

**Wednesday
3 November 2021**

**Volume 702
No. 66**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 3 November 2021

House of Commons

Wednesday 3 November 2021

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement

1. **Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of the effect of the UK-EU trade and co-operation agreement on Scotland.
[903918]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alister Jack): This is an incredibly significant week for the whole planet, as countries from around the world gather in Glasgow to negotiate on climate action. We are facing a climate emergency, with no time to lose; we must keep 1.5° alive. I am sure that the whole House will join me in urging all countries at COP to make a real commitment to change. I know that we will all want to take this opportunity to thank Police Scotland for working so hard to ensure a safe and secure COP26. It is supported in that by 7,000 police officers from other UK forces. I am very pleased that the UK Government have brought COP26 to Glasgow, and I am sure the city will receive a long-term boost from being in the world spotlight.

The UK Government have agreed a deal with the EU that fully delivers for Scotland and the rest of the UK. Our deal provides Scottish businesses with exceptional access to EU markets. It is the first time the EU has ever agreed a zero-tariff, zero-quota deal. I regret that the SNP refused to support that deal.

Kirsten Oswald: Brexit-induced labour shortages are having a real impact on several sectors of the Scottish economy, with social care, hospitality, and food and drink among the worst hit. For some, the impact has been catastrophic, with up to a third of Scotland's harvest of some crops left to rot in the fields. Those are the direct consequences of this UK Government's hard Brexit deal and their ideological decision to abruptly end freedom of movement. The Secretary of State knows that, and he knows that the EU provided over €1 billion in Brexit support to Ireland, so will he back Scotland's employers and support a compensation fund to mitigate the Brexit damage inflicted on Scotland against our will?

Mr Jack: The hon. Lady will know that I backed the increase in the seasonal agricultural workers scheme from 2,500 to 30,000. The National Farmers Union of Scotland is well aware of that; I led on those negotiations. She will know that the EU settled status scheme has been successful. We were told that fewer than 3 million people would apply but in fact over 6 million have applied. Some of those workers have remained in their countries; they can come to the UK freely, as she knows, but they remained in their countries during the pandemic, and the pandemic has been a factor. We also have the shortage occupations list, which creates lower salary requirements for skilled workers. This Government are doing everything they can, but we have to recognise that there is a pandemic effect on labour shortages at the moment.

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): The Secretary of State will be aware that the principal export market for most businesses in my constituency is in England. Does he share my frustration that the Scottish Government, rather than supporting those businesses with exports to other parts of the United Kingdom, continue to pursue an independence agenda, which could only mean more barriers for those businesses?

Mr Jack: My right hon. Friend is spot on. Scotland's trade with the rest of the UK is three times more than her trade with Europe. It is worth over £50 billion, it is worth over half a million jobs, and it is critical that we keep the border open.

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): The Secretary of State will remember that Scotland voted to remain part of the European Union, and that despite every compromise offered, this Government ploughed ahead with Brexit, knowing full well the damage that it would do to Scotland and that it was against the wishes of the people in Scotland. Now, the Office for Budget Responsibility has projected that the UK's economy will be 4% smaller because of Brexit, and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs found that Scottish exports were actually higher last year, during the height of the pandemic, than they are this year, after Brexit.

I know that the Secretary of State mentioned the pandemic, but that means that Brexit is having a worse impact on Scottish exports than the pandemic. Although he could have fooled me with his lack of mask, Mr Speaker, I am going to presume that the Secretary of State is not in favour of the pandemic and its effects. Given that the effects of Brexit are worse, why does he support it?

Mr Jack: The hon. Lady quotes the OBR. Actually, the OBR prediction was for economic growth to be 4% in March. The reality is that it has corrected that, and its prediction is now for economic growth to be 6.5% in 2021 and 6% in 2022. Actually, our economy is recovering strongly, and it is the fastest-growing economy in the G7.

Mhairi Black: This alternative reality is an international embarrassment. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) already mentioned, the EU provided over €1 billion to Ireland as a Brexit compensation fund to combat its effects. Since we know

that Brexit is damaging Scotland's economy and since this place clearly thinks itself so superior to the EU, without mentioning existing funds can the Secretary of State tell us when Scotland will receive its Brexit compensation fund and how much will be in it?

Mr Jack: We have just had a Budget where the Chancellor has given £41 billion in the block grant, up £4.6 billion and the largest ever block grant received by the Scottish Government since devolution began in 1998. On top of that, this week there was almost £200 million in structural funds support through the levelling up fund, the community renewal fund and the community ownership fund. More money is going into Scotland than ever before to support Scotland as we go through the pandemic. It is a matter of enormous regret that last night, when the Budget vote took place, the SNP did not support all that extra funding for Scotland.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): The EU announced earlier this week that it would be removing the tariffs on American whisky, in a further de-escalation of the trade dispute between the US and the EU. Clearly, there has already been positive news for the Scotch whisky industry with the five-year suspension, but will the Secretary of State work with me to encourage the UK Government to remove all tariffs on American whisky, which would further support the distillers in Moray and the industry across Scotland?

Mr Jack: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I know that there are over 40 distilleries in his constituency, so I understand why he feels very strongly about this issue. I agree with him. We were successful in taking the 25% tariff away, but it needs to be removed completely and not just suspended for a number of years. The way to do that is for us to also remove our tariffs on bourbon. I would be very happy to meet him to discuss that.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Brexit has been nothing other than an unmitigated disaster for Scotland. We now have food shortages, labour shortages, businesses unable to export their products and food rotting in the fields. Is it not about time, instead of all this mealy-mouthed nonsense, that the Secretary of State got to his feet and apologised to the people of Scotland for dragging our nation out of the European Union against its national collective will?

Mr Jack: I simply do not recognise what the hon. Gentleman says. We have been through the pandemic and it is far too early to say what any impacts are to make predictions, but what we do know is that our economy is growing. We are doing fantastic trade deals around the world, which will benefit the Scottish economy, and Scottish food and drink. He just needs to get positive about that: stop talking down Scotland's businesses, stop talking down Scotland, and start to get optimistic about the opportunities we face.

Mr Speaker: May I just gently say to Ministers that they are meant to speak through the Chair? That was becoming a very personal battle and I am trying to not allow that.

Scottish Fishing Industry

2. **Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con):** What steps he is taking to support the Scottish fishing industry. [903919]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Iain Stewart): My Department continues to work closely with the Scottish fishing industry. Following the success of our Scottish Seafood Exports Taskforce, which made real progress on issues identified by industry, we are continuing to bring together industry and Ministers through our Scottish Seafood Industry Action Group to continue that productive engagement.

Andrew Bowie: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. As a newly independent coastal state seeking this week to negotiate with Norway an agreement on Arctic cod, what is he doing to break the monopoly of the foreign-owned and rather slyly named UK Fisheries, which has had more than its fill from Svalbard and has for decades fleeced the Scottish fishing industry over the UK quota on Arctic cod?

Iain Stewart: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I am well aware of the representations the catching sector in Scotland has made over quotas it lost when we were a part of the common fisheries policy. That saw Scottish quotas swapped for the benefit of a foreign-owned vessel. I am sure that being an independent coastal state must mean that we look after our truly domestic businesses first and foremost.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I hope the Minister is aware that the next few weeks will be the most important weeks of the year for businesses exporting fish to continental Europe. Nothing should be done that will affect confidence in the reliability of supply from these shores. These are the same people who were absolutely hammered in the first week of the year as a consequence of the shambolic start to the year. They were promised compensation by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs at that stage. I have spoken to one supplier in Shetland who has been told that if he had allowed his fish to rot on the quayside, he would have got full compensation, but because he sold it at a significant discount in the domestic market, he will get nothing. Surely that it is not how it was supposed to work?

Iain Stewart: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising that point. If he cares to send me the details of that firm, I will certainly follow that up with my colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and make sure that the scheme has been working as it should have been.

Scotland's Shipbuilding Industry

3. **Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to create jobs and encourage investment in Scotland's shipbuilding industry. [903920]

13. **Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to create jobs and encourage investment in Scotland's shipbuilding industry. [903931]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alister Jack):

The UK Government's commitment to shipbuilding in Scotland is unwavering. Over the past 15 years, we have delivered: six Type 45 destroyers, launched from the Clyde; two aircraft carriers, assembled at Rosyth; five offshore patrol vessels, built on the Clyde; and we have ensured a bulging order book for the future—eight Type 26 frigates have been ordered, with three of them already under construction on the Clyde, and five Type 31 frigates have been ordered and are destined for Rosyth.

Sarah Atherton: I am pleased that the first deal has been cut for the Type 31 frigate, HMS *Venturer*, which is being built at Rosyth. With the fleet's construction due to support 1,250 jobs and 150 apprenticeships, does my right hon. Friend agree that such projects are integral to the Union?

Mr Jack: I absolutely agree: the shipbuilding industry makes a huge contribution to strengthening the Union. It directly supports UK security and prosperity, and it supports 25,200 jobs across the UK and 7,000 direct jobs in Scotland. I was fortunate to visit BAE Systems in Govan recently and I met the excellent workforce building HMS *Glasgow*; I am assured that she will be a very fine ship.

Jack Lopresti: Does my right hon. Friend share my disappointment that Scotland's state-owned shipyard could not even compete for a Scottish ferry building contract, and does he note that the Scottish Government's failure may cost many shipbuilding jobs?

Mr Jack: I do share my hon. Friend's disappointment that the Scottish Government-owned shipyard was unable to compete in the tenders for two new ferries for Scotland. That disappointment is shared by the whole of Scotland, particularly island communities, who are suffering every day as a result of the SNP's self-inflicted ferry fiasco.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Orbital O2 tidal generator was the first marine vessel launched from Dundee in 40 years. Wave and tidal offer massive opportunities for the wider maritime industry in Scotland. All that is required for these technologies to scale up is a ring-fenced pot of money in the forthcoming contracts for difference auction. Will the Secretary of State, given his power, raise this with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to make sure that that happens? I would be happy to meet him.

Mr Jack: Yes, and yes.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): In 2019, the Scottish Government took shipbuilding company Ferguson Marine into public ownership. The yard was supposed to deliver two ferries by the end of 2019 at a cost of £97 million. The ferries still have not been delivered and the total cost has ballooned to more than double the original budget, leaving islanders without new ferries and taxpayers footing the bill. As we have just heard, rather than now using the shipbuilder to build more ferries, they are sending the contracts abroad to create jobs in other countries. Does the Secretary of State think that that

represents value for money for Scottish and UK taxpayers? If he does not, will he raise the issue with Scottish Ministers, because taxpayers really do deserve better?

Mr Jack: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. The Scottish Government's incompetence in this area has cost the taxpayer very, very heavily. Eleven organisations responded to the original procurement process. The three chosen to tender were shipyards in Romania, Poland and Turkey. I would have preferred the Scottish Government to show some loyalty to UK shipyards, even if their own one could not fulfil the contract.

Scottish Seed Potato Industry

4. Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support the Scottish seed potato industry. [903921]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Iain Stewart): This Government are continuing to work collaboratively with counterparts in the devolved Administrations on issues affecting seed potato growers. We remain in close contact with the main industry bodies and we continue to press the European Commission to allow imports of our high-class seed potatoes.

Duncan Baker: The EU continues to block seed potato exports into Europe. It offers no reciprocal trading arrangements and that is harming not only the vital industry in Scotland, but my growers, Solana Seeds, in North Norfolk. Will my hon. Friend agree to meet me to explain the situation further and what we are doing to rectify this problem?

Iain Stewart: I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend. I can tell him that an application has been submitted to the EU to lift the restrictions, based on recognising GB seed potato requirements as equivalent, and is being pursued at both a political and a technical level. We remain committed to finding a solution to allow exports to resume and will continue to press our case with the Commission. In the meantime, the temporary authorisation that allowed imports of seed potatoes from the EU expired on 30 June.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): This is just another example of the botched Brexit deal failing to take into account the needs of a small but very important industry. The industry has now completely collapsed; 30,000 tonnes of seed have not been exported and £13.5 million of trade is no longer in place. What is the Minister doing to ensure that an equivalence deal is reached with the EU as soon as possible so that trade can resume?

Iain Stewart: In addition to the points that I made in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Duncan Baker), I point out to the hon. Lady that there is enormous export potential around the world, particularly in China and elsewhere in Asia, for Scottish seed potatoes. I discussed the matter with the industry in Glasgow on Monday evening. There is huge potential, and we will do everything we can to help the industry to realise it.

Government's Plan for Jobs

5. Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Government's Plan for Jobs in supporting people in work in Scotland. [903922]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Iain Stewart): Our UK-wide total Department for Work and Pensions spend on labour market support will increase to more than £6 billion, which will give everyone a chance to progress, work and develop the skills that they need for the modern workforce. In Scotland, we have made available more than 15,000 jobs, and approximately 8,000 jobs have already started.

Sara Britcliffe: Supporting young people to fulfil their potential is key to levelling up opportunity. Does my hon. Friend agree that the UK-wide kickstart scheme, which has made well over 10,000 Scottish placements available, is yet another example of the UK Government delivering for the people of Scotland?

Iain Stewart: I absolutely agree. If I can loop my answer back to earlier questions about labour market issues, I hope that the schemes that the Government are putting forward will help to give the next generation the skills to fill these domestic vacancies.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): A proper plan for jobs would have Scottish renewables at its heart. There are four simple steps that the Minister could take today to unleash that proper plan's potential: first, persuade the Treasury to create a pot dedicated to tidal energy in the fourth contracts for difference auction; secondly, instruct Ofgem to reform transmission charges to stop disadvantaging Scotland; thirdly, fund energy interconnectors from the island generators to the mainland; and fourthly, back the Acorn carbon capture and storage project. Those Government decisions would not only transform the UK energy sector, but create a Scottish jobs legacy from COP26. Will the Minister demand that his Cabinet colleagues act now to create a proper jobs plan for Scotland?

Iain Stewart: The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue. Scotland has enormous potential in the renewables sector. I can reassure him that the Acorn project is not dead; it did not get through to the first two, but it is the reserve project and we will be working closely to ensure that it is in a future round. Through my Department, we are funding a number of renewable energy schemes such as CoRE—the Community Renewable Energy project—in East Ayrshire. Tidal energy, which the hon. Gentleman referred to, can form part of the Orkney islands growth deal. More generally, I would be happy to facilitate a meeting with my colleagues in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy so that the hon. Gentleman can discuss the wider issues.

Ian Murray: I would certainly accept a meeting with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to go over the issues, but I would have thought that the Minister and the Scotland Office would also

want to champion them. If one outcome from the conference of the parties is quite clear, it is that we need action, not just words.

The Chancellor's Budget last week did not have a plan for jobs either; in fact, he barely mentioned it. Despite paying more, Scottish taxpayers are getting much less after a decade of devastating Tory and SNP austerity. It is no plan for jobs to increase taxes on businesses and hard-working people at a time when households and businesses are struggling with rapidly rising costs. Are the Minister—as a Conservative Minister—and his Department comfortable that under his Government, hard-working Scots now face the highest tax burden since the 1950s?

Iain Stewart: On income tax, the Scottish Government are responsible and it is indeed true that they have higher taxes than the rest of the UK. I will leave the hon. Gentleman to take that up with the Scottish Government.

On his wider point about unemployment and employment, if the hon. Gentleman casts his mind back to the Budget last week, the forecast for unemployment after the pandemic was originally about 12%, but it is going to be less than half that. The changes that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is making to universal credit tapers, for example, will leave more money in the hands of hard-working people.

Turing Scheme: Young People in Scotland

6. Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Turing scheme for young people in Scotland. [903923]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Iain Stewart): The Turing scheme has provided funding for more than 40,000 participants from schools, colleges and universities across the UK to study and work around the globe during this academic year. Education providers in Scotland have received more than £8.2 million in funding under the scheme.

Ben Everitt: As one of two Members of Parliament representing Milton Keynes in this place, I am especially proud that the scheme is named after one of our local heroes, Alan Turing. Can my hon. Friend and neighbour confirm that the scheme's organisers will continue to seek global opportunities for our students, in the hope that we can inspire the next generation of codebreakers? Will he also join me in welcoming the fact that there are 28 successful applicants for Scottish projects, and £7.9 million is available for those projects this year?

Iain Stewart: I absolutely agree with my hon. and close Friend in Milton Keynes. It is a matter of pride that the scheme is named after Alan Turing, and given the work that he did to help the globe, I think it entirely fitting that our global scheme, which goes way beyond the horizons of Erasmus, is proving such a success. I am happy to confirm that, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in his Budget last week, funds will be provided to deliver the scheme for another three years.

Scottish Parliament: Legislative Competence

7. **Greg Smith** (Buckingham) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament. [903924]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alister Jack): I have frequent conversations with Cabinet colleagues about maintaining and strengthening the devolution settlement and ensuring that the Government's focus is on delivering for Scotland. It is important that all legislation clearly reflects the competence and roles of Scotland's two Parliaments and two Governments.

Greg Smith: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the key issue here is the need for the Scottish Government to exercise their existing powers more effectively, rather than asking for new powers or seeking to go outside the realms of the Scotland Act 1998?

Mr Jack: As my hon. Friend will know, we routinely engage with the Scottish Government on the use of devolved powers. It is in the interests of citizens across the UK for both Governments to operate within their respective powers, as set out in the Scotland Act. That is why I informed the Deputy First Minister back in March that I felt that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill and the European Charter of Local Self-Government (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill contained clauses that were outside the competence of the Scottish Government. Sadly, our warnings and suggestions for changes to the Bills were ignored, so our Law Officers referred the relevant clauses to the Supreme Court. The Court agreed with our views on every count. I hope that the Scottish Government will in future work with us to ensure that their Bills respect the devolution settlement, so that we do not waste any more time and money when enacting important legislation.

Renewables and Green Energy: Onshore Employment

8. **Kenny MacAskill** (East Lothian) (Alba): What steps he is taking to support onshore employment from renewables and other forms of green energy in Scotland. [903925]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Iain Stewart): This Government are committed to the transition of the economy to net zero by 2050. We recently published our net zero strategy, which will support hundreds of thousands of well-paid jobs and leverage up to £90 billion of private investment by 2030 across the entire United Kingdom.

Kenny MacAskill: Communities must have local as well as large-scale projects such as turbine manufacturing, which Scotland is sadly missing out on, but communities such as my own in East Lothian are denied a share of the wealth going ashore. There is a legislative gap to allow community benefit from offshore as opposed to onshore wind. Will the Minister meet me to discuss this to see whether East Lothian and other such communities can benefit from offshore wind, as Shetland has benefited from oil and gas?

Iain Stewart: I am always happy to meet the hon. Gentleman, but I would point out to him that this Government are investing heavily in offshore wind, as was announced this week by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): Scotland clearly has a lot to offer towards our net zero objectives—not least its high-quality wind! Can my hon. Friend confirm that the Acorn carbon capture and storage and hydrogen project is still very much part of the UK Government's plans for our overall carbon capture, utilisation and storage strategy and our net zero objectives?

Iain Stewart: The short answer is yes. As I explained a moment ago, that was not successful in the first two but it is a reserve project and we are actively working to ensure that it is there in future rounds.

10. [903928] **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Over 97% of Scotland's electricity comes from renewable sources. This sector's expansion is hampered not by potential but by the highest grid connection charges in the UK. COP is an opportunity to reassess such arrangements, so what discussions has the Minister had with Cabinet colleagues on reducing those connection charges?

Iain Stewart: I regularly meet Cabinet colleagues to discuss these matters and I will continue to do so. I would point out the investment that my Department is making in renewable energy right across Scotland. This includes the community renewable energy—or CoRE—project in East Ayrshire and tidal energy and offshore wind in Shetland. We are making real investment that will make a real difference to people's lives and the planet.

Mr Speaker: Before we come to Prime Minister's questions, I would like to point out that the British Sign Language interpretation of the proceedings is available to watch on parliamentlive.tv.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [904037] **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 3 November.

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): As the House will be in recess next week, I am sure that colleagues will join me in looking ahead to Armistice Day and remembering those men and women who have served and lost their lives in the service of this country. We also thank the members of our armed forces who continue to do so today.

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Dr Huq: The Prime Minister has been busy preaching urgency this week at COP26, and I hope that he has caught up with his sleep. When he sits down with his grandchildren one day and they ask, “What did you do in that week of COP26?”, will he be able to outline one action that was in his gift that had an immediate impact? Will he be consistent with what he has always said and done and take on the biggest emitter of CO₂ in the whole of Europe, which greedily and voraciously wants more? Will he ditch his predecessor’s damaging, daft, pre-levelling up, pre-Zoom and pre-90%-drop-in-demand proposal and have a fresh vote in this House to kill off the third runway at Heathrow?

The Prime Minister: What this Government are going to do, rather than taking steps to damage the economy of this country, which is what Labour would do, is get to net zero aviation. That is the future for this country: clean, green aviation. And by the way, that has every chance of arriving a lot earlier than a third runway at Heathrow.

Q2. [904038] **James Wild** (North West Norfolk) (Con): I share my right hon. Friend’s commitment to building back better, building back greener and levelling up, and I have a project that would deliver on all those things: rebuilding the ageing Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King’s Lynn. I have shown him the pictures of the 200 props holding up its decaying roof, so will he make the Queen Elizabeth one of the eight new schemes giving people in Norfolk, Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire the hospital they need?

The Prime Minister: I know that my hon. Friend does a huge amount of work for his constituents. I have seen the pictures that he describes. I can tell him that the application is in from the hospital in his constituency and that it is under consideration. We aim to make our final decision in the spring of next year.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the deputy leader of the Labour party, Angela Rayner.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can I share the Prime Minister’s opening words regarding our armed forces and the tremendous work that they do? I also send my best wishes to all those recovering in Salisbury and give our sincere thanks to the emergency services that responded on that day. I would also like to wish all those who are celebrating tomorrow a very happy and peaceful Diwali.

Let me start with something on which there should be agreement on both sides of the House. The independent standards process found that a Member broke the rules on paid lobbying. Surely the Prime Minister accepts that this is, and should be, a serious offence, yet we have seen reports that he will respond by scrapping the independent process and overturning its verdict. In no other profession in our country could someone be found guilty by an independent process and just have their mates vote them back into the job. Surely the Prime Minister and this Government are not going to do that today.

The Prime Minister: No, of course we are not going to do that, because paid lobbying, paid advocacy, in this House is wrong. I make absolutely no bones about that.

Members who are found guilty of it should apologise and pay the necessary penalties, but that is not the issue in this case or in the vote before us today.

The issue in this case, which involves a serious family tragedy, is whether a Member of this House had a fair opportunity to make representations and whether, as a matter of natural justice, our procedures in this House allow for a proper appeal, which is something that should be of interest to Members across this House and should be approached properly in a spirit of moderation and compassion.

Angela Rayner: Let me put it simply. If it was a police officer, a teacher or a doctor, we would expect the independent process to be followed and not changed after the verdict. It is one rule for Conservative Members and another rule for the rest of us.

When a Conservative Member was found guilty of sexual harassment but let off on a loophole, they said the rules could not be changed after the event. So they cannot change the rules to stop sexual harassment, but they can change the rules to allow cash for access. Why is the Prime Minister making it up as he goes along?

The Prime Minister: All the professions that she mentions have a right of appeal, which is what the House needs to consider. I respectfully say to her that, instead of playing of politics on this issue, which is what Opposition Members are doing, she needs to consider the procedures of this House in a spirit of fairness. Instead of playing politics, we are getting on with delivering on the people’s priorities: 40 more hospitals, 20,000 more police officers and wages up, growth up and jobs up across this country. Those are our priorities. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Perkins, I do not want to see any more of that.

Angela Rayner: It is not about playing politics in this place; it is about playing by the rules. As we can see, it is one rule for everybody else and another rule for the Conservatives. When they break the rules, they just remake the rules. I know Donald Trump is the Prime Minister’s hero, but I say to him in all seriousness that he should learn the lesson that, if he keeps cheating the public, it will catch up with him in the end. While the Conservatives are wallowing in sleaze, the rest of the country faces higher bills, rising costs and damaging tax rises. Can he tell us the projected tax increase per household over the next five years?

The Prime Minister: What I can tell her is that the recent Budget took cash from those who can afford to pay the most and made very substantial tax cuts for the hardest working and poorest families in this country. We cut £1,000 with the universal credit taper relief for hard-working families in this country—2 million families had a £1,000 tax cut—and we are lifting the living wage across the whole country. We are also ensuring that this country gets on with a high-wage, high-skill, jobs-led recovery, and never let it be forgotten that had we listened to the Opposition we would have none of those things because we would still be in lockdown.

Angela Rayner: I think the Prime Minister missed out the number, so let me help him out. The Resolution Foundation found that by 2026 taxes will be £3,000 more

per household since he took office. My constituents and his are feeling the pinch, and they are worried about Christmas as well. Their bills are going up every week and the Budget did nothing to help them. So can the Prime Minister tell them: how much was the tax cut that he gave to the banks instead?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Lady knows very well, it is the banks and the bankers who are paying far more proportionately as a result of our tax measures to cover the cost of the NHS. It is a very moot point because, of the £36 billion, 50% comes from the 14% who are the richest in this country—overwhelmingly, from the banks and financial services industry—who can pay the most. The astonishing thing is that, when it came to voting for that £36 billion increase—for 48 new hospitals, 50,000 more nurses and looking after our public services—the Opposition voted against it.

Angela Rayner: According to the Prime Minister's own Budget documents, it was £4 billion in tax cuts to the bankers and £3,000 of tax rises per household. That is good news for the donor who gave his party half a million pounds—his bank got a bonus of nearly £8 million—but not so good news for the rest of us.

This month, as the Prime Minister said, we remember and celebrate all those who serve our great country, all those who have lost their lives, leaving behind loved ones, and those who have sustained life-changing injuries and live every day with the consequences of their sacrifice. Yet hidden in the small print of the Budget was a £1 billion cut to day-to-day defence spending. So will our servicemen and women face pay cuts, or will there be fewer of them, with less support?

The Prime Minister: I think it is quite incredible that we are now hearing this from the Labour party, when they would have pulled us out of NATO. I think the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) actually wanted to abolish the Army. The woman sitting next to the right hon. Lady wanted to abolish the Army. What you have got with this Government is spending on defence that is the highest since the cold war; it is the biggest uplift since the cold war and an increase that has restored confidence in this country around the world, in our ability to defend not just our own shores, but our friends and partners. That is what this Government are doing.

Angela Rayner: The Prime Minister knows that I asked him about the annual defence budget, which his own Budget documents show will drop by £1.3 billion. I hear his fine words, and I am from a military family myself, but I will not take party political lectures from him, because too often the Government's actions do not match their words. I think of my constituent who fought in Afghanistan, yet was threatened with sanctions because he was unable to physically travel miles to the nearest Department for Work and Pensions office. The Prime Minister's tax cut for short-haul flights last week cost £30 million—that is 50% more than the Government spend on supporting veterans' mental health each year. The charity Combat Stress has lost £6 million in funding this year, even as calls to its helpline have doubled. So will the Prime Minister match our proposal to reinvest the £35 million saved from cancelled Ministry of Defence contracts to support our veterans, who surely deserve it?

The Prime Minister: It is because we have been able to run a strong economy and take our economy out of lockdown that we have been able to invest massively in the NHS, to lift spending on defence to record levels and to keep supporting our fantastic public services. That is what this Government are able to do.

I enjoy my conversations with the right hon. Lady, in spite of the insults and party political points that she directs towards the Government. I do not want to cause any further dissension on the Opposition Benches, but I think you will agree, Mr Speaker, that she has about a gigawatt more energy than the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). I am just putting that out there. But it is the same old Labour: no plan and no ideas. We are getting on with delivering on the people's priorities and taking this country forward. Growth is up, jobs are up, wages are up and productivity is up. All Labour does is play politics while we deliver.

Q5. [904041] **Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I thank the Prime Minister and the Government for securing our fantastic Stoke-on-Trent levelling-up funding. If we are truly to level up opportunities and access to opportunities in Stoke-on-Trent, we must also improve our poor public transport, so will my right hon. Friend agree to look at the possibility of bus franchising in the Potteries?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, I am a fanatic about buses. We are putting £1.2 billion more into bus funding, and I know that Stoke-on-Trent has applied for that. I urge my hon. Friend to take up his suggestion immediately with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): As we look forward to Remembrance Sunday, may I, too, commend those who have served and the military and security services that protect us all for the job that they continue to do?

Sir David Attenborough's powerful opening statement to COP26 told us that the journey to net zero means:

"We must recapture billions of tons of carbon from the air."

The Climate Change Committee has been clear that carbon capture and storage

"is a necessity not an option"

to achieve the planet's net zero targets.

This week, Scotland's world-leading climate targets have received widespread praise from, among others, the UN Secretary-General. Scotland is finding partners around the world to tackle the climate emergency, but in Westminster there is not even a willing partner to deliver the long-promised carbon-capture project. Scotland's north-east has now been waiting weeks for a clear reason for exactly why the Scottish cluster bid was rejected. There have been no clear answers, and not even clear excuses, so perhaps the Prime Minister will answer this simple question: does he know exactly how much of the UK's CO₂ storage the Scottish cluster could deliver?

The Prime Minister: I am a massive enthusiast for carbon capture and storage around the whole UK. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the Acorn project in

Aberdeen remains on the reserve list. He should not give up: we will come back to this issue and, of course, we want to make sure that we have a fantastic industry generating clean hydrogen around the country. The right hon. Gentleman should not despair. In the meantime, we are supporting amazing Scottish plans to get clean energy from wind, hydrogen and all sorts of means. I thank the people of Scotland and the people of Glasgow for the way they have helped to produce what has been, so far, a fantastically well-organised summit.

Ian Blackford: It is bad enough that the Prime Minister rejected the Scottish cluster a week before COP, but what is worse is that he clearly does not even know or understand what his Government were rejecting. Let me tell him: the Scottish cluster bid would have stored 30% of the UK's CO₂ emissions and supported the creation of around 20,000 jobs in green industries. It was far and away the best bid, Prime Minister. If the decision was based on science alone, it would have been approved on the spot. It is obvious that there was a political decision in Westminster to reject it. With days left at the COP summit, will the Prime Minister now reverse his Government's massive own goal in rejecting the Scottish cluster?

The Prime Minister: I am trying to encourage the right hon. Gentleman to be a little bit less gloomy about the prospects of this initiative. I understand exactly what he says, and we are working with the Scottish Government, whom I thank for their co-operation and all their support for COP in the past few days and weeks and for what they are doing. We will come back to this issue. What I think is working well is the spirit of co-operation among all levels of government in this country, and what does not work is confrontation.

