probably more of a community interest between the good people of Buckinghamshire and the good people of Oxfordshire, and there might be a good common interest between the people of Bedfordshire, Milton Keynes and Northamptonshire, rather than saying that people in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough should somehow feel an affinity with the people of Oxfordshire and Berkshire.

Joy Morrissey: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. Alluding to the history between Oxford and my constituency, we were the first stop-off on the coach trip from London to Oxfordshire. The economic prosperity of Beaconsfield was built on providing meals, entertainment, hotels and livery to those making the vital trip from London to Oxford. There is that historic link, but my hon. Friend is right that the Oxford-Cambridge arc is not attributable to any of those historic qualities or natural linking that might be found in other regions.

Richard Fuller: My hon. Friend is right to bring in that historical perspective. Sir Edward, may I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister if we can have a Conservative vision of the Oxford-Cambridge arc? Let us not just take the Blairite vision off the shelf and say that the Government must now impose it.

What would a Conservative vision look like? First, it would be grounded in local democratic accountability, at the lowest possible level, with parishes, neighbourhoods and towns making decisions and not having them dictated by the state. Secondly, it would be a vision that rested primarily on the private sector to determine what would happen and where, and ensure both business and housing growth. We have recent evidence of that. According to *Property Week*, last year the Oxford-Cambridge arc was already seeing the largest inward housing investment. The market is working it out; we do not need a Government top-down plan to do it.

Thirdly, there is a role for Government in co-ordination, which we can understand, but the focus should be on international examples that can be repeated here, rather than trying to create something that has not got any international power and saying, “Let’s try and make it work here.” That means creating a focus of innovation with innovation grants and support in towns and cities across the arc.

There should be a focus on green transport initiatives and commuter transport initiatives, getting people from Cambourne into Cambridge in a green and environmentally sound way that works with the flow of people, building communities around Cranfield that work on unmanned vehicles, and undertaking initiatives around large public bus transportation systems in Oxfordshire, which are based on electric or battery-powered vehicles. Working with local councils to find out what people need locally, in combination with innovation and support from the Government, will allow the brains in those cities to create new champions who can create examples for the rest of the world.

3.22 pm

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) on securing today’s debate. I welcome the opportunity to debate the future of the Oxford-Cambridge arc and follow the lucid arguments advanced by the hon. Members for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey), for Henley (John Howell), for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer) and for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller).

I have very happy associations with both Oxford and Cambridge, having had the pleasure of living in both cities for a couple of years. I took my MSc in applied statistics at Oxford University and my MPhil in history at Cambridge University. I love both cities and their surrounding areas, and care about their distinctive character, history and future development.

However, the plans for the Oxford-Cambridge arc are already outmoded. Events have overtaken plans drawn up in a markedly different age. Covid-19 has challenged the assumptions that underpinned the Oxford-Cambridge arc back in 2016, which was based on a model of building 1 million new homes, along with a road and rail transport system to take people to places of work at various points across the arc. My first question for the

[Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi]

Minister is whether Her Majesty's Government have properly re-evaluated the assumptions underpinning the scheme, not just of population growth but of changes to patterns of commuting and working, and where people will be working in the future, to ensure that plans meet the needs of residents?

The spatial plan consultation, for example, should cover whether there is a need for genuinely affordable and social environmentally sound housing; I believe there is. Local authorities should be given proper representation within the arc arrangement. I have discussed these important points with my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), the chair of the Labour party, who, fighting assiduously for her constituents as usual, has already met the Minister and his officials and has written to him. Although she could not attend today's debate, I hope that her invaluable input will not be ignored, but instead incorporated into Government plans. Local people, businesses and leaders cannot be ignored. Proper consultation must be guaranteed.

We recognise the need for more homes, but have Ministers thought through the implications of 1 million new homes and the impact on existing communities, on the natural environment, on biodiversity and on levels of pollution? If we build 1 million homes, how do we balance the needs of the local environment? What kind of homes? We need homes for young people, just starting out, and homes for nurses, teachers, train drivers, supermarket workers and social carers—in other words, homes for the heroes of the pandemic. Where is the plan for affordable homes for those heroes? In all candour, I tell the Minister that the blue wall will not be happy if he ignores their views, as we have heard eloquently, again and again, from hon. Members today.

Then there is the question of transport. Central to the Government's version of the Oxford-Cambridge arc will be the expressway, a massive motorway-building project, like something from the 1970s or 1980s. I welcome the Minister's decision to scrap the expressway and I praise campaigners who fought so hard to make Ministers see sense, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), who rightly called it

"a last-century approach to a 21st-century challenge".

Yet again a Conservative Government is catching up with Labour policy, but dither, delay and retreat on the expressway cannot be replaced by dither and delay on the Oxford-Cambridge rail link. The Government must now give their full-throated support to the completion of phases 2 and 3 of the East West Rail link, linking Oxford, Bicester, Winslow, Bletchley, Bedford, Cambourne and stops along the way to Cambridge.

That investment in the railway is a superb opportunity for world-class station design and facilities for passengers; for full access for people with disabilities; for integrated transport systems linking up walking, cycling and bussing; for affordable spaces for local businesses and traders; for flexible ticketing and sensible pricing; and for environmentally friendly and sustainable use of buildings, energy and land. Most of all, the East West Rail link must be fully electrified. It must be a shining example of post-carbon, safe, clean and affordable public transport. The last point that I invite the Minister to address, therefore, is the full electrification of the East West Rail

link. Rather than further prevarication and evasion, today would be a perfect opportunity to announce Government support for full electrification.

Labour supports investment in new homes, in new rail links, in projects that tackle climate change and in community building—in investing in a 21st-century economy—but they must be the right projects, based on the correct assumptions in our post-covid society. At all stages, they must engage every part of the community, not just the loudest and best organised, and never in a dash for growth at the expense of existing communities, never at the expense of people on low incomes, and never at the expense of our climate.

3.28 pm

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward, and it is certainly a pleasure to take part in a debate secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker), or the Member for Wycombe International, a doughty campaigner for his constituents. He spoke eloquently on the issues and the opportunities that face his constituency and Buckinghamshire.

It is also good to see that, beyond the confines of the county of Buckinghamshire, we have a great many other interlopers, as I think my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller) described himself in a moment of lucidity. We also have my hon. Friends the Members for Henley (John Howell) and, remotely, for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer). It is good to see them. By their presence, they demonstrate how very large a space the arc is. It stretches from the southern border of Leicestershire all the way down to the London borders and crosses east-west a large chunk of our country. Having mentioned them, it would be remiss of me not to note, too, the presence of the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), who has also always spoken up strongly for his constituency.

We believe the arc is a globally significant area. It is a very big space, which provides the homes for approximately 3.7 million residents. It supports over 2 million jobs and adds over £110 billion to our economic output every year. While London puts the United Kingdom at the heart of global financial and legal markets, the arc is the driving force for national innovation and science. We believe that with the right collaborative support from the ground up, not the top down, by 2050 we could see economic output in the area doubling to over £200 billion a year, with the addition of 1.1 million further jobs.

When I have spoken to colleagues across the House and to our colleagues in local government, I have always been at pains to express that this is not about house building; it is about economic development of a very large region for jobs, skills and the transport and other infrastructure required to build the hopes and opportunities of the people who live there. It is about housing too, but housing is not the central thrust of what we are trying to achieve. When I hear talk from the Chamber of 1 million additional homes, points that were made in a report of some five years' standing, I reply by saying that is not a Government target and it is not a Government policy.

I pointed that out to my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire in this Chamber, but I suppose the best way to keep a secret is to make a statement in the House of Commons. I think the only way that we can put to bed or break open this particular secret is to keep repeating the point that 1 million homes is not a Government target. More homes are what we need and require, because in certain parts of the arc space, Cambridge being an example, average house prices are 12 times the average salary of a local resident. In other parts of the arc, house prices are as expensive, so we do need to build more homes with the right infrastructure for the people who need to live in this space.

Mr Steve Baker: Is it the case that the 1 million new houses were the National Infrastructure Commission's idea, but that the Government have simply not adopted that as their target? I think that is what I heard the Minister clarify.

Christopher Pincher: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. My fundamental point is that the local plans and local authorities remain the building blocks—if he will forgive the pun—for house building and commercial construction in the area. We certainly want to make sure that local authorities work collaboratively with one another to make best use of this space, but it is the local plans that drive the numbers.

To answer the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey), some authorities may wish to be ambitious and go further than the local housing need number, based on 2014 Office for National Statistics numbers. They may wish to go further. Others may have constraints. They may be green belt constraints, AONB constraints or other constraints. Those also need to be taken into account when local authorities take their plans to the planning inspector. It is for the planning inspector to decide what is a reasonable plan. If local authorities can demonstrate they have a reasonable plan, the numbers in that plan are what they are judged against, not the local housing need number.

I make two further points. The first is that if a plan falls out of date, it is the local housing need number that the planning inspector will look at if speculative planning applications come forward, so all authorities should ensure that they have up-to-date plans. Secondly, it is the case, generally speaking, that when local authorities collaborate with each other constructively, they can find ways of spreading their overall need across a wider space and thereby, using innovative means such as pursuing brownfield regeneration or using the permitted development rights tools that we have given them, ensure that there is less pressure on the all-important green spaces that we all know and enjoy.

If I may, I will address some of the points raised by colleagues. My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield raised a number of points. She made it very clear that she wants local authorities to define what should be built, and our planning reforms emphasise that very point. We want local authorities to define the homes or the commercial properties that they need to build, the density and the design of them and the quality of them, to ensure that we get the right homes, the homes that we need. She also made the point that in her constituency there are certain challenges with affordability. That is one reason we have introduced the First Homes policy,

which will allow the construction, through the planning system and developer contributions, of new homes discounted by at least 30%, which can be defined as for local people or key workers, for example, in order for them to benefit from the opportunity to own their own home.

We have also introduced the affordable homes programme for 2021 to 2026, which provides £12.3 billion of investment in affordable homes across our country. It will provide a significant number of new homes that local people can rent at reduced prices or that they can buy into, in a shared-ownership sense, at reduced increments, so that people can get on the housing ladder more easily.

My hon. Friend also raised the question of biodiversity and the importance of having green spaces that people can enjoy. We certainly recognise that, in the post-covid world, that will be important. She asked what the effect of the covid emergency would be. I think—like Zhou Enlai answering the question “What has been the effect of the French revolution?”—that it is as yet a little too early to say. But we do know that people need better green spaces. That is one reason why, in the national model design code, we have called for tree-lined streets and a better hierarchy of homes versus green space. We have also, in the Environment Bill, made it absolutely plain that when development takes place there must be a biodiversity net gain of 10%. We have also made it plain that local nature recovery strategies, to which she refers, are a fundamental building block of that Bill, which is soon to become an Act, and we shall bake those strategies into our plans for planning reform when we introduce legislation later this year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley made, as ever, a very thoughtful speech. He raised the question of the expressway and how that was handled. I will certainly take his remarks back to the Department for Transport and to Homes England. I simply note that in that particular case the Government listened. Clearly, there was local concern about how the approach was made and the proposals were tabled, and the Government have agreed that another course should be taken.

A number of colleagues have discussed—again, eloquently—the question of the spatial framework. We will begin a consultation on the spatial framework very, very shortly. In building our approach to that, which began in February, we have taken on board the views of local businesses, local councils and local authority leaders, who, across the political divide, have given us useful input. We want to ensure that we carry the public with us as we undertake this spatial framework vision consultation. The questions that we will ask in that consultation over the next several weeks will be high-level ones: “How do you want your space to be used?”; “What sort of environmental considerations do you have and how do you want them baked into planning?”; “What are the transport issues that you face?”; and “What are the job and the skill opportunities that you want to see for yourself and the place where you live?” The answers that people give us to those questions will feed a set of policy prescriptions that we could then take forward into another consultation, again engaging local people and involving local authorities and local leaders.

Fundamentally, we want to ensure that local people really get to have their say and not just the usual suspects, if I can put it that way. That is one of the reasons why we have taken such great pains to use the most modern

[Christopher Pincher]

technological tools, such as apps, to reach as many people as possible, including in diverse communities—those people who are not usually touched by the sorts of dry questions that Government and our agencies sometimes ask, including young people, people from ethnic minorities and people from less advantaged backgrounds—so that we get proper feedback that can then inform the decision-making process. We want to make sure that there is proper consultation, proper feedback and proper engagement at the heart of this.

That is also our approach to the growth board that we want to set up, to ensure that business leaders across the area can provide their full and fundamental feedback as to what policies they want to inform this space, because—again—this process is not simply about housing. Homes are important, but so are jobs and the infrastructure to support those jobs, which is why we want to ensure that the growth board plays a vital role in the arc.

My hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire asked the very important question: “What about the infrastructure that really matters to people?” Not the big roads or the great big railways that impress certain people, perhaps, but the GP surgeries, the clinics, the playgrounds, the schools and the extensions to schools. That is one reason why, in our proposals for planning reform, we are proposing an infrastructure levy to replace the community infrastructure levy and section 106, which I think most people and bodies, including 80% of local authorities, agree is a rather convoluted and opaque process for providing developer contributions. It tends to be loaded in favour of the bigger developers, it tends to be very slow, and it tends to result in the infrastructure that was initially conceived of being negotiated away.

We want a system that will provide infrastructure up front that is far less negotiable and that means communities get what they want when they expect it, and as they want it. That is one of the reasons why the proposals built into our planning reforms will be so important for community buy-in to the proposals.

My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South said that this process is not just about houses. Well, he is dead right; it is not just about houses. I have been at pains to be clear about that. It is about the economic generation of a very wide area in the centre of our country in the south, and not simply about houses. He also asked us to be collaborative. We will be, because we fully understand that if we are to succeed in this area, we need to engage the public and take them with us.

Sir Edward, I am conscious that I have now gone on for some 10 or so minutes, that there will be a Division soon, and that the Opposition spokesman wants to intervene, so I shall let him do so.

Mr Dhesi: I thank the Minister for giving way; he is most generous to do so. He has not responded to my key point about the east-west rail link. In order to assuage residents’ concerns and ensure that we are moving towards a greener post-carbon society, can he confirm that the east-west rail link will be fully electrified?

Christopher Pincher: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and I understand his concern. He will know that this Government are the greenest Government that we have ever had, and the policies that

we are pursuing and the commitments that we have made will ensure that that continues. For example, the future homes standard will ensure that homes built after 2025 are at least 75% more carbon-efficient than present homes. He will note that I am not the Transport Minister. DfT is looking at the proposals for east-west rail. We are all committed to it, and I trust that we will get an announcement sooner rather than later.

We are fundamentally committed to the arc and the economic opportunities it presents. We are committed to ensuring that local people are engaged in our plans. We want to ensure that the homes that are built to support the people who want to live and work in the arc are of the right quality, in the right places and are built with the grain of local communities.

We want to ensure that the right infrastructure to support those homes is developed at the get-go and not way down the line. We want to ensure that the jobs and skills in the arc complement those industries that are already there, and provide the jobs for the future. We want to take everyone with us in that enterprise. We believe that the arc can be a tremendous boon to our country and support to the local community. We are determined to see it happen and do it with the support of the local community.

3.46 pm

Mr Steve Baker: It has been an interesting and informative debate. I am extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend the Minister for some of the things he said. Before I come on to those, I was grateful that my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey) reminded us that her constituents are so entrepreneurial. If people have taken enormous risks all their lives, in order to buy themselves a large house in a nice place, they are going to be upset and push back if we build houses in their view. We need to ensure that the system gives them some opportunity to say no and to be compensated.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) was right to chide me that I had created the impression that this was a matter only for Buckinghamshire. He was followed very nicely by my hon. Friends the Members for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller) and for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer). It was important that my hon. Friend the Member for Henley set out some of the co-ordination problems, and reiterated the importance of the localism agenda, which, Sir Edward, you will remember we were all great fans of early on when we came here. My right hon. Friend the Minister reinforced the importance of those ideas.

The highlight of the debate for me, if my right hon. and hon. Friends will not mind my saying so, was when my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South expressed a sentiment from my heart to his lips, about the pre-eminence of the name of High Wycombe. I was grateful to him for that. My hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire was right to remind us about the regional development corporations. He spoke most articulately, and I was grateful to be here for his speech.

There was tremendous agreement with the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi). I say to my right hon. Friend the Minister that we had better appropriate the slogan “affordable homes for heroes” before the Opposition put it on all their leaflets. I certainly would like some affordable homes for the heroes of Wycombe.

My right hon. Friend the Minister made a very strong case for a doubled economic output, with 1.1 million new jobs. I hope he will not mind my saying that, when people hear of another 1 million jobs, they will wonder about the homes to go with them. He has been clear that the local plans remain the building blocks that drive the numbers. That will be heard across the region, in all the counties. I very much hope that councillors and officials will be reassured by that.

Finally, my right hon. Friend the Minister made the point that he wants to ensure that local people have their say over what is done. That is the fundamental point on which everyone here is agreed; and I am most grateful for that.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): On the part of the pre-eminent town of Gainsborough, I must now put the Question.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

3.49 pm

Sitting suspended.

UK Emissions Trading Scheme: Wales

4.5 pm

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the operation of the UK Emissions Trading Scheme in Wales.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I commend the co-operative approach taken by the UK and devolved Governments in establishing the emissions trading scheme and in agreeing a common framework that treats each nation as an equal partner in our climate efforts. The scheme has brought coherence to one element of our combined efforts to achieve net zero.

There is, of course, room for improvement. I draw the Minister's attention to concerns expressed by the Green Finance Observatory:

"The elephant in the room is that offsets are fundamentally not about mitigating climate change, or even about removing past emissions, but about enabling future emissions, about protecting economic growth and corporate profits."

I hope that the Minister will reflect on those remarks when she sums up the debate. They raise two critical questions. First, how will businesses fundamentally reduce aggregate emissions, and do so rapidly? Secondly, what is the role of Government in facilitating that change?

In order to meet our climate targets, we must not only reduce overall emissions but adopt carbon-negative strategies. The most economical and natural of those is tree planting. I hope to expand on that point today and in doing so make a case for more closely linking the UK emissions trading scheme with a separate and voluntary carbon offset market. Both schemes encourage businesses to reduce overall emissions. They are currently unconnected in policy; they run parallel to each other. I accept the technical and policy challenges associated with directly incorporating carbon offsetting into the UK ETS, but I believe that an association between the two schemes, if established, would bring rigour, scrutiny and additional resources to the offsetting process.

Governmental intervention is urgently required to bring much-needed stability to the voluntary carbon offset market in Wales. My hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) recently highlighted that large companies are already purchasing vast tracts of agricultural land in the upper Teifi and Tywi valleys for forestry and carbon offsetting and are doing so in a manner that internalises financial gain and externalises the social, economic and cultural costs.