Q6. [904042] **Simon Jupp** (East Devon) (Con): House prices are rising in East Devon, with the dream of home ownership becoming out of reach for too many local people. New-build developments must be affordable, with protections in place to restrict the number of properties becoming second homes. The loophole that allows second-home owners to avoid paying council tax should be closed quickly to help local authorities. Will the Prime Minister meet me and colleagues from across the south-west to discuss this growing crisis across our region?

The Prime Minister: I know how strongly my hon. Friend and other colleagues across the south-west feel about this issue. That is why we have legislated to introduce higher rates of stamp duty on second homes. We will ensure that only genuine holiday businesses can access small business rates relief, but I am certainly happy to meet colleagues to discuss what further we may do to ensure that local people get the homes that they need.

Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba): In the words of the Minister of State for Business, Energy and Clean Growth:

"Scotland is vital for the UK's energy needs, both currently and in the future...It is also vital for our future offshore wind capabilities, and other low-carbon and renewable energies."—[*Official Report*, 19 October 2021; Vol. 701, c. 615.]

As he confirms, it is the rest of the UK that is dependent on Scotland, not the other way round. Does the Prime Minister not realise that his failure to invest in carbon capture and storage at St Fergus in Grangemouth and to feed the potential at Mossmorran in my constituency, is regarded as an act of deliberate economic vandalism, casting himself less as Bond and more as Blofeld the villain, for all the COP26 world to see?

The Prime Minister: What the COP26 world can see is the astonishing achievements of Scotland and the rest of the UK in developing clean energy sources. I have said to the right hon. Gentleman, the leader of the hon. Gentleman's party in Westminster, that we will come back to the Aberdeen—[*Interruption.*] Sorry, forgive me, the hon. Gentleman is a member of a different party, but it has substantially the same agenda. We will come back to this. What I have found encouraging about the past few days is the spirit of co-operation and joint enterprise that I now detect that will enable us to deliver massive carbon cuts across this whole country.

Q7. [904043] **Peter Gibson** (Darlington) (Con): Darlington station is receiving £105 million thanks to this Government's plans to make it HS2 ready. I want to make sure that Darlington benefits from high-speed rail, so will my right hon. Friend meet with me and regional colleagues to discuss the eastern leg of HS2 and the reopening of the Leamside line to allow the full region to be better connected?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for everything that he has done for Darlington. He should wait for the interim rail plan to come out, but, in the meantime, we are upgrading Darlington station. There are plans in place and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced £310 million of funding over the next five years to transform local transport networks in the Tees Valley.

Q3. [904039] **Kate Osborne** (Jarrow) (Lab): The Prime Minister says that he is fanatical about buses, but what about trains, and not just in Darlington? I am talking about the Leamside line. Last Wednesday, I was notified that a joint bid to reinstate the mothballed Leamside line had not been successful in attracting the next stage of the feasibility funding from the Government as part of the restoring your railway fund. Will the Prime Minister tell us what specific plans the Government have to invest in the north-east, in places such as Gateshead and south Tyneside in my constituency, and when will he get serious about levelling up in our communities instead of just using the term as a meaningless, populist slogan?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady must wait for the integrated rail plan, but the north-east will be the beneficiary of the biggest investment in our rail infrastructure beyond HS2 that we have seen for a century. We will be putting in about £96 billion more, and we want the local and regional authorities to work with us to ensure that we promote the projects that the people really want.

Q11. [904048] **Dame Andrea Leadsom** (South Northamptonshire) (Con): I want to really thank my right hon. Friend for his support for the early years healthy development review and, in particular, for the half a billion pounds

of new money at the spending review last week. He often says that talent is spread equally across our country, but opportunity is not, so does he agree that giving every baby the best start in life is the best possible way to level up across our country?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I have listened to my right hon. Friend over many years on this issue and she is 100% right in what she says about the importance of early years. That is why we are investing £500 million to support families and children, including £82 million to create a network of family hubs to bring together services for children of all ages. We are going to continue to invest in children's early years—for example, the offer of 15 hours of early education for disadvantaged two-year-olds that has already benefited 1.1 million disadvantaged kids since 2013.

Q4. [904040] **Florence Eshalomi** (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): I was recently contacted by a Vauxhall constituent whose mother tragically committed suicide after criminal domestic abuse by her husband, with the inquest into her suicide finding his actions to be a direct cause. Incredibly, her abuser now stands to inherit her pension and entire estate because she was unable to complete a divorce. This has left the family devastated, and I am sure that the whole House will join me in sending them our condolences. Does the Prime Minister agree that convicted domestic abusers should never be able to profit from their victims, and will he meet my constituent and me to fix this hole in the law?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member describes a truly tragic and appalling case. I am sure that the whole House will share the revulsion that she has expressed at the outcome of the law's processes. We will certainly need to have a meeting to see what we can do to address that loophole.

Q14. [904051] **Jeremy Hunt** (South West Surrey) (Con): NHS staff performed magnificently during the pandemic, but there are now severe shortages in nearly every specialty. Will my right hon. Friend support an amendment to the Health and Care Bill that is backed by 50 NHS organisations and every royal college to require Health Education England to do regular independent forecasts of the numbers of doctors and nurses that we should be training, so that we can reassure people that, despite the pressure today, we are at least training enough doctors and nurses for the future?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that we have to ensure that our NHS has the staff that it needs. That is why there are 50,000 more healthcare professionals in the NHS this year than there were last year—12,000 more nurses. In addition, there are 60,000 nurses in training—[*Interruption.*] Somebody on the Opposition Benches asks, "Why are there waiting lists?". It is because we have been through a pandemic. We are fixing those waiting lists with £36 billion of investment, which the Labour party voted against.

Q8. [904044] **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is a little over a year since I last challenged the Prime Minister over his campaign promises to the 1950s-born women, in which time he has done hee-haw

about their pension injustices, so will he tell me today: do his Government have any plans to deliver justice for the women involved?

The Prime Minister: This is a very difficult issue, as the whole House knows. The case of the WASPI women is not easily addressed. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the expenditure involved is very considerable and the tax that would have to be raised would be very considerable. We continue to reflect on all the options to ensure that people across this country get fair pensions.

Jill Mortimer (Hartlepool) (Con): As a mother, I cannot begin to imagine the pain and torment of losing a child. Richard Lee, a constituent of mine and veteran who served with distinction in the British Army, has been living with this pain every day of his life since 28 November 1981. On that day, his daughter, Katrice Lee, went missing from a military shopping complex near Paderborn in Germany. It was Katrice's second birthday, and her family are still searching. The 40th anniversary of Katrice's disappearance is coming up at the end of this month. It will undoubtedly be an exceptionally painful event for the entire Lee family. Will the Prime Minister please agree to meet Mr Lee, father to father, and reassure him that Katrice has not been forgotten?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I thank my hon. Friend for raising this absolutely tragic case. I know that the thoughts of the whole House will be with Katrice Lee's family. Of course I will agree to my hon. Friend's request and meet Mr Lee, father to father.

Q9. [904046] **Sarah Green** (Chesham and Amersham) (LD): The Epilepsy Society is a charity and world-leading research centre based in my constituency. It started the epilepsy climate change initiative to better understand the effects of global warming on epilepsy, and the impact is already clear. A recent survey showed that in hot weather 62% of those whose seizures were uncontrolled experienced an increase in seizure frequency or severity. Will the Prime Minister join me in endorsing the epilepsy climate change initiative and commit to more funding to research the impact of climate change on human health?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady raises a very interesting aspect of research into epilepsy. We are funding epilepsy research with another £54 million over the last few years. The issue that she raises of any particular link between hot weather or climate change and epilepsy is certainly one that we will be going into.

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): Last week, an independent inquiry into Lib Dem-run Sutton Council's own heat network found that it was set up on false assumptions, including funding that was never obtained and homes that do not exist—and now my constituents are going to be left footing the bill. Does the Prime Minister agree that this latest failure shows that the Lib Dems are just not fit to govern and that those responsible should go?

The Prime Minister: It is not the first time that the Lib Dems have campaigned on homes that do not exist or will never exist, if I think of their campaign in Chesham and Amersham. I will certainly look into the matter that my hon. Friend raises.

Q10. [904047] Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): In a recent ITV interview, the Prime Minister was asked about my constituent Jenni Garratt. Jenni is a victim of the cladding scandal. Just before last Christmas, her building was evacuated because of safety concerns. She has been forced to pay £5,000 for a waking watch and alarms. She has to find £1,200 a year for car parking she can no longer access. The work needed to make her building safe is being blocked by the actions of her freeholder. She does not know the costs she will face, but they are estimated at thousands of pounds. Yet in his interview, the Prime Minister said Jenni had “a frankly unnecessary sense of anxiety”.

So will he meet her to hear why she is worried, and do so before the Building Safety Bill completes its passage through the House?

The Prime Minister: I have every sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's constituent—[*Interruption.*] I certainly do. I have every sympathy, but what I think is unfair is that people such as her are placed in a position of unnecessary anxiety about their homes when they should be reassured.

I sympathise deeply with people who have to pay for waking watches and other such things. I think it is absurd. But what people should be doing is making sure that we do not unnecessarily undermine the confidence of the market and of people in these homes, because they are not unsafe. Many millions of homes are not unsafe—and the hon. Gentleman should have the courage to say so.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): The new police and crime commissioner for the West Midlands has chosen to cut back on stop and search across the region. Can the Prime Minister confirm that while stops and searches must be proportionate and not discriminatory, they remain an important part of keeping our streets and communities safe?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I certainly agree with that. It was a point that I raised recently with the Labour Mayor of London. We agreed on many things—he was very much out of line with the current Labour policy on lockdown, for instance—but I certainly thought that he was wrong about stop and search. We need to make sure that stop and search is part of the armoury of police options when it comes to stopping knife crime. If it is done sensitively and in accordance with the law, I believe it can be extremely valuable.

Q12. [904049] Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Prime Minister, we can save the UK taxpayer £200 million and level up south London's health service. St Helier Hospital is set to lose its A&E, maternity, intensive care, children's service, renal unit and 62% of beds to healthy, wealthy Belmont, at a staggering cost of £600 million. But there is an alternative: rebuild St Helier, where health is poorest, and save £200 million. Now, it is not my job to help the Prime Minister sort out his budget, but would not this be a good place to start?

The Prime Minister: We are investing in 48 new hospitals and rebuilds. What is the hon. Lady's job, frankly, is to vote for £36 billion of investment in the NHS, which will allow us to take our health services forward. Why would she not do that?

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): I commend the Prime Minister on his diplomatic efforts in recent weeks and ask him about another serious and grave issue that was raised at the G20 in Rome: the strong likelihood of a nuclear-ready Iran within a matter of weeks or months. What will the UK do with our international partners to tackle that? If it is via an agreement, will it be stronger and more enduring than the last one? If it is not, as many people suspect, what is our plan B?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question on an issue that he knows a great deal about. This is a case of making it clear to the Iranians that there is an opportunity for them to do something that would be massively in the interests of their people and of Iran: to come back to the table and do a further agreement—a son of the joint comprehensive plan of action—and restore the JCPOA at the Vienna talks. That is what needs to happen. That is the posture of the G20 and of our friends and allies around the world.

Q13. [904050] Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): The universal credit cut is already hitting people hard. Even before the challenges of the pandemic, 39% of children in my constituency grew up in poverty. Deptford First, a local charity that I chair, has launched a fundraising campaign to support people through the winter months. The Prime Minister is well known for his abilities to attract wealthy donors to the party. Will he use those skills to boost our campaign or—even better—will he cancel the cuts?

The Prime Minister: What we have done with universal credit is abolish the old system, which unfairly taxed people on universal credit, and help people with a £1 billion tax cut. What we on this side of the House believe in is rewarding work. That is what the people of this country want to see. That is why we have put the tax cut on those who are on universal credit and that is why we are lifting the living wage. What is the Opposition's policy on universal credit? It is not nothing; they want to abolish universal credit.

Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con): The Mayor of London is refusing to rule out the so-called outer London charge, which would apply to all vehicles registered outside Greater London that cross the Greater London boundary. That would have terrible consequences for my Orpington constituents and those who live in the neighbouring constituency of Old Bexley and Sidcup. Louie French, the excellent local candidate for the by-election, has pledged to fight that appalling proposal. Will my right hon. Friend join me in wishing Louie French luck with that and ensure that this silly move from the Mayor of London is stopped in its tracks?

The Prime Minister: I certainly do agree with my hon. Friend, who is an old friend of mine; I have worked closely with him on London issues for many years. I know where Labour's instincts are. It always wants to put taxes up, particularly on motorists, and I think a checkpoint Chigwell would hit working families. What the Labour Mayor of London needs to do is get a grip on TfL's finances and stop whacking up the taxes on ordinary people in the capital city.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): The Prime Minister is very much aware of my constituent, Jagtar Singh Johal, who was abducted by plainclothes

officers while shopping with his new wife in the city of Jalandhar, Punjab, on 4 November 2017. The intervening years have seen allegations of torture overlooked, and ostensibly strong words from the Prime Minister's Government about the case overshadowed by excitement over a trade deal with the Republic of India.

As we approach the fourth anniversary of Jagtar's arrest tomorrow with no charges having been brought in the case by the Government of India, can the Prime Minister's Government grant the smallest of favours to Jagtar's wife and his family in Dumbarton and declare his detention an arbitrary one?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the campaign that he has been running for Jagtar Singh for a long time. I say to him that the closeness of our relationship with India in no way diminishes our willingness to raise that case with the Government of India. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised it the last time she was in India.

Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con): Unlike the Opposition, I welcome the record investment in the NHS announced in the Budget. Will my right hon. Friend support my campaign for a new health centre in the village of East Leake in my constituency, where the current building is no longer big enough to serve the population? It will soon need to accommodate 3,000 new patients from new building.

The Prime Minister: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary will do his utmost, in the course of the coming decisions, to oblige my hon. Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Ruth Edwards) in her justified campaign for Rushcliffe and its hospital. How incredible that Labour Members continue to catcall and attack the Government when they voted against the tax rising measures that are necessary to fund our NHS! They are completely inconsistent. They have absolutely no plans and no idea.

G20 and COP26 World Leaders Summit

12.41 pm

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement about the G20 summit in Rome and update the House on COP26 in Glasgow.

Almost 30 years ago, the world acknowledged the gathering danger of climate change and agreed to do what would once have been inconceivable: to regulate the atmosphere of the planet itself by curbing greenhouse gas emissions. One declaration succeeded another until, in Paris in 2015, we all agreed to seek to restrain the rise in world temperatures to 1.5° C.

Now, after all the targets and promises, and after yet more warnings from our scientists about the peril staring us in the face, we come to the reckoning. This is the moment when we must turn words into action. If we fail, Paris will have failed, and every summit going back to Rio de Janeiro in 1992 will have failed, because we will have allowed our shared aim of 1.5° to escape our grasp.

Even half a degree of extra warming would have tragic consequences. If global temperatures were to rise by 2°, our scientists forecast that we will lose virtually all the world's coral reefs. The Great Barrier Reef and countless other living marvels would dissolve into an ever warmer and ever more acidic ocean, returning the terrible verdict that human beings lacked the will to preserve the wonders of the natural world.

In the end, it is a question of will. We have the technology to do what is necessary; all that remains in question is our resolve. The G20 summit convened by our Italian friends and COP26 partner last weekend provided encouraging evidence that the political will exists, which is vital for the simple reason that the G20 accounts for 80% of the world economy and 75% of greenhouse gas emissions. Britain was the first G20 nation to promise in law to wipe out our contribution to climate change by achieving net zero; as recently as 2019, only one other member had made a comparable pledge.

Today, 18 countries in the G20 have made specific commitments to achieve net zero and in the Rome declaration last Sunday every member acknowledged

“the key relevance of achieving global net zero greenhouse gas emissions or carbon neutrality by or around mid-century”.

To that end, the G20, including China, agreed to stop financing new international unabated coal projects by the end of this year—a vital step towards consigning coal to history—and every member repeated their commitment to the Paris target of 1.5°.

In a spirit of co-operation, the summit reached other important agreements. The G20 will levy a minimum corporation tax rate of 15%, ensuring that multinational companies make a fair contribution wherever they operate. Over 130 countries and jurisdictions have now joined the arrangement, showing what we can achieve together when the will exists.

The G20 adopted a target of vaccinating 70% of the world's population against covid by the middle of next year, and the UK is on track to provide 100 million doses to that effort. By the end of the year, we will have donated over 30 million doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca

vaccine, and at least another 20 million will follow next year along with all 20 million doses of the Janssen vaccine ordered by the Government. The G20 also resolved to work together to ease the supply chain disruptions that have affected every member as demand recovers and the world economy gets back on its feet. I pay tribute to Prime Minister Mario Draghi for his expert handling of the summit.

But everyone will accept that far more needs to be done to spare humanity from catastrophic climate change. In the meantime, global warming is already contributing to droughts, brushfires and hurricanes, summoning an awful vision of what lies ahead if we fail to act in the time that remains. So the biggest summit that the United Kingdom has ever hosted is now under way in Glasgow, bringing together 120 world leaders with the aim of translating aspirations into action to keep the ambition of 1.5° alive. I am grateful to Glasgow City Council, Police Scotland, police across the whole of the UK and our public health bodies for making the occasion possible and for all their hard work. For millions across the world, the outcome is literally a matter of life or death. For some island states in the Pacific and the Caribbean, it is a question of national survival.

The negotiations in Glasgow have almost two weeks to run, but we can take heart from what has been achieved so far. Nations that together comprise 90% of the world economy are now committed to net zero, up from 30% when the UK took over the reins of COP. Yesterday alone, the United States and over 100 other countries agreed to cut their emissions of methane—one of the most destructive greenhouse gases—by 30% by 2030, and 122 countries with over 85% of the world's forests agreed to end and reverse deforestation by the same deadline, backed by the greatest ever commitment of public funds to the cause. I hope that will trigger even more from the private sector.

India has agreed to transform her energy system to derive half her power from renewable sources, keeping a billion tonnes of carbon out of the atmosphere. The UK has doubled our commitment to international climate finance to £11.6 billion, and we will contribute another £1 billion if the economy grows as is forecast. We have launched our clean green initiative, which will help the developing world to build new infrastructure in an environmentally friendly way, and we will invest £3 billion of public money to unlock billions more from the private sector.

The UK has asked the world for action on coal, cars, cash and trees, and we have begun to make substantial, palpable progress on three out of the four, but the negotiations in Glasgow have a long way to go and far more must be done. Whether we can summon the collective wisdom and will to save ourselves from an avoidable disaster still hangs in the balance. We will press on with the hard work until the last hour.

12.49 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for advance sight of this statement, and for updating the House on the G20 summit in Rome. It cannot be overstated how crucial the next week and a half is. I am pleased that there has been some progress as the Prime Minister outlined, but the next 10 days need to move beyond prepacked

announcements. This is an opportunity for Britain, alongside our friends and allies around the world, to deliver historic change. By taking action to reduce emissions right now in this decade, we can avoid the worst effects of climate change. That cannot just be a political ambition; it is a necessity for humanity.

As the G20 ends and COP26 continues, I assure the Prime Minister that all Labour Members are desperate for it to be a success. We hope that our negotiations can bring people together and deliver urgent solutions to the biggest challenge our world has ever faced. However, there is some cause for concern. The G20 needed to be a springboard to COP26, and a real opportunity to show Britain's diplomatic strength in bringing people together and applying pressure where it is needed. We need to convince the big polluters to meet the commitment to 1.5°, to find solutions to phase out fossil fuels, to ensure a just transition for workers, and to create a fairer and greener economy. However, the G20 did not achieve that, and the Prime Minister is failing in his efforts to convince world leaders that more must be done. He has welcomed commitments for the distant future, and I accept that, but he knows all too well that we need to halve carbon emissions now, and at least by the end of this decade, if we are to keep global temperatures down. It is time for urgent climate action now, not more climate delay.

We all know how difficult it is to convince the world to curtail carbon emissions, but it is our responsibility to do so. It is the Prime Minister's responsibility to influence world leaders and lead by example. As we try to convince other countries to phase out coal, the Government are refusing to make their mind up about coalmines within their borders. They could have followed the lead of the Welsh Labour Government and changed planning policy to ensure that no new coalmines were developed, but they did not. As we try to convince big emitters to do more on reducing emissions, unfortunately this Government are agreeing a trade deal with Australia that removes key climate pledges. They are undermining our messages by giving a free pass to our friends. When Britain must convince the wealthiest nations in the world to pledge more money to help developing countries cut their emissions and adapt to climate change, what have this Government done? They cut development aid that would have funded vital climate projects. How does the Prime Minister expect to convince others to do more, when he is setting such a poor example?

I also want to raise global vaccinations. Last week the G20 agreed a vague promise to explore ways to accelerate global vaccination against covid-19, yet in some of the world's poorest countries, less than 3% of people have received even one dose of the vaccine. We all know that we live in a globalised world, where the more the virus spreads, the greater the threat of new variants. We are not safe from covid here until people are safe from covid everywhere. There is no more time for rhetoric; it is time for action. The Prime Minister mentioned our efforts on vaccines, but last week it was revealed that the UK is lagging behind all other G7 countries bar one in sharing surplus vaccines with poor countries. That is shameful. Our fantastic scientists who developed the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine are being let down by our Prime Minister's actions. We need booster jabs in Manchester, and vaccines shared with Madagascar. It is now time for actions, not words. As the world gathers

over the next two weeks, we all hope for the breakthrough that we need. Britain has a proud history of building alliances and standing up for what is right, and I have no doubt we will be able to do that again. I wish the Prime Minister well in his efforts, and I ask him to pay attention and go for the detail on this. If he fails to deliver the change we need through this conference, we will all pay the price.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Lady asks me to go for the detail, but having said some kind things about her approach just now, after listening to that I think I prefer the forensic—or the pseudo-forensic—approach of the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). She is completely in ignorance of the basic facts. We have cut our CO₂ emissions by 44% on 1990 levels, largely by moving from 80% dependence on coal 50 years ago to about 1% or 2% today. It is a massive cut.

We have not cut our investment in overseas development aid for climate change funding—[*Interruption.*] No, we have not. We have kept it at £11.6 billion. I do not know whether the right hon. Lady was paying attention to the news, but only the other day we announced another £1 billion, which we were able to do because of the growth in the economy. She is completely wrong about the facts. As for what she said about vaccines, I am afraid it is an insult to the incredible work done by the UK vaccine roll-out programme across the world. One and a half billion people have had access to cost-price vaccines, thanks to the deal that this Government did with Oxford AstraZeneca—a record no other country in the world has—to say nothing of the £548 million extra that we put into Gavi, or the extra 100 million vaccines that we are donating by June next year. This country has an absolutely outstanding record in supporting vaccination around the world. If the right hon. Lady wants to look at the detail, I urge her to go off and study it.

I welcome the broad thrust of what the right hon. Lady said about COP26. I think she was saying that she sees signs of progress but there is a lot more to do, and frankly, there she is right. Perhaps I can point to the things that have happened since G20, and draw her attention to India's massive commitment to cut CO₂ by 2030 by cleaning up its power system. I can point to the \$10 billion from Japan over the next five years to support developing countries around the world, and I point also not just to Brazil, but to Russia, China and 110 countries around the world that have signed up to the forestry declaration to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030. That considerable achievement will make a huge difference, and we will use consumer power, and the power of corporations and the private sector around the world, to effect that change.

For me, the single most important thing that came out of COP was an agreement around the world about the basic intellectual approach now being taken by the UK through the clean green initiative and what Joe Biden calls the build back better world initiative. That is the thing that offers greatest hope for humanity. We are not just putting in Government money to help countries around the world clean up, and putting in development aid money—although we are massively supporting that—but we are now leveraging in tens, perhaps hundreds, of trillions of private sector investment. That is the way to

[The Prime Minister]

make the difference, and if we can get that right at this COP it will be a truly remarkable thing. As I say, however, there is still a long way to go.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Given that we are now taxing people at a higher rate than at any time since we were impoverished under the Attlee Government, and given that despite the fact that we produce only 1% of global emissions and China produces 27% we are now loading further controls on our industry that are not being matched in China or India, further eroding our competitive advantage, will the Prime Minister grip all his spending Departments and ensure that we root out waste and incompetence and create a genuine enterprise, low-tax economy?

The Prime Minister: Yes, and that is why we still have among the lowest corporation taxes in the OECD, in spite of the measures that we have been obliged to take because of the pandemic. That is why we put in, for instance, the 125% super deduction for companies to invest in capital, invest in infrastructure and expand their businesses. The results—the benefits—are already being seen, just in gigabit broadband alone.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I thank the Prime Minister for advance sight of his statement.

The G20 was an opportunity to build momentum ahead of the COP summit, but I think even the Prime Minister would admit that it largely failed to meet people's demand and desire for increased global co-operation. If we are to meet the global challenges that all of humanity now faces, that needs to change, and change very quickly, with a meaningful agreement in Glasgow over the course of the coming week. All of us hope that that will be the case.

On climate change, we know that the G20 is responsible for 80% of global greenhouse gas emissions, so it is right that the G20 members bear the biggest responsibility. Countries that have contributed the least to this climate crisis must not be left to pay the biggest price. That is why there has to be a commitment to climate justice and why that is so important.

In Scotland, we recently doubled our climate justice fund to £6 million per year, providing £24 million over the Scottish Parliament Session. But the commitments from the largest nations in the G20 always seem to be heavily caveated. On Monday, the Prime Minister promised £1 billion in UK aid for climate finance, but—here is the catch—only if the UK economy grows as forecast. Exactly the same excuse is presented when it comes to the Government's disgraceful policy of cuts to overseas aid. When will the UK Government stop caveating their commitment to climate justice, follow Scotland's leadership and establish a climate justice fund?

On Afghanistan, what concrete actions and timelines were agreed to help end the terrible famine that is ripping through that country? Finally, on covid, what specific targets and timelines were agreed to rapidly increase vaccine roll-out to those nations that are being left behind in the suppression of the virus?

The Prime Minister: First, on climate finance for the world, the right hon. Gentleman makes a valid point, because it is essential that the developed world supports the developing world on the path to decarbonisation. That is why the \$100 billion per year is so important. Contributions such as the one we saw from the Japanese yesterday, what the French have done, what the Germans have done and what Joe Biden did the other day are important steps, but there is much more to be done. But be in no doubt: the right hon. Gentleman should be very proud of what the UK is committing—the £11.6 billion that we committed two years ago, plus another billion the day before yesterday. These are big sums now that the UK is giving, and we are way out in front.

The right hon. Gentleman is right to raise Afghanistan. We had sad but good discussions about Afghanistan, and we are determined to work together to concert our humanitarian relief to do what we can, notwithstanding the difficulties that there are obviously going to be with our relations with the Taliban.

On the global vaccine roll-out, the right hon. Gentleman will have heard the commitments made by countries around the world. I think the UK can be very proud of what we are doing on top of the 1.5 billion AstraZeneca doses, with another 100 million doses by June next year.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): To what extent does the success of the entire enterprise depend upon the promised finance to the developing world?

The Prime Minister: Very largely.

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I thank the Prime Minister for all his efforts to try to make COP26 a success. For many of us, halting climate change has been the passion of our lives. May I ask the Prime Minister to confirm reports I have heard that the British negotiating team in Glasgow is seriously concerned that China's proposed contribution to cutting emissions, particularly on coal, goes nowhere near fast enough or far enough? If that is the case, will he commit to working with all our partners in the west and across the world, particularly those vulnerable countries that are already watching the waves of climate change hit their shores, to take any necessary action to pressure China to make the right decision?

The Prime Minister: I want to thank the right hon. Gentleman, because his political record shows that he has done a huge amount of good in this area. That is the truth of the matter, and I thank him for what he has done.

What is happening with China is very important, but it is a mixed picture and it is important not to be too negative at present. The right hon. Gentleman is right about domestic Chinese coal-fired production, and we are hoping for progress there. We are hoping that when China says that it can peak in carbon dioxide output before 2030, that date of "before" is correct and it is considerably nearer now than 2030. That is where the work is being done.

But what is interesting is that when China made the commitment to stop overseas financing for coal, that had an instant impact on many of China's friends and partners around the Asia-Pacific region, which took the

signal and have also stopped overseas financing for coal. It is that climate of the power of the room in the COP that is starting to make a difference, but whether it is going to be possible at this COP to get China to make the commitments that are really necessary, I am afraid it is just too early to say.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): I welcome all the progress made so far at COP26 and congratulate all those involved, including my right hon. Friend, but what will we do if we do not get agreement on article 6 and persuade countries such as China to properly price carbon into their economies? Our businesses in the UK are carrying their share of costs to deal with climate change. Why should we allow them to be undercut by competitors that keep their prices down by using highly polluting industrial production techniques? Surely that is not something that the free world economies can tolerate.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend knows a great deal about this issue, and he is right to draw attention to article 6 and the carbon credit issue. That is something on which our negotiators will be working flat out until the final hour of COP.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): One of the terrible effects of climate change is felt in south Wales valleys seats, where extreme weather conditions and heavy rain have destabilised some of the disused coal tips. People live in terror of another Aberfan, and I know the Prime Minister shares that fear. The majority of the dangerous tips are in my local authority area. I just wonder whether he would be prepared to meet me, the leader of the local council and the other Members from Rhondda Cynon Taf, specifically to discuss how we can make sure that all those tips are safe. I really do ask him for that meeting.

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman. He has raised this issue with me several times. I will see what I can do to oblige him. This is something that I do want to try to fix, but it is primarily something that the Welsh Government should be addressing themselves. I will talk to the Welsh Government and come back to him.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I strongly congratulate the Prime Minister on throwing his heart and soul at COP26; no one can have worked harder.

The UK is responsible for 1% of global carbon emissions; China is responsible for 28%. Since 2000, two thirds of the increase in global carbon emissions has come from China. Is China's commitment to reach peak coal in 2030 an aspiration or a binding target?

The Prime Minister: I think what President Xi Jinping would say is that China keeps its promises. We will have to hope that that is true. I think the people of the world will want to hold all of us, all Governments, to account, but my hon. Friend is completely right to focus on the particular pressure that China faces from us and from the whole world.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I welcome the Prime Minister's recent conversion to the climate cause. I agree with him that the clock is indeed at one

minute to midnight, which begs the question as to why his snooze button was on for so long. He will know that the first rule of diplomacy is to walk the talk. Will he now take this opportunity to put real credibility behind his stirring words to lead by example and to commit now, finally, to reversing the decision on the Cambo oilfield—yes or no? Very simple.

The Prime Minister: What I can tell the hon. Lady is that we continue to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels of all kinds, and we will be going for complete net zero in our power production by 2035, moving beyond coal by 2024. I think it was a Scottish National party Minister who said that oil was still a part of Scotland's future. I will say nothing about the Cambo oilfield. What I will say is that there is a future for hydrocarbons in so far as we can liberate hydrogen and make clean energy.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his leadership of COP, particularly the achievement of getting 100 countries to sign up to the methane pledge. He will know, however, that some of the biggest emitters have not signed up. When will the power of the room, which he described a moment ago, be on those countries to sign up to the pledge as well?

The Prime Minister: Now. We are just going to keep going. This is a rolling series of negotiations. We are ringing people up the whole time. COP is in full flow at the moment.

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): The Prime Minister has not yet mentioned water resilience, yet it is at the top of the agenda for many of the countries most affected by the climate emergency. What is his assessment of funding for water resilience projects? Will he commit not to cut but increase funding for water resilience?

The Prime Minister: We support water resilience projects around the world, as part of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and had a good discussion on the issue of water resilience and other aspects of climate change resilience with vulnerable countries over the last few days.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): The Prime Minister knows very well that the north of Scotland is closer to the Arctic circle than it is to London. For any delegate at COP26 who doubts the climate emergency, all they have to do is glance at the retreating ice or the melting cover frost, and the methane being released as a result, to be convinced that this emergency really is happening. The Chinese in particular will benefit from the withdrawal of ice as the northern sea route opens up, particularly for bulk carriers carrying coal. Does the Prime Minister therefore not agree with me that the Chinese have a doubly important moral obligation to stick by their commitment to reduce the production of coal in China, otherwise we in the west will be burning their coal?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is completely right to point out the consequences for the world of the retreat of the ice towards the north pole. I am afraid that will offer opportunities not just for China but

[*The Prime Minister*]

ourselves. Scapa Flow and other parts of Scotland will potentially become very important for sea traffic of a clean, green variety.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): In pursuit of dramatic reductions in the miniscule carbon dioxide emissions produced by this country, ordinary people are facing higher petrol prices, higher energy prices, restrictions on what they can drive, the replacement of gas boilers and higher green taxes with declining incomes. Can the Prime Minister understand their frustration and disdain that those who tell them that they must bear those burdens fly into Glasgow in private jets and ferry around town in gas-guzzling caucalades? More fundamentally, does he really believe, given the huge natural forces that continually change the world's climate, that by reducing carbon dioxide we can somehow or other turn the world's thermostat up and down at will?

The Prime Minister: First of all, this country is moving to zero-emission vehicles. The right hon. Gentleman talks about gas-guzzlers; we are supporting jet zero aviation. His big objection is to the science. He is obviously a complete climate sceptic. He should look at the graph that David Attenborough produced on the first day of the summit, showing the clear correlation between the huge anthropogenic spike in CO₂ and the current rise in temperatures, and the way that temperatures have tracked CO₂ volumes in the air over the last thousands of years. The science is absolutely clear. I think the people of this country know that it would be an economic disaster not to address it. What the people of this country know is that clean, green technology can deliver higher wages and fantastic jobs for generations to come. They see a great future in this.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): I want to reinforce the point the Prime Minister has just made. Will he reassure my constituents that the goal of achieving net zero is not a burden to be borne, but an opportunity to be grasped to create new innovative jobs and new sectors in which we can lead the world?

The Prime Minister: Our green industrial revolution alone, the £26 billion we are putting in, generates 440,000 more jobs in battery technology, electric vehicle manufacture, wind farms and maintenance. The opportunities are vast for this country and we are at the cutting edge.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): I welcome the statement today, but does the Prime Minister believe, like I do, that it is important to encourage more people to use rail, instead of other carbon-intensive transport methods? If so, why is he cutting duty on domestic flights, or will he now rethink that decision?

The Prime Minister: There is a very clear climate reason for putting up duty on long-haul flights, because they account for 96% of emissions. In the case of our own United Kingdom, with its far flung islands represented by some distinguished Members on the Opposition Benches, it is a useful thing to remove barriers to movement.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): Given the phenomenal success to end and reverse deforestation, I was tempted to tease my right hon. Friend about build back beavers. However, will he meet me to discuss what can be done, using institutions such as Kew Gardens, to reverse the spread of deserts through the better planting of trees?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend. That is a brilliant idea. Kew has played an amazing midwife role over the centuries in taking plants from one part of the world, nurturing them and then planting them with huge advantage in other parts of the world. That is certainly something I would be happy to take up with him.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Prime Minister is absolutely right that this is a moment for turning words into action. One very important but quite small action that he and his Government could take now is the creation of a ringfenced pot for the development of tidal stream energy in the next round of contract for difference options. This is a decision that has to be taken by the end of this month. Will the Prime Minister talk to his colleagues in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Treasury to make sure that that happens?

The Prime Minister: This is a point I have now heard several times from those on the Opposition Benches. Without having perhaps all the technical expertise, I am very impressed by the tidal proposals I have seen. What I will undertake to the right hon. Gentleman is not an absolute commitment on contract for difference or the strike price for tidal power, but I will certainly go away and look at it again.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Well done, Prime Minister, on motivating people and delivering that which others were saying could not be delivered at COP26 so far, just a couple of days into a two-week programme. May I invite him to visit Rolls-Royce, which is working on developing a 100% sustainable fuel jet engine for aviation, and to put his considerable weight—I do not mean that in a personal manner; I mean as Prime Minister—behind the gigafactory proposal for Coventry in the West Midlands Combined Authority?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend. It was, in fact, only a couple of weeks ago that the entire Cabinet was in Bristol with Rolls-Royce, looking at what it is doing with GKN and other companies on sustainable aviation. We are also looking actively at what we can do to support a gigafactory in the Coventry area, but obviously, there are commercial discussions under way.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): As Chair of the G7 and of COP, the Prime Minister will know that the world community is \$20 billion short of what is needed for the vaccination programme, and we have missed the target of \$100 billion promised for climate finance. The International Monetary Fund has given the world a shot in the arm with \$650 billion of special drawing rights, which the Prime Minister helped to push for. The UK has been given £20 billion, more than the entire community of low-income countries put

together, but why are we being so slow and sluggish in recycling that money back to the IMF so that it can be put to good use? We are behind France and America; we are a laggard when we should be leading.

The Prime Minister: What we are doing is putting hard cash into supporting countries around the world. The right hon. Gentleman makes a good point about the SDRs. We are looking at that as well, but we are prioritising cash up front.

Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con): My right hon. Friend knows that I am a fervent supporter of his efforts for the UK to lead the world in decarbonisation, and I know that he would not wish to impoverish anyone here or abroad on the way. No country has yet leapfrogged our path to prosperity from wood, coal and gas to nuclear. In asking developing countries to consign coal power to history, my concern is that we risk sustaining their poverty if we do not provide an alternative. Does he agree that, with his historic climate finance agreements and our existing development aid, we have a huge opportunity to export UK small modular reactor technology around the world to hasten their path to prosperity instead?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for an exceedingly thoughtful question. He is absolutely right in the logic of what he says. We must help the developing world to leapfrog. All sorts of technologies are very attractive, including the one that he suggests. The opportunity there is to generate fantastic British jobs as well.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Open Democracy recently reported the Prime Minister's former colleague in the EU Vote Leave campaign, Nigel Farage, as saying that a referendum on green taxes "could well be my latest campaign".

We are hearing increasingly loud objections from the so-called net zero scrutiny group from among his ranks of MPs. The Institute of Economic Affairs said recently that it would

"continue to challenge the ropery economics"

of net zero. What will the Prime Minister do to challenge those siren voices from among his supporters?

The Prime Minister: I study the people's feelings about this. What so changed in this COP from Paris, which I attended, or from Copenhagen, which I was also at, is that this time, it is from the public. I have great respect for colleagues around the House who say that this is all going too far, too fast and that people cannot afford it. Actually, I do not think that we can afford not to do it. I also think that it is economically a massive opportunity for this country and that that is where people increasingly are. Calls for a referendum on this will fall on stony ground.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I spent the past couple of days at COP26 with south-east Asian nations' representatives. The situation is exactly as the Prime Minister described, with real progress on cash, coal and trees and particularly momentum in signing up to the forestry declaration. My right hon. Friend will know that the UK pavilion is symbolically opposite next year's G20 Chair, Indonesia. Does he agree that using

the clean, green finance initiative is a real opportunity for us to do more to help them to transition from coal-fired energy to renewable energy, often in collaboration with UK partners on wind, solar and marine energy?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for everything that he has done with ASEAN—Association of Southeast Asian Nations—partners. He has absolutely been leading the charge for us in that region, particularly with Indonesia, and they are great partners of ours. What is coming out of COP is the idea that countries who are finding it tough, as he said, to move beyond coal need a coalition of countries to help them, with a portfolio of programmes that they need to get done, whether it is hydropower or carbon capture and storage—whatever it is—that we can help to finance and de-risk, in order to leverage in the trillions from the private sector, as we did with wind power in our country. People are seeing this model as the way we can do it—not with endless grants and handouts from Governments in the richer countries around the world, but through stimulating the private sector to come in and deliver a quantum leap in the infrastructure concerned.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): GKN-Melrose has announced its intention to proceed with the closure of the Erdington plant, which employs 519 loyal, long-serving workers in an area with the fifth-highest level of deprivation in Britain, and to export production to Poland, which is still burning coal on a grand scale for years to come. Does the Prime Minister therefore understand the dismay of the workers concerned? With the automotive industry in transition to an electric future, does he agree that we need a supply chain here in Britain, employing workers here in Britain, manufacturing here in Britain, as part of a green industrial revolution here in Britain?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I passionately agree with that. GKN does an amazing job across the country, particularly in delivering some of the most difficult solutions, such as sustainable aviation. We need to ensure that we have the ecosystem of gigafactories and electric vehicle manufacturing capabilities, and all the supply chains here in Britain, but with an energy cost that allows those businesses to be competitive. That applies to steel, automotive and everybody else, and I am afraid that, at the moment, the differential between our domestic users' electricity costs and industrial energy costs is too high, and we have to fix it.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): As chair of the all-party group for woods and trees, I thank the Prime Minister and the negotiating teams for their fantastic work in tackling deforestation. I also welcome the Government's continued commitment to the northern forest, planting 50 million trees across the north, hopefully with many of them in South Yorkshire. Will he join me in appealing to community groups and schools to get involved with the Queen's Green Canopy project, as we all plant a tree for the jubilee?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is completely right. Planting a tree for the jubilee is a wonderful thing to do; we should all be doing it. We want to plant 36,000 hectares of trees every year as part of our contribution—one of the many ways we are contributing—to the fight against climate change, and to beautify our landscape.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): As chair of the all-party group on small island developing states, I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister acknowledged the imminent threat to them in his statement. Two things would really help them: one is to have access to the finance that hopefully is now on the table—because, as countries with very limited resources, it is very difficult, they tell me, to get their hands on the money and to do the bids—and the other is to develop blue finance. We know that the City of London leads on green finance. Blue finance for the blue economy and marine conservation would really help them, and we could take a lead on that.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is completely right about the imperative to help the small island states. I must say that, at COP and in the last few months, they have been incredibly valuable in getting the world to focus—the Maldives, the Seychelles, Bangladesh, where people face catastrophic flooding, Mauritius and Barbados, which was brilliant the other day. They are helping to focus minds on the issue and attract massive sums of investment.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): The UK can be very proud of the commitments that we have already made, but some of our actions are in danger of making our manufacturing and particularly our heavy industry uncompetitive. May I ask the Prime Minister once again whether there is any significance in the absence from COP26 of leaders of our industrial competitors such as China and Russia? Is he confident that they can be persuaded to do more after the conference to provide a more level playing field?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for the point that he makes, and I understand why he should be anxious, but I talked to both President Xi and President Putin and it was clear: they said that the pandemic precluded them from coming. I understand the situation that they are in. They have very senior negotiators in Glasgow as we speak—Xie is a very senior operative in the Chinese system—and we have to hope for results. In the end, the change is going to be driven not just by the feelings of people in the western democracies, but by the political pressure and the pressure from business that is already being felt in China, and in Russia as well.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I was pleased to see reference in the Prime Minister's statement to action on trees. He will be aware that in Scotland we produce 80% of woodland planting across these islands, not least because of small groups such as the one at Mount Vernon community hall, which has made a real effort on biodiversity. What more can the Prime Minister do elsewhere in the UK to try to get action on tree planting and follow the lead of Scotland, and indeed of Mount Vernon?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate Scottish tree-planting groups on the initiatives that they have taken. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that huge numbers of trees are planted in Scotland. We want to see the rest of the UK catch up and do better; I am afraid that the rates did decline a bit during the pandemic. We have to accelerate. What my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) said just now about “Plant a tree for the jubilee” is absolutely right.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Later today in this Chamber, we will talk about nuclear. That shows that the Government are now looking forward to the future—we have two nuclear power stations in Heysham—but I would also like to draw to the Prime Minister's attention the wondrous work that we are doing to prepare for the Eden project in Morecambe. I know that I invited him last week at Prime Minister's questions, but I am still pushing it: Boris, come and see us in Morecambe.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his unrelenting invitation. Of course I will do my utmost to oblige him; he is a great campaigner for clean power. As he knows, we are taking forward plans for SMRs as well.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Transport makes up the largest share of UK carbon emissions, but rail travel is clean and green, so I ask again: why on earth is the Prime Minister choosing to make it cheaper to take domestic flights, while failing to set out a proper plan for rail electrification, failing to confirm a high-speed rail line to the east midlands and the north, and putting up rail fares?

The Prime Minister: We are investing massively in rail in the way that I described at PMQs earlier, not just with HS2, but with Northern Powerhouse Rail and the integrated rail plan. The hon. Lady objects to domestic air travel, but the vision that she should support is the idea of moving away from using tonnes of kerosene to hurl planes into the air. We can do it with other approaches, and that is what we should be following.

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I welcome the Prime Minister's leadership around the world, particularly in getting the world's biggest polluters to reduce their carbon footprint. My constituents are keen to move forward and transition to a decarbonised lifestyle. Does he agree that getting information to them is key? There are many times when all of us, as consumers, purchase things from China that may well be available here in the UK, but we do not understand their in-built carbon footprint. Does he agree that information about carbon on items that we purchase is important for consumers?

The Prime Minister: Schools in Cornwall that I have been talking to have a fantastic understanding of what Cornwall is doing to cut carbon. There are amazing projects in Cornwall, and we are also making sure that in education—in classes—kids understand the in-built carbon cost of the goods that they buy.

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance): At present, the UK does not yet have measures in place to reach carbon neutrality by the year 2050. Indeed, last week, the Chancellor could not even mention climate change once in an hour-long speech on the Budget. Surely the UK should be offering leadership in this area by putting in place a comprehensive green new deal that combines economic and social policy, alongside measures to combat climate change.

The Prime Minister: I do not know what planet the hon. Gentleman has been on. He is totally wrong. This Government have helped to cut the UK's emissions of

carbon dioxide by almost half from 1990 levels, which is an astonishing thing to have done. We have the most ambitious nationally determined contribution of any country in the EU—78% by 2035 on 1990 levels—and we are doing it through all the measures that he knows. Has he not heard about what we are going to do on zero-emission vehicles or what we are doing on our power emissions? I think he needs to look at what is happening. Yes, of course there is more to do. As for green bonds, we issued one the other day and got £10 billion out of it—so just keep up.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): As well as cars, the world will need clean, smart urban transport if we are to meet the climate challenge. Companies such as the one behind the Westfield PODs in Dudley South are developing products that can succeed, thrive and help us to decarbonise, but too often the regulatory framework lags behind the innovation. Will the Prime Minister work with Ministers and our international partners to develop international type approval standards so that these products can succeed and we can decarbonise transport on an urban level as well as lead on personal cars?

The Prime Minister: I agree 100%. I am looking forward to seeing the Westfield PODs and their means of conveying human beings around, although I cannot quite imagine what they are. What we want in this country is regulators for growth, and for green growth. We need a much more proactive approach that engages with brilliant ideas like that.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Moving to rail travel and away from more carbon-intensive forms of transport will be essential if we are to meet our ambitions to tackle the climate emergency. Two years ago, the Prime Minister visited Poulton and announced his commitment to reopen the railway line to Fleetwood. Can he tell my Fleetwood constituents what progress he is making with that, and when they can expect to catch the train from Fleetwood to the entire national rail network?

The Prime Minister: What we are doing is a general programme of Beeching reversals around the country. I will get back to the hon. Lady as soon as I can about what is happening in Poulton, but this is the biggest investment in rail for a century or more.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): An estimated 15% of global carbon emissions come from livestock production around the world—more than all transportation put together. On the former, what discussions have been had at COP26 with our international partners on reductions? On the latter, what discussions have there been about the rest of the world taking the lead from the United Kingdom in sustainable aviation technology?

The Prime Minister: On livestock emissions, my hon. Friend is right that methane is a very powerful greenhouse gas. It degrades quite fast, so it is not as bad as CO₂ in some ways, but we do need to cut methane emissions and we have committed to doing it by 30%. Agriculture is a particularly difficult problem, but there are ways of doing that, without moving away from livestock farming.

There are things we can do with breeding and other techniques to reduce methane emissions and we are certainly looking at that.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): The Prime Minister is right to tell the House, and indeed the world, how exciting these promises on reforestation and methane reduction are. However, he will recall that, 12 years ago, when the rich countries committed themselves to transferring \$100 billion to the poor countries every year, there was no mechanism for measuring the progress of that transfer, and the world failed. Can the Prime Minister tell us what the legacy will be, particularly in respect of deforestation? Will there be a proper mechanism to hold to account President Bolsonaro, or the Indonesians, or any other country, wherever it may be?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has made an incredibly important point. There are two ways of holding Governments to account, whether they are the Governments of China, Brazil or Russia, or indeed ourselves. First, it is not only the Governments who have signed up, but corporations—the big commodities corporations, such as Cargill. They have agreed no longer to use products that are sourced as a result of deforestation, and consumers will hold them to account, as well as Governments, for what they do.

Secondly, the financial institutions, worth trillions—Barclays, Aviva, and many others around the world—have agreed that they will not finance projects that depend on deforestation. Again, their investors and shareholders, and everyone involved with them, will hold them to account for what they do. If they cheat and invest in deforestation, they will suffer, because, as I said to the House earlier, what is changing now is the power of the consumer, the power of the voters, the power of the world—the power of those who want their Governments to do the right thing now.

Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con): Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating the staff and pupils at Ysgol Dinas Brân school in Llangollen, whom I visited recently, on the excellent work that they are doing in studying climate change and working closely with Denbighshire County Council to ensure that their school operates on a carbon-neutral basis?

The Prime Minister: It gives me great pleasure to congratulate Ysgol Dinas Brân, which I know from my own abortive attempt to win the seat that my hon. Friend now represents so well. I thank those at the school for what they are doing, and I think they are quite right to set the example they are setting. All new schools in our country are carbon-neutral.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I thank the Prime Minister for his updates on the G20 summit and COP26, and also for listening so carefully to the suggestions from these Benches. I am sure that he, too, is disappointed that the G20 could not agree on an end date for domestic fossil fuel use. Will he be brave, show leadership, and set an end date for the extraction and domestic use of all fossil fuels in the UK?

The Prime Minister: We will have no fossil fuels at all in our power generation system from 2035 onwards.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Six per cent. of global GDP is spent on fossil fuel subsidies, which is destroying our planet, and China spends more on them than the United States, Russia and the European Union combined. Will the Prime Minister take leadership in reducing fossil fuel subsidies? In particular, will he support the carbon border taxes that are being promoted by the EU, so that, for instance, UK steel made in Wales is not displaced by Chinese steel made from coal, which has twice the carbon footprint, and we can protect local jobs and save the planet through greener trade?

The Prime Minister: I think that our steel companies have done a great job in trying to reduce their carbon footprint. That is extremely hard for steel corporations, because they are one of the biggest emitters that we have. We must move towards zero-carbon steelmaking, while keeping a steelmaking industry in this country. The measures that the hon. Gentleman has described—such as the carbon border adjustment levy—are certainly worth considering.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): The United Nations Secretary-General has said that it will be very difficult to secure the commitment needed for the 1.5° goal, and, in relation to new fossil fuel excavations, that

“we don’t need more oil and gas”.

Will the Prime Minister tell us what engagement his Government are having with the oil and gas industries to support them in their efforts to decarbonise sustainably?

The Prime Minister: We talk all the time to the oil and gas industry, which has a great and proud history in this country. I believe that the future for the industry—for hydrocarbons—is moving beyond the old combustion approach and towards the extraction of clean power. That is the direction in which we should be going.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It seems that we are in the last chance saloon if we are to make an impact on limiting the effect of climate change. Does the Prime Minister share my disappointment that China and India have failed to match many other countries’ commitments to reach net zero by 2050, placing their targets 10 and 20 years later? Does he agree that if the remainder of COP26 is to be a success, we need to get some movement from them on that as well?

The Prime Minister: We will continue to push on the net zero dates. Although I agree with the hon. Gentleman’s characterisation of those countries’ targets, I think we also need to look at what both of them are saying about what they will do pre-2030. As the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) pointed out,

that is the key issue on which we need to focus. The Indians have now made a big commitment to decarbonising their power system by 2030, and the hon. Gentleman has heard what we have already said in the House about the Chinese commitment to “peak” CO₂ output in 2030 or before. The question is, how long before? Both those countries have made substantial progress, but obviously it is not yet enough.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): In his statement, the Prime Minister said:

“We have the technology to do what is necessary: all that remains in question is our resolve.”

With that in mind, why do the British Government not extend the favourable financing model being proposed for nuclear energy generation to other technologies, such as the proposed Swansea tidal lagoon?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I was very attracted to the Swansea tidal lagoon model, but it is extremely expensive for the energy it produces. I see Opposition Members shaking their heads. If they can produce plans that show a more economical way of doing it, I shall be only too happy to study them.

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): Earlier today at COP26, young people from the group Green New Deal Rising tried to ask the Chancellor directly why he was continuing to subsidise fossil fuels and the fossil fuel industry to such an extent. Instead of engaging with those young people, whose generation could be the first to die from climate change rather than old age, the Chancellor promptly banned them from attending his talk. I wonder whether the Prime Minister and the Chancellor could instead engage with that generation of young people, and move on from greenwash towards a green new deal to raise Britain up and meet our climate obligations.

The Prime Minister: It is precisely for the sake of that generation—with whom, by the way, every member of this Government and, I am sure, Members throughout the House engage all the time on this issue—that we are doing this.

I am actually starting to think that we can fix this. I was pretty gloomy a while back, but I do now think that we have the technology, and we certainly have the finance. I think we have a growing package of solutions that we can bring to bear, and I think it will be of massive benefit to young children growing up in this country. I hope so, because one of the things I worry about is that young people in this country are mentally very badly affected by the prospect of serious climate change. I think that it preys on their minds. We need to lift that burden from them and show them that there is a more hopeful alternative—and I really think that it is starting to appear.

Schools and Educational Settings (Essential Infrastructure and Opening During Emergencies)

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

12.49 pm

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for educational settings including early years, schools, colleges and universities to be classified as essential infrastructure and remain open to all students during public health and other national emergencies; and for connected purposes.

Between the start of the pandemic and July 2021, British children were out of their classrooms for almost half of the available school days as a result of nationwide shutdowns and isolations. The majority of the country's universities switched to remote learning, with many students still not having returned to full face-to-face teaching. Those closures wielded a hammer blow to our children's and young people's education and wellbeing. The mechanisms this Bill will put in place will safeguard the education, mental health and life chances of those already hardest hit and of future generations.

Let me take a moment to give special thanks to the teachers and support staff who did all they could to keep children learning over the past 18 months. I especially welcome the support for the Bill of Children's Commissioners past and present, of two former Children's Ministers and significantly, of the parents group, UsforThem, which has campaigned day and night to keep schools fully open and our children learning in the classroom as they should be.

It is beyond doubt that for those who engaged in online learning, less material was covered than would have been covered in the classroom. Moreover, many children could not participate in online learning at all. School closures and the move to online learning increased the existing inequalities between those from disadvantaged backgrounds and their better-off peers. The facts speak for themselves and testify to what parents know instinctively. A tablet is no substitute for in-person schooling and the inspiration and guidance that teachers and support staff provide. A laptop cannot replace the enriching, nurturing and skills-building environment that the school community gives to our children, enabling them to thrive and develop to reach their potential. A screen cannot replace the social interaction and friendships that are the essential building blocks of childhood. Perhaps worst of all, school closures increased the existing inequalities between those from disadvantaged backgrounds and their better-off peers. We must face and address head on the brutal reality that school closures have been a national disaster for our children.

Over the last 18 months, the four horsemen of the education apocalypse have galloped towards our young people, threatening their futures and holding them back from climbing the ladder of opportunity. The negative impacts of the pandemic are stark. School closures have contributed to a widening attainment gap and worsening mental health, not to mention numerous safeguarding hazards and diminished life chances. Even prior to the pandemic, disadvantaged pupils were already 18 months of learning behind their better-off peers by the time

they took their GCSEs. The pandemic has turned the attainment gap into a chasm, undoing the significant amount of progress made over this last decade.

Recent research published by the Education Policy Institute has shown that at national level the average learning losses for primary school pupils were 3.4 months in maths and 2.2 months in reading. For disadvantaged pupils, learning loss was even greater, with 4.2 months lost in maths and 2.7 months in reading. A tsunami of mental health problems now threatens to overwhelm our young people. One in six children now has a probable mental health disorder, up from one in nine in 2017. The Department for Education itself has concluded that the evidence for the impacts of school closures on mental health and wellbeing is "substantial" and "consistent".

Schools and educational settings play a vital role in safeguarding our young people from harm. Without that safety net, too many vulnerable youngsters have slipped through the cracks. Devastating figures from the Centre for Social Justice show that 100,000 children have failed to return to school, for the most part, since schools reopened. During the first lockdown, 94% of vulnerable children were not in school. A significant increase in social service referrals, domestic abuse and child safeguarding concerns has been reported between April 2020 and March 2021, which the directors of children's services across the country have linked to the pandemic restrictions and the closure of childcare settings.

It is estimated that school closures will cost our young people between £78 billion and £154 billion in lost earnings over the course of their lifetimes, and those figures are for an optimistic scenario. In the worst case, as much as £463 billion could be lost. Report after report speaks to these harms, but they were not an unfortunate inevitability of an international public health emergency. Our children have missed more than double the amount of school as children in other countries, including France, Spain, Austria and Lithuania. British children have missed more school than any other country in Europe except Italy.

I come to my Schools and Educational Settings (Essential Infrastructure and Opening During Emergencies) Bill. Currently, the term "essential infrastructure" is used in our legislation to describe the facilities and systems necessary for a country to function, and upon which our daily lives depend. It would be inconceivable to close power stations, hospitals or food retailers during a time of crisis, and rightly so—they are lifelines to our communities. The educational devastation of the last 18 months has made it abundantly clear that for children, families and society, schools must also be seen as lifelines. In guidance issued in 2020, the Government defined educational institutions as "essential infrastructure" along with providers of power, healthcare and water. But despite this nominal definition, during the first and third lockdowns schools were closed to most pupils while other essential infrastructure remained open.

It is our duty now to treat our schools as essential infrastructure, both in word, and more importantly, in deed. To that end, this Bill will recognise and define educational settings as essential infrastructure in practice by enshrining in statute that we must never close our schools again, save in the most dire and exceptional circumstances. Furthermore, the Bill will put in place a triple lock of protections. This will mean that before

[Robert Halfon]

any national or regional closure, the advice of the Children's Commissioner must first be sought on whether such a closure is necessary, and laid before Parliament. We rightly follow the science and advice of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies and the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation when it comes to our health, so it is only logical that we must also follow the advice provided by those with the best interests of our children at the heart of their mandate. Secondly, any proposed school closure must be debated and approved by the House. Thirdly, in the event of an agreed closure, every three weeks that schools remain closed, the Education Secretary must return to Parliament, having sought the advice of the Children's Commissioner, to seek its re-approval for a continued closure.

This triple lock will ensure that the needs and rights of children and young people are considered and upheld. It will mean that the relevant experts are consulted and their advice acted upon. It will ensure that this House is fully involved and accountable for any decisions to close schools and disrupt schooling. Lastly, it will make certain that any disruption will be tightly time-limited. These measures are no less than our children deserve. Diogenes once said that

"the foundation of every state is the education of its youth".

We must learn from our experiences over the course of the pandemic to ensure that we prioritise children's education. We owe it to our young people to safeguard the educational futures that covid-19 put on hold. Anything less would be a dereliction of duty.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered.

That Robert Halfon, Edward Timpson, Tim Loughton, Sir Iain Duncan Smith, Christian Wakeford, Tom Hunt, Brendan Clarke-Smith, Greg Smith, Siobhan Baillie, Miriam Cates, Munira Wilson and David Warburton present the Bill.

Robert Halfon accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 February 2022, and to be printed (Bill 184).

Committee on Standards

Mr Speaker: Before the debate begins, I think it would be helpful if I set out the procedure to be followed. The Leader of the House will move the motion. I will also allow enough time at the end of the debate to ensure that the Chair of the Committee on Standards has the opportunity to respond.

Members are, of course, free to consider and, if they wish, criticise the process that the House has set in place to consider Members' conduct. However, there is a long tradition of not attacking individuals, such as Officers of the House, who are not here to defend themselves and do not have the ability to do so. They are doing the job that the House itself has set them to do. I remind the House that good temper and moderation are the characteristics of parliamentary language. Please let us keep calm, keep sensible and make sure the House has a debate in which we are respectful and tolerant to each other.

I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of Dame Andrea Leadsom. Under the terms of the business motion agreed yesterday, the amendment will be moved formally at the end of the debate, but of course she will speak sooner.

2.1 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): I beg to move,

That this House—

(1) approves the Third Report of the Committee on Standards (HC 797);

(2) endorses the recommendation in paragraph 212; and

(3) accordingly suspends Mr Owen Paterson from the service of the House for a period of thirty sitting days.

As Leader of the House of Commons, it is important that I move this motion to facilitate debate on the report by the Committee on Standards. I have said before that Members of Parliament must uphold the highest standards in public life, which is why the process for this House to consider standards infractions is of the utmost importance. It must be fair and robust, and it must command respect on both sides of the House. There must be tough and robust checks against lobbying for profit, and there must be a proper process to scrutinise and, if necessary, discipline those who do not follow the rules.