Those costs increasingly pose an existential challenge to Welsh farmers and rural communities and are inimical to efficient land use and a just transition. To echo the National Farmers Union, we urgently need to ensure a system that makes carbon offsetting mean the right tree in the right place. The Government, by acting as a broker and data-backed co-ordinator, can help to ensure appropriate land use for carbon offsetting, support the sufficient scale of planting and empower local farmers and rural communities to make a carbon-negative effort for themselves.

Wales's forests are a natural economic and national asset at the very heart of our decarbonisation efforts. The lungs of our nation, our forests sequester approximately 1.84 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent annually, while pollution removal by woodland was estimated to

[Ben Lake]

have an ecosystem value of more than £385 million back in 2015. Our forests are also essential for our environment and biodiversity. Indeed, of the 542 listed species of principal importance to the Welsh Government, 210 rely wholly or partly on woodland habitats.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Will my hon. Friend acknowledge the crucial importance of restoring Wales's peatlands, given that their climate change mitigation potential is 3,000 tonnes of carbon a year, equivalent to 5% of Wales's transport carbon emissions? I am sure he will also take the opportunity to welcome the peat restoration projects led by parc cenedlaethol Eryri, the Snowdonia national park.

Ben Lake: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention and, indeed, will join her in congratulating the parc cenedlaethol on that work. Peatland restoration will be an incredibly important part of our carbon mitigation and sequestration efforts. More work to ensure that local actors such as the parc cenedlaethol can fully benefit from and engage in that process is what we as politicians and policy makers should focus on in the future.

The area of land covered by trees and woodland in Wales has tripled since the early 20th century, increasing from 88,000 hectares in 1905 to more than 309,000 hectares as of March 2020. It accounts for about 14.9% of the Welsh land area. That is significantly greater in percentage terms than in England or Northern Ireland, but the coverage lags behind our Scottish cousins and is lower than both European Union and wider European averages, so we have much further to go.

The "Woodlands for Wales" strategy suggests increasing tree planting to at least 2,000 hectares per year from 2020. The Climate Change Committee, recognising the challenge of reaching net zero, has been even more ambitious, recommending an increase to woodland cover in Wales from present levels to 24%. That would mean planting 43,000 hectares of new trees by 2030 and 180,000 hectares by 2050.

Set against that backdrop, Welsh farming finds itself at a perilous juncture, buffeted on the one hand by increased trade barriers with our largest market and uncertainty over future income support, and on the other by increasing pressure on land use. Welsh land, like all land, is of course a finite resource. If climate goals are to be met in a sustainable and fair manner, solutions cannot be imposed on rural communities. Instead, solutions can and should be implemented in conjunction with rural communities, and in a way that protects them from any damaging consequences. That is especially important when it comes to Welsh forestry and carbon sequestration. If we are to achieve the desired objective of reducing carbon emissions and promoting biodiversity, rural communities must be at the heart of implementation. Welsh farmers play a vital but often overlooked role in the climate equation, with over 109,000 hectares of woodland—just over a third of the total woodland in Wales—located on Welsh farms. To fulfil the stated tree-planting objectives, therefore, we need to understand the implications for the farming and food and drinks sectors, which rely on this agricultural land—land that is also essential to the wellbeing of the rural economy.

At scale, concerns about food security are increasingly valid. We must also account for the real risk of displacing food production elsewhere, to countries that may have higher carbon footprints and lower environmental standards. The last thing that any of us would want is for an unregulated carbon offset market to bring about the perverse scenario of productive agricultural land in Wales being sold to large corporations for the purposes of carbon offsetting while we increase our food imports from across the world. Such a scenario—namely, the offshoring of our food production—would make a mockery of wider sustainability efforts. I must warn the Government that there are anecdotal examples of such a scenario beginning to take root in some parts of Wales. We must therefore act now to ensure that it does not become widespread.

The best way forward would be to increase the support for farmers and rural communities looking to enter the carbon offsetting market for themselves. I pay tribute to the fantastic work by academics based at Bangor University. In particular, I thank Professor John Healey, Dr Prysor Williams, Dr Sophie Wynne-Jones, Dr Tim Pagella and Ashley Hardaker for their outstanding research, which I commend to the Minister. If she were to review their work, she would note that substantial barriers to entry still exist for farmers and local landowners hoping to diversify into agroforestry. The UK ETS could play a transformative role, not only by better regulating the offset market but by providing the resources to encourage tree planting that is locally grounded rather than purchased by external, big business actors.

Practically, ETS revenues could be used to hasten a system of payments, as has happened in Ireland, so that farmers can afford to wait for a crop of trees to mature in order to derive an income stream. We could also look at land tenure restrictions and review contractual clauses that prohibit the planting of trees, which are especially important because over 30% of Welsh landed is tenanted.

Although such measures may seem parochial, they are fundamental to ensuring that we actually deliver a transition that is just as well as sustainable. We must work with farmers, who manage over 80% of land in Wales, to deliver a forested future that is critical to the overall success of our decarbonisation efforts. The alternative, in which big business can buy land, plant trees without any reference to local biodiversity and the optimum use of different parcels of land, all the while continuing with their polluting, business-as-usual practices, is unacceptable. Greenwashing, as the Minister will know, is an ever-present danger, but in this instance it would devastate Wales's rural communities, culture and economy.

I hope that the Minister will address concerns that the ETS is not moving fast enough nor fundamentally reducing emissions. I also hope that she will agree that local groups and farmers should be supported to play an important part in the carbon offset market and in so doing lead the transition to net zero. We must not allow large corporations to buy farms, put rural communities out of home and land, and weaken local food production for the sake of greenwashed business as usual. More specifically, I would welcome any thoughts that the Minister might have on integrating carbon offsetting into the wider UK ETS framework to ensure that we have effective regulation of the market, the promotion of sustainable practices and the rewarding of responsible practitioners.

I hope that today's debate, short as it is, has demonstrated the need for co-operative action across the UK to ensure that our greener future is ecologically, socially and culturally sustainable and, therefore, that the transition to it is a just one.

4.15 pm

The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) on securing this really important debate on the operation of the UK ETS in Wales. The four Administrations of the UK have worked together over months and years to establish what will be the world's first net zero carbon cap and trade market and a crucial step towards achieving the UK's target for net zero carbon emissions by 2050. We have drawn on our years of experience and global leadership in carbon pricing, going all the way back to the original UK ETS in 2002, to ensure that the new scheme has the flexibility and ambition to deliver for the whole of the UK. We share the combined objectives of driving permanent emission reductions across the UK while protecting the competitiveness of our businesses, be they steelworks in south Wales, ceramics producers in central England or whisky distilleries in Scotland. The UK ETS authority—the UK Government and the three devolved Administrations—continue to make good progress in the operational delivery of the UK ETS in our respective nations.

The UK ETS market opened on 19 May and there have now been four successfully completed auctions, with a fifth taking place tomorrow. Collectively, we published the free allocation table for stationary installations on 11 May, and we have since issued just under 40 million free allowances to qualifying operators. The allocation table for aviation operators was published on 28 June, and we will be issuing allowances to qualifying aircraft operations shortly, but we are committed to building on the process, and officials from the four Administrations are already working together on plans to further increase the climate ambition of the UK's carbon pricing policy.

The UK ETS authority has already jointly committed to exploring a number of areas where we could go further and faster, and together we plan to set out our aspirations to continue to lead the world on carbon pricing. The overall cap for UK ETS is an obvious place to start, and we will be moving together quickly to consult on a consistent net zero trajectory for the cap, drawing on the advice from our statutory advisers, the Climate Change Committee. We will also be reviewing free allocation, which is a key measure to protect our industries, to prevent the offshoring of emissions—I think we all agree that that slightly defeats the point—and to ensure that the system is fair and equitable across the UK and its constituent nations, while maintaining the level of ambition that we really need to be able to get to net zero.

Together, we will tackle the case for expanding carbon pricing across the economy while encouraging innovation in emerging decarbonisation technologies. The hon. Gentleman's challenge of connecting forestry with the ETS is one that we will indeed look at. We have committed to explore expanding the UK ETS to other sectors—two thirds of emissions are currently uncovered—including thinking about how the UK ETS can incentivise the deployment of greenhouse gas removal technologies, be they nature-based, as he identified, or indeed engineered

not by nature. We shall enhance the effectiveness of the UK ETS, particularly for aviation, while recognising our international obligation in that sector.

A key objective of the UK ETS is to protect the competitiveness of UK industry, so as well as the free allocation of allowances to sectors at risk of carbon leakage, which is the offshoring of production and emissions, we are providing a package of measures to help businesses to decarbonise. On 17 March, the Government published the UK's first-ever net zero strategy for industry. The document is the first strategy published by a major economy, and it sets out how industry can decarbonise in line with net zero while remaining competitive and without pushing emissions abroad. The strategy sets the expectation that emissions in industry will fall by around two thirds by 2035 and at least 90% by 2050 compared with 2018 levels, in order for us to achieve net zero. We have challenges ahead and we need to find the best, most effective and most impactful solutions.

The UK ETS is a jointly established, jointly operated scheme that has great potential for all Administrations.