However, it is also my role as Leader of the House to listen to the concerns and thoughts of Members on both sides of the House, which are now too numerous to ignore. Since the publication of this report, many hon. Members have expressed their concern about the way in which it was prepared, as is evident in the amendment to the motion tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom).

Today I come not to defend my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) but to consider the process by which he has been tried. It is not for me to judge him—others have done that—but was the process a fair one? "Let justice be done though the heavens fall." Any disciplinary process concerned, as it is, with people's jobs and livelihoods must be fair and must respect basic principles of natural justice.

The concerns raised with me in this case and other standards cases by hon. Members from Government and Opposition parties include: the lack of examination of witnesses; the unused mechanism for the appointment of an investigatory panel; the interpretation of the rules relating to whistleblowing; the length of time taken and the lack of continuity in participation and investigations; the application of aggravating factors; and the absence of the right of appeal.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): My right hon. Friend refers to the lack of appeal, which is a point I have heard on a number of occasions. Are not the oversight of the Committee on Standards and, indeed, the judgment of this House both effective appeal processes in this matter?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Committee on Standards is clearly not an appeal process, because it is the Committee's report, not the commissioner's report, that comes before us. The commissioner is the adviser to the Committee and is supervised by the Committee.

I wish this Chamber, as my hon. Friend suggests, were the court of appeal, but as this matter has been discussed we have seen how quickly what happens in this Chamber becomes partisan. [*Laughter.*] Opposition Members cackle and crow, and they have made my point. It is a sadness to me that this Chamber is not, as one would hope it could be, the apolitical court of appeal for standards cases, but the Opposition have absolutely no desire to do that. We therefore need to consider an independent appeals process, as we have with the Independent Expert Panel.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I simply ask the Leader of the House a question that I ask of all Conservative Members. Does he think he would be standing here today and making these changes if it were a Labour MP?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think the hon. Lady knows me well enough to know that the answer is yes. I would have no hesitation in doing exactly the same if I thought a Labour Member had not had a proper process and had representations of that kind.

Dame Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give way?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am answering the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), so have patience.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley has raised this point in previous debates, saying that she would have done something regardless of the party. In my view, she said that in good faith and I accepted her good faith. I hope she will do the same for me.

Dame Angela Eagle: I thank the Leader of the House for giving way.

Today's debate could be a turning point, and not of the kind that many of us would like to see. Can the Leader of the House tell us how often this House has overturned a report of the Standards Committee with respect to the behaviour of a particular Member?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am afraid the hon. Lady has not troubled to read the amendment, which does not overturn the report of the Standards Committee. The amendment

asks whether there should be a form of appeal and sets up a Committee to consider how the standards process is working. As I said, there have been problems with the process.

On the examination, or non-examination, of witnesses, paragraphs (6) to (10) of Standing Order No. 150 allow the commissioner to appoint an investigatory panel to assist in establishing the facts relevant to an investigation. The Standards Committee is also able to request that the commissioner appoints such a panel. Under these provisions, the commissioner chairs the committee with two assessors, who advise the commissioner but have no responsibility for the findings. One would be a legal assessor and the other a senior Member of the House who would advise on parliamentary matters and be appointed by you, Mr Speaker. The commissioner would determine the procedures and could appoint counsel to assist the panel.

The Member against whom the complaint had been made would be entitled to be heard in person and would have the opportunity to call witnesses and examine other witnesses. At the conclusion of proceedings, the commissioner would report as usual. The legal assessor would report to the Standards Committee as to the extent to which the proceedings had been consistent with the principles of natural justice, which of course include the right to a fair trial under a proper and just process, and the Member assessor might report on the extent to which the proceedings had regard to the custom and practice of the House and its Members.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): The Leader of the House started with a quote, and I am often reminded that what is false exists on the same judicial footing as what is right. I make no judgment about those who signed the amendment but, given that six of them have had allegations upheld against them by the Standards Committee in the last year, can he differentiate between how what was good enough for them is not good enough for the right hon. Member we are discussing?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, and I am grateful to him for doing so. The reason why this has come now is the volume of complaints that have come through and the more widespread feeling of unfairness, across all Benches, that has been brought to my attention and the attention of others. In simplistic, clichéd terms, this is the famous straw that has broken the long-suffering camel's back.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: But I do not see any Opposition Members signing the amendment.

Mr Rees-Mogg: That is the point I made earlier about the unfortunate state of affairs whereby this House does not work as a court of appeal, but, regrettably, becomes partisan, which reinforces the need to have an independent body.

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): I am certainly getting up, as I know many Opposition Members are, not in a partisan way but because I care about the integrity and reputation of the House and our democracy. I have a lot of personal empathy with the individual who is subject to our debate today and the terrible personal circumstances he faces. But the matter has been considered twice, in two separate stages, in a procedure well known in this House.

[*Dame Margaret Hodge*]

The allegation is incredibly serious. It is that the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) used his position of trust as a Member of Parliament and abused that for personal gain. I say to the Leader of the House that it would be absolutely terrible for our democracy if we did not take those decisions that have been unanimously agreed and endorse them in this House today. We would bring into danger the real trust in our democracy and the integrity of this House.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The right hon. Lady says that this has been looked at, and it has, but there has been no form of appeal and many of the aspects of it have been contested.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): I am a member of the 2019 intake. December will mark two years since I have been here so I confess that I do not know the rules and regulations inside out. However, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that under the rules paid advocacy has been banned from this House since 1695? Why do this Government appear to be bending the rules when it suits them?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Because the rules are not being treated in that way. The exemption exists for whistleblowing, which I will come to.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): We need to widen this out. People out there believe that the Government's attempt to rewrite the rules is dodgy, and the reason for that is because it is dodgy. It is a plan to cover up the kind of corruption we have seen throughout the covid crisis. Polls show that the population believe that the Government are corrupt, and I am afraid that they are correct. This is the most corrupt Government in modern history. Unless they change their behaviour, will they not be doing further permanent damage to our democracy and people's belief in it?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am, as always, grateful to the hon. Gentleman, as he proves my point. The pieties espoused from the other side about being non-partisan are always undermined by the hon. Gentleman, who is the epitome—the very acme—of partisanship.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Is the plain truth not that if the amendment passes today, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) could actually find himself in an even worse position? He could be further condemned by an appeals process, which could find against him.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is right about that.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): My right hon. Friend was interrupted in the course of his speech by an intervention; he was about to say something regarding the question of contested cases, which is at the heart of this issue. Report after report, including by the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege, has said that in such cases criteria for fairness have to be applied. As he has so adequately stated, this investigatory panel does provide for such a state of affairs but it was not applied by the Committee in this case.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who makes a point that I am going to make in slightly more detail.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Will the Leader of the House also accept that the report itself says, towards its conclusion, that “paid advocacy” and the exceptions are open to interpretation? That being the case, and given that there are two different interpretations here, surely the difference of interpretation should be open to some appeal.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and this is one of the key things that the Committee will be asked to look at, to see whether it can clarify the interpretation on the whistleblowing exemption.

Let me return to Standing Order No. 150, which appears to provide a mechanism for the investigation of contentious cases that respects natural justice, ensures that legal counsel is appointed, is appropriate for what is a quasi-judicial process, and introduces significant checks and balances into the investigation, such as the appointment of a separate member by the Speaker to act as an assessor and the right of the Member being investigated to call witnesses and be able to examine other witnesses, rather than leaving this to the discretion of the Commissioner. In a case where so many witnesses and so many Members have made their concerns known, it is unfortunate that the Commissioner did not appoint such a panel. Indeed, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and the Committee on Standards have never opted to use this mechanism, despite having had many contentious cases before them.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Some 17 individuals have come forward saying that they wish to give oral evidence, but that was refused. Is not the point that, whether or not someone is guilty of paid advocacy, there must be justice and that justice must be seen to be done? In this case, many right-minded people would say that justice has not been seen to be done.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am sure that the Committee we are setting up will want to consider the appearance of witnesses and whether that ought to be a fundamental right of people accused of serious cases—

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): If it is all right, I just want to respond directly to the point that has just been made. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: I would like to hear what the hon. Gentleman has got to say before we make a judgment.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman can intervene on me, but he cannot intervene on a point made by the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant)—

Mr Speaker: Let me help. It is not going to be direct; I think it is direct to the point that was made to you, Leader of the House. I think we can dance around on the head of a pin, but that is not going to be helpful in a very important debate today.

Chris Bryant: I just wanted to make a simple point, which is that we reviewed and read all the witness statements. Nobody asked to make an oral witness

statement to us. It is perfectly normal in most workplaces in this country, as a retired High Court judge confirmed to me yesterday, for witness statements to be read and considered, and not necessarily for witnesses to be questioned or cross-examined. We did a perfectly normal, fair hearing for the right hon. Member for North Shropshire. We considered all the witness statements and we published them.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The point is that there was this facility to set up an investigatory panel, which was not used. It would have been able to see all the witnesses that my right hon. Friend wanted.

Michael Fabricant: Is not the point on natural justice in this country about the ability to cross-examine witnesses? Is it not the case that written evidence is not the sort of evidence that can be cross-examined?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Mr Speaker, my hon. Friend has made a mini-speech very pithily.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): Once again, we are seeing this become partisan. We are examining the cases of the individual, but for me the key thing that is not right is that even the Commissioner is in an impossible position. Therefore, we desperately need to reform a system that puts the staff in that place.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, because that helps me to get back to the point about process. The 2015 Committee on Standards report on “The Standards System in the House of Commons” noted that the provisions relating to the panel had “never been invoked”, questioned why the investigatory panel was “necessary” and recommended that the provisions be “reviewed”. However, the House never chose to remove these provisions, so this was an active mechanism open to the Commissioner and the Committee, which they decided not to use. It is the Government’s belief that it is right to allow the House to revisit whether, to ensure natural justice, our procedures should be changed to give Members of Parliament the same or similar rights—including the right of examination of witnesses—as apply to those subject to investigations of alleged misconduct in other workplaces and professions.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Before my right hon. Friend carries on, may I add that anybody who is complaining about the amendment to the motion is complaining about the procedures of this House as they exist in respect of standards cases? All standards cases come to this House for this House to dispose of as it thinks fit. That is what this House is debating now and that is perfectly legitimate. The reason why the mechanism to which my right hon. Friend referred has never been used is that, unlike what was recommended by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the commissioner would chair the panel. For it to be an independent appeals process, it should be chaired independently. It has never been used because it would be so likely to arrive at the same conclusion.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point. It is really important to remember that this House can never be and should never be a mere rubber stamp, which is not our purpose; we are a sovereign Parliament.

Let me turn to the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire. The proposed Select Committee could consider, for example, whether the Standing Orders should be changed so that a panel was always established in contentious cases, or it could consider a new mechanism to ensure that witnesses were always called and examined.

Let me turn to whistleblowing and its relationship to the rules on lobbying, as raised by the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson). The rules related to paid advocacy have been considered many times over the years and rightly place restrictions on Members. In 2012, the House recognised the need for a whistleblowing provision to make it clear that in exceptional cases, if there were some serious wrong, a Member could approach the responsible Minister or public official, even if to do so might incidentally benefit a paying client. Concerns have been expressed about the commissioner and the Committee’s interpretation of the application of this exemption in the case of a serious public policy issue, and about whether the balance was correctly struck. We must therefore think carefully about how we protect the ability of our MPs to raise issues where they see them while ensuring that our system is robust against abuse. The balance is worth examining, and a Select Committee appointed for the purpose of reviewing our standards system would be able to give it due consideration.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): If any Member, regardless of their political affiliation, is involved in paid advocacy to the tune of £100,000 per year, I would expect the House and the Committee to come to the same conclusion—for a Member from any political party and of any affiliation.

Mr Rees-Mogg: That will be a matter for the proposed Select Committee to look at. The purpose of the exemption is for serious wrong and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire pointed out, the problems with milk and with carcinogens in processed food that he pointed out saved lives. If a Member comes into information because of an outside interest, should they really hold it back from Government officials—if it would save life?

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I am not without sympathy for the proposition that the rules require reform in this regard, but the Leader of the House knows, as we all do, that when the House requires reform, it can be done effectively only by building consensus. We build the consensus first and then bring it to the Chamber; I am afraid this Chamber is never where we build consensus. Surely it is already apparent to the Leader of the House that even if the House votes today to constitute the proposed Select Committee, the prospects of achieving consensus in that Select Committee are now as remote as they would be of achieving it in the Chamber today. I am afraid the way the Government are going about this is self-defeating.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The right hon. Gentleman is an experienced Member and quite rightly points out that consensus is very hard to achieve in this Chamber—indeed, this Chamber is physically designed not to achieve it—but our Select Committee processes do, on occasions,

[Mr Rees-Mogg]

manage to achieve consensus from pretty stiff contention in this Chamber, so I am more optimistic about having a Committee that could come to a consensus.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab) *rose*—

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Rees-Mogg: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, then to the right hon. Lady.

Peter Kyle: The Leader of the House is utterly detached from the reality of most working MPs in the House, so let me inform him that most of us do not need to get paid £100,000 to do the job we are already paid for. If we think something is endangering our residents' lives, we do it for free.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am glad that I saved the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) for next, because that point was so fatuous that it is not worth answering.

Yvette Cooper: A cross-party Committee, including lay members, has already considered this issue and come to a unanimous conclusion. My hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury) asked the Leader of the House why the House should not just come to a conclusion on paid advocacy, which we are clear is against the rules, and the Leader of the House said that was a matter for the new Committee to consider. The old Committee, including lay members, has already considered it and come to its independent conclusion; why does the Leader of the House think the new Committee will somehow be better than the old Committee? Does he not realise that this just looks to everyone as if he simply does not like the conclusion that the old Committee came to?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Dare I say that the right hon. Lady is modelling herself on the deaf adder and, charm I never so nicely, she is not hearing what I am saying? The new Committee could come to the same conclusion, but the point at issue is that we are discussing the process, the lack of appeal and the failures in the processes as they currently exist.

Let me come to the length and continuity of investigations. Across many standards cases we have seen huge differentials among the lengths of time taken for investigations. There appears to be no consistency. For example, the case of the Chair of the Standards Committee himself, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), was completed within a week using the rectification procedure, after he had failed to declare something after two years. That is contrasted by the lengthy investigation into the case of my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire, which took just over two years from the start of the inquiry to the publication of the Committee's report.

It is equally concerning—this is an important point for those who have been speaking up for the Committee—that the current processes do not ensure continuity of attendance at the Committee, with different Members

present at the Standards Committee's three formal meetings on the report. By the final meeting, only 50% of the membership had attended all three meetings, and four of the 11 members who attended that meeting had not attended the meeting in which the evidence of my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire was heard. Although we all understand the pressures on Select Committee members, that seems to be in sharp contrast to the expectations in a judicial process such as jury service, when people are meant to be there to listen to the evidence, and a good reason to look again at our processes.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Are the Government asserting, under that premise, that there will be a compulsion for Members to attend not only the proposed Committee but every other Select Committee?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The proposed Committee is very different from other Committees, but that will be a matter for the ad hoc Select Committee to consider.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): That is precisely the case when we serve on a Special Standing Committee for a private Bill: Members are required to be present because it is a quasi-judicial process.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for reminding us of the procedure in private Bill Committees.

The Committee on Standards has itself noted:

“Long investigations are undesirable...place the Member concerned under considerable strain”—

and—

“should be conducted as expeditiously as possible, so long as rigour and fairness are not compromised.”

In fact, the Committee is itself examining the length of recent investigations and adjudications, as part of its inquiry into the code of conduct, to see whether further steps can be taken—

Dame Angela Eagle: You've taken a third of the time for the debate!

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady chunters that I have taken a third of the debate; that is because people like her have intervened. Either I answer people's questions or they just get a monologue. It is better to have a proper debate.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): Under the right hon. Gentleman's Government, an MP can be found guilty of sexual harassment and retain the Conservative Whip; can be found guilty of bullying and keep the job of Home Secretary, overseeing law and order; can break covid rules and be Health Secretary; can break the law and be Leader of the House; and can endanger the lives of our armed forces and allies and be promoted to Deputy Prime Minister. Why should we be at all surprised by the return of cash for questions and Tory sleaze?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It seems that these admirably non-partisan socialists can talk a lot of nonsense in this House and not have to correct the record later, but we shall see.

Sir Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): If the House does introduce an appeals process, it is very important that the appeal is heard in good time. If the appeal panel upholds the original ruling, what will happen?

Mr Rees-Mogg: If the original ruling is upheld, it will come back to this House for a vote on the proposal in the normal way. I agree with my hon. Friend that it should be timely.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Can I take the Leader of the House back to what he was saying a couple of minutes ago about the whistleblowing exemption? Does he recognise the grave danger that, if the interpretation of that exemption that he appeared to be commending was accepted by the House, there would in effect be no ban at all on paid advocacy?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The right hon. Gentleman is a very distinguished and fair-minded Member of this House. It is fundamentally important that the whistleblowing exemption is an exemption and not a loophole that can be exploited for all purposes. Paid advocacy demeans the House and is not something that Members should be involved in. On the other hand, if people have come across a serious wrong in the course of something they have been paid for, I think most fair-minded Members would think it only right and proper that they should tell Ministers about it. There must be a clear dividing line, which I hope the Select Committee would be able to establish. That is at the heart of the disagreement between my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire and the Committee on Standards, and that matter needs to be clearer.

Chris Bryant *rose—*

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think the hon. Gentleman is going to speak at the end, so it may be best if he does that.

Sir Bernard Jenkin *rose—*

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend has already intervened. Let me continue, because I am conscious of time.

The Committee noted that the commissioner has, since March 2020, routinely conducted an initiation interview with a Member concerned in investigations that involve serious allegations to assure herself that the Member is fully appraised in detail of the allegations and the process at the earliest possible stage. That postdates this case, but it is worth noting that my right hon. Friend suggested a meeting in his letter to the commissioner on 16 January 2020. These are welcome steps, and a Select Committee appointed by the House could look further at how the system might be approved.

I will now move on to the aggravating factors that the Standards Committee refers to in a number of its reports. A consistent theme has been that Members' refusal to admit wrongdoing in contentious cases has been considered an aggravating factor leading to greater punishment, but we do not want to encourage a system in which a person has to admit fault in order to receive a reasonable response from the Standards Committee. Members who believe that they are innocent must be able to continue to assert that from the beginning to the end without that being considered an aggravating factor.

Plea bargaining is not part of our system. Expectation of self-denunciation is not where we want to get to. We do not want struggle sessions, though the Opposition may like struggle sessions, in order to receive more lenient sanctions. We saw examples of that recently where a Member was considered to have a higher degree of culpability because he did not accept the judgment of the Committee and commissioner on his correspondence with the judiciary. There was also the case of my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), whose punishment, for the arguably innocuous and legitimate act of writing to Michel Barnier after his request for the views of MPs, was shortened and not brought to the Floor of the House on the condition that he admitted wrongdoing. This is a concerning theme in these investigations that clearly warrants greater review.

Perhaps the most critical point to emerge on concerns expressed by Members is the question of a right to appeal. I consider that right to be fundamental to the provision of justice, which is regrettably not genuinely provided by the matter coming to the Floor of this House—a regrettability that has been reinforced by the conduct of this debate so far.

I observe that, in the House of Lords, there is an appeal process that provides that the noble lord concerned has a right of appeal to the Conduct Committee against the commissioner's findings and any recommended sanction. Having considered any appeal, the Conduct Committee, having agreed an appropriate sanction, reports its conclusions to the House, which has the final decision on the sanction. That is why I support the amendment in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire. It proposes setting up a Select Committee to review the standards process and consider whether Members should be afforded the same or similar rights as apply to those subject to investigations of alleged misconduct in other workplaces and professions, including the right of appeal, and to make recommendations for reform. The Committee will, therefore, be able to recommend setting up an appeals mechanism and recommend other changes to increase confidence. It will also be able to consider whether the case against my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire should be reviewed with the benefit of any new appeals mechanism, or whether the Standards Committee report should be considered by the House. It will be a method by which we can reset a process that has lost the confidence of many Members of this House.

Let me be clear: the new Committee will not be the judge, jury and executioner in this case. It will be time-limited and established for the particular purpose of recommending improvements to the standards system for the House to consider. For example, following the Committee's work in relation to this report, it is entirely possible that a reformed process, including any new appeal mechanism, may conclude that this initial report and sanction was entirely correct. This complex case still demands proper consideration, and the Select Committee would in no way pre-determine that.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Can the Leader of the House explain why it is appropriate that this new Select Committee should have an in-built Government majority, while the Standards Committee with its lay members does not. If this is about trying to

[*Caroline Lucas*]

improve our processes, why is he running the risk of making it look to anybody looking in from the outside that, essentially, this is like someone who has been found guilty of a crime, but instead of serving a sentence, his mates come together to try to change the judicial system? It looks really bad.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Sometimes, to do the right thing, one has to accept a degree of opprobrium, but it is more important to do the right thing to ensure that there is fairness.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Rees-Mogg: I cannot refuse to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Chris Elmore: Can the Leader of the House explain to the House why, for all other Select Committees, Members of this House vote for the Chair, but on this occasion he has decided to appoint a Chair and still call it a Select Committee?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is not true that all the posts are elected. The Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee, for example, is not elected. The hon. Gentleman, who is on the Procedure Committee, really ought to know better and know the details of the composition of Select Committees of this House.

I shall turn briefly to a letter sent to me yesterday by union representatives about the importance—

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We only have an hour and a half to discuss this. This is the time that the Government gave us to discuss this matter. There is huge interest in this debate. Is there anything that you can do to encourage the Leader of the House to wind up his remarks?

Mr Speaker: I think the Leader of the House has just said that he is coming to his conclusion.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Thank you for your ruling, Mr Speaker. It is always a balance in this House as to whether one tries to answer as many questions as possible, which is, I think, the better way of conducting the debate.

A letter was sent to me yesterday by union representatives about the importance of maintaining independent and impartial investigations into misconduct. The standards system stands in contrast to the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme, which has an appeal panel, chaired by a High Court judge. That is for the very reason that all parties referred to the scheme must have total faith in it. It has been absolutely essential in achieving positive cultural change in this House precisely because of its rigorous, judicial processes, transparency of operation and evident commitment to natural justice and the right to appeal. The House should be proud of the ICGS system, and it owes a debt to my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire for its establishment. It is clear that we can learn many lessons from its operation, and I would encourage the Select Committee to look to the ICGS system, with its benefits of judicial experience, as an example of how a process of independent adjudication can be set up effectively.

In summary—I was expecting a “Hear, hear” for that, Mr Speaker, as I am coming to my conclusion—there are numerous problems with the operation of the standards system, a fact that has been highlighted by the concerns of Members across this House in this particular case and others. Given these concerns, I think that it is only right that consideration of this report be paused until our standards system can be reviewed. Therefore, I will support the amendment so that the new Committee can consider whether Members should have

“the same or similar rights as apply to those subject to investigations of alleged misconduct in other workplaces and professions, including the right of representation, examination of witnesses and appeal”, and whether this case itself should continue through any reformed system recommended by the new Committee.

Members must act when we see a situation arise that we do not believe to be compatible with the principles of natural justice. This is about the process and not the individual case, but when considering this report how can one not consider the great sorrow that my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire has suffered? The suicide of his wife is a greater punishment than any House of Commons Committee could inflict. As we all know:

“The quality of mercy is not strained.

It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven

Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed:

It blesseth him that gives and him that takes”.

It is in this way that the House should consider this case and standards more widely. The system must provide justice tempered by mercy, for mercy is essential to justice.

Dame Angela Eagle: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Leader of the House appears to have spent this whole time supporting the amendment and has not actually moved the motion that he was meant to be moving.

Mr Speaker: I think the Leader of the House did move the motion, although I agree that it was a variation. I want the shadow Leader of the House to put the other case now. I call Thangam Debbonaire.

2.41 pm

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): It gives me no pleasure to be standing here responding to a standards motion, although I now feel that what I am responding to is the Leader of the House moving the amendment, rather than the motion.

I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to the standards commissioner and her team, not only for their diligent work in carrying out this inquiry, but for all the other work that they do to actively promote high standards across the House. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who chairs the Standards Committee, and all the other Committee members who contributed to this thorough investigation.

Since 1695, there have been rules on paid advocacy. A motion passed on 2 May 1695 said that

“the offer of money or other advantage to any Member of Parliament for the promoting of any matter whatsoever...in Parliament, is a high crime and misdemeanour”.

If, today, the amendment passes or the motion falls entirely, it sends the message—to paraphrase my right

hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), the deputy leader of the Labour party, who said this better than me earlier today—that when we do not like the rules, we just break the rules; and when someone breaks the rules, we just change the rules. It turns the clock back to before 1695. Such actions were not acceptable then and they are not acceptable now.

Dame Margaret Hodge: Does my hon. Friend agree that the only logical explanation for the action by Government Ministers and Back Benchers today is not necessarily the recommendations of the report that we are considering today, but that there may be many others in line to come forward that will cause even greater embarrassment to those on the Government Benches?

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank my right hon. Friend, who is a distinguished Member of this House, for raising that point. It is hard to work out why this is happening. In fact, I am going to skip ahead to a later point in my speech. As you know, Mr Speaker, the Leader of the House stands up in front of us every week. If he wanted a debate on changing the rules and changing the system, he has had that opportunity every single week, but I have yet to hear him mention it until today, when we are considering a live case.

In this case, the Committee concluded:

“This is an egregious case of paid advocacy”.

It said that the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson)

“repeatedly...used his privileged position...to secure benefits for two companies for whom he was a paid consultant”,

and that this

“has brought the House into disrepute.”

A lot has been said in the media about the standards process over the last week, but since 1695 this House has only ever strengthened the system. The Library and the appendix to the code of conduct can provide a timeline and details for any Government Members who are interested. The introduction of a House of Commons Standards Commissioner in 1995 and the Standards Committee in 2013 were key features of strengthening the system. It has worked well and has gone a long way to restoring public trust in the House. It is vital that the integrity of the standards system is maintained. In fact, the Committee on Standards in Public Life recommended just this week that the system needs to be strengthened, not weakened. But no—Government Members seem to want to rip up the entire system. Our Committees, which are cross-party, carry out their inquiries independently of influence from this House and that must continue to be the case.

Under the code of conduct, all of us are expected to adhere to the ethical standards of the seven principles of public life. It seems that some Government Members need a reminder that those principles are: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. That expectation is good for us all. If someone in this place falls short, there has to be a system in place to hold MPs and other public officials to account. That is our standards system. It is a standards system that our Parliament voted on and approved. Just changing the system when somebody does not like a result is not acceptable.

If the Government wish to debate the merits of the standards system, the Leader of the House can get up tomorrow and schedule time to do so. Some Government Members who have signed the amendment are Chairs of House Committees and could have initiated reviews or made proposals, but they did not. I hate to remind the Leader of the House, but today there is a motion before us about a report and its recommendations. It is absolutely in order for Back Benchers to table an amendment, but it is quite astonishing that the Government seem to have endorsed and whipped it.

Shamefully, it seems that Tory MPs have been backed by their Government to hijack this debate, which should have been about endorsing a Committee report. The Government are sending the message that paid advocacy—MPs selling their offices and position as an elected representative—is fine. I am afraid that some, including Government Members from the Dispatch Box today, are claiming that this is a process without an appeal, but the commissioner reviews cases, makes recommendations and refers them to the Standards Committee, which is cross-party, with a majority of members from the Government Benches, as well as lay members with expertise; they decide whether to approve the recommendations, and we debate and vote on them.

Correct me if I am wrong, but as I understand it, the right hon. Member for North Shropshire had access to legal representation. His character witness statements are in the report and were duly considered. As some of my colleagues have pointed out to me, if everybody who wanted to give oral evidence to a court of law was just accepted, where would that get us? Is that really what we are saying—that there should be a system whereby if I want to give evidence, I get to say what I like?

The Committee process is, in effect, a process of appeal. The Committee upheld the commissioner's report and recommendations, and so must this House. For the public to maintain their trust in us, it is crucial that our independent standards procedure is not undermined or, worse still, systematically dismantled all together, as I fear is happening now. Is that what the Leader of the House wants his political legacy to be—undermining Parliament and our MPs even further? Does he fully understand the potential consequences of doing this?

Standards are important; they matter. The commissioner and the Committee took careful consideration of a very large amount of evidence. It took a long time to read, and I strongly suspect that some Members did not read it. The Committee recommended the sanction on the motion before us. It would be extraordinary for this House to overturn that independent, cross-party recommendation.

I hate to remind the Leader of the House, but just last month Government Members said that they could not possibly support retrospective rule change; and yet, here we are. In the middle of a case, Tory MPs—yes, I am going to state that, because it is only Tory MPs who have signed this amendment—are trying to change the rules. It is a serious case of paid advocacy against the rules that are clearly set out. The public rightly expect us to abide by the rules and to be held to account. We must vote to do so today.

We cannot have a return to the Tory sleaze of the 1990s. Members and the public will remember cash for questions and those Tory scandals of the 1990s. This Tory dilution of our standards procedures sends a

[Thangam Debbonaire]

terrible message to the public and our constituents that it is one rule for certain MPs and another for everyone else. The enduring damage that that would do to Parliament's reputation is something that none of us should be prepared to consider.

2.49 pm

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I do not think anyone enjoys taking part in this debate. Were the Government's motion to be considered unamended, I would vote for it. Had the second amendment been selected, I would vote for it. I will not vote for the first amendment.

I was on the Standards Committee up to 2003, when I withdrew on a point of practice, rather than principle, that the House, the Speaker and the then Labour Government had not supported Elizabeth Filkin. I am not going to change my practice now.

I am one of the people, probably like most people in this House, who has read the full report. I have read what the chief vet said about the milk allegation. I have read what my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) has said, and to whom I join in offering sympathy for what has happened in his life. I recognise that the involvement of Randox with Aintree and with him, and his wife's role at Aintree, meant that he would be close to a business, and I recognise that much of what he said is uncontested by the commissioner and by the Standards Committee.

The issue is whether he would have done better, as I think was possibly indicated by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in Prime Minister's questions, to have said that he held one view, the commissioner and the Committee held another, that he now recognises that what they felt was reasonable, and he is sorry to have had a view that has caused this upset and these difficulties to all of us. I still hope that were I in that situation I would have had the sense, basically, to accept that there are views other than my own and that I should not always see things with my own justification rather than in the way people outside this House, and some inside this House, would see them.

On the decision as to whether the contents of the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom) are correct, I do recognise that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) said, the 2003 recommendation of the Committee on Standards in Public Life is worth looking at. But that was 18 years ago, and if this is a serious problem, it should have been brought back for consideration by the House or by senior Members of this House during the past 18 years. I am unhappy to bring it forward now as a way of changing what should be the normal process of upholding the Standards Committee's endorsement of the standards commissioner's advice to the Committee.