Ben Lake: I am grateful to the Minister for her response. As the work gets under way to expand the ETS scheme, will she ensure that the wider costs of any scheme, particularly carbon offsetting in local communities—whether those costs be the loss of agricultural land or the impact on the vibrancy of rural communities—can somehow be incorporated into the approach taken? I appreciate that it is a very complex issue and I do not pretend to have the answers, but could she reassure us that that will be considered as part of the future work scheme?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I take note of that. The hon. Gentleman may want to call for a similar debate with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to discuss other aspects of the funding that will go to those smaller communities as we change the systems, now that we are no longer under the EU frameworks.

The UK ETS is focused on supporting industry to make those transitions and has great potential for all Administrations. It recognises both the unique opportunities and, indeed, the challenges in each, which are all different. I endorse and agree with the hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts), and share their passion for all those nature-based solutions, which are critical to helping us to sequester carbon from trees to peat. I am a particular advocate for peat restoration across Northumberland, for obvious, biased reasons.

I encourage all Members to work with Government and Natural Resources Wales as we think about extending the ETS scheme, which we are just starting to do. We will seek to review it in some detail and think about how we can expand it. There is a great deal of room to continue the conversation. I look forward to working with Members as we set out the consultation in due course and make progress. I hope we will continue this important discussion and find solutions to ensure that these really important industries of ours can compete effectively on the international stage.

Question put and agreed to.

4.22 pm

Sitting suspended.

Voter ID

[SIR GARY STREETER *in the Chair*]

4.50 pm

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice in order to support the hybrid arrangements. I must remind hon. Members participating virtually that they must leave their cameras on for the duration of the debate and that they will be visible at all times, both to each other and to us in the Boothroyd Room—which is a very wonderful thing for all of us. Welcome. 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.

4.51 pm

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab) [V]: I beg to move,

That this house has considered the introduction of Voter ID.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Gary. Today's debate is on an issue and a piece of legislation that pose a direct threat to our democracy. Citizens casting their votes in polling stations in England, Scotland and Wales currently do not need to present any form of identification. It is in that context, where elections in the UK are being undertaken safely and securely, that the Government have presented the Elections Bill—a Bill that will cost more than £40 million over the next decade to address a problem that does not exist.

The Government state that the Elections Bill will ensure that elections are “secure, modern and fair”, implying the baseless assumption that they are currently not secure, modern and fair. Election administrators in local government work tirelessly to deliver safe and reliable elections. This year, local councils delivered one of the biggest sets of elections ever held, an incredible feat after a decade of austerity. Luton Borough Council, in my constituency, has had £157 million cut from its funding since 2010. Now the Government want to heap additional, unnecessary work on under-resourced election administrators. According to academic research, 99% of election staff do not think fraud has occurred in their polling stations, and 88% of the public think our polling stations are safe.

From 2010 to 2018, there were a total of five police cautions issued for personation at polling stations in the UK and four convictions. In 2019, a year that included a high-turnout general election, there was one conviction out of more than 59 million votes cast. Although those rare cases are serious, and allegations must be investigated, they had little or no impact on the outcome of the election. The Electoral Reform Society has stated:

“Adding a major barrier to democratic engagement off the back of so few proven cases would be a sledgehammer to crack a nut.”

Can the Minister explain whether she believes that voting is safe and secure in Britain? The Government like to point to Northern Ireland, where they enforce voter ID, but the situations could not be more different. At the 1983 general election, 949 people arrived at polling stations in Northern Ireland to be told that a

vote had already been cast in their name. Faced with high levels of documented, in-person electoral fraud, Northern Ireland introduced mandatory ID in 1985, and a free electoral ID card in 2002.

The introduction of voter ID in Northern Ireland did impact turnout, which was acknowledged in the Minister's Department's letter to Unlock Democracy in May this year, which stated that

“turnout appeared to be lower”

after the introduction of photographic ID as part of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002. Around 25,000 voters are estimated not to have voted, as they did not have the required identification. Almost 3,500 people were initially refused a vote for not presenting identification. In a different context, and faced with military-style organised in-person fraud, an ID scheme was a proportionate response to protect the integrity of elections in Northern Ireland. That level of voter fraud has not been identified elsewhere in the UK.

The Government also rely on the misleading argument that if people need ID to pick up a parcel, why should they not need it to vote? Unlike picking up a parcel, voting is a legal right, not a privilege. Estimates suggest that around 3.5 million UK citizens—7.5% of the electorate—do not have photo ID. Furthermore, 11 million citizens do not have a passport or driving licence. Research estimates that about 1.3 million people in the UK do not have a bank account. This legislation would disproportionately impact sections of society. As Liberty has said:

“If you're young, if you're a person of colour, if you're disabled, trans or you don't have a fixed address, you're much less likely to have valid photo ID and could therefore be shut off from voting.”

In Luton, we are proud of our super-diverse town. The 2011 census data showed that 45% of our population are not white—the very people that this discriminatory policy is more likely to impact—and not everyone can afford photo ID. A passport costs £85 and a driving licence £43. A Department for Transport survey found that 76% of the white population hold a driving licence compared with 52% of the black population. After the past year, the number of universal credit claimants in Luton South increased by 146% between February 2020 and March 2021, so photo ID will only have become more unaffordable.

Will the Minister explain why the Government are putting their energy into creating barriers to voting for already marginalised or deprived communities? I anticipate that the Minister will stress the free elector ID, but many on low incomes will not have the necessary free time or the means to access it. The ID process will require voters to take time off work or caring responsibilities to request it; those who can most easily take time off are those people who are most likely already to have ID. Also, in accessing the card and verifying the elector at the polling station there will be additional barriers, such as for those who wear face coverings or niqabs, or those who are part of the trans community, who, for example, may have changed their name.

Organisations such as Sense, Mencap, Age UK, Crisis and The Traveller Movement have all raised their concerns with me about how voter ID impacts people with complex disabilities, people with learning difficulties, the elderly, those who are homeless and Gypsy and Traveller people. The Bill has no provisions that directly address these concerns, so why is the Minister introducing a policy that will make voting more difficult for these groups?

Ministers repeatedly refer to evidence from the Electoral Commission, stating that the Government's voter ID pilots at the 2018 and 2019 English local elections show there is no impact on any particular demographic group. However, there is a clear disconnect between the Cabinet Office's statement and the Electoral Commission's evidence. In both of its most recent reports, the Electoral Commission has said that it had no way of measuring the effect of photo ID on minority ethnic communities' votes. Its report in 2019 states that polling station staff were not asked to collect demographic data about the people who did not come back. The commission recognises that that means it has no direct evidence of whether people from particular backgrounds were more likely than others to find it hard to show ID. Also, the Local Government Information Unit has highlighted that 37% of those who were refused a ballot paper did not return to vote, and in two areas just under half of those turned away did not come back with ID.

If the Government's argument does not stand up to scrutiny, why are they intent on introducing voter ID? If no such voting issue exists, and if all the evidence points to voter ID causing voter suppression, what is the point of proposing these additional barriers to voting? I believe there lies the issue. This legislation cannot be unpicked in good faith, as the Government's claims do not reflect reality. Instead, we have to take this policy for what it is: a discriminatory policy that will disenfranchise millions of voters. Much of the functioning of the legislation will be enacted through secondary legislation. Either the Government do not know how it will be implemented or this is simply an extension of whipping up a culture war, targeting black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, people with a disability, the trans community and the working class.

I am sure we all agree that encouraging high turnout is vital to sustain a healthy, thriving democracy. Imposing barriers on voting to tackle baseless allegations, which will lead to voter suppression, is disgraceful. The estimated cost of photo ID would be better spent on increasing confidence in our democracy through improving political literacy and encouraging engagement in the political process. Since 2010, this Government have cut youth services funding by 73%. Reversing those cuts would also help to improve democratic participation.

I have a question for the Minister. How does she expect me to explain the introduction of voter ID to my constituents, who are more likely to suffer voter suppression because of it, and to my council, which will have to undertake unnecessary additional work after a decade of cuts? I look forward to receiving specific responses to each of the questions I have asked and to each of the points I have raised, but I will conclude by saying that our elections are well run, so if it ain't broke, don't fix it. This dangerous legislation must be scrapped.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): We have only six Back-Bench speeches, not seven, so we can aim for five minutes each.

4.59 pm

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary, and to follow the hon. Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins), although I have to politely disagree with some of her assertions.

In this country and most true democracies, the right to exercise the franchise is one of the most important symbols of the state as servant not master. Once every four or five years, voters go to the polls and give their verdict on the policies, commitments and ideals that they think will best suit their ambitions and hopes for where they live. It is a marvellous privilege, and we should not forget that there are still many places where people are denied that right.

Worst are those that go through the motions with an attempt to legitimise often ruthless, cruel and oppressive regimes through a veneer of respectability, in a charade of an election where every ballot box will be stuffed and every vote for the regime or junta in charge counted at least twice. That is why it is so important that our own democratic process is utterly unimpeachable. When we seek to bring the virtues of liberal open democracy to the rest of the world and promote our values, we cannot turn a blind eye to fraud and corruption at home. I do not need to look too far from my own constituency for examples of where that has already happened.

In Rochdale, a sitting Labour councillor who was serving as a member of the executive was caught voting twice in a local election. He accepted a caution from the police after claiming ignorance of the rules. This was a senior councillor who was still sitting on Rochdale Borough Council.