I refer to the debate in 2010 when Jack Straw was the Justice Secretary and Sir George Young, as he then was, contributed for my party, as did I. We chose the system we are now using. If we want to consider changing it, we should do it in a proper way. I do not regard this as appropriate now.

2.52 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): It is a real pleasure to follow the Father of the House, who offers some realistic and sage advice about how we take forward processes and business such as this. It would be good if the Leader of the House was to listen to his very straightforward comments about what is going on today.

When I was first told about this, I thought it was some sort of joke. I thought, "They can't possibly be serious." I expected maybe to come to a debate that would be the usual suspects speaking on behalf of one of their pals—but not today. Today we have the full force of the Government whipping operation dragooning Conservative Members of Parliament through this House to overturn the decision of our Standards Committee and to introduce a new way of examining breaches of the rules in this House. It is an almost outrageous suggestion.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way on the Government's approach: seeking to introduce mechanisms to neutralise court rulings of the Supreme Court, seeking to defy the European convention on human rights, seeking to reform the Electoral Commission, and now this. Does he, like me and I am sure many others on the Opposition Benches, agree with the litany of Giovanni Capoccia that this is a dire warning of the pillars of democracy being undermined by the Conservative and Unionist party for its own nefarious needs?

Pete Wishart: Yes, I do. I say to my hon. Friend and to this House: the public are watching this. The public are examining how we do this type of business, and, I say ever so gently to my Conservative colleagues over there, they are not liking what they are seeing. They are extremely concerned about the way that this House is going when it considers some of these issues.

What the public are observing is a shoddy attempt to turn back the clock to the worst excesses of 1990s Tory sleaze. What they see is the return of the days of brown envelopes and cash for questions—the absolute worst of sleaze and cronyism. What they see is the Conservatives trying to get one of their mates off the hook by ignoring independent due process, and rewriting the rules because they do not suit them, to close down an independent process and replace it with a Committee of this House with a Conservative majority and a Conservative Chair. Let us get rid of all independent process and just have them adjudicate on everything. Why do we not get the executive committee of the 1922 Committee to replace the whole of the judicial system across the UK? If a Conservative supporter is found guilty of any offence, why do we not get a committee set up to reconsider that verdict and have a look at it once again? That is the type of realm of possibility we are getting into with this.

I do not care if this place seems as sleaze-ridden and crony-ridden as it wants to be. In fact, it does me good if people from Scotland are watching and observing this place descending into the midden that we know it can become. It serves my purpose to see it do that. But is that what the Conservatives want to do with this House—to so debase and degrade the way that we do things that the public will start to look on this place with nothing other than utter contempt?

Let us just remind ourselves about what the Standards Committee found. It found that the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) broke multiple rules when he lobbied the Government on behalf of Radox and Lynn's Country Foods. The Committee's report said:

"No previous case of paid advocacy has seen so many breaches or such a clear pattern of behaviour in failing to separate private and public interests."

It quite rightly imposed the maximum sanction available to it. What the Conservatives now want to do is to overthrow that verdict of this independent Committee and to have the matter determined by a Committee with a Conservative Chair and a Conservative majority. That is natural justice Conservative-style for you. Can I say this to you, Mr Speaker? This Committee is supposed to have a Conservative Chair, four other Conservative members, three Labour members and one Scottish National party member, but the Scottish National party will not serve on any kangaroo court designed and determined by the Conservative party in order to do away with an independent process for looking at a breach of the rules.

God knows what Kathryn Stone must be making of this. She has every right and every entitlement to walk right away from all this and have nothing further to do with this House that now attempts to change the rules midway through the process. The shadow Leader of the House is absolutely right. We were only told a couple of weeks ago that we could not change the rules retrospectively, but here we are in the middle of considering a standards report, and that is exactly what we are doing. What a way to do our business. What a shoddy return to the days of Tory sleaze. What a way to reduce this House into the absolute shambles that it is.

Today, Tory MPs are being instructed by their Whips to vote for this. We are doing this without any scrutiny or consideration of how these rules are rewritten. If the Leader of the House wants us to look at how we approach these things in future, he should bring forward a debate, not just 90 minutes where he took up half the time, because nobody has an opportunity to get in and say anything. Do it properly. Why are we doing this when we are considering a standards report? We will not take our place on this Committee; we will have nothing to do with it. I hope that Labour Members do not take their places on it either. If the Conservatives want to be the judge and jury and the arbitrator in all this, that is up to them. Get on and do it; we will have absolutely nothing to do with this process at all.

2.58 pm

Dame Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): I am very disappointed in the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), because, in effect, he is accusing me, having worked with me over years on achieving justice for this place, of being completely disingenuous. I find that very personally disappointing.

Today is a day for serious consideration by all colleagues across this House. We must address the grave concerns about the way in which we are held to account under our own Standing Orders. My amendment is not about whether the findings of the third report of the Committee on Standards are correct or incorrect. It is not about whether Mr Owen Paterson is innocent or guilty under that report. It is not about letting anyone off, stitching

anything up, or any of the other accusations flying around the Chamber. Today's amendment is about the process of investigations into Members and the question of whether this process must now be reviewed by a politically balanced Select Committee that will consider some exceedingly serious questions. First, there is the question of whether our investigatory process should more closely reflect the laws of natural justice, where an accused Member can expect to have their own evidence taken into account, to put forward witnesses in their defence, to be interviewed early in the process and provide their own explanation and, vitally, to access an independent appeal process.

Secondly, there is the serious question of whether Standing Orders Nos. 149, 149A and 150 are entirely fit for purpose. Those are the Standing Orders that govern the make-up of the Committee on Standards and the powers of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

I worked with Kathryn Stone when I was Leader of the House, and I know she takes her role seriously and strives to take a balanced view. However, the PCS does not have a legal background and is not required to by orders. She works as both sole investigator and judge. The Committee on Standards can change her recommendations, should it choose, but there is no clarity on when or why that would happen. The Committee will perfectly understandably tend to prefer to uphold the system over the individual. The PCS can decide to establish an investigatory panel to help her, and the Committee can even require her to establish such a panel, but again there is no clarity in Standing Orders on when that should be done, and it has never been done to date.

As Leader of the House between 2017 and 2019, a cross-party team of Members worked flat-out under my chairmanship—I pay tribute to them again today—to establish an independent complaints and grievance scheme. I know well that the scheme has its detractors and is still disappointingly slow to dispense justice. However, that cross-party team made great efforts to ensure that it followed the laws of natural justice—specifically that, first, both alleged perpetrator and alleged victim are very clearly able to give their side of the story to an independent case manager; secondly, witnesses can be presented in support of either side; thirdly, legal support can be provided; fourthly, there is a clear hierarchy where the investigator is not also the prosecutor, and fifthly, there is a clear appeals process. Furthermore, until found guilty, the alleged perpetrator is presumed innocent, and the investigation is confidential. Vitally, the whole scheme is reviewed on a regular and timetabled basis to ensure it continues to be fair and impartial.

Yvette Cooper: The right hon. Lady did important work on the independent complaints process, but she will recognise that, as Leader of the House, she had considerable time to propose reforms and amendments to the Committee on Standards process, should she have chosen to do so. Does she not recognise that proposing reforms now, in conjunction with this individual case—where an independent investigation and an independent cross-party Committee have come to very clear conclusions about paid advocacy—undermines the decisions and integrity of this House and any positive purpose to any reforms she might want for the future?

Dame Andrea Leadsom: I am incredibly sympathetic to what the right hon. Lady says. In fact, I was about to come on to what many in the Chamber are asking, which is, “Why bring forward this review today, on the day we are being asked to consider one particular case?” She asks why I did not bring forward these changes when I was Leader of the House. The answer is that I was working flat-out, on a cross-party basis, doing 18-hour days—many Members would support that point—on the independent complaints and grievance scheme. Had I stayed in post longer, I absolutely would have looked at this review. I am frustrated that these two systems have not been brought into line with each other. I share her frustration. I would have strongly preferred for this review to have been kicked off on its own merits at a time when the waters would not be muddied by the inevitable party political point scoring.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): My right hon. Friend was a distinguished Leader of the House. She has set out in her amendment a view about how this system should work, which would be far more judicial and forensic. I am sure that many of us in this House on both sides find these whole processes very unedifying and somewhat embarrassing. We do not vote on our remuneration packages. In the scenario she is setting out, would it be appropriate for the House still to vote on these reports, or, given the beefed-up investigatory powers that she is setting out—looked at by the Standards Committee—should it not come for a vote of this House at all? It should be at the Standards Committee, which should then opine on what it hears.

Dame Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises an important point, which came up time and again during consideration of the independent complaints and grievance scheme. It was made very clear that, in a democratically elected system, ultimately, it has to be for elected colleagues to be able to make the final decision. That is an incredibly important point of principle. It was put to me that, if we ever reached a point where unelected people could remove elected people, we would put ourselves into the position of a dictatorship. But I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a powerful case for reform, but as the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) said, that reform can only work if it comes from all parts of the House. By bringing her amendment today, it looks like we are moving the goalposts. For that reason, I cannot support her. What might she say about that?

Dame Andrea Leadsom: As I just said in response to the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), I share the concern that we are bringing this forward today. I sincerely hope that colleagues from all parts of the Chamber will be prepared to join together to review this system, which is so clearly flawed. I ask all colleagues to search their hearts carefully today. As MPs, there is no doubt we are our own harshest critics and judges. We spend so much of our lives trying to deliver justice to our constituents and fighting against unfairness wherever we see it. Today’s amendment is not about one judgment on one person. It is not about letting anyone off the hook, and it is not about rejecting the report of the Committee on Standards.

Jess Phillips: With much respect, and having worked with the right hon. Lady for many months on the ICGS process, it is only fair, in the light of that, that I raise that today two of the people who went through that process have contacted me. They are victims of sexual harassment or assault, and they say that what is happening in Parliament today is very unedifying and makes them certain that victims will find it difficult to understand that we will not just overturn things and make it very hard for anyone to come forward about anything.

Dame Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. We have worked together on this for many years. I must make clear to her that the amendment is not looking at the independent complaints and grievance scheme. As I have set out, that was established under a cross-party review, and it had all the laws of natural justice taken carefully into account in its establishment.

Today’s amendment is an opportunity to review the process for fairness, natural justice and impartiality in the system that oversees Members of Parliament. The review is proposed to take place within three months from today, at which time the specific case can be brought back to the House for reconsideration.

Michael Fabricant: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Dame Andrea Leadsom: I will just finish, because time is pressing. A colleague texted me today to say:

“Achieving change in this place is tough, but today’s amendment could lead to a standards system that is fairer for all. It is so sad that it takes a tragedy for the House to act.”

There is never a right time to act, but let us please do our best for fairness and support the amendment today.

3.9 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I am regretful at rising to speak in this debate. Although we have political adversaries in the House, we are also all colleagues who work together in the same place. I have the utmost sympathy for the family tragedy that hit the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) and the greatest admiration for how he then took up the campaign for the prevention of suicide to help others. In the more than 20 years that we have been in the House together, he has shown me nothing but kindness and courtesy.

It is very much because we as MPs know and understand each other that the House recognised that we needed a complaints system that involved a strong measure of independence. We all recognise that the public want, and are entitled to, the highest standards from their elected representatives, and we are proud to claim that that is the case. We all recognise that the people who elect us want us to act in their interest and in the public interest, and that they want no conflict of interest to blur the issue of our private financial interest with our role as MPs.

Trust in our democracy is all important, but it is fragile. The reputation of the House is easily damaged and, when damaged, hard to restore, as we discovered not only in the lobbying scandal, but in the expenses scandal. How we deal with this issue will reflect on the House as a whole and on each of us individually. I hope

that Members on both sides are clear that this is House business, not Government business, and therefore the vote should not be whipped, much though the Whips will try.

We made these rules on lobbying; we need to enforce them. No one foisted the process on us; we initiated it and decided it. Where there are criticisms about the rules that we decided on, changes can be proposed, but as the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) said, they must have an all-party basis to go forward with integrity. That is the way we should do things.

What we must not do is make the rules and then decide to set them aside when we have misgivings about the outcome. I will oppose the amendment and support the motion, and I urge right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House to do the same.

Mr Speaker: I call Sir William Cash. Sir William, you have only three minutes. I am sorry about that.

3.12 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): This case is about the whole House, not just an individual Member. It is about the manner, process and principle whereby the case was conducted by the Committee on Standards, although there has been much discussion about the role of the commissioner.

The responsibility lies with the Committee, which is ultimately a matter for the House as a whole. The amendment addresses a failure by the Committee in a serious contested case, as this was, to call for an investigatory panel as it had the right to do and should have done. Had an investigatory panel been set up, it would have brought into play the rules of natural justice, human rights and the criteria insisted on by a series of reports, including that of the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege.

Under the Committee on Standards Standing Orders, in particular Standing Order 150(5), the commissioner may hold an investigatory panel but “if so requested by the Committee”

is obliged to hold such a panel. Then all the aspects of fairness and justice that I have mentioned, and that have been insisted on in a series of reports, would have come into play. They include establishing disputed facts, the appointment of a legal assessor and counsel, the right for a Member accused of misconduct to be heard before such a panel, the right for such a Member to call and examine witnesses, and the opportunity for the legal assessor to provide an opinion

“as to the extent to which its proceedings have been consistent with the principles of natural justice”.

All that was denied to the Member in this case. In similar serious contested cases, it is as plain as a pikestaff that Members on both sides of the House would want to insist that such rules of fairness were brought into play for them, as would be expected in any walk of life. It would be utterly inconceivable for Parliament—it would be rightly condemned for doing so—to pass legislation denying to the courts, justice systems, statutory tribunals, professional committees or ACAS that a person accused of misconduct be granted such procedures. In a nutshell, although in courts, tribunals or professional disciplinary arrangements, any person in the land could

apply for judicial review where there had been a failure to comply with such procedures, that does not apply because of parliamentary privilege and article 9 of the Bill of Rights.

There is a further question about the role of the lay members. In this case, for a variety of reasons, including recusal and the absence of some Members of Parliament on the Committee when the report was finalised, the lay members were left in a majority, which is clearly not the way in which the Committee was intended to operate, despite past warnings.

For all those reasons, and because the House as a whole has overall jurisdiction over all Standing Orders, I believe that the amendment is essential. An investigatory panel should have been set up to ensure that. If the Committee had requested it, which it did not, the commissioner would have been obliged, under the Standing Orders, to ensure it. I therefore strongly urge that the amendment be made.

3.15 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker—sorry, Mr Speaker.

Hon. Members: You wish!

Mr Speaker: I think we'll move on. [*Laughter.*]

Chris Bryant: I think he got the easier job.

I have not done any radio or television interviews on this matter because, as Chair of the Committee, I am a servant of the House. I thank the Commissioner and the Committee. In particular, I wish the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Allan Dorans) well, because he is very ill at the moment. I hope that he will be back with us soon. It is inappropriate for people to comment on absences from the Committee when they do not understand why members might be absent.

I am painfully conscious that the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) lost his wife in tragic circumstances in June 2020. I wish to express my sincere condolences to him. I have known suicide in my family, as he knows, and I have performed many funerals for suicides. I know the grief, the anguish, and often the guilt that is associated. The last year must have been very distressing for him, and the Committee took those circumstances fully into account when considering his conduct.

I will address the charges, the process, the sanction and the amendment. The charges are very serious. The Member repeatedly, over a sustained period, lobbied officials and Ministers on behalf of his paying clients, Radox and Lynn's Country Foods, from whom he was receiving more than £9,000 a month, as he still is. He pursued their commercial interests. When they could not get meetings with officials and Ministers, he used his privileged position as a Member of Parliament to secure them. Providing privileged access is a valuable service.

The Member promoted what he called “Radox's superior technology”. He wanted the Government to use Radox's calibration system. He repeatedly used his taxpayer-funded parliamentary office for commercial meetings. That is paid lobbying. In some shape or form, it has been banned since 1695 and expressly so since

[Chris Bryant]

cash for questions, which brought this House into terrible disrepute in the 1990s. One Conservative Member described it to me as a “catalogue of bad behaviour”. I have yet to meet a Conservative MP who has not said to me, “He clearly broke the rules.” I think that includes the Leader of the House.

The Member says that he was raising serious wrongs, but he did not say so at the time. If they were truly serious, one might have expected him to write articles or do media interviews, as he was perfectly entitled to do. He did not. He did the one thing that he was banned from doing: lobby Ministers time and again in a way that conferred a direct benefit on his paying clients. That is expressly forbidden. It is a corrupt practice.

On the process, the Member has had a fair hearing. We had legal advice from Speaker’s Counsel throughout. As one former High Court judge said to me yesterday, “the procedure is consistent with natural justice and similar or identical to workplaces up and down the country.”

We on the Committee spent many hours reviewing the evidence in this case without fear or favour. The Member had prior notice of the charges and the evidence against him at every stage. He had his legal advisers with him. The Committee invited him to make his appeal against the commissioner’s findings in writing and in person, and I hope he would confirm that we gave him every opportunity to make his case to us and that the session was conducted respectfully and fairly. I think he is nodding.

The Member has said that his witnesses should have been interviewed. Natural justice requires that witnesses be heard, but that does not necessarily mean that they must be heard orally or cross-examined. We did what many courts and tribunals do every day of the week: we reviewed all the witness statements, took them into consideration and published them in full.

The Member claims that the commissioner had made up her mind before she sent her memorandum. That is completely to misunderstand the process. As the commissioner has done in every other case, she started an investigation and invited the Member to meet her and/or to submit evidence. Once she had completed her investigation and, by definition, found on a preliminary basis that there had been a breach of the rules, she submitted a memorandum to him for his comments, and then to the Committee. That is when we heard his appeal, in writing and in person.

I turn to the sanction. As the Committee says in the report:

“Each of Mr Paterson’s several instances of paid advocacy would merit a suspension of several days, but the fact that he has repeatedly failed to perceive his conflict of interest and used his privileged position as a Member of Parliament to secure benefits for two companies for whom he was a paid consultant, is even more concerning. He has brought the House into disrepute.”

A Conservative colleague whom I respect a great deal said to me on Monday that justice should always be tempered by mercy. I agree. But justice also demands no special favours.

These are the precedents that we considered: Patrick Mercer was suspended for six months; the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) for 30 days; Jonathan Sayeed for 14 days; and George Galloway for 18 days. When Geoffrey Robinson failed to provide proper responses to the commissioner and Committee, he was suspended

for a month. This case is just as serious because it involved at least 14 instances. It was a pattern of behaviour, and the Member has said time and again over the last week that he would do the same again tomorrow. If the House were therefore to vote down or water down the sanction, or to carry the amendment, it would be endorsing his action. We would be dismantling the rule on paid advocacy, which has been around in some shape or form since 1695. I am afraid that the public would think of us as the Parliament that licensed cash for questions.

Let me turn to the amendment. I have worked with the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom) on many things; I think she is very wrong today. It is the very definition of injustice that one should change the rules or the process at the very last moment, and to do so for a named individual. That is what the amendment does. Retrospective legislation to favour or damage an individual because they are a friend or a foe is immoral and the polar opposite of the rule of law. That is why, as the Leader of the House knows, I spoke and voted with Conservative Members when we were considering a retrospective motion to subject the hon. Member for Delyn (Rob Roberts) to a recall petition. The amendment should fail on that basis alone—it is the opposite of due process.

The amendment purports to set up an appeal process, but an appellate body must be independent and every single member of the body will be *parti pris*, by definition. They will have been whipped and taken a view today. They will almost certainly have voted. The proposed Chair, by agreeing to have his name put forward, is already not independent. I point out gently to the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire that it was her motion as Leader of the House on 7 January 2019 that set up the Standards Committee in its present form. At that time, she said that

“a greater element of independence was required, and that having seven lay members and seven parliamentary Members on the Standards Committee...provides the right balance—having the memory and the corporate understanding of being in this place, while at the same time ensuring that we can benefit from the experience and knowledge of independent lay members.”—[*Official Report*, 7 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 128.]

The body she proposes today will have no independent members—no independence.

Dame Andrea Leadsom *rose*—

Chris Bryant: I will not take an intervention, if the right hon. Member does not mind. She must know that this is a retrograde step. She also said—I say this strongly to all hon. Members who have said many things about the parliamentary commissioner—that

“ensuring that the PCS can operate independently...is vital and will better enable justice for those seeking recourse.”—[*Official Report*, 7 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 127.]

The amendment will drive a coach and horses through our standards system. We will have two rival Select Committees on standards at the same time, charged with the same piece of business. As many hon. Members may know, the Standards Committee is engaged in a review of the code of conduct, which we are required to do in every Parliament, and that will include review of the operation of the system. I am absolutely certain that there are things that we could do better. I am determined to make sure that we will do things better to ensure natural justice.

Sir William Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Bryant: I will not, if the hon. Member does not mind. I want to conclude my remarks; I am sorry. He has already caught Mr Speaker's eye.

We are close to agreeing a report on how we can improve the system. I would also say that the suggested process will keep this running for yet more months. I agree with the Leader of the House: I hate investigations that take a long time, but I will point this out gently. The commissioner was, I think, right to suspend her investigation on the right hon. Member for North Shropshire after his wife's death. It was only once his lawyers said it was okay to restart that she initiated it again. All the delays in the process have been down to his seeking further extensions of deadlines, and we have always sought to meet those. I think it is inappropriate to keep it going any further.

I also draw a distinction between an appeal on the facts, which we have heard, and an appeal on the sanction. It may be right that there should be an appeal process on the sanction. That is not the process that we have adopted with any other Member thus far, and that is why I think it is wrong to confuse changing the process with the case in hand. It is, as I said earlier, by definition wrong to change the process at the very last moment.

The Committee also says in the report:

"A Member is entitled to contest, even vigorously contest, the Commissioner's interpretation of the rules and her findings. We do not mark down any Member for doing so."

The aggravating factor in this case was a lack of insight into a conflict of interest, not a lack of acceptance of breach. I will say this to the Member: this could have been very different if you had come to us and said, "I am sorry. I was trying to do the right thing, but I got it wrong. I want the House to uphold the highest standards, and I accept the reprimand and the sanction. I hope my constituents will deal kindly with me." The danger is that, if the amendment is carried, his name will become a byword for bad behaviour.

Let me end with this. I hope all Members know that I care passionately about Parliament. The vast majority of Members are here to do good. We make significant sacrifices, as our partners know. We make a big difference, often on campaigns that have no party issue in them—indeed, I hope the House will support my Acquired Brain Injury Bill on 3 December. *[Interruption.]* I think that was unanimous, Mr Speaker. But if the public believe that we are marking our own homework, our reputation, individually and collectively, will be tarnished. Independence is essential to protect us. A Conservative MP said to me yesterday:

"There have been times when I have been ashamed of being a Member of this House, I don't want to go back to that."

Of course, as Chairman of the Committee, I remain a servant of the House, but I also have to look at the public. They want the House to uphold the highest possible standards. Nobody can be above the rules. It is the public who should judge this, and I fear they will find us all wanting if the amendment is carried today. I warn colleagues, with all my heart: do not do something today that we will rue in the future.

Mr Speaker: Can I just say before people vote: please, take your time going into the Lobbies. I am going to extend the vote, just because of the nature of where we are at the moment.

Amendment proposed: (a), leave out from "this House" to the end and insert:

"(1) notes the Third Report of the Committee on Standards (HC 797);

(2) notes concerns expressed about potential defects in the standards system and therefore declines to consider the report at this time;

(3) and resolves:

(a) that a Select Committee be appointed to consider and make recommendations by 3 February 2022 on the following matters:

(i) whether the current standards system should give Members of Parliament the same or similar rights as apply to those subject to investigations of alleged misconduct in other workplaces and professions, including the right of representation, examination of witnesses and appeal;

(ii) the extent to which the procedures under Standing Order Nos 149, 149(A) and 150 should be made consistent with the principles of natural justice;

(iii) whether the case against Mr Owen Paterson should be reviewed or whether the Third Report of the Committee on Standards (HC 797) should be reconsidered by the House;

(iv) and such other matters as appear to the Committee to be connected with the matters set out above,

and calls on the Government to bring forward a motion to give effect to any recommendations of the Committee within five sitting days of the publication of the Committee's report;

(b) That the Committee consist of nine Members;

(c) That Mr John Whittingdale be Chair of the Committee and be given a casting vote in the event of a tie;

(d) That the Committee shall consist of eight other backbench members; to be nominated by parties in the proportion of four Conservative, three Labour and one SNP; nominations shall be submitted to the Committee of Selection no later than 15 November, after that date motions for nomination can be made notwithstanding any gaps in membership, and any motion made in the House on behalf of the Committee of Selection by the Chair or another member of the Committee shall be treated as having been made in pursuance of Standing Order No.121(2) for the purposes of Standing Order No.15(1)(c);

(e) That the Committee have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House; to adjourn from place to place, to report from time to time, to appoint legal advisers, and to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the Committee's order of reference."—(*Dame Andrea Leadsom.*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 250, Noes 232.

Division No. 99]

[3.29 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Allan, Lucy
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, 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
 Benton, Scott
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Brine, Steve
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, rh Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinage, Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Dorries, rh Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fletcher, Nick

Ford, Vicky
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Grundy, James
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkins, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnston, David
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Loder, Chris
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan

Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Nici, Lia
 O'Brien, Neil
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David

Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Symms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tracey, Craig
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Scott Mann and
Michael Tomlinson

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Begum, Apsana
 Bell, Aaron
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 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
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy

Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dowd, Peter
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Dromey, Jack
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Fuller, Richard
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Griffiths, Kate
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hoare, Simon
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 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
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 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
 Mills, Nigel
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Mortimer, Jill
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 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
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 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
 Stevens, Jo
 Stevenson, John
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes

Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Wragg, Mr William
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:

**Mary Glindon and
 Colleen Fletcher**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Hon. Members: Shame!

Mr Speaker: Order. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) needs to be calm a minute while I do the next part of the script. [*Interruption.*] You might find it shameful, but I think I am in charge.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The House divided: Ayes 248, Noes 221.

Division No. 100]

[3.45 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Allan, Lucy
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, 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
 Benton, Scott
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham

Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Brine, Steve
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, rh Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Crosbie, Virginia
 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, rh Michelle
 Dorries, rh Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Grundy, James
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Holden, Mr Richard
 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
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnston, David
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Loder, Chris
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Nici, Lia
 O'Brien, Neil
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Rosindell, Andrew

Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward

Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tracey, Craig
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike

Tellers for the Ayes:
Scott Mann and
Michael Tomlinson

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Begum, Apsana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 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
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)

Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dods, Anneliese
 Dowd, Peter
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Dromey, Jack
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet

Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 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
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 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
 Mills, Nigel
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 Offord, Dr Matthew

O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 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
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 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
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Sarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Wragg, Mr William
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:

Mary Glindon and
 Colleen Fletcher

Resolved,

That this House—

(1) notes the Third Report of the Committee on Standards (HC 797);

(2) notes concerns expressed about potential defects in the standards system and therefore declines to consider the report at this time;

(3) and resolves:

(a) that a Select Committee be appointed to consider and make recommendations by 3 February 2022 on the following matters:

(i) whether the current standards system should give Members of Parliament the same or similar rights as apply to those subject to investigations of alleged misconduct in other workplaces and professions, including the right of representation, examination of witnesses and appeal;

(ii) the extent to which the procedures under Standing Order Nos 149, 149(A) and 150 should be made consistent with the principles of natural justice;

(iii) whether the case against Mr Owen Paterson should be reviewed or whether the Third Report of the Committee on Standards (HC 797) should be reconsidered by the House;

(iv) and such other matters as appear to the Committee to be connected with the matters set out above,

and calls on the Government to bring forward a motion to give effect to any recommendations of the Committee within five sitting days of the publication of the Committee's report;

(b) That the Committee consist of nine Members;

(c) That Mr John Whittingdale be Chair of the Committee and be given a casting vote in the event of a tie;

(d) That the Committee shall consist of eight other backbench members; to be nominated by parties in the proportion of four Conservative, three Labour and one SNP; nominations shall be submitted to the Committee of Selection no later than 15 November, after that date motions for nomination can be made notwithstanding any gaps in membership, and any motion made in the House on behalf of the Committee of Selection by the Chair or another member of the Committee shall be treated as having been made in pursuance of Standing Order No. 121(2) for the purposes of Standing Order No. 15(1)(c);

(e) That the Committee have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House; to adjourn from place to place, to report from time to time, to appoint legal advisers, and to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the Committee's order of reference.

Chris Bryant: On a point of order, Mr Speaker—

Mr Speaker: Just to let people know, I am not going to continue the debate. We have been through the debate, but I think that this might be a point of clarification, and I am happy to accept it in that light.

Chris Bryant: It is a very simple one, Mr Speaker. I do not want to delay the House. Some people have asked whether the Standards Committee continues to exist. It does, and we will be meeting on Tuesday morning. I will still be its Chair.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I do not believe that any hon. Member is truly honourable if they serve on this

Question accordingly agreed to.

[John McDonnell]

new Committee. Therefore I want my constituents to know that no Member of Parliament serves on this corrupt Committee in my name.

Mr Speaker: As I have said, we are not going to go through all the Members in the debate.

Nuclear Energy (Financing) Bill

Second Reading

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that I have not selected either of the reasoned amendments.

3.57 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Hands): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I want to start by apologising the House for the fact that I will be unable to stay for all of the debate as I am taking the train to Glasgow to be there for energy day at COP and will therefore miss the wind-ups. I have informed Mr Speaker of this, and those on the Opposition Front Bench. The Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), the Minister for Science, Research, and Innovation, will be here for the debate and he will respond for the Government.

Two weeks ago, on 19 October, the Government published their net zero strategy. It is our vision for a decarbonised economy in 2050 and the policies and proposals that will keep us on course to reach net zero emissions through our five-year carbon budget. It is a strategy that puts the UK on a trajectory to meet carbon budget 6, a 78% reduction in emissions compared with 1990 levels by 2035, as the Prime Ministers reminded us earlier today. These kinds of ambitious goals are vital as we host COP26. Integral to achieving carbon budget 6 is our new ambition to fully decarbonise the power sector by 2035. This will mean that the UK is entirely powered by low-carbon electricity, subject to security of supply. Of course our electricity system must be resilient and affordable, as well as low-carbon. It will predominantly be composed of wind and solar but, as last year's energy White Paper made clear, a low-cost, reliable system means that renewables will be complemented by technologies that provide power when the wind is not blowing or the sun is not shining. Large-scale nuclear power plants are the only proven technology available today that is deployed at scale to provide continuous, reliable and low-carbon electricity. Our electricity system needs nuclear power.