The rules should be clear and properly enforced. The idea of taking ID to the polling station is not a radical one. In fact, it is quite common around the world. Unless we are seriously saying in this debate that countries such as Germany, France and Canada are failed states or oppressive regimes, it could just be that we are the international outlier. I can speak only from my own experience, but on more than one occasion when I have been canvassing I have been asked by somebody whether they need to take their polling card with them to the polls, and on more than one occasion when I have been outside telling, I have been handed a polling card because people legitimately assume that they have to prove who they are when they go to vote. When told that they do not need to, many of them say, "You should probably do something about that."

The idea is not even new to the UK. Voters in Northern Ireland have been providing proof of their identity since the 1980s, with no difficulty in the smooth running of elections. As long as there is access to a free recognisable form of photo identification that identifies that a person is eligible to vote and, more importantly, eligible to vote where they are attempting to, there should be no adverse effect on participation. It is even reasonable to assume that increased confidence in the integrity of our elections could encourage some of those who abstain to re-engage with the democratic process.

Voter suppression is a vile and unconscionable act, and accusations of it being levelled without a good faith basis are scurrilous and unbecoming. Voter fraud is sinister, and we have evidence of it already. A simple change requiring additional checks at the polls will go a long way to bolstering our political process, and we should, in short, welcome it.

5.2 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. It might come as no surprise, but I disagree with most of

[Alan Brown]

the comments made by the previous contributor, the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson). Voter fraud is an issue that the Tories have obsessed about for a long time without ever having proof that it is an issue that needs additional legislation and voter ID to resolve. Giving one example of one conviction does not actually underline the need to bring in such widespread legislation, which will indeed lead to voter suppression. Even the pilot trials that were undertaken proved that many people did not have ID with them, and even when they might have accessed ID, many did not return to vote and a lot of folk were effectively disfranchised. The Electoral Commission has admitted that it does not have enough evidence to draw strong conclusions from the results of the pilot, so again that undermines the argument for the legislation.

The Tories talk about democracy, but the Bill could disfranchise between 2 million and 4 million people from disadvantaged backgrounds or from ethnic minorities—in other words, non-Tory voters. We have already had the boundary reviews that give the Tories an advantage. We now have a Bill to put the power of calling elections solely into the hands of the Prime Minister, and now this. Those are all ploys to cling on to the levers of power. Then they are looking to extend the franchise to give Brits abroad the vote for life. Why? Because they believe there is an ex-pat cohort that will vote Tory.

In the talk about extending the franchise for life abroad, quite often we hear the example of a war veteran deprived of the vote. What they never say is that that war veteran is often stuck in a frozen overseas pension, so it would be far better to do something about that. Meanwhile, in Scotland, we extended democracy and the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds at the independence referendum—a move that was cynically opposed at the time by Labour, the Tories and Lib Dems. We have now brought that in for all elections in Scotland, and we have also extended the right to vote to refugees and foreign nationals with leave to remain. By contrast, down here, in a further bid to upset democracy and fair elections, the Tories want to curb the powers of the Electoral Commission. Their argument is that the Electoral Commission does not have sufficient powers at the moment.

The Scottish National party is the only major party not to have been fined for breaching election rules. Indeed, the Electoral Commission believes the fines that it can impose at the moment are now just seen by all three UK-wide parties as business-as-usual election expenses, so that is way bigger an issue than the 33 or 34 accusations of possible voting misrepresentation out of 34 million votes cast. Of course, clerical error quite often accounts for possible voter impersonation, so voter ID might not solve that in itself.

There is actually a far bigger issue for democracy than possible vote fraud: the attitude of the Tory Government, and how they reward chums and donors. We have a Secretary of State for Housing—he is still in place—who made an illegal planning decision that was going to save a Tory donor millions of pounds. We have the covid contracts fast-tracked to Tory donors, and the misuse of funds for the contract to Public First to undertake political polling in Scotland. It is shocking

that the Good Law Project and openDemocracy—not to mention the SNP—are relying on the courts to hold the Tory Government to account.

Looking at elections, we have seen the dirty tricks and the personal data breaches by Vote Leave, which has also been subsequently quoted by the Tories, and so many people from Vote Leave migrated into advising the Tory Government. Instead of trying to disenfranchise voters, it would be better for all if the Tories created level playing fields for elections and were seen to be part of an open and transparent governance structure—not the unfortunate “them and us” set-up that we have at the moment.

5.7 pm

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. I think the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) approached this issue with an attitude of “Let’s throw various things at the wall and see if any of them stick,” rather than a coherent argument.

The hon. Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) opened the debate by saying that this legislation is a direct threat to our democracy and is tackling a problem that does not exist. I am pleased to see on the Government side my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Tom Randall). We are both former members of the Conservative party in Tower Hamlets, and we both vividly recall that this is a problem that does exist and has happened. I am afraid to say that, but for the brave work of a few individuals, without any support from our authorities, an election in our country’s capital city, next to the heart of our financial district, would have been taken away due to improper conduct. One of my great friends in the world is Councillor Peter Golds, and he behaved remarkably, along with others, to ensure that that election was not taken away.

I understand that the hon. Member for Luton South feels that she needs to defend her constituents and put her case forward, but I am not sure it is as coherent as she wants it to be. We all know that the example we cite at this point is that the Labour party requires identification to attend its meetings. Please explain to me why Labour party meetings are more important than the elections that decide our Government.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I would not normally intervene, but I want to clarify for the hon. Member that there is absolutely no requirement to show ID to enter a Labour party meeting. Indeed, I have been a member of the Labour party since 2004 and have never been asked to show ID to attend meetings. As hon. Members might expect, I am a very active member of the Labour party. I just wanted to correct the hon. Member on that point.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Back on the motion, Mark Fletcher.

Mark Fletcher: I commiserate the hon. Lady for her long membership of the Labour party—I hope it has not proved too costly. However, she will be aware that there have been many adverts for Labour party events that say that members must bring identification. I am very happy to provide screenshots of those events, but I think that she will accept the common point, and perhaps she could return to it later.

The hon. Member for Luton South referred to police convictions and the Electoral Commission. There was a sort of dampening down—“This is not really a problem, because the law is not really that concerned.” There is an argument on police resources and how much time is dedicated to this issue, but the point is that the Electoral Commission in this country is not fit for purpose, in my humble opinion. It has not directed enough resources to this issue.

Finally, on the idea that people do not have identification and that they would be unable to show it, my understanding is that 98% of people in this country have suitable identification. This is a *de minimis* requirement for people to be able to participate in a democracy. Our laws are made by the people who are elected. They come to this House to be the voice of the people. We should make sure that the process is fair, transparent and meets the highest standards we can possibly have. Do we really think that this small matter of having voter identification, which will help to improve the process, will somehow disenfranchise millions of people? It is a ludicrous suggestion.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Now, through a slight quirk in the call list system, I call Tom Randall.

5.11 pm

Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary, and to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher), who is my predecessor as chairman of the Poplar and Limehouse Conservative Association. I agree with everything he has said, particularly his generous remarks about Councillor Peter Golds and his campaign against electoral corruption.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) on securing the debate. We sit alongside each other in the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, and I often agree with everything she says in that Select Committee. Regrettably, I will disagree with almost everything she has said this afternoon.

The hon. Lady says that this is a problem that does not exist. How does she know? To answer that question, perhaps it would be helpful to have a potted history on how to commit electoral fraud. There is a marked register that sets out who has voted and who has not. In the case of council elections, it is very easy to tell, with a little bit of research, who the 50%, 60% and in some areas up to 70% of people are who do not habitually vote in council elections. Once someone is armed with that name and an address, they can go to the local polling station and give that name and address. Unlike at Labour party meetings, there is no ID—they just need to give that name and address to the clerk at the polling station and they will be handed that voter's ballot paper.

If someone lives in a town or small village, the clerk might recognise that the name and face do not match up, but if they live in a crowded urban area—take Tower Hamlets, as a random example—where people do not know each other and do not know their neighbours, the ballot paper will be handed over with no questions asked. If someone were to do this perhaps later on in the evening, at 8 or 9 o'clock, when most people who were going to vote had voted, they would be able to do that successfully, and they might, in an urban area, be

able to go around a few polling districts, if they have really done their homework, and vote several times for several people, before the close of poll at 10 o'clock.

Throughout the whole of this process, this is perhaps the most unique fraud of all. It is a fraud in which the victim does not know that they are a victim of fraud. If someone has decided not to vote in an election, they will not go out to check the marked register—if they even know what the marked register is, which most people do not. They will not go out to check that they have not voted in an election in which they have decided not to vote.

If a victim of electoral fraud does not know that they are a victim of electoral fraud, how does the hon. Member for Luton South know? I have not had an answer to that so far. However, this debate has a little while more to run, so I look forward to being enlightened on that point.

5.14 pm

Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (Alba): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. I congratulate the hon. Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) on obtaining the debate. I agree with her and share her sentiments.

I think I can speak with some experience. Others are equally experienced, but I first contested an election in winter 1974. I have contested elections since 1982 at every level—local authority, Scottish Parliament, United Kingdom Parliament and, indeed, the European Parliament. I have contested rural seats and, in particular, urban and deprived seats, so I think I have some experience.

Have I seen electoral fraud? Yes, but in almost 50 years' experience, I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of instances in which it has occurred. There are, of course, many apocryphal tales. I have heard them mentioned, sometimes by my own side, sometimes by others: keys to empty flats being used, to take polling cards; or staff in care homes taking the residents'. None of them actually bore any scrutiny. Does electoral fraud happen? Yes, we know that it happens. I have seen the sad situation in Northern Ireland, but that is not the situation either in Scotland or, certainly, south of the border. That is why the Government's position in fact creates a worse situation for democracy.