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

Greg Hands: Of course I will give way. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could explain why the SNP is so resolutely opposed to continuing the strong nuclear tradition in Scotland.

Alan Brown: I will do so later, but the Minister knows nuclear waste is a key issue. On proven technology working alongside renewables, he will be well aware that pumped storage hydro can provide that. Why will the Government not give the go-ahead for Coire Glas in the highlands, which has been progressed by SSE?

Greg Hands: The hon. Gentleman is right, and we are looking at that technology, but I stress what I just said about deployment at scale. We need something that can be deployed at scale to provide the bulk of our electricity when the sun is not shining or the wind is not blowing.

We are always open-minded on other new technologies, but the most important thing is what can be deployed at scale. The measures in this Bill are critical for ensuring we have the option to bring forward further nuclear capacity.

Twelve of the UK's 13 current nuclear reactors, representing approximately 85% of our nuclear capacity, are scheduled to close by 2030. Although Hinkley Point C is under construction, additional nuclear is likely to be needed in a low-cost 2050 electricity system. That is why we have committed to bring at least one further large-scale nuclear project to final investment decision by the end of this Parliament, subject to value for money and all relevant approvals.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Does that not mean much more nuclear is needed if it is the preferred means of backing up wind? The new nuclear the Minister is talking about will not even replace the nuclear that is closing.

Greg Hands: I have good news for my right hon. Friend, which is that the regulated asset base model that we are introducing here can be used for further nuclear power plants, including small modular reactors and other key nuclear innovations. He will also know that, in the net zero review, we launched a £120 million fund for new nuclear innovations, which will allow us to increase our nuclear commitments and capabilities beyond the existing commitment to one new plant having its investment case in this Parliament.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Further to the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood), Hinkley Point C will produce between 7% and 8% of the nation's electricity needs once both reactors are up and running. A further plant of the same size would perhaps take it to 16%, but surely we need at least 25% to 30% if we are to make sure we have enough power to keep the grid going when the wind stops and there is no sunlight.

Greg Hands: My hon. Friend makes a good case for supporting this Bill, which will allow the financing options to expand our nuclear power base. I appreciate his support for Hinkley Point, as the MP for a nearby area.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): Is not the problem with the Government's proposals that the new financing model, which is very favourable, goes towards only one technology? Are the British Government not therefore picking a winner from the available technology options? Does that not go against Conservative ideology?

Greg Hands: No, actually. In fact, the ability to add levies or extra payments on to bills is already in place for multiple technologies. It is not there for nuclear alone. The broad concept exists for other technologies, too.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: I will make a bit more progress.

The Chancellor's spending review backs this commitment by providing £1.7 billion to enable the investment decision, alongside a new £120 million future nuclear enabling fund to tackle barriers to deploying new nuclear technology.

Mark Tami: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: I will make a bit more progress.

However, it is clear that we need a new funding model to support the financing of large-scale and advanced nuclear technologies. Under the existing mechanism to support new nuclear projects, the contracts for difference scheme, developers have to finance the construction of a nuclear project and only begin receiving revenue when the station starts generating electricity. That was the right model to use for Hinkley Point C, given that it was the first nuclear project to be built in the UK for a generation.

Mark Tami *rose*—

Greg Hands: I am going to make more progress.

But the lack of alternative funding models has led to the cancellation of recent potential projects, such as Hitachi's project at Wylfa Newydd in Wales and Toshiba's at Moorside in Cumbria. We have digested the lessons from Hinkley Point C; it is time to provide these alternatives.

Mark Tami *rose*—

Greg Hands: I am going to make some more progress.

This legislation will facilitate financing of additional nuclear capacity through implementing a regulated asset base model and additional measures to mobilise private capital into new projects. At this point, I will give way to the very patient Member from north Wales.

Mark Tami: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. Does he agree that since the advanced gas-cooled reactor programme, we have not had a programme of new nuclear reactors? We have had very drawn out processes for one-off plants, whether at Sizewell or Hinkley. We need to plan and have new reactors, preferably with the same build. If we look at what the French have done, we see that they can take one part of one reactor and put it in another one. We have always tinkered with reactors, rather than see this as a long-term project.

Greg Hands: I think the right hon. Gentleman is a supporter of the Bill and the approach being taken by the Government, because exactly this new financing model will allow us a greater diversity in our nuclear projects. It will allow us to bring in more private sector finance. I know he is a long-standing Labour MP, so perhaps he might want to reflect on Labour's role in those lost opportunities over the years.

Mark Tami *rose*—

Greg Hands: Let me finish responding to the first intervention first. I was reading the 1997 Labour manifesto the other day. We remember those days when they came in as "new Labour", and their manifesto said:

"We see no economic case for the building of any new nuclear power stations."

[Greg Hands]

The right hon. Gentleman has been here a long time, so perhaps he would like to say why he was a backer of the 1997 Labour manifesto.

Mark Tami: I actually came here in 2001, but I will leave that there. I have been a long-time supporter of nuclear power. I think that the problem, on both sides of the House, is that we have energy review after energy review, we identify what all the problems are and we do absolutely nothing about it. We need a long-term plan, and I am talking about both sides of the House here. I will certainly be supporting this Bill tonight.

Greg Hands: The right hon. Gentleman said he was first elected in 2001, but my guess is that he was a supporter of the 1997 manifesto. What says supports what the Government have been doing here for some time, which has been to increase our nuclear capacity and make sure the financing models are in place to support the funds. I am surprised he voted against the Budget last week, with its £1.7 billion made available for new nuclear. Perhaps he might explain to his constituents why he was against that Budget.

Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con): Just to carry on the point about Labour's involvement in this, I should point out that at his final party conference Tony Blair said:

"10 years ago I parked the issue of nuclear power. Today, I believe without it, we are going to face an energy crisis and we can't let that happen."

For the first time in my life, I am going to say that Tony Blair was right. The French are reaping the rewards of Messmer's nuclear legacy. Will my right hon. Friend commit today to his Messmer-style nuclear legacy for the UK?

Greg Hands: I, too, do not often agree with Tony Blair, but it was good to see his conversion in the end, albeit that it took him 10 years. I have always been a passionate supporter of nuclear power, right since I was first elected in 2005, which was round about the time of that Labour volte-face. I was a strong supporter of Labour's changing its view at that time; it is just such a pity that there was a lost decade before it came to that view.

Let me move on—

Jonathan Edwards: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: No, I am going to make some progress. I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

The Bill could help to get new projects off the ground throughout Great Britain, including, potentially, the Sizewell C project in Suffolk, which is the subject of ongoing negotiations between EDF and the Government, as well as potential further projects, such as on the Wylfa site in Wales.

Jill Mortimer (Hartlepool) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on this landmark Bill, which will help us to reach our net zero targets by 2050. Does he agree that it creates an incredible opportunity to replace the soon-to-be-decommissioned reactor in Hartlepool with a new advanced modular reactor, which could create the high-quality, high-temperature steam that we need for hydrogen production in Teesside?

Greg Hands: I visited my hon. Friend's constituency with her two or three weeks ago—in fact, it was my first ministerial visit under my new portfolio—and I was impressed by the commitment to hydrogen in the area and to our new approach to energy overall. The most important thing to understand about this Bill is that it enables future nuclear projects and a diversity of financing models, with greater access to private sector finance in particular, so that we are less dependent on overseas developers as we go forward. That is the most important thing to take away. I would of course be delighted to come back to Hartlepool to see what it has to offer in this policy space.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): When will I be able to get one of these little modular, Rolls-Royce reactors?

Greg Hands: I think my right hon. Friend is referring to small modular reactors, the technology behind which the Government have put their support. The ability to finance them will start to come in, and I would hope to speak further on that with my right hon. Friend.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): My understanding is that eight sites around the UK currently have planning permission for new nuclear power stations. I have two nuclear power stations in my constituency and we would welcome a third; will the Bill help in some way to speed up the planning process so that we can get investment into communities? My local nuclear power stations are supposed to be decommissioned within the next 10 years.

Greg Hands: The Bill does not change the planning process, but it does change the investment case and the ability to bring in private sector investment, particularly institutional funds, including British pension funds, that are currently put off or find it difficult. It also affects the ability to bring in private institutional investors from overseas—we have seen the difficulties at Wylfa and at Moorside. In that sense, my hon. Friend will find the Bill of great encouragement in respect of future nuclear builds in his constituency.

Alan Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Jonathan Edwards: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: I am going to make a bit more progress. I have taken a lot of interventions, and the time for this debate has been a little curtailed.

The Government are introducing this Bill at a time when the cost of energy is on all our minds. We are committed to making the transition to low-carbon power affordable to households and businesses. Nuclear is part of a low-cost future electricity system and helps to reduce our exposure to volatile global gas prices. The measures in the Bill mean that we can keep nuclear in the mix at a lower cost than would otherwise be the case.

Under the Bill, the Secretary of State will be able to designate a company to benefit from a RAB model, provided that it satisfies certain criteria. This will empower the Secretary of State to insert new conditions into the company's electricity generation licence to permit the

company to receive a regulated revenue in respect of the design, construction, commissioning and operation of a nuclear project. A RAB model allows a company to charge consumers to construct and operate new infrastructure projects. It allows the company's investors to share some of the project's construction and operating risks with consumers, overseen by a strong economic regulator. That in turn significantly lowers the cost of capital, which is the main driver of a nuclear project's cost to consumers.

Jonathan Edwards *rose—*

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP) *rose—*

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con) *rose—*

Greg Hands: I will make a little more progress.

RAB is a tried and tested method that has successfully financed other large UK infrastructure projects. The introduction of a special administration regime will prioritise the plant's opening and continuing to operate in the unlikely event of a project company's insolvency. That will protect consumers' investment in the plant and ensure that they realise the plant's benefit. Members should know that this legislation is not specific to one project, as I have already said, and could be applied to nuclear projects across Great Britain.

Jonathan Edwards: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: I will make progress.

The RAB model could open up opportunities for British companies and our closest partners to develop new projects and technologies, including the Wylfa Newydd site in Anglesey and small modular reactors, as well as the Sizewell B project.

Angus Brendan MacNeil *rose—*

Greg Hands: I will make more progress. I have taken a lot of interventions.

The legislation will also make technical changes to the regime of funded decommissioning programmes, removing barriers to private financing of nuclear projects in support of our nuclear energy ambitions. That section will not apply in Scotland.

Members will be pleased that this new funding model will reduce our reliance on overseas developers for financing new nuclear projects. It will substantially increase the pool of potential private investors to include British pension funds, insurers and other institutional investors.

The funding model will require consumers to pay a small amount on their bills during the construction of a nuclear project. These payments from the start of construction will avoid the build-up of interest on loans that would otherwise lead to higher costs to consumers in the future.

Angus Brendan MacNeil *rose—*

Greg Hands: I have given away enough.

Members will be reassured that a project starting construction in 2023 will add only a very small amount to the average dual-fuel household bill during this Parliament, and, on average, less than £1 per month during the full construction phase of the project.

Angus Brendan MacNeil *rose—*

Greg Hands: I will give way to the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) because I have not given way to him yet in this debate and I miss him from the International Trade Committee.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. We had many a good exchange at that stage, but I want to take him back a little further to when I was Chair of the Energy and Climate Change Committee. It was pointed out in representations that were made to me that, sometimes, the Government ask the wrong questions. When they say they want nuclear, what they really need are 6 GW baseload. That might be achievable with a mix of technologies and at a cheaper strike price. Hinkley, for instance, is £92 per megawatt-hour, index linked to, I think, 2012 prices. Had that question been asked differently, not stipulating nuclear but asking for 6 GW, the price achieved might have been around £70, saving bill payers, taxpayers and everybody an awful lot. I caution the Government against going down one route and prescribing the technology—the Minister did mention technologies. Perhaps he should say what he needs, which is 6 GW baseload.

Greg Hands: As I have outlined, the Bill is about nuclear. Creating a more diverse potential finance base is exactly what it is about. It is not biased in favour of one technology vis-à-vis another, but, as a Government, we have been absolutely clear about the important, growing role that nuclear will play. On Hinkley Point C, we think that that was the right model for the decision at that time. I think the hon. Gentleman's problem is with nuclear as a whole rather than specific problems at a nuclear plant. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe said:

"International climate objectives will not be met if nuclear power is excluded".

I think his policy is to exclude nuclear power in its entirety.

Members will be reassured that a project starting construction in 2023 will add only a very small amount to the average dual-fuel household bill during this Parliament—on average less than £1 per month during the full construction phase of the project. I believe that these bill impacts are proportionate, given the benefits that nuclear offers our electricity system. Ultimately, nuclear power will deliver a lower-cost system for consumers compared with reliance on intermittent power sources alone. The RAB model will make new nuclear projects cheaper. Our analysis has shown that using this funding model for a nuclear project could produce a cost saving for consumers of more than £30 billion, compared with funding projects through a contract for difference.

Alan Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: No, I am going to make more progress.

[Greg Hands]

That saving equates to more than £10 a year for an average domestic dual-fuel bill throughout the life of a nuclear power station, which can operate for 60 years.

The UK has a pioneering history in nuclear energy. We were the first country in the world to set up a civil nuclear programme, back in 1956. There are proud communities—I see many Members who represent them here today—who have been working in the industry for more than 60 years. Creating new nuclear projects will support this important sector and help to level up the UK. The civil nuclear sector is already a major provider of high-value, high-skilled jobs across the entire country. It employs approximately 60,000 people, with nearly 90% of those jobs based outside of London and the south-east. New nuclear projects will be important sources of economic opportunity for the whole country. Hinkley Point C has already created well over 10,000 job opportunities. Future nuclear projects bring with them significant opportunities for training the future nuclear workforce through apprenticeships and training schemes to increase skills.

This legislation will vary in application across the UK. The Government are undertaking close joint work with other stakeholders on the potential options for nuclear at the Wylfa site. The RAB model could play a key role in funding any future project there.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: No; I am going to have to finish.

Members will know that the Scottish Government have a different position with regard to new nuclear projects. To be clear: this Bill will not alter the current approval process for new nuclear, nor the responsibilities of the devolved Governments. Nothing in this Bill will change the fact that Scottish Ministers are responsible for approving applications for large-scale onshore electricity-generating stations in Scotland. The steps taken in this Bill will mean that Scottish consumers will benefit from a cheaper, more resilient and lower-carbon electricity system, so it is right that Scottish consumers should contribute towards the construction of new projects.

Northern Ireland is part of the single electricity market with the Republic of Ireland. As such, energy users in Northern Ireland will not pay towards nuclear projects financed through the RAB.

Taken as a whole, the Bill will ensure that consumers across Great Britain will benefit from a cheaper, more resilient and lower-carbon electricity system that is funded in a fair and affordable way. I hope that Members will agree that this is an important and timely piece of legislation. Recent increases in gas prices have demonstrated the key role that reliable low-carbon power through nuclear has to play in our transition to net zero.

The Bill is a unique opportunity to deliver a trinity of benefits, as it will: help us to create a resilient low-carbon energy system; deliver value for money for consumers; and deliver and create thousands of well-paid jobs across the country. I hope that Members will take the next step towards net zero and levelling up the whole UK. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.22 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): Labour believes that new nuclear has an important supporting role to play in the energy mix, alongside the decisive shift to renewables that we need to deliver the climate transition and secure our energy security. As set out by the Climate Change Committee, we need all the low-carbon power sources at our disposal to deliver the rapid and fair transition that is required.

I am sorry that the Minister, in presenting the Bill, has chosen the partisan knockabout route, rather than giving it the serious consideration that it deserves. If we want to go down that path, we can reflect on the decade of dither and delay on the Government's part, with mixed messages from the Conservative Government on new nuclear. The result is that, after 10 years, we have one half-finished nuclear plant, which is funded by a mechanism that, as the Minister himself accepts, is quite disastrous in terms of future prices. The record of this Conservative Government on new nuclear is frankly very poor. At last we have a Bill that might rectify some of that poor performance over the last 10 years. We need to support the need to finance new nuclear. We will scrutinise this Bill to guarantee fairness for bill payers, including protecting consumers against any potential cost overruns, protecting the poorest households, and scrutinising the balance between public spending and bill payers.

It is welcome that at long last we are coming to the key issue in nuclear power, which is how we build the power stations that we seek to place in the mix of low-carbon energy for the future. We know how not to do it, as I mentioned. We have already seen from the passage of building Hinkley C, and the disappearance of many nuclear projects and programmes, that the model that the Government have long stood for—that power stations should be built entirely by the private sector, and that private-sector security can be bought by price mechanisms that grossly inflate the cost of energy to the customer in the end—is highly flawed.

We are facing a last-chance saloon for new nuclear build that requires us to throw away those principles and start again, because most of the programme of new nuclear power stations that the Government have been envisaging over the past 10 years has been washed away. As late as 2018, there were possibly three consortia actively pursuing an interest in building five new nuclear power stations. These have progressively fallen by the wayside. Consortia have fallen apart, companies with an interest in financing projects have pulled out, and we are now left with one proto-consortium—effectively just EDF—building Hinkley C and with active plans to build a new power station at Sizewell. It is not only an active interest. Sizewell is designed to be effectively a clone of the plant that is currently being built so that it can start to build as Hinkley completes its construction phase and the workforce currently undertaking construction at Hinkley can transfer to the building of its clone at Sizewell.

We ought to add two other factors that will have a substantial bearing on how we proceed with building plants—or in this instance, a plant, because that is all we have under consideration right now. First, the consortium proposing to build Sizewell is not exactly champing at the bit to finance it. EDF has effectively mortgaged

itself to the hilt in financing 65% of Hinkley C and has stated unequivocally that it is not about to do the same with Sizewell C. Secondly, we still have the arrangement in place concluded by the then Chancellor George Osborne to arrange a fast track into the heart of our nuclear programme for the China National Nuclear Corporation via a Secretary of State's investment agreement to help fund Hinkley C power station to the tune of 35% of the upfront capital; 20% of the second in the EDF consortium's programme, Sizewell C; and the big prize for the Chinese—control of the financing, build and running of a third nuclear power station at Bradwell in Essex, which is now unlikely, to the point of impossible, to happen.

It is likely that the Chinese will not be able to get their hands on a real nuclear power station all of their own and they will not be investing into 20% of Sizewell—indeed, the Government seem to have set aside £1.7 billion in the Budget to buy out their interest in Sizewell C. Labour has long warned that the Government are playing a dangerous game when they outsource the funding of critical national infrastructure to foreign Governments. We are now seeing the results of a decade of Conservative Governments doing exactly that, and mostly failing to get anywhere. There we have it in terms of the UK's nuclear programme for the foreseeable future—only one plant in prospect for a start before the late 2020s.

John Redwood: The shadow Minister is very thoughtful on these matters. How much standby capacity does he think we need to back up the wind and solar that will be the majority of our generation in due course?

Dr Whitehead: Interestingly, the Climate Change Committee, which has looked into this matter in great depth, considers that in the overall long-term future make-up of our energy mix, about 8 to 10 gigawatts of standby power—thermal power—is likely to be required in the shape of new or existing nuclear power stations. That is about the size of the difference with an overwhelmingly renewable but variable economy, with elements of firm power backing it up.

I have mentioned that one plant only that would be included in the suggested 8 GW to 10 GW is in prospect for a start before the late 2020s, because every other proposal has fallen away. However, it is not financed and is probably not financeable by private capital. It is only part financeable by a state financier, with which we do not now want to do business. Let us be clear before we go any further: this Bill is about finding a formula to fund and build Sizewell C power station. Whatever its generic pretensions, that is the issue we should be concentrating on. Even so, getting that plant going would cover most of what the Climate Change Committee considers is the presence in the mix needed.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): Before the hon. Gentleman moves on from discussing the financing for Sizewell C, does he agree that it is important, when we are talking about financing, that the financing is not just in place for the build of the power station itself, but for the necessary infrastructure and mitigation measures for the local communities in the area, who will be suffering from construction traffic and the like for potentially a 12-year period?

Dr Whitehead: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the build cost and financing of a nuclear power station has to include not just the obvious things that we think are associated with a nuclear power station, but all the other infrastructure around that nuclear power station and contributions to decommissioning costs. That is what we are talking about in terms of an overall financing package, and that is why a financing package has to last over the whole life, effectively, of that nuclear power station. I do not intend to move on from the financing of Sizewell C, because that is essentially what this Bill is all about. It is about all those things that the hon. Gentleman mentions, so far as that particular project is concerned.

This plant, if it goes forward—we hope it will go forward with something like this kind of financing—would cover a substantial part of what the Climate Change Committee considers necessary in the mix of low-carbon energy to drive power towards net zero by 2050. I have mentioned that it thinks about 8 GW to 10 GW of new nuclear power would be needed to complement a predominantly renewable power line-up so that firm power considerations are met, without being in such numbers that it puts the development of renewables into jeopardy. That 8 GW to 10 GW includes new nuclear power, but also the one existing power station that will probably last beyond the 2030s in Sizewell B.

Hinkley and Sizewell C together therefore would go a long way towards meeting that assessment by the end of the decade, with two 3.2 GW power stations with reactors in each, and the remaining Sizewell B power station continuing in action. It is not surprising then that we are talking about nuclear financing, which is pretty much all the Bill covers. Exam question: how do we finance an unfinanceable nuclear plant when we know we have got to do it because there is no other option? Even if we did decide to repeat the frankly disastrous device of providing a CfD for the plant at Hinkley, which is likely to produce power at twice market cost, it still would not work, because that does not solve the problem of getting investors into the plant for the lengthy period before production starts. There are ways in which nuclear finance can be sorted out.

Jonathan Edwards: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the very considered manner in which he is presenting his case. Is there anything in his mind that would stop the UK Government using this new financing model for other technologies, such as the tidal lagoon in Swansea, or is it blatantly unfair that one technology has a very favourable financing scheme, while another technology that could provide many of the solutions that he seeks is stuck on contracts for difference?

Dr Whitehead: The hon. Member mentions tidal power. Of course, a regulated asset base system can be used for any sort of major infrastructure project—and indeed has been already, as I will come to. I do not see the discussion on that system as being about just nuclear power, but a method of funding a large infrastructure project that has certain requirements that must be met by continuous funding throughout its operation. He is right that infrastructure projects other than nuclear in the energy sector could and should be funded by that system.

[Dr Whitehead]

The National Audit Office discussed those options when it reviewed the decision making and value for money that the CfD process for Hinkley entailed. The route adopted by the Government, after much internal wrangling and delay, is a regulated asset-based model that is essentially constructed along the lines that it has been used for already in capital projects such as Heathrow terminal 5 and the Thames Tideway project. That is, the whole project is part-funded by the proceeds of a levy on bills. The levy varies in size during different phases of the project and, in the latter phases of production, lowers or even goes negative if the project's income exceeds the ceiling of allowable costs under RAB.

There are substantial advantages to the RAB model for making the project investable. It provides returns for investors as the project proceeds rather than at the end of it, as does the CfD model, which allows investment to be brought into the frame for the project from sources that might otherwise balk at the timetable between investment and return. It also reduces the hurdle rate for investment in the project, thereby in theory substantially reducing the overall cost of financing the project and likely resulting in cheaper prices for the energy produced by the plant.

There are also substantial risks with RAB that need to be managed. It places the cost and risk of financing the project on the shoulders of customers, in this instance electricity bill payers, which adds to bill costs through a levy on their bills before anything has materialised. In the event of the plant not being completed, it lumps them with bill costs without the benefit of the plant for which they have paid producing relatively cheaper electricity.

RAB also adds to the burden of bills unpredictably if the project overruns on cost or time—both of which, as we know, nuclear plant development is rather prone to. The extension of the construction period for a project, when the highest effect is felt on bills, lengthens that higher take period. An increase in cost may also cause revisions to be made to allowable costs ceilings, and hence cause heavier costs on bills.

We are in somewhat uncharted waters with a project such as Sizewell C because of its size, complexity, timescale and investment costs compared with the more modest sums and shorter timescales involved in existing RAB projects. Nuclear power stations elsewhere in the world have been funded along RAB lines, but have simply not been completed, which has left consumers with a huge bill and no benefit.

In short, we need to go into this kind of arrangement with a clear eye about the advantages and risks of a RAB model for nuclear. As far as we can, we should attempt to mitigate the risks and play up the advantages. It is workable, but only if the Government have a serious plan.

The Government have sought to alleviate at least some of the disadvantages by introducing to the Bill a special administrative regime for the project in the event of a failure of the company involved during construction. We will look carefully at those provisions, but they seem to be a useful commitment to ensure the robustness of the overall project, even if its prime developer fails to deliver. We also accept that provisions in the Bill on

who may be involved in legacy and decommissioning costs will help to clarify the risks for security trustees and secured creditors.

There is much to agree with in the Bill, given the evident need to secure a mechanism that enables Sizewell C to be developed and come into production at a reasonably early date. There are measures to lower the overall cost of the project so it is investable and less price inefficient than its immediate predecessor, and to ensure that the project stays on track and delivers at the end of it. However, there are still many questions to be answered, particularly on the robustness of the RAB model under circumstances where the inevitable “optimism bias” of project costings—that candid acknowledgement comes from the Bill's impact assessment—proves to be disadvantageous and costly to consumers who, after all, are supposed to be paying up for a benefit later on. It is important that we look at such matters carefully, with a clear eye on consumer protection, and do not just assume that the mechanism will milk customers for whatever it takes to produce an outcome in the end.

We need much greater clarity about the Government's intentions on the difficult situation concerning Chinese investment in Sizewell. That may not be central to the Bill and the RAB model, but it is indirectly affected. The project's overall shape will be affected by whether the Government take over the Chinese share, offer it to other investors or even calculate that RAB is a sufficiently powerful tool to enable investors easily to come in and scoop it up once the Secretary of State's investment agreement provisions are untangled. We need to know in the Bill's early stages what the Government will do about that and through what mechanisms.

As the Bill progresses, the Government can expect Labour's overall support but also a proper, critical eye on aspects of the mechanisms they are adopting and a particular emphasis on protecting the people, who will either stand to benefit from a reliable power station producing needed energy at reasonable cost if it goes right or suffer grievously if it goes wrong. In other words, the customer must be first in our minds in taking such decisions, and we will stand up for them as the Bill progresses.

4.41 pm

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): I welcome the Government's action to introduce the regulated asset base funding model for the financing of new nuclear power plants. As a former energy Minister, and indeed a former science Minister twice, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to see at first hand the brilliant services that our nuclear energy industry provides, despite the many compounding hardships that it faces.

Nuclear power currently provides just under 20% of the UK's energy needs, but almost half that capacity will be retired and lost by 2025. For the UK to achieve its net zero obligations and beyond, expanding our nuclear energy fleet will be paramount as it provides emission-free energy without the need for the wind to be blowing or the sun to be shining. The case for nuclear energy as a clean source of power should be evident. It may have done more for decarbonisation and reducing carbon emissions in the past 70 years than any other industrial sector.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The right hon. Member speaks of the baseload and the constant flow of energy from nuclear. Does he support the tidal energy efforts being made in Scotland? Would he support far more investment in that?

Chris Skidmore: I believe that we do not have a choice. We must look at every form of renewable energy, nuclear energy, carbon capture and storage and hydrogen to reach net zero. We cannot make the perfect the enemy of the good. Equally, in looking at how to decarbonise, there are no good and bad actors; the most important thing is outcomes. We have a target set for 2050 but cannot ignore that we wish to reduce our carbon emissions now. I therefore welcome any technology that can achieve that sooner rather than later.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): My right hon. Friend knows a lot about these things. What percentage of our energy does he estimate will be produced by nuclear power stations by 2050?

Chris Skidmore: That depends on the potential for innovation for the future. We have an energy crunch coming down the line with perhaps just a single nuclear plant open by 2030 and, at the same time, we will move from existing nuclear fission reactors through to small modular nuclear reactors, advanced modular nuclear reactors and, ultimately, fusion.

As science Minister, I assigned Government investment for the spherical tokamak for energy production units. We need certainty and a clear strategy for where the nuclear pathway is going beyond the existing reactors and to front-load that investment now. I will come to why the RAB model is so important as it allows that front-loading.

As I mentioned, nuclear power has resulted in an annual saving of 22.7 million tonnes of CO₂, the equivalent of taking one in three cars off the road. The Government's proposal to adopt the regulated asset base funding model for nuclear power is bold and ambitious, but it is also needed. The beauty of the funding model is that it inherently encourages a wider range of private investment in new nuclear projects, reducing the UK's reliance on overseas funding.

As it stands, developers are forced to provide the finances for construction up front and begin receiving revenue only when the station starts generating electricity. Even in the best of times for energy markets, which we certainly are not in now, that lack of certainty diminishes how investable nuclear power projects are. As we have seen, sadly, with the nuclear projects at Moorside and Wylfa, our current funding model is simply not fit for purpose; 5.8 GW of nuclear energy, just over half our current supply of nuclear power, was lost directly because funding could not be secured. Those locations have both been described as highly desirable sites for new nuclear power plants, but even after the Government offered to take the equity, provide all the debt finance and back a revenue-stabilising mechanism, private investors still had to walk away.

Jonathan Edwards: I do not question the hon. Gentleman's expertise or knowledge on this issue, but perhaps he can help me out. From the Minister's letter, and from what the hon. Gentleman himself has said

during the debate, we know that 12 of the UK's 13 current nuclear reactors are scheduled to close by 2030. The main argument for large nuclear is the baseload protection it gives that other technologies cannot provide, but it seems to me that it is highly unlikely, even with this new financing model, that a large new nuclear plant will be built before 2030. The question that arises from that for me—I admit that I am not an expert—is, how will that baseload be covered while we are waiting for the new large nuclear plants to be built?

Chris Skidmore: That is a very important question. It is not just 2030 that I am concerned about, but 2025. Nuclear currently accounts for 18% of electricity generation. The current closure rate of plants means that by 2025, nuclear will go from 18% down to 10%, so we will lose 8% of energy supply in the next three years alone. We will not be able to cover that gap; the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We are behind the curve here, which is why the Bill is vital. No one should vote against it tonight, because to do so would simply be to kick the can further down the road.

Nuclear also provides a fantastic opportunity to level up. Think of the jobs that it can provide: no one who lives near an area in which there is a nuclear power plant is against nuclear. Hinkley C in Somerset, relatively near my constituency, provides 30,000 jobs, of which 70% are local. It offers enormous potential for creating a sustainable pipeline of skill and talent for the future.

On the RAB funding model, others have asked during the debate, "What about other technologies?" The RAB model has also been established and received strong support from investors in other large infrastructure projects. Indeed, RAB-based funding has provided the funding mechanism for numerous financings of offshore wind transmission cables and infrastructure, as well as Legal & General's financing for Mutual Energy's Gas to the West gas network expansion project in Northern Ireland.

Yet the real advantages of this new funding system will come in relation to emerging innovative nuclear energy technologies. As anyone who is interested in reaching net zero will be aware, plans to develop third-generation nuclear reactors are well under way, with British companies such as Rolls-Royce leading the way. Some of those innovations—I have mentioned small modular nuclear reactors—have been designed to be able to be mass-manufactured at one site, powered by an SMR nuclear power plant, and then shipped domestically or internationally, massively reducing the cost. That brilliant technology will have the added benefit, I believe, of helping to power hydrogen electrolyzers, which are highly more efficient if they are given a supply of heat. In turn, those will be able to decarbonise sectors that are the most difficult to decarbonise—the hard-to-abate groups that energy cannot touch, which need liquid fuel. The potential for nuclear heat and energy to generate hydrogen I think has the potential, in turn, to generate a clean energy revolution.

Those exciting technologies look to radically shake up the international energy supply system, but it is only through an adequate and appropriate funding model that we can take full advantage of their possibilities. As we have seen with the recent rise in global energy prices, energy security must be at the forefront of all our minds when debating policy. One of the best ways to avoid the

[Chris Skidmore]

situations that the world currently faces is by having a diversified energy supply, nuclear included. Additionally, it is only through the correct development and deployment of innovative technologies that we can both secure our energy supply system and achieve our net zero obligations. Net zero by 2050 is the ultimate mission for our generation and one that we must achieve as quickly, efficiently and effectively as possible. The RAB funding mechanism provides a clear path for nuclear to play its part in that mission.

4.50 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Not for the first time I think I am going to express a minority view in the Chamber, but I am sure everyone will listen carefully and, once I present my arguments, change their minds and agree with our point of view.

The real debate is whether we need new nuclear or not. I intend to spell out why we do not need new nuclear and, therefore, why we do not need the Bill. Before doing so, I want to highlight the UK Government market failures that have led to the Government scrambling to bring forward the Bill.

We know that Hinkley Point C is currently under construction, but it is under construction as the most expensive power station in the world. There are several reasons for that and how it came about. First, successive Governments seem to have developed a groupthink, following lobbying from the nuclear industry, that somehow nuclear is a prerequisite for our future. Then came the rationale that building a suite of new large-scale nuclear power stations would lead to competition and cheaper costs. However, that philosophy was flawed in that there were not enough competitors to start with and then a piecemeal approach was taken by nominally awarding sites to different preferred bidders. For Hinkley Point C, that meant EDF was the only game in town, so there was no competition when negotiating the contract. EDF had already been beset with problems with its EPR prototypes in Finland and France, so it had to be more cautious in its pricing. It is little wonder then that the UK Government ended up with such a bad deal. They have since tried to tell us that the eye-watering strike rate of £92.20 per megawatt hour for a 35-year contract, while the cost of offshore wind dropped to £40 per megawatt hour for just a 15-year concession, meant that the nuclear deal was a good deal.

In a letter last week, the Minister of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands), was effectively saying, “By the way, the Hinkley Point C deal was actually rubbish and poor value for taxpayers, so now we have an alternative funding model and we’re bringing that forward.” Interestingly, it was stated in the letter that the new funding model could potentially save the taxpayer £30 billion to £80 billion. How much money do the Government estimate has been wasted on Hinkley? How many billions of pounds are the Government willing to commit bill payers to if they say they can save up to £80 billion? Logic says that hundreds of billions of pounds would have to be spent to be able to argue that there could be a saving of £80 billion. I will happily give way to the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for

Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), if he can tell me how much money that £80 billion saving is estimated on? The right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham would not give way, but I am happy to give way if the hon. Gentleman can tell me how much the Government estimate—[*Interruption.*] I take it that he will not give us a figure. The Minister will not come forward and give a figure. That does not add confidence. The Government are saying the saving could be between £30 billion and £80 billion. That is a huge range and that does not give confidence to the estimating proposals either.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (George Freeman): Just to correct the record, it does not at all mean I am not going to answer the hon. Gentleman’s question. It means that I will do it in the usual way, when I wind up at the end of the debate.

Alan Brown: I was so hopeful that I was getting an answer there on the hundreds of billions of pounds that are being committed.

Returning to Hinkley Point C, we hear how advanced the project is and how well it is going, but the reality in terms of cost is that it is £4.5 billion over the initial estimates, which is 25% over budget. On progress, the commissioning date for unit one has now been put back to June 2026, instead of the anticipated 2025, but they also admit there is a programme risk of up to 15 months on top of that. That means that it could be September 2027 before unit 1 of Hinkley is operational and unit 2 will then follow a further year behind. So it is realistic to say that Hinkley Point C will not be fully operational until 2027-28, which is 10 years after we were initially told that Hinkley Point C was required to stop the lights going out. Given that the lights have not gone out, that undermines the original case for Hinkley.

We have to bear in mind that the EPR system has still not been shown to be successful. Flamanville in France is expected to start generating to the grid in 2024, 12 years late. Finland’s project has been delayed yet again, until next year, and it is 13 years late. Both have been crippled with spiralling cost increases.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Further to those costs, we know that the permanent safe disposal of radioactive waste from nuclear power plants has not yet been achieved by any country. A 2018 study from the department of geology at the University of Kansas recently suggested that nuclear waste disposal would be two and a half to four times more expensive than has been estimated. Those costs will be passed on to those who come after us. Is my hon. Friend satisfied that these possibilities have been fully taken into account in the financing model?

Alan Brown: It will be no surprise to hear that I have no confidence that the true costs of nuclear waste disposal are actually included. We hear that this is rolled up in the strike rate for Hinkley, but if something happens and EDF goes out of operation, who will pick up the additional costs? It will clearly be the bill payers or the taxpayer. We hear about the fact that nuclear is supposed to be clean energy, but how can it be classed as clean energy when we are burying radioactive waste and having to store it for up to 1,000 years? That, to me, does not mean clean energy.

Taishan in China was held up as an exemplar EPR project when it was commissioned, but it has been offline since June this year due to safety concerns and rod damage. It is clear that the design and construction of EPR nuclear stations has still not been bottomed out properly. As the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead), said, a reliance on French state-owned EDF and the Chinese state company China General Nuclear kind of undermines the argument about having sovereign energy security. It makes no sense.

Despite the cost and programme issues at Hinkley, we are told that Sizewell C will somehow be different. There will be cost savings from learning on Hinkley. The design will be replicated, saving more money, but the reality is that the site at Sizewell C is bound to have different ground conditions, different environmental considerations and different logistics and site constraints, which affects methods of working, and that means that we cannot build an exact duplicate station the same way.

Even if savings are realised on Sizewell C compared with Hinkley, what does that mean cost-wise? If Sizewell C saves 25% compared with Hinkley, that is still a capital cost outlay of £18 billion. Surely there are better ways to spend £18 billion. We heard from the right hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) about the number of jobs being created. If I was given £18 billion to £20 billion, I am sure that I could create 30,000 jobs—by the way, that is £730,000-odd a job in capital costs alone. That is not a good return.

On costs, we are told that a new deal signed under the proposed new funding model in the Bill will cost consumers only £1 a month during construction, but if we look at a 10-year construction period for Sizewell C, we see that that means that bill payers in 28 million households will pay £3.4 billion before it is operational. That is a further £3.4 billion in expenditure when that money could be better invested elsewhere.

We still do not know with this Bill what the long-term pay-back options will be. Will there be a further agreement on the strike rate or a minimum floor price on the sale of energy? What length of contract will bill payers be tied into once a RAB model for an agreement is signed off?

What else could we do with that amount of money? We could upgrade all homes to energy performance certificate band C. We could have wave and tidal generation. The UK Government are willing to introduce the Bill and commit hundreds of millions of pounds to nuclear—the Budget has £1.7 billion just for developing nuclear to a negotiation stage—but they will not even ringfence £24 million for wave and tidal in pot 2 of the forthcoming contracts for difference auction. The disparity is clear.

It is time the Government took their blinkers off. It will be a real disgrace if they do not provide a pathway for wave and tidal projects to scale up. Scotland is currently leading the world on the issue; the O2 tidal generator is operational and grid-connected in Orkney. I hope that the Minister will reconsider the request to ringfence a small amount of money in pot 2 of the forthcoming contracts for difference auction.

Mark Jenkinson: I am a huge supporter of tidal energy, but is it not the case that nuclear, given its energy density, is the most environmentally friendly and low-carbon technology that we have, while tidal has the

potential to significantly damage marine ecosystems? I am a big supporter of tidal energy, but we have to be really careful about where we deploy such things. We have a ready-built, proven technology here—the most environmentally friendly and low-carbon technology that there is.

Alan Brown: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman about nuclear being clean—oh, wait, apart from the radioactive waste that we still do not know what to do with. We will ignore that point, but he has a valid point about the need for clear environmental considerations with respect to where we site any marine project. That should be part of a robust, up-front planning process, working with the likes of Marine Scotland. There are regulatory bodies that have oversight of these projects, so it is important that they be involved in the planning process. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is still a huge future for wave and tidal.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): The hon. Gentleman highlights the value of marine energy in Scotland and elsewhere; he and I are absolutely on the same page on that. Does he agree that one thing it would be very helpful for the Minister to take away is the need to clarify the precise size of the pot that will be available specifically for marine energy in the next contracts for difference auction round, CFD AR4? There is a danger that unless there is a specific pot, the marine energy providers will be rather crowded out by other forms of renewable energy.

Alan Brown: I completely agree. I was happy to co-sign the cross-party letter from the all-party parliamentary group on marine energy, which I fully support. I hope that the Minister is listening, because this is a matter that we agree on across parties.

Looking at other technologies that we should be spending money on, I compliment the UK Government on seeing the opportunities that floating offshore wind can bring, but let us start deploying it much more quickly and investing more money, because that is where the real future is. Clearly, the further out to sea the turbines are, the greater the reliability of wind and subsequent generation.

There needs to be much greater investment in carbon capture and storage. The Government need to reverse their disgraceful decision not to have a Scottish cluster as part of their track 1 CCS projects. A Scottish cluster would also deliver hydrogen production, which is vital on the pathway to net zero.

We heard earlier, as we always do, the argument that nuclear is required for when the sun does not shine and the wind does not blow, but as I have tried to point out to the Minister, there is an existing technology that can address that issue: pumped storage hydro, a renewable energy source that utilises surplus grid energy to fill the reservoirs and can then dispatch electricity when required. Pumped storage hydro is the perfect foil for intermittent renewables, rather than big, inflexible nuclear power stations that invariably pump energy to the grid when it is not required. An Imperial College report suggests that there could be system savings of £700 million a year from using pumped storage hydro technology instead of nuclear.

[Alan Brown]

SSE has all the necessary permissions in place, right now, to progress a new pumped storage hydro scheme at Coire Glas in the Highlands. It is progressing the design at its financial risk, and all that it needs is agreement with the Government and a minimum floor price for electricity—not a strike rate and not direct funding, just a minimum guarantee on the sale price of electricity. Then the development can reach the construction stage, and can be commissioned in the same timeframe as Hinkley. I ask the Government to reconsider, and to get round the table with SSE and other developers.

Mark Jenkinson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene again. I am a big supporter of pumped hydro, which is great for storage, but we cannot neglect the fact that we require a surplus of electricity to pump the water in the first place, up to the point of that storage. It is great to be in control of when we release the water and use the energy, but we have to think about how we get it up there in the first place.

Alan Brown: Absolutely. That is my point. This is about utilising spare energy and then filling the reservoirs. That is much more productive than, with nuclear, putting additional electricity into the grid and then making constraint payments to wind farm developers to turn the turbines off. Those turbines could be used to much greater effect for the likes of pumped storage hydro, or generating green hydrogen.

It is clear that there are alternatives to nuclear. The Government have rightly pointed out that the existing nuclear fleet is coming to an end, but they have wrongly concluded that that means we need new nuclear. Dungeness went offline earlier this year, seven years early, because of safety concerns. Hunterston B is about to go offline, and Hinkley Point B will close next summer. Hartlepool and Heysham will follow in 2024. That means that Hinkley Point C will not even replace the lost capacity, and by 2024, 5.3 GW of nuclear capacity will have been lost to the grid.

If the grid can operate successfully without that 5.3 GW of nuclear for three or four years until Hinkley's 3.3 GW comes on line, that in itself confirms that new nuclear power is not required. In all likelihood, Torness and Heysham 2 will not last until 2030, so all but one of the existing stations will be offline before Hinkley comes online. By not replacing the existing nuclear fleet as it comes to the end of its life, the UK Government are themselves proving that we do not need a nuclear baseload, because the grid can operate without it, unless an energy security crisis arises when all the other stations go offline. The Minister can address that later if he wants.

Although here in the Chamber it is just me saying that we do not need new nuclear, plenty of experts agree. Back in 2015, the then chief executive officer of National Grid, Steve Holliday, said:

"The idea of large power stations for baseload is outdated".

In the 2019 World Nuclear Industry Status Report, Mycle Schneider, who was the lead author of the report, said that nuclear power

"meets no technical or operational need that low-carbon competitors cannot meet better, cheaper and faster."

A recent study by Good Energy and the Energy System Catapult demonstrated that carbon emissions from the power sector could be eliminated as early as 2030 without the need to develop new nuclear power. Sarah Darby, associate professor of the energy programme at Oxford University's Environmental Change Institute, has said:

"Nuclear stations are particularly unsuited to meeting peak demand: they are so expensive to build that it makes no sense to use them only for short periods of time. Even if it were easy to adjust their output flexibly—which it isn't—there doesn't appear to be any business case for nuclear, whether large, small, 'advanced' or otherwise."

It is clear that there is not a case for new nuclear—and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) pointed out earlier, we have yet to address the nuclear waste issue. It will cost £132 billion to deal with the existing nuclear waste legacy. Why do we want to create another waste legacy for future generations to deal with?

So we do not need nuclear, and we do not need this Bill. Even if we consider what it aims to achieve, the fact remains that there is market failure, given that Hitachi has walked away from Wylfa and Oldbury and Toshiba has walked away from Moorside. So there is no competition to drive down cost, and EDF and China General Nuclear are still the only show in town. As the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) asked, while the RAB model may might bring down costs, what protections are there in the event of project overruns?

Clause 2 puts all the powers of negotiation and contract award into the hands of the Secretary of State, and allows the Secretary of State to determine what is value for money. We all know how good the Government are at direct negotiations, so how can they guarantee value for money in a transparent manner?

As I touched on earlier, we have been told for five years that Hinkley is good value for money, but now the Government have come back to the House to say that actually that is not the case and they have a new plan for how to deliver nuclear. I therefore cannot possibly support this Bill, especially as the electorate of Scotland have consistently voted to elect a Government on a "no new nuclear" manifesto. Why should Scottish bill payers be forced to pay for nuclear energy that they do not want or require? This is another democratic deficit for Scotland, especially when so much of our renewable energy is not being supported at the moment and we are stuck with the highest grid charges in Europe. It really is time that Scotland had control of its own energy decisions, but in the meantime I will be proud and pleased to vote against this Bill.

5.10 pm

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): It is an honour to be called to speak in the debate and to follow the excellent speech from the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown). In my constituency we have two nuclear power stations, whose output going into the national grid at any given time makes up about 10% of our national energy. They are the largest employer in my constituency, and I have extended family members who work in the nuclear power industry. In fact, it is hard to find anybody in my constituency who does not. We do not just have nuclear, however; we have other forms of energy from wind all the way down to biomass and also, out to sea, what I believe is the largest offshore wind farm in Europe.

The initiatives that the Government are now bringing forward are long overdue. I remember, back in 2010, when the then Energy Secretary Chris Huhne delivered his first speech to the House under the coalition, in which he said that nuclear power would be funded by private enterprise. Afterwards, I had a chat with him about that and he told me that, in his opinion, nuclear was old technology and an outdated form of energy. Anybody in this House who knows me well, as you do, Mr Deputy Speaker, will know my sense of humour. At that point, I said to Chris, “I think the wind has been blowing too hard between your ears, my old son.” He did not find that funny at all. The point I was trying to make to him was that we have an eclectic energy mix in this country of ours, from the great top of Scotland all the way down to the bottom end—and, dare I say it, we also get energy from the continent.

It is about time that we addressed how we are going to fund our future energy needs, especially nuclear. What has not been mentioned so far is that we are trying to get fossil fuels eradicated in one form or another within the next 40 years and that there will be more electric cars on the road. How are we going to power those electric cars? How are we going to meet that demand and keep the economy moving in an electrified form? It can only be done with nuclear power.

Nuclear power is the only form of energy we have that is constant. It is produced 24/7. The Walney wind farm produces a huge amount of energy for this country, but every one of those windmills would have to be producing energy at the same time to match the input into the grid of the two nuclear power stations in my constituency at that moment, whereas those two power stations are pumping energy into the national grid 24/7. It defies belief that we have not invested in nuclear power before now and that we have waited until this point to come up with a funding formula to do so.

Richard Graham: My hon. Friend is making some good points about the incredible efficiency of nuclear power operating 24 hours a day. On the specific point of how to finance new nuclear power, does he agree that, when the financing for Hinkley Point was being developed almost a decade ago, it would have been impossible to do a regulated asset-based proposal because, having not built a new nuclear power station for a generation, the risks to the taxpayer would have been enormous? Now that Hinkley Point is being done, however, we can take that same model on to Sizewell C and then hopefully on to Wylfa and elsewhere, gaining experience, expertise and reductions in cost as we go along. Does he agree that this is therefore the right model at this time?

David Morris: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. We can take forward this model of heavy lifters, which is how I refer to the bespoke power stations at Hinkley Point. Rolls-Royce has talked at length about a factory in which it would build modular nuclear power stations akin to the power plants on nuclear submarines, which are built not far from my constituency—we see them across the bay.

There are different models coming forward, and we are looking at and accelerating different types of approval because of the need for the low-carbon efficiency of nuclear power. Hinkley Point is a bespoke model, just like the huge heavy lifters we have at the Heysham 1 and 2 configurations in my constituency.

I agree with the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) that there are lots of jobs in the nuclear power industry. It is not just the people working in the power stations; it is the vast supply chain. The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun, who is my friend outside the Chamber, raised his valid concern about the processing of nuclear waste, but at the old Sellafield site across the bay from my constituency there is a laboratory that converts used plutonium into forms we can use. Americium, for example, is a by-product of decaying plutonium and uranium, and it can be used to power satellites for 100 years—it cannot be used clandestinely. Plutonium is like a wine that gets better with age, and as it decays it produces something that can be used in a different context.

Other industries spin off from nuclear, and the reality is that we have to meet our energy demands. It is brilliant to see the new Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), in his place, and he is an old friend of mine. I am glad the Bill has been introduced, and I believe the whole House will back this initiative because we are a great nation collectively and this is how we will power our future industries, transport and economy.

It is good to see the Bill because nuclear is important to my constituency. We have one of eight footprints in the country on which we can build a nuclear power station, and my whole community welcomes this initiative.

5.18 pm

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in this debate.

If we did not already know that decarbonising our energy supply is one of the most urgent challenges facing not just this country but the whole world, the ongoing discussions in Glasgow at the COP26 summit have certainly informed us. There is now worldwide consensus on the need to phase out the use of coal and other fossil fuels in energy production, transport, heating and industry, and it is encouraging to hear some of the commitments made by delegates towards that goal. We have quite a good story to tell already on that in this country. In the UK, energy production accounts for approximately 15% of all carbon emissions. One significant challenge we face is how to replace the role of coal and fossil fuels in energy production with carbon-free alternatives, but we have already made great progress in decarbonising our energy supply. Carbon dioxide emissions from power stations were 75% lower in 2020 than in 1990, and this change has come about largely from the introduction of new energy sources, particularly renewables, such as wind and solar. The use of coal in our power supply fell sharply from the mid-2010s onwards, after which the use of renewables expanded rapidly. Wind power is now the cheapest form of electricity generation, and it was Government policy that made the substantial difference to this change, notably the decision of the then Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change to introduce contracts for difference to incentivise private sector investment into the renewables sector. That Secretary of State was my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey), whom, I gather, went on to more exalted roles.

[Sarah Olney]

The legislation has strong precedents. Unlocking the barriers to private sector investment into carbon-free alternatives in our energy market has catalysed the changes we need to see. We need to go further to make sure that we can completely decarbonise our energy sector, supporting renewables and household and community energy.

Mark Jenkinson: Does the hon. Lady not prefer France's decarbonised electricity model to Germany's model of ever-increasing emissions and air pollution because of its decisions to close down nuclear power stations and go back to burning lignite, the dirtiest form of coal there is?

Sarah Olney: My remarks are about the UK power sector, but I take the hon. Gentleman's point about Germany. Clearly, as I think I have clearly stated, we want to move towards carbon-free alternatives to coal. I also want to make it clear that it is not our position that we should be closing down nuclear power stations; we support the ones that are currently operational and where contracts have been signed to open new ones. As I want to go on to make clear, our position is very much that there should not be new nuclear power stations. We need to go further to make sure that we can completely decarbonise our energy sector. We want to support renewables and household and community energy. It will create jobs. To pick up on the point made by the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) about jobs in the nuclear sector, let me say that the advantage of jobs in the renewables sector and in other alternative energy supplies is that they can be spread over a much larger area of the country. I believe he said that there are probably 18 viable sites for new nuclear power stations, many of which are concentrated in his part of the world. I am interested in job creation right across the country, and renewables offer much better opportunities for us on that.

Of course, we want to cut fossil fuel imports. On that basis, I strongly back the Government in what they are trying to achieve here, but not for nuclear. I wish to reiterate the Liberal Democrat position: there is currently no economic or environmental case for the construction of any further nuclear stations in the UK. The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) set out, in his extensive and detailed speech, very much what we believe: there really is not a case for such construction.

A further point I wish to make is that it will take 20 years to build a new nuclear power station, however it is funded. We have very ambitious net zero targets. As the Minister said, we want to be net zero in our power sector by 2030, which is much sooner than in 20 years. We need to move considerably faster than that, and we already have the tools and technology to cut carbon significantly in our power sector in a much shorter period, so we need to accelerate the deployment of renewable power. We need to remove restrictions on solar and wind. We need to build more interconnectors to guarantee the security of supply. If we did that, we could reach at least 80% renewable electricity by 2030, which would be consistent with the Government's aims to achieve net zero.

Notwithstanding the points made by other Members about the growth in demand for electricity from electric cars, we can do much more to reduce demand for electricity from existing sources.

Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a strong case against nuclear power. Is she aware that it was her own party leader who signed off the Hinkley Point C deal?

Sarah Olney: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I am fully aware of that; I just want to reiterate that Liberal Democrat policy is that we are against any further nuclear power stations. We want to redouble our efforts on renewables, and I think I have probably said that several times now. We believe there is no economic or environmental case for further nuclear power stations.

Richard Graham: The position that I think the hon. Lady is taking is that the Liberal Democrats believe that all our future energy needs can be covered entirely by wind, both onshore and offshore, and possibly a bit of marine energy. What happens when the wind is not blowing and the sun is not shining? That is precisely when the base contribution of nuclear energy is so vital. By not increasing nuclear capacity, the hon. Lady would not allow us to be able to produce the energy demanded by consumers, who include her constituents as well as those of all Government Members.

Sarah Olney: The current issue with renewables is one of storage, but the technology to address some of the problems is being developed at speed. It is clear that by putting our energies, investment and ingenuity into answering some of the questions in relation to storage in particular, but other things as well, we can achieve net zero much faster through renewables. It would be much more productive to invest in storage solutions than to invest in nuclear power.

Let me return to my point about the need to address electricity demand. Currently, households are a key source of demand, but a lot of that demand comes from inefficient buildings. We need to do much more to insulate the existing housing stock and to ensure that we have much better building standards for new builds. The Government need to do much more on that. I am a member of the Public Accounts Committee, and we have released a report on the green homes grant, which was a total failure, and the report goes into a fair amount of detail as to why. I urge the Government to redouble their efforts to get Britain's homes insulated, because it is key that we use that as an opportunity to address the demand for power. We need to look at both sides of the equation.

If we can unlock more private sector investment, we can support investment in innovation and cutting-edge technologies, including tidal and wave power, energy storage, demand response, smart grids and hydrogen. My personal belief is that those things are much better uses of our time, energy, ingenuity and private sector capital than investing in more nuclear power stations.

In her intervention earlier the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock), who is no longer in her place, highlighted the grave risks of nuclear power. I urge the Government not to ignore, in their

enthusiasm for nuclear, the considerable downsides of nuclear waste. As a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I visited Sellafield last year, and I hope that every Government Member who promotes this Bill will also take the opportunity to do so. I found it so eye-opening in respect of the consequences of dealing with nuclear waste and the considerable time, effort and money that is still now being spent to dispose of nuclear waste that was generated in the 1970s, before I was born. It was just extraordinary and really brought home to me the literally toxic legacy that we leave for future generations when we create nuclear waste. I am not confident in some of the proposed solutions to deal with it, which could have grave environmental consequences. We cannot be confident that in 50 years' time people will take nuclear waste seriously and that the right procedures will be in place.

I urge the Government to take nuclear waste very seriously indeed. We spend billions every year to dispose of it, which is why it is of interest to the Public Accounts Committee. The issue dates back to the fuel crisis in the '70s, when the Government prioritised keeping the lights on. The costs are an ongoing liability for future generations and divert Government spending from other purposes. We need to be very careful before we propose to increase the existing legacy of toxic waste. I feel very strongly about that and urge the Government fully to consider the downsides.

In summary, we do not need new nuclear power stations. We want more private sector investment in innovative solutions and to spread the jobs bonus throughout the country. We cannot afford the legacy of nuclear waste that the Government propose to leave to future generations. We will vote against Second Reading.

5.29 pm

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney). It was interesting to hear the contrast between the position of the Liberal Democrats a few years ago and their position now, but we have to respect those views, which do change with time.

Part of the context of this debate is the concern over energy security, which is so important. Obviously, there have been spikes in gas demand and gas prices, but we need only look at the situation in Texas and California a little while ago to see how energy supplies can be affected, which is why we in the United Kingdom need to ensure that we have energy security. As with other European countries, we ought not to be as dependent on energy supplies from countries that are not as friendly as they might be to our national interests. We need only look at random events across the globe, such as the one that happened in the Suez canal, to see how supply chains can be so dramatically affected. We therefore need that secure energy supply, and nuclear is a key part of that for the United Kingdom.

We also need firm energy, or that baseload energy. We hear a great deal of discussion about solar panels and wind turbines, whether at sea or on land, but those provide intermittent energy. We cannot rely on that energy, although it does have an important contribution to make; that is why nuclear energy ought to form a key part of our reliable energy production.

There is a great deal of interest in this area in the north-west of England. Many of our skills are centred there, whether it be Sellafield, Warrington or Heysham, and that huge wealth of talent needs to be maintained. We also have the important Springfields site near Preston, which produces our nuclear fuels. We need to ensure that the site is secured. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that, when future contracts are given for nuclear power stations, the future viability of the Springfields site in the short, medium and long term is secured within the context of those contracts. Springfields does a huge amount of good for the local economy. It is also a wonderful source of apprenticeships. These are often very high-skilled and very well-paid jobs that we ought to be promoting and certainly protecting.

Hinkley Point C is at an advanced stage of construction. We need to look at the skills being developed at that site, and ensure that they are retained within the nuclear sector, so we need to be looking at when Sizewell C will be funded and brought online.

Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con): That is exactly the point that Vulcain Engineering in Stroud has been explaining to me. We have a fusion bid in at the moment, which is an amazing opportunity, but the company is very clear that if we do not have another nuclear project in play we will lose so many of those jobs and skills—not only from the south-west, but from the whole UK. They will go abroad and will not come back.

Chris Green: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. We need to secure those jobs and we need, as early as possible, to give that reassurance to engineers and others and say to them, “Your future is in the nuclear industry.” In that way, people can be focused on sticking with the industry and looking for that next job. It is about building that fleet of nuclear power stations. Whether it is Sizewell or further power stations down the line—there are already eight sites that have been identified for future nuclear—we need to give workers the reassurance that their skills are needed within the sector.

Richard Graham: My hon. Friend rightly referred to the phrase “a fleet of nuclear power stations”. Of course, in that context, Hinkley Point C and Sizewell C would be the aircraft carriers, as would anything in the future in Wylfa, but there are also opportunities for the smaller frigates. That is where the small modular reactors being proposed by Rolls-Royce could come as an extremely useful addition to those aircraft carriers. Does he agree?

Chris Green: That is such an important point. I agree entirely that we already have the larger-scale nuclear reactors and the established technology. It is so important that we look at SMRs and AMRs, and at the leadership that can be provided in a consortium by Rolls-Royce. If we get in early and develop that technology in the United Kingdom, we can export it around the world and create more wealth in the United Kingdom from this incredibly important source of energy and the power stations.

Bob Stewart: As I listen to discussions on the expansion of nuclear capability in this country, it slightly worries me that we have not talked about the security of those assets. My worry is that they could be interfered with by some foreign power in a cyber-attack. That must be part of all the planning for these places.

Chris Green: My hon. Friend makes a really important point. The physical security is one aspect, but the cyber-security, including firewalls and other protections, is immensely important to the sector. This energy provision is a key strategic interest and we cannot allow anything to interfere with it, but I am sure that the Minister and the experts in the sector are well aware of those threats.

Alan Brown: On security, I presume that the hon. Gentleman shares my concerns about China General Nuclear being involved at Hinkley and still being in the mix for Sizewell C.

Chris Green: I am concerned about the strategic national interest, but I think that most people at home would need to have reassurance on this: the security risk of the technical aspects, to which people might be more sensitive, is different from the financial aspects, which is what the Chinese involvement is at the moment. Those are two very different things. However, I do acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's concerns.

Mark Jenkinson: On security, the Office for Nuclear Regulation is considered to be one of the best nuclear regulators in the world. I certainly have faith in its being able to do its job, but is not the reason why state-backed companies are involved in nuclear construction that they have the money to put in up front? Is not this legislation exactly what we need to remove the need for them to be involved?

Chris Green: I agree entirely that there are huge challenges for the private sector to come up with the cash for the nuclear sector, because of providing the money up front; it takes such a long time to build a power station before energy or electricity can be produced, and people can get returns for their money. That is why the regulated asset-based model is key. It has been used in other areas successfully, so it is now seen as a reliable way of financing large projects.