As parliamentarians, we should be encouraging people to participate in the franchise. Although the elections that just took place in Holyrood did not go the way I would have wished, I very much welcome the fact that, despite the fears that many of us had, turnout increased. That can only be a good thing for democracy. We would be delighted to obtain these days the turnout when I first participated back in 1974. We have to ensure that we encourage participation, not discourage it.

I have been fortunate in my political life to have met Professor Henry Milner. I think he is probably still alive; he will be a very old man. I remember him speaking to me and lecturing me. He gave me a copy of his book “Civic Literacy”, which is a fascinating study that I would recommend to any Member. He compares and contrasts the high turnouts in places such as Finland and Scandinavia and the lower turnouts in places such as Australia and, indeed, Belgium—countries where voting is mandatory and it can be a criminal offence not to vote. He explains that high turnout is not about being

[Kenny MacAskill]

able to vote at Tesco, and it is not about being given a free pen or whatever else. What matters is understanding, knowledge and awareness; people have to appreciate what they are voting for. It is not a simple, straightforward matter.

I accept that low turnout will not necessarily be blamed on impediments. As Professor Milner mentions and as we all know, people stood in the blazing sun in South Africa to vote for the end of apartheid, despite the difficulties in getting to vote. In the United States, it took ages for people to be able to vote and they went through difficulties and great delay, but they did so. That said, we have to remember that, as well as Professor Milner's lessons about raising political awareness, education and civic literacy—by which he means measures such as public service broadcasting and access to a broader, open media—there is a lesson about making it as easy as possible to vote. Voter ID goes against that, and that is why it is counterproductive.

The measures are not as flagrant as what we see in the United States, but let us remember that what we see in the United States is something utterly shameful. The voter suppression that was practised by those who supported President Trump's attempts to rig the ballot and remain in office came about after reconstruction at the end of the civil war, when those who could not retain ownership of people through slavery sought to retain it by rigging the ballot box. Sadly, voter suppression continues in the United States.

Voter ID is about voter suppression. For that reason, those who represent minorities have continued to express their concerns. Members may shake their heads, but this is not me; I am simply taking advice from the likes of the Electoral Reform Society, which I support and view as neutral. Those concerns also come from organisations such as Mencap, Crisis and those who represent the most vulnerable.

People sometimes criticise the referendum in Scotland, but it was truly startling: more people voted in the independence referendum than have voted in any election to the Scottish Parliament since. On that basis, voter ID is a counterproductive measure that discourages voting and is fundamentally wrong.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): The sitting is suspended for 15 minutes, until all Members return.

5.19 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

5.39 pm

On resuming—

[SIR EDWARD LEIGH *in the Chair*]

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The electoral integrity Bill, which is now called the Elections Bill, is a bit of a con. Putting the word “integrity” in the title—it is now in the long title—of the Bill cannot disguise that. It seeks to solve a problem that in reality does not exist, as we have heard. With only one person convicted of voter fraud and one person cautioned, it is very hard not to draw the conclusion

that something else is going on here. If the Government disagree with that—I appreciate that they do—they need to let us see the evidence as to why they are so convinced that this legislation is necessary.

The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher) told us that he was aware—to his knowledge—that alleged election fraud had taken place, but by his own admission, that attempt was thwarted. That was before we had this legislation in place, so clearly the legislation was not necessary to prevent that.

Mark Fletcher: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Patricia Gibson: I will not give way, because we need to move on. What we do have evidence for, from countries around the world where voter ID operates, is that it creates the barrier that we have heard about—a barrier to voting, and a barrier between citizens and their right to exercise their democratic choice.

The hon. Member for Gedling (Tom Randall) said that we do not know whether election fraud is taking place. All we can rely on are the facts, and the facts do not bear out the claim that there is a need for this Bill. Here is the rub: all the evidence shows that the more socially disadvantaged a voter is, the more likely it is that that voter will be further disadvantaged by the introduction of voter ID. Is this a mere accident? Is it a mere accident that the demographics most likely to be disadvantaged by the Bill are less likely to vote Tory? It must be an accident, surely. It must be an accident, because the title of the Bill—[*Interruption.*]

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): Order. Can we all just calm down?

Patricia Gibson: The Bill was called the electoral integrity Bill, and the long title still refers to “integrity”, so I am sure that any advantage or perceived advantage to the Tory party will be accidental.

The American experience tells us that voter ID resulted in reduced turnout among black, Hispanic and working-class voters, but of course this Government will know that. Research in the UK shows that the voters least likely to possess the necessary ID include the most disadvantaged groups in our community, but again, the Government will know that. The Government well know that 3.5 million voters across the UK do not have access to photographic identification and 11 million do not have a driving licence or a passport.

The example of Northern Ireland shows that an estimated 25,000 voters did not vote, because they did not have the required form of identification, but this information is not routinely published and no proper work has been done to analyse the further effects in Northern Ireland. The Government are willing to spend the estimated £10 million in implementing this exclusive, unnecessary scheme at a time when, as the Government will surely agree, spending is under real pressure, so it is almost impossible not to be suspicious of this measure.

In contrast, what do we see in Scotland? We see the franchise extended to 16 and 17-year-olds for the Scottish Parliament and local authority elections, and we see votes for foreign nationals who have leave to remain. Perhaps it is worth considering that, as a direct result of that, the voter turnout in May's Scottish Parliament election was the highest for any election since devolution

was established in 1999. There might be a lesson in that for proponents of this legislation. Surely any healthy democracy would seek to encourage voter participation instead of doing what we know suppresses turnout, for reasons that simply are not backed up by any convincing and sustained evidence. The so-called electoral integrity Bill, as was, is very much about elections, but let us be clear: it has nothing to do with integrity, which many argue is not really a priority for this Government anyway. Sadly, that is a problem for this Government, because the voters are watching and they understand what is going on here. The views expressed by those of us today who oppose the Bill speak for the electorate, who know.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): I just inform hon. Members that we had a 22-minute suspension, so we now have to finish at 6.12 pm. Can the Front-Bench spokesmen keep an eye on the clock, because it is only fair to give the proposer of the debate some time at the end?

5.44 pm

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) on securing this debate.

It is striking that the general arguments against this measure are so consistent: it is a solution in need of a problem, its implementation will have a disproportionate effect on certain communities and it undermines our democracy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) said, it is part of a pattern of measures—something we must not lose sight of. The hon. Member for Gedling (Tom Randall) made an important point; he said that we cannot really quantify it, but a problem really exists. In evidence-based policy making, one would normally identify a problem and then craft a proportionate solution. This way, we have a so-called solution that we know will cause a problem, but we have absolutely no idea of the quantum of the problem it is there to fix, if it even exists at all. I say gently to the Government that one should develop policy on the basis of evidence rather than anecdote. It is no surprise, given the evidence that we have, that this measure has quite rightly been described as voter suppression.

Let me turn to the genesis of the current voter ID plans. When the noble Lord Pickles reported on electoral fraud in 2016, he highlighted what he called the trust nature of polling station voting, and he was absolutely right to do so because trust is at its heart; it is the great strength of the voting process. Regardless of whether one agrees with the first-past-the-post electoral system, once voters have properly registered to vote, they do not need ID or even a polling card. In this democracy, if someone is entitled to vote, they can turn up and can cast their ballot—or not—for whoever they please. Suppressing the right to do that by making it more difficult will reduce trust in the result, not increase it, because the public will assume, quite rightly, that in some way this Tory Government have suppressed the vote to fiddle the result in their favour.

We did hear stuff about Tower Hamlets, and I do not doubt for a second that a lot of shenanigans went on, but the criminals should be arrested under the existing law. We refer to Tower Hamlets, but let me remind hon.

Members of Dame Shirley Porter, Westminster council and the homes for votes scandal, which the district auditor described as “gerrymandering”. At the end of the day, after many court cases and trials and a huge amount of money, the verdict was upheld by the House of Lords and she was asked to repay £42 million. If the public are concerned that somebody is at it, we have evidence of Tory gerrymandering designed precisely to win a handful of marginal wards in one local authority.

I do not think we should be going down the road of voter suppression, lest we end up with the head of the Post Office taking away post boxes for communities that do not vote Tory, as we saw in the United States when post boxes were removed from Democrat-voting areas during the last presidential elections. To proceed with this voter suppression plan, before the Supreme Court has made a determination on whether the pilot schemes that the Minister may pray in aid were even legal, further suggests that something is far from right.

When the Government responded to the various reports by the Lords Select Committee or the Joint Committee on Human Rights on this matter and various related matters, they said a number of things, such as that the potential for electoral fraud exists and

“the perception of this undermines public confidence in our democracy.”—[*Official Report*, 12 May 2021; Vol. 695, c. 2WS.]

However, there was precisely no evidence that anyone has ever not voted because of the small potential for electoral fraud. They said that although the incidence of voter fraud may be low, its impact can be significant and takes away a voter’s right to vote as they want. That is true in the few cases of personation that we have seen, but the impact of voter fraud is not just low to the point of being almost insignificant; it is almost non-existent. This is, as almost everyone has said, a solution looking for a problem.

The Library has helpfully told us that the worst year for personation was 2016, with 44 allegations and a single, sole, solitary conviction. That is one conviction for personation in 2016, which was the year of the EU referendum—a ballot in which more than 30 million people cast a vote.

The Government have also said that showing ID for everyday activities such as picking up a parcel is something that people from all backgrounds do already, and that voting should be no different. In my view, that is a facile and puerile argument. Collecting a parcel is not a human right, but being able to vote freely in a democracy is.

Finally, the Government have said that voter ID does not have a negative effect on election turnout or participation. That is simply not true. We know from the pilots that the proportion of voters not returning after initially being refused a ballot ran at between 0.1% and 0.7%, which implies between 46,000 and 325,000 people in a UK election in the whole of Great Britain. This plan alone would likely deny somewhere in the order of a quarter of a million people the right to vote, so it will have an impact on participation. And as has been mentioned a number of times, the Electoral Commission has suggested that 3.5 million people would not have a suitable ID, which means that the impact could be substantially larger.

So, however the Government slice and dice it, whether the scale of the suppression is only a quarter of a million voters or 3.5 million voters, and whatever we

[*Stewart Hosie*]

heard in Tower Hamlets or whatever we know about for Westminster City Council, this would be voter suppression on an industrial scale, and I urge the Minister to think again.

5.51 pm

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Sir Edward.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) on securing this debate. It is indeed a timely debate, given the recent publication of the Government's Elections Bill. As the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) said, it was initially mooted that it would be called the electoral integrity Bill, but it has absolutely no integrity and absolutely stinks of voter suppression. Consequently, I am glad that my hon. Friend has secured the debate, so that we can set out the reasons why the requirement to show photo ID to vote is a solution looking for a problem.

I will focus my arguments on three key areas. The first is the fact that voter fraud is vanishingly rare in England, Scotland and Wales, and that voters actually have high confidence in our British democracy. The second is that requiring photo ID for voting is a huge waste of taxpayers' money; it is estimated to cost £120 million over 10 years. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, this policy is discriminatory: it will lock millions of people out of democracy. I think that once we start to break down the Government's arguments for requiring photo ID, the mask starts to slip and there is a pattern of behaviour by which this is an act of voter suppression to try and rig future elections.

My first argument is that voter fraud is incredibly rare. When I say that, I mean that personation at polling stations is incredibly rare. I am the sort of person who looks at the statistics on electoral fraud when they are published, and it is an uncomfortable truth for all of us who are political activists that the main perpetrators of electoral fraud in this country are actually political activists. Indeed, it is something that I have seen in my own constituency, when one of the political parties that campaigns in Lancaster fraudulently filled in ballot nomination papers and made up people's names and addresses. Sadly, that type of fraud is quite common.

What is very rare is personation at polling stations. Many colleagues have already set out the statistics on that. For instance, 2019 was a year with a high-turnout general election, but the UK saw just one conviction for personation out of 59 million votes cast in that year alone. To put that into some kind of context, a person is more likely to be struck by lightning three times than to be impersonated at a polling station. So, personation is incredibly rare, and I am really pleased that the British people actually have confidence in our democracy, with recent surveys showing that confidence in our elections is at its highest for 10 years—since record-keeping on this issue started.

So we have an electorate who are confident in our democracy, and very low instances of voter fraud. We should be proud of our democracy, and certainly not talking it down in the way that the Government are doing.

My second argument is about the colossal waste of taxpayers' money. As we have heard from my colleagues, the Government are choosing to spend £120 million of taxpayers' money to introduce the voter ID scheme, presumably to catch one case of voter personation. I would argue that the money would be better spent on 9,000 more police officers on our streets over the next decade, in order to deal with the rising knife crime that blights so many of our communities, or perhaps on solving the epidemic of violence against women and girls—it feels like the Government have chosen to ignore that at the expense of pursuing this policy.

Voter personation is absolutely a crime, but it is about priorities and scale. We are spending £120 million on something that is so tiny, whereas huge problems in our society are going unaddressed. I would argue that such a level of investment could be better spent on fighting the types of crime that I have just spoken about, or perhaps we could even give a pay rise to our NHS workers, who are exhausted after an absolutely torrid 18 months of fighting covid on the frontline. Perhaps we could instead consider funding our children's catch-up education to an adequate level and supporting young people's mental health. But no—£120 million of taxpayers' money is deemed more valuable on this project, which is looking for a solution.

My final argument is that this policy locks people out of democracy. It is a regressive policy. It makes it more difficult to vote, and it puts barriers up. We have talked a lot about the people who do not have access to ID and marginalised groups, but it is actually also a barrier for those that do have ID, because it is an additional barrier. It means people looking around for their passport or driving licence before heading to the polling station. This policy can do nothing but suppress voter turnout, and when voter turnout is decreased, it is easier to manipulate elections and become more vulnerable to actions of potentially rogue states.

Mark Fletcher: The hon. Lady kindly intervened on me, told me of her Labour party membership since 2004 and told me that people do not require voter ID to attend Labour party events. To return to Tower Hamlets, I am conscious that the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Apsana Begum) hosted an event at St Paul's church in Bow on Sunday 27 October 2019. On the poster for that event, which I have in front of me, it says very prominently, "Bring photo ID." I am just curious as to why all the arguments that the hon. Lady is making do not apply to Labour party events.

Cat Smith: Attending a Labour party event is not a human right, but voting in a democratic election in a democratic country is. That is the first obvious point to make, but I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has given me the opportunity to talk about Tower Hamlets, because fraud was an issue in the election of Lutfur Rahman as mayor. I absolutely recognise that, and it is a serious issue, but if we are going to argue that personation at polling stations was the primary issue of fraud there, I would argue that we are actually missing the bigger picture, because there was postal vote fraud, there was illegal provision of false information, there was illegal employment of paid canvassers, and there was bribery and undue spiritual influence. It is important to look at such things as a whole, because the Elections Bill will

involve taking a very small slice of the problem and, I would argue, using it for party political advantage because of voter suppression.

Mark Fletcher *rose—*

Cat Smith: I do not think Sir Edward has the patience for me to give way a second time, but I am sure that we will have plenty of time to explore the arguments much further as the Bill comes before the House.

It is wrong for the Government to pursue the Elections Bill, which would require voter ID, when we are still waiting for the High Court judgment on the legality of the pilot schemes. The pilot schemes saw over 1,000 voters turned away from polling stations in just a few council areas. If we scale that up to a UK general election, we are talking about potentially changing the outcome of the election by locking people out of democracy.

This proposal is a colossal waste of money. It is a solution seeking a problem and it is a discriminatory policy that will lock some of the most vulnerable people, who need political representation the most, out of our democracy. I am proud of our British democracy. The British people have confidence in it, and it is about time that the Government started talking it up.

5.59 pm

The Minister for the Constitution and Devolution (Chloe Smith) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I will aim to speak for no more than 10 minutes, leaving time for the hon. Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) to come back in at the end. I hope that is sensible.

I thank the hon. Member for Luton South for bringing forward this debate, and all hon. Members who have contributed. The Government and I are committed to upholding the integrity of our democracy, giving the public confidence that our elections remain secure well into the future. Voter fraud is a crime that we cannot allow room for. We propose to stamp out any potential for it to take place in our reserved elections.

The hon. Member for Luton South asks why I would do this. It is because I want more people to vote, because I want people to have their own vote and because, apparently unlike some hon. Members speaking today, I want to stop criminals having two, three, four or more, or scores of votes.

Personation—assuming the identity of another person with the intention to deceive—is, by definition, a crime of deception. It only comes to light later. It is very difficult to prove and to prosecute, but it is a crime and by no means a victimless crime. It is often the most vulnerable who find themselves targeted. The Electoral Commission stated in its review of electoral fraud in 2013:

“The majority of people in communities affected by electoral fraud are victims rather than offenders.”

The people who are likely to be the victims of electoral fraud can be described as vulnerable.

I recognise the hon. Lady’s concerns about the diversity in her constituency. I am going to address many of those points today. I will start with a further point from the Electoral Commission’s own research, published by the University of Manchester, the University of Liverpool and the Electoral Commission in 2015, which warns that residents are at greater risk of being victims of electoral fraud in diverse areas.

Voter identification is important. It is a reasonable approach to strengthening our electoral system. It virtually eliminates the risk of personation occurring in the first place. Since its introduction in Northern Ireland, there have been no reported cases of personation. The EC has also previously noted that the confidence of voters that elections are well run in Northern Ireland is consistently higher than in Great Britain, and there are virtually no allegations of electoral fraud at polling stations.

Even the perception that our electoral system is vulnerable to fraud is of course damaging to public confidence. Data from our pilot evaluations show that the requirement to show identification increased public confidence in voting, and we all want that.

In 2016, Lord Pickles conducted an independent review of electoral fraud in the UK, which provided the evidence of vulnerabilities in our elections that must be addressed. In the case of Tower Hamlets, where an entire election was declared void by such fraud, he made a number of recommendations, including the introduction of voter identification at polling stations. Hon. Members speaking today, including the hon. Members for East Lothian (Kenny MacAskill) and my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson), have added to that evidence base. It happens in our country, it is wrong and we have the power to act.

The introduction of voter identification is also supported by the independent Electoral Commission. It is backed by international election observers, such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s office for democratic institutions and human rights, which has repeatedly called for the introduction of ID in polling stations in Great Britain, saying that its absence is a security risk.

Many other democracies around the world, such as Canada, France and Germany, and the Scandinavian countries—already hailed by the hon. Member for East Lothian today—require some form of identification to vote, and they use it with ease. Showing identification to prove who you are is something that people of all walks of life already do every day.

As we have discussed, many constituency Labour parties require two types of ID to vote in Labour party selection meetings—but then, the picking up of a parcel has been called a privilege. Perhaps Labour Members think that membership of their party is for the privileged as well.

The suggestion that millions of voters will not be able to vote is simply not supported by the evidence. Cabinet Office research from earlier this year shows that 98% of electors already own the photographic documents that we propose, either in date or expired. The survey was the first of its kind looking at the full range of photographic ID planned. I note in passing that the figures used by the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) are out of date and are not relevant to the identification that is proposed.

It is important to be aware that the list of approved photographic forms of identification will not be limited to passports and driving licences, but will include a broad range of documents already in use, including, for example, various concessionary travel passes, proof-of-age standard scheme cards and photocard parking permits issued as part of the blue badge scheme. Out-of-date ID will also be accepted as long as the elector can still be

[Chloe Smith]

recognised from the photograph, and any eligible voter who does not have one of any of those forms of identification may apply for their free, locally issued voter card from their local authority. That is critical. Everybody who is eligible to vote must and will have the chance to do so. We will continue to work with the Electoral Commission and other stakeholders, including charities and civil society organisations, to ensure that voter identification works for all. I encourage hon. Members to look at our comprehensive equalities impact assessment, which was published alongside the Bill.

As a Labour Minister said in 2003 when introducing photo ID in Northern Ireland:

“If we believed that thousands of voters would not be able to vote because of this measure, we would not be introducing it at this time.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 1 April 2003; Vol. 646, c. 1248.]

Indeed, look at all the work that I led to ensure that elections could take place this year, despite the pandemic, with voters able to vote by a new proxy scheme, up to polling day itself if necessary. That is not a Government suppressing voters. I strongly suggest that sensible politicians drop that foolish language.

It is vital that such an important policy be implemented properly. That includes secondary legislation, which is a sensible approach. The roll-out of voter identification was successfully trialled in two years of pilots in a variety of local authorities, and we are building on that knowledge with research, modelling and planning, as we work with the electoral sector and wider organisation on the national implementation plans. Crucially, we will ensure that there is sufficient time and resources to support the hardworking elections teams to put it in place. Critically, there will be comprehensive targeted communications and guidance by the EC to raise awareness among voters.

Of course, introducing voter ID is only one of the measures that this Government are bringing forward to strengthen our electoral system. After all, personation is just one of the interlocking types of fraud that we have seen at polls, as argued by the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) and as demonstrated in Tower Hamlets. That is why, with our new Elections Bill, we are also tightening the rules for absent voting, giving greater protection to all people with a postal or proxy vote arrangement. We are legislating to clarify and improve the outdated legislation on the offence of undue influence of an elector.

Modernisation is critical inside the polling station as well. The test of identification already exists, but voters are asked only for their name and address, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Tom Randall) rightly

pointed out. I regret that some seem to oppose voter identification in principle, because that principle has been part of our elections for decades. It is right to do it, but we need to do it well, not badly. Victorian law needs to be updated, and that is what we are doing.

I thank the hon. Member for Luton South for bringing forward the debate, and all hon. Members who have contributed. We have discussed a number of important issues, and we will have much more debate as the Elections Bill progresses through Parliament. I look forward to that, because this policy is truly important to protect that most precious of things—our democracy.

We are the stewards of a fantastic democratic heritage, but it is not perfect and we must keep striving to ensure that it stays secure, fair and transparent in the face of the challenges that the modern world brings. Strengthening the integrity of our electoral system will give the public greater confidence that our elections will remain secure well into the future. The measures in our Bill are a reasonable and proportionate approach to give the public confidence in a core principle of our democracy—that their vote is theirs, and theirs alone.

6.8 pm

Rachel Hopkins: We have had a long afternoon, with the votes in the House. I thank everybody for their participation. I thank in particular the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) for his comments, because I believe that this is just the Government's attempt to cling on to the levers of power. I thoroughly agree with the hon. Member for East Lothian (Kenny MacAskill) that we should encourage participation and civic literacy. I particularly agreed with the right hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie), who said that we need evidence-based policy, not anecdote. Finally, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith): we on this side of the House all know that this is a solution looking for a problem, and that £120 million of taxpayers' money could be much better spent fighting crime with 9,000 more police officers.

Ultimately, the proposals will lock the most marginalised people out of democracy, including those with disabilities, the elderly and those from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. The Minister said that we must do everything to protect our democracy and I agree, but tackling potential fraud by actually disenfranchising voters is wrong.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the introduction of Voter ID.

6.10 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statement

Tuesday 13 July 2021

HOME DEPARTMENT

National Crime Agency: Crime Reduction Function Inspection

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): The National Crime Agency (NCA) leads the fight against serious and organised crime. It has the power to task other law enforcement partners and a capability, with local to international reach, to disrupt the impact of serious and organised crime on the UK.

This is the eighth Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and fire and rescue services inspection of the NCA and examines the non-specialist NCA investigation teams based at the branch offices across the UK. The focus is specifically on the alignment of investigations to the threats, allocation of resources, and the NCA's capacity to tackle organised crime.

I have asked HMICFRS to publish the report. It will be published today and will be available online at www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk. I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The inspection found that NCA's crime reduction function is working well in a number of areas of law enforcement. The agency's management of the highest priority cases and the difficult management of scarce, specialist resources are effective, and cases being developed by the intelligence command are focused on SOC threats. The agency's investigators show resilience and flexibility often in difficult conditions. However, the report also identifies a number of areas for improvement, including assessment of capacity in the investigations command to meet the demand being developed by the intelligence command, inadequate level and quality of equipment and access to investigative tools in some parts of the country, an over-reliance on legacy IT systems and the need for consistent investment to ensure the NCA is at the same standards as the police force.

[HCWS173]

Petition

Tuesday 13 July 2021

OBSERVATIONS

TRANSPORT

Outer London driving charges

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that consideration should be given to stopping the Mayor of London imposing charges for driving in Outer London; notes that if the Mayor of London imposes these charges, residents of the constituency of Dartford will be forced to pay a £3.50 fee each time they drive in Outer London.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to consider stopping the Mayor of London from imposing charges on driving in Outer London.

Andhs_6bBigBoldHdg the petitioners remain, etc.—
[Presented by Gareth Johnson, *Official Report*, 30 June 2021; Vol. 698, c. 372.]

[P002670]

Observations from The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean) and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Baroness Vere of Norbiton:

Behind this issue lies the question of the finances of Transport for London (TfL). In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the Government have agreed three extraordinary funding and financing packages for TfL worth over £4 billion to ensure the continuation of public transport services in London. Whilst keeping transport in London moving, these deals push TfL to achieve financial sustainability as soon as possible—with a target date of April 2023—ensuring fairness to national taxpayers.

A condition of this support required the Mayor of London and TfL to develop a plan for financial sustainability. One of the Mayor's proposals is a Boundary Charge. An estimated 1.3 million vehicle journeys are made into London every weekday and the Mayor has asked TfL to carry out a feasibility study on such a charge and its impact on road users. Minister Maclean stated that the Government does not support a Boundary Charge in a Westminster Hall debate on 23 March 2021. The Secretary of State reiterated that position on 29 April 2021 in the House of Commons, during Transport questions.

While transport in London is devolved to the Mayor and TfL—and it is for the Mayor and TfL to find ways to balance TfL's budget—the Government will ensure that any proposal is consistent with national policy.

ORAL ANSWERS

Tuesday 13 July 2021

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	149	HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE—continued	
Carers	162	NHS Estate	152
Childhood Obesity	155	NHS: Trade Deals	154
Covid-19: Child Health Services	159	Patient Transport: VAT	160
Covid-19: Departmental Response	151	Pharmacies: Primary Care	158
Covid-19 Roadmap	157	Quarantine-free Travel	160
General Practice Data for Planning and Research..	156	Social Care Reform	149
Health and Social Care: Collaboration	159	Topical Questions	162
New Hospitals: Funding Bids	161		

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Tuesday 13 July 2021

	<i>Col. No.</i>	<i>Col. No.</i>
HOME DEPARTMENT	5WS	
National Crime Agency:		
Crime Reduction Function Inspection	5WS	

PETITION

Tuesday 13 July 2021

	<i>Col. No.</i>
TRANSPORT	1P
Outer London driving charges	1P

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons*,

**not later than
Tuesday 20 July 2021**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 13 July 2021

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 149] [see index inside back page]
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Electric Vehicle Charging Points (New Buildings) [Col. 171]
Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Felicity Buchan)—agreed to
Bill presented, and read the First time

International Aid: Treasury Update [Col. 173]
Motion—(Boris Johnson)—on a Division, agreed to

Armed Forces Bill [Col. 231]
Programme motion (No. 3)—(David T. C. Davies)—agreed to
As amended, considered; read the Third time and passed

National Health Service [Col. 270]
Motion—(Helen Whately)—on a Division, agreed to

Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism [Col. 300]
Motion—(Chris Philp)—agreed to

English Votes for English Laws [Col. 306]
Motion—(Mr Rees-Mogg)—agreed to

Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority [Col. 327]
Motion—(Mr Rees-Mogg)—agreed to

Randolph Turpin [Col. 330]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall
Fisheries Management [Col. 39WH]
Aquind Interconnector [Col. 66WH]
Oxford-Cambridge Arc [Col. 71WH]
UK Emissions Trading Scheme: Wales [Col. 92WH]
Voter ID [Col. 97WH]
General Debates

Written Statement [Col. 5WS]

Petition [Col. 1P]
Observations

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