Now is the time to make progress in this area. We have the skills base, the national need and the national security questions. All these things come together at the same time to make a compelling argument, so I am pleased that the Government are bringing this legislation forward, whether it is for the larger-scale nuclear reactors or the smaller-scale nuclear reactors. Let me finally say to my hon. Friend the Minister—I know that he has an interest in this—that, in the slightly longer term, if we do develop the fusion reactors, perhaps this funding model could be used there.

5.38 pm

Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): It is an honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green). I speak wearing my hat as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the environment, and I want to touch on some of the environmental issues addressed by some Opposition Members.

Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, Fukushima: the names of the world's nuclear accidents haunt people around the planet to this day. Fears of lethal invisible radiation killing thousands of people and laying waste swathes of the planet—these are very audible concerns. But then there are the facts. No one died from Three Mile Island,

and studies afterwards showed that there was no measurable increase in cancer rates. One person died from Fukushima. Again, post-accident studies showed no measurable impact on cancer rates.

Then there is Chernobyl. I have been to Chernobyl—to Chernobyl village itself. I went with the United Nations, which spent a long time studying the medical impact of the world's worst nuclear accident for 15 years after it happened. There I saw the alarming sight of happy villagers who had refused to leave after the accident and were taking the opportunity to restore the beautiful Chernobyl village church; they took a delight in showing me around it. I met a mother in Chernobyl village who had conceived and given birth to a totally healthy baby. Yes, 41 rescuers died of acute radiation sickness in the immediate aftermath of the accident, and there was a measurable increase in childhood thyroid cancer, which is, luckily, vanishingly rare, but otherwise the UN scientists found no measurable negative medical effects from the nuclear accident itself and concluded they had been vastly exaggerated.

We have now had nuclear power around the world for nigh on 70 years, and it has proven to be just about the safest and greenest form of energy. Safety is measured in the industry in terms of deaths per terawatt-hour of energy production, taking all direct and indirect deaths into account, including through the supply chain. For coal, it is 24.6 deaths per terawatt hour; for oil, 18.4; for biomass, 4.6; and for gas, 2.8. For nuclear, it is 0.07. Yes, that is a bit higher than wind, solar and hydropower, although in roughly the same ballpark, but several orders of magnitude lower than other forms of power, and in terms of CO₂ emissions, nuclear produces less than hydropower. It is about the cleanest and safest form of energy in the world, and it is, as we have heard today, massively scalable.

So why have we not embraced it? I will tell you why:

“Opposition to nuclear energy is based on irrational fear fed by Hollywood-style fiction, the Green lobbies and the media.”

Those are not my words but those of James Lovelock, one of the most eminent environmental scientists, who founded the whole Gaia thesis. As a former environment editor of *The Observer* and *The Times*, and as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the environment, I believe that the environment movement has been one of the most important and positive movements of the last half century. The fact that we are all environmentalists now—including the Queen, I note—proves the positive impact the movement has had. However, the environment movement made a major strategic error by campaigning so hard against nuclear power. Increasingly, many environmentalists agree. Even as Fukushima was still smoking, George Monbiot, the environmental leader, had a damascene conversion and started making the moral case for nuclear power.

If we believe that climate change is the biggest threat to the planet, we have to use every tool in the toolbox to combat it. We have a moral obligation not to campaign against the one technology that can probably help more than almost any other to get to net zero.

Chris Green: Does my hon. Friend share my concern that with nuclear we have existing established technologies that can be used and rolled out, even though the timescale in the Bill is reasonably long, but other technologies

that we would desire to come down the line in the future are not established and currently cannot work at the scale we need?

Anthony Browne: I absolutely agree. As I said, we have had nuclear for 70 years and we know that it works. The point I was about to come to, which my hon. Friend touched on earlier, is that the French have 70% of electricity produced by nuclear and they have a very well-established industry. It is not politically controversial at all. They have made it work and made it cost-effective. That is one of the reasons why France has far lower carbon dioxide emissions than we do in the UK. We should change to other technologies. We heard mention of tidal power earlier—yes, absolutely. However, there have been many projects to try to make tidal power work over the past few decades and none of them has yet quite succeeded, although we should still carry on trying.

As I have said many times in this House, the UK has had a really good track record in reducing carbon dioxide emissions, roughly halving them. Our per-capita emissions are now lower than those of many other countries, including green icons such as Denmark and Norway, but France has had lower emissions than us for decades because of nuclear power. I used to live in Belgium and got my electricity bills from France, and they used to have to say where the electricity came from: “nonante-neuf pour cent nucléaire”, which is—in Belgian French, not French French—“99% nuclear power”. That was always a delight for me. Driving around France, nuclear power stations are all over the place. It is not a political issue; people are very comfortable with it.

The environment movement has been very successful in demonising nuclear power beyond any scientific justification. That in part is why UK Governments have been so nervous, and it has meant as a country we have gone from being a world leader in nuclear power and one of the first to introduce it to being a straggler with a semi-clapped-out sector, as we have heard, with all these power plants going out and without much expertise, so that we end up depending on foreign companies and foreign Governments to be able to do anything. We have to build up our capacity again as a country. As we move away from nuclear fuels, we need a strong nuclear sector more than ever.

Alan Brown: The hon. Gentleman is talking about demonising nuclear, but is having a £132 billion waste legacy to clean up demonising nuclear, or pointing out a harsh reality?

Anthony Browne: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that point, which I was going to come to. Clearly nuclear has to be cost-effective throughout the whole lifecycle, and there is a burden of responsibility on the Government to ensure that is the case, although I must admit I do not recognise the £132 billion figure.

As we move away from fossil fuels, we need nuclear power more than we did in the '50s, '60s, '70s when we were developing it. As we start using electricity to heat our homes and power our cars, we need more production capacity that is resilient and secure. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) made a point about energy efficiency, and I completely and utterly support that, but as we move away from fossil fuels across other

areas of the economy and our lives, the demand for electricity will go up rather than down, whatever we do with efficiency. That is inevitable, so we need to ensure we have more production and more secure production.

The recent spike in gas prices has shown our national vulnerability if we do not have resilient energy suppliers, and we must guard against that happening to electricity suppliers. We cannot risk windless days and dark days leading to blackouts in future. Wind, solar and hydrogen power are wonderful. We have done great in rolling them out—wind power produces more energy than any other source and that is great—but they are not the sole solution. We need every tool in the toolbox. We need to ensure that we can provide the stable, resilient base-load that we will increasingly need as we move away from fossil fuels.

In the various debates I have had about nuclear power over the decades, anti-nuclear campaigners normally pipe up at this point with, “Nuclear power is not a good use of taxpayers’ money.” That is when I know they have largely run out of other arguments. Obviously nuclear has to be value-for-money. I am an economic, fiscal Conservative. We want to go for the best value forms of energy, not the expensive ones. It needs to be financially sustainable, and we need to look at the whole lifecycle costs of nuclear power. Clearly the Government have a duty to do that, and that is what the Bill is about. The Government have to ensure we have the right financial framework to ensure that the nuclear industry can survive and thrive and in the most cost-effective way possible. If companies are to invest multiple billions of pounds to build nuclear reactors, they need to do it in the lowest risk way, otherwise the cost of capital becomes prohibitive and the projects are not viable.

I used to work at Morgan Stanley, the US investment bank, and we had a big infrastructure fund investing in projects around the world—not nuclear, I have to say, but many other different sectors. When assessing new infrastructure investment, we have to factor in many of the risks. There is construction risk: can we build the thing? There is technology risk: if it is a new technology, will it work? There is political risk: what if there is a new Government who change their mind and say no? Then there is demand risk or volume risk: will there be enough demand for the product and will it be at the right price to generate the revenues to pay for the cost of capital being put up front to build it?

The trouble with the previous financing regime is that it did not deal with the first risks and expected companies to bear all those risks up front at cost to themselves. That meant that many companies found they had just too much risk to make the projects viable. It is not surprising that some companies ended up pulling out of nuclear power stations they had been planning to build.

The regulated asset base model that the Bill brings about is a far better model for financing the building of nuclear power stations, because it properly shares construction risk, political risk and technology risk between the public sector, consumers and companies. The RAB model is a completely standard model that has been widely used in other areas of infrastructure for decades and is well understood, as various Members have pointed out. The Government and companies have experience of the RAB model. We know it works well and we know how to make it work well in the interests of both parties. I am delighted that we are on the front

[Anthony Browne]

foot again with nuclear power as a country. As we progress and improve our expertise as a nation, as we have heard we need to do, nuclear power will get more standardised, easier to build and better value for money. The Government must continue to have courage in their convictions with nuclear power. I fully commend the Bill to the House.

5.49 pm

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this important debate. I declare an interest as the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for energy security.

The development of new nuclear power stations in the UK is long overdue. Right hon. and hon. Members have made excellent points about the need for energy. The period of outright objection more than 20 years ago, and the stop-start nature of progress in the last decade, have largely stemmed from the funding challenges faced by new nuclear power stations.

The Bill is a major positive and significant step to help to meet our net zero carbon agenda and to secure our energy supply, which has come into clear focus in recent weeks. The challenge of the gas supply and the variability in renewable sources have led to a sharp rise in energy costs, the bankruptcies of many providers and an alarming worry for constituents. Some businesses have even been forced to operate at reduced capacity because of energy supply challenges. Europe as a whole has been exposed as vulnerable to other states' decisions.

New nuclear diversifies the supply, delivers energy from within the UK, and offers a reliable, stable and clean source of energy that can form a major part of our baseload electricity needs. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne) said, diversification is important and nuclear is fundamental to providing the necessary energy security.

The argument in favour of nuclear power has been won among the public for some time, yet until now, we have not been able to develop projects that minimise the financial risk to the public as taxpayers and as consumers. The regulated asset base financing model is therefore a significant positive step that I strongly support, because it has the capacity to reduce the cost of capital to allow projects that would otherwise remain on the drawing board to move forward.

Much of the policy's success will focus on assessing risk. RAB has been used successfully in other major infrastructure projects around the world, and there is no reason it cannot be used for new nuclear, but its evolution will not be straightforward. The challenge will come in assessing and costing the risks faced by developers. New nuclear is different from some of the more predictable models that RAB has been used for, so we will have to be open and candid about the challenges as we develop the policy.

The biggest challenges of developing new nuclear come in the early construction stages when operation is typically 10 years or more away and when design problems and implementation faults emerge. They often lead to significant cost overruns and the need for changes at a huge cost financially and with long delays. Those uncertainties have hampered the development of new

nuclear through more traditional financing models for so long. RAB will help, but the risks and costing the risks will remain.

I was closely involved in Wylfa Newydd, the Horizon proposal by Hitachi on Anglesey, and along with my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), developed a third-third-third finance plan between the UK taxpayer, Hitachi and the utility companies to bear the risks of the early stages in particular. Despite the Government offering a third of those capital costs, including covering the financing costs in the proposal, the project stalled. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) who is working tirelessly to keep the project alive. I am optimistic about its future. That highlights the challenges, but does not negate the risk or the assessment of the risk. RAB certainly overcomes the challenges of financing costs, which is welcome, but I ask the Minister to recognise that central to the policy's success is assessing the risk and, therefore, the costing of the risk. Any further detail as the Bill passes through the House and the other place will be helpful in reassuring investors, policy makers and operators in the process.

The RAB policy is an excellent fit for SMRs and AMRs, and will be even more so once the first concept has been proven. The repeat structures of SMRs and AMRs will allow such projects finally to get off the ground significantly. I gently remind the Minister that when the nuclear strategy was launched, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells and I visited Trawsfynydd in north Wales to highlight how it and Wylfa on Anglesey were both perfect sites for small modular reactors. I hope that he will recognise that as policy initiatives develop.

I want to support the Minister and the Bill's proposals. This is a welcome, major and positive step in satisfying our energy demand, achieving our climate goals and securing our energy needs and supply. Assessment of the risk is central. As I mentioned, despite challenges we sought to overcome with fair and generous offers, challenges will remain, but RAB will play a big part in overcoming them. The detail of how we assess and cost the risk as part of the RAB model will be fundamental to giving confidence to investors and the nuclear industry.

5.56 pm

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Alun Cairns). As the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) pointed out, all the events of COP26 are proceeding in Glasgow as we speak, which reminds us forcibly of the need to reduce still further greenhouse gas emissions from our energy-generating sector. While recent years have seen a notable increase in energy from renewable sources such as wind and solar, it must be recognised—as many hon. Members have—that such forms of generation are intermittent, so other sources must be pursued to produce the reliable, predictable baseload of generation that a modern economy needs.

Hon. Members have pointed out other technologies that can produce reliable baseload generation. The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) mentioned pumped storage, and of course the Dinorwig pumped storage scheme in north Wales is an exemplar

of such technology. Similarly, there are proposals for a large-scale tidal range lagoon in Colwyn Bay in my constituency, which, with a projected installed capacity of more than 2 GW, would be a major generating station by any standards. However, we must recognise, as my right hon. Friend the Minister did in opening the debate, that the most proven technology is nuclear, and we should certainly pursue that, too.

While I was at the Wales Office, I devoted much of my personal energy to trying to secure the construction of the Wylfa Newydd nuclear station on Anglesey. I echo my right hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan in paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) for all her efforts in trying to revive that project. It was a happy day in November 2012 when Hitachi announced its purchase of the Horizon operating company. There was no doubt about its enthusiasm for the project. I visited the Hitachi construction factory in Hitachi city in Japan and spoke to a senior nuclear engineer. He told me that Wylfa was the very best location he had seen anywhere in the world for a nuclear power station, so it was not anything wrong with the site that saw off Wylfa Newydd; it was the contracts for difference financing model. The strike price that was offered was too low and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan pointed out, even an equity deal between the British Government, the Japanese Government and the operators could not make it work. The Government are therefore entirely right to look for a different funding model.

The regulated asset base model has a good track record of funding major infrastructure projects; it was successfully used to fund both Heathrow terminal 5 and the Thames tideway tunnel. Importantly, as other hon. Members have pointed out, it is a model that can be used to attract private funding, making the need to rely on foreign sources of funding less likely and, it is to be hoped, obviating the need to look to companies directly or indirectly controlled by foreign Governments, some not entirely friendly, to develop our new nuclear fleet.

The Bill will be welcomed in north Wales. I mention north Wales in particular because it has a long history of expertise in the nuclear industry. Not only does the Bill put the potential of developing Wylfa back on the agenda, but it offers hope of providing a funding model for a new fleet of small modular reactors. There has for some time been a call for a pathfinder SMR project at Trawsfynydd, where the old reactor has for many years been in a state of decommissioning. The local authority, and the Welsh Government too, support the development of SMRs at Trawsfynydd. This is the opportunity for Her Majesty's Government to take the lead in an exciting new project that could establish the United Kingdom as a leader in the technology, as well as provide a new centre of excellence in a location that has established nuclear expertise.

I welcome the Bill, which provides the opportunity for a new funding model and the prospect of a revived nuclear industry in north Wales. However, I wish again to echo the points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan. The question of potential cost overruns is a significant issue. It is important that the Government make a very careful assessment of the likely costs. It has been pointed out by commentators that pension funds may be reluctant to invest in such projects unless they can be assured that the costs will be

kept under control, so that is key. Otherwise, I fully welcome the Bill and look forward to supporting its Second Reading.

6.2 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I am pleased to speak in support of this Bill, which facilitates the provision of a secure energy supply, will ultimately keep down consumers' bills, and is crucial to achieving our net zero obligations. Specifically, along with the announcement in last week's Budget, the Bill paves the way for the construction of Sizewell C in Suffolk, which can bring enormous benefits to the county, to the Waveney area and to Lowestoft.

We need new nuclear, as it provides energy security. It is the only proven technology that can supply low-carbon baseload at scale. It complements, rather than competes with, the growth of renewables—in particular, in an East Anglian context, offshore wind. It also promotes the development of other clean technologies, such as hydrogen, which is planned at Sizewell, direct air capture and, in due course, small modular reactors.

The funding mechanism presented in the Bill is the regulated asset base model, which, with the right safeguards, has the advantage of driving down the cost of capital for such large infrastructure projects, acts as a catalyst for private sector investment and, according to Government analysis, can lead to savings to consumers of at least £30 billion.

Along with offshore wind, Sizewell C can bring great benefits to the local Suffolk and East Anglian economy. It is estimated that during the 12-year construction period, £2 billion will be put into the Suffolk economy. During that period, there will be three apprenticeship cycles and 1,500 apprenticeships can be created. This is an opportunity to leave an enduring legacy of knowledge, skills and infrastructure which in the long term, once construction has been completed and Sizewell C is operational, can make Lowestoft and Waveney an attractive location in which to set up and grow a business.

There is much work to do, but a good start has been made, with Sizewell C and East Coast College signing a memorandum of understanding to deliver the skills needed for this and other major projects in the area. It includes support for a civil engineering campus at Lound, to the north of Lowestoft; engagement with the Energy Skills Centre in Lowestoft itself; and collaboration on welding and fabrication capacity and capabilities.

The Bill and the hive of activity over the past 10 days are extremely welcome, although some might say 20 years too late. Subject to the development consent order being approved, let us get on with it and, in doing so, enhance our energy security, help to propel us along the road to net zero, and bring enduring jobs and prosperity to local people in Suffolk and in my constituency.

6.6 pm

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), who is so erudite and passionate, and to speak on Second Reading.

My constituency of Ynys Môn is known as “energy island”: we have wind, wave, solar and tidal. We are soon to have hydrogen, and we have a long history in nuclear. Back in 1963, construction began on an £80 million

[*Virginia Crosbie*]

nuclear power station at Wylfa head, near Cemaes on Anglesey. It was chosen for its strong rock foundation and its access to sea water. Its two nuclear reactors went live in 1971. At the time, Anglesey was considered to have

“leapt dramatically forward into the space age”.

The station was described as

“the nation’s biggest and most powerful...yet interfering as little as possible with the beauty of the Anglesey scenery”.

Some 3,000 people were involved in its construction and in 1964, 20 local 16-year-olds became the first apprentice intake. They trained to become

“the youngest engineers to take charge of an atomic power station in the world”.

At its height, Wylfa employed around 500 people. Just along the coast, an aluminium smelting works, employing a similar number of people, was built in Holyhead to be able to access cheap electricity direct from Wylfa.

In 2006, however, as the lifespan of Wylfa power station was drawing to an end, the Isle of Anglesey County Council voted to support the construction of a second plant. Wylfa B, now known as Wylfa Newydd, was intended to take over from Wylfa as it came to the end of its working life. Employment was a key factor. Losing so many jobs would be tough on any part of the UK, but on Anglesey there simply was not any comparable industry on the island for people to move to. It is estimated that at the height of construction, Wylfa Newydd, or new Wylfa, would employ around 9,000 and in steady state production would have a workforce of around 900.

The old Wylfa ceased generation in 2015. The aluminium works closed shortly afterwards and just under 1,000 jobs disappeared almost overnight, yet Wylfa Newydd is still on the cards. The people of Anglesey have been on a 16-year rollercoaster journey, with the prospect of quality new careers constantly just over the horizon. The majority of Anglesey residents actively support Wylfa Newydd, but they feel forgotten. They have had enough of being offered carrots only to receive disappointment. That is why the Bill is so important to my constituency of Ynys Môn.

When Hitachi withdrew the development consent order for Wylfa Newydd at the start of this year, it cited programme financing as the main factor. I am co-founder and chair of the nuclear delivery group, which I set up with my fellow atomic kitten, my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison), who is a passionate advocate for nuclear. Over the past 18 months, we have regularly raised new-build financing as a significant concern. I am delighted to see BEIS respond to this issue and bring this Bill to the table. Companies such as Bechtel and Rolls-Royce are already keen to establish new nuclear at Wylfa Newydd, so this proposed regulated asset base model offers significant hope to Anglesey.

The Bill could be the starting point for regenerating an area that desperately needs levelling up. It could finally lead the people of Anglesey over the horizon into a whole field of carrots. With that in mind, I appeal to my constituents and the people of north Wales, who would also benefit: now is the time for us to come together as a community and embrace the opportunity that the Bill offers us. We cannot afford to stay in our

partisan corners, we cannot afford to stay silent, and we cannot afford to let this opportunity slip through our fingers.

In 2015, the Welsh Government described Wylfa Newydd as a “once in a generation opportunity” and estimated that it could be worth £5.7 billion to the Welsh economy. Ten years on, this project will be a game changer locally, regionally and nationally. Nearly two decades of waiting for Wylfa Newydd may finally be coming to an end. Wylfa Newydd is rightly described as the best nuclear site in the UK. The Prime Minister has said that he is a “fervent supporter”.

I welcome the Bill and, for the sake of our young people and future generations, we must put aside our political differences and work together. Diolch yn fawr, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Diolch yn fawr.

6.12 pm

James Daly (Bury North) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow such a powerful, articulate, passionate speech, as I think everybody would agree, and I want to develop some of the points that were made by my hon. Friends the Members for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) and for Waveney (Peter Aldous).

I wanted to take part in this debate not because of any great knowledge of the nuclear industry, but because of the impact that it has on my region and the people in it. I am the chair of the all-party group on youth employment. We constantly strive to find new industries—new technologies—or developing existing industries to provide the high-skilled, high-paid jobs that people want in my constituency, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) and in the whole of the north of England. The north of England has a great legacy in nuclear. It was the home of the first nuclear power station 65 years ago and now houses close to half the country’s 60,000 employees in the civil nuclear workforce. They are all based in our region.

Therefore, what opportunities are we talking about? What opportunities does new nuclear present to the north of England? There is support for investment in businesses in the north in line with the Government’s levelling-up agenda. Jobs and skills were mentioned in various speeches by my hon. Friends. There is the preservation and growth of an expert, 60,000-strong supply chain, which includes Sillavan metals in my constituency, a company that is expanding, developing technology and giving young people opportunities through apprenticeships. All these industries are related to this Bill.

It is also fair to say that many jobs in the north of England have been revitalised by Hinkley Point C. Those jobs, skills and investment across the supply chain in the north of England come from investment in nuclear, but we also have clean growth, with low-carbon, always-on power to support renewables and facilitate the development of other clean tech such as hydrogen, direct air capture and small modular reactors to accelerate clean growth and new industries across the region, including decarbonisation clusters in Teesside and in Yorkshire and the Humber. There is energy security,

with firm, clean base-load power to the grid that will support renewables and give us greater control in our transition to net zero while helping to wean Britain off its reliance on energy imports.

This truly is a Bill that is at the heart of the north of England and can have an impact on many, many lives. The regulated asset base that the Bill introduces has been articulately covered by other hon. Members, so I will speak about Sizewell C, about which I agree with every point that my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney made. I also agree with the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead): essentially, I interpret the Bill as finding a way to finance Sizewell C and its positive impact.

Hearing of the developments happening in Waveney bring joy to my heart as chair of the APPG on youth employment, but there is no reason why those opportunities cannot be spread more widely, including in the north of England. Sizewell C is the only nuclear project that is ready to start construction and realise the benefits of new nuclear for the north of England, hopefully within this Parliament.

More than 90% of the UK's civil nuclear workforce is based outside London and the south-east, with nearly half in the north of England. More than 500 businesses based in the north of England are currently involved in the construction of Hinkley Point, so Sizewell C presents a huge long-term opportunity for the north of England.

I am sure that many MPs have been contacted by the consortium that is involved and wish to take the project forward. We cannot ignore the fact that the consortium has pledged £2.5 billion of private sector investment and 13,000 jobs just in the north if Sizewell C goes ahead. There is a downside if it does not go ahead: there could be up to 10,000 losses due to the failure to properly transition workers from the Hinkley Point project.

Sizewell C is a legacy project that will generate 3.2 GW of clean, low-carbon electricity—enough to power 6 million homes, including across the north. What is there not to like about the Bill? As ever, the Government are levelling up, creating opportunities and ensuring that we have a clean, reliable, resilient source of the power that our country needs.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We now come to the wind-ups, but the shadow Minister is slightly detained.

Dr Whitehead: He's gone to the loo, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: He has, yes.

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con)
rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker: What do you want to say, Mr Goodwill? You have only just come in.

Mr Goodwill: Well, I could say a few words if we have time. *[Interruption.]* Oh, he's here now.

Mr Deputy Speaker: None the less, thank you for your consideration. Seamlessly, we now move on to the wind-ups. I call Matthew Pennycook.

6.17 pm

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): My apologies, Mr Deputy Speaker; I thought that another contributor was waiting to speak before me.

It is a pleasure to wind up the Second Reading debate for the Opposition. Notwithstanding the somewhat overly partisan opening from the Minister of State, who came along, as he often does, with a set of pre-scripted remarks that were in danger of being as old as some of the nuclear plants that are presently being decommissioned, it has been a considered and well-informed debate in the main. I thank each right hon. or hon. Member who has taken part.

I will pick up on three points that have featured prominently. First, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) argued convincingly, although the Bill has the appearance of a general piece of enabling legislation, it is in practice concerned solely with the future of Sizewell C; I believe that the hon. Member for Bury North (James Daly) has just conceded that. Sizewell C is a project that EDF has no intention of financing from its own balance sheet and that we know has failed to entice the necessary private investors, as the right hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) mentioned in relation to Moorside and the fact that the current funding model is not fit for purpose.

It is vital that we bear that point in mind as the Bill progresses, because unfortunately for some, and much as the spin might suggest otherwise, it does not herald the dawn of a new nuclear fleet. It is simply a necessary means of resolving the issue of whether Sizewell, the last potential nuclear project that could conceivably begin to generate by the end of this decade, is constructed or not, and—this was referred to by the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) and, in an intervention, by the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham)—the issue of whether the cost reductions that will flow from the plant being a clone of Hinkley Point C, and its ability to draw on the skills and workforce associated with that site, are secured.

Several Members, including the hon. Members for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) and for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney), argued that nuclear should not form any part of the UK's future low-carbon energy mix. We on this side of the House respect their strongly held views on the subject, but we take the view, as does the Committee on Climate Change, that a limited amount of new nuclear is required to achieve the decarbonisation of the UK's electricity system within the next 14 years, and to meet our longer-term net zero target. Since Sizewell C is the only power station that can now feasibly come online within that timeframe, we want to ensure that it does, in order to provide the necessary amount of firm power to support a predominantly renewable energy mix.

Alan Brown: As I pointed out earlier—and the hon. Gentleman is well aware of this—much of the existing nuclear fleet is going offline before Hinkley even comes online. Does that not indicate that the grid could operate safely and we could have energy security without relying on a new nuclear station?

Matthew Pennycook: I listened carefully, as I always do, to what the hon. Gentleman said in his speech. I think what he misses is the fact that the demand for

[Matthew Pennycook]

electricity will double, so I do not think that his argument about the amount of baseload or firm power that is required necessarily follows.

Mr Goodwill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Matthew Pennycook: I will, but then I must make some progress.

Mr Goodwill: Does the hon. Gentleman also appreciate that we may need to generate large amounts of hydrogen, or indeed use nuclear energy for direct carbon capture, and perhaps synthesise jet fuel in that way?

Matthew Pennycook: I think we will need a range of technologies. Let me return to a point that has been made by several Members. I think we must take a lead from the Committee on Climate Change, which made its view very clear in its balanced pathway scenario for the sixth carbon budget. It estimates that we will need 10 GW of nuclear power by 2035. We will have a predominantly renewable energy system, but we do need the firm power that comes from a limited degree of nuclear to support that.

My second point relates to what has been the elephant in the room today, namely China's involvement in UK nuclear power. As we debate the principle of the Bill today and scrutinise its provisions in the weeks to come, that issue cannot be set aside. Members in all parts of the House want to understand more fully precisely where the Government now stand on the deeply flawed deal that they struck with China General Nuclear in relation to Sizewell, which has been mentioned several times in the debate.

The CGN stake in Sizewell was without doubt a sweetener for the far larger prize of unfettered Chinese ownership and operation of a nuclear plant at Bradwell, but while it seems certain that the very notion of a Chinese-run UK nuclear plant is now dead, we have yet to hear Ministers say so explicitly, or tell the House how the Government intend to disentangle themselves from the 2016 investment agreement signed by the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark). We deserve to be told, and I hope that the Minister will at least make some reference to that issue in his closing remarks. We also need to know how the Government plan to divest CGN of its minority stake in Sizewell C, and what the estimated impact of that divestment will be on the overall financing of the project, because that issue has very real implications for the mechanism that the Government have chosen to enable Sizewell to progress, namely the RAB model.

That brings me to my third and final point. A number of Members, including the hon. Members for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne) and the right hon. Member for Kingswood spoke clearly and forcefully about the advantages of the RAB model. It is not in dispute that the proposed model will lower the cost of capital on nuclear projects—I fully accept that—and it is also not in dispute that it would lower overall costs, although we on this side take issue with the frankly heroic assumptions that underpin the claimed £30 billion to £80 billion in long-term savings vis-à-vis coal-fired financed projects. However, it is also undeniably the case that these advantages would be secured as a result of shifting a proportion of risk on to consumers.

It is worth emphasising not only that the RAB for which the Bill would provide, and the risk therefore entailed in it, are of a different order of magnitude from RAB arrangements utilised on other infrastructure projects, but also that when it comes to the yearly surcharges levied on customers on those projects financed via RAB arrangements—for example, the Thames tideway tunnel, which has been mentioned

several times today—there is an inherent degree of uncertainty about the level at which those charges might peak. That is why it is important that the right hon. Members for Vale of Glamorgan (Alun Cairns) and for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) and the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) rightly emphasised the need to scrutinise the precise arrangements that will be brought forward and the need for safeguards when doing so.

While we on this side of the House acknowledge the advantages of the RAB model for new nuclear compared with contracts for difference financing, we have concerns about the potential exposure of customers if costs rise significantly or if serious overruns take place. We do not oppose the principle of the Bill, and we have no intention of voting against it this evening, but we intend to look very carefully in Committee at precisely how the Government intend to implement the RAB model in question, at whether its benefits are as significant as has been claimed, and at how many investors the Government expect to return to the UK market if this legislation passes. Most importantly, we want to work with the Government to explore ways in which consumers might be better protected from escalating costs in the event that things go wrong. New nuclear must provide secure and affordable low-carbon energy, but it is still by no means clear that the Bill stands to deliver in both those respects. It is imperative that it should do so.

6.25 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (George Freeman): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook), and I want to thank him and all hon. Members who have spoken in this important debate. We have had more than 15 speeches and a number of important interventions. I also want to thank the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) for his constructive approach to this important piece of legislation.

In the seven minutes available to me to wrap up the debate, I want to try to deal with as many of the points that have been made as possible. First, I would like to remind the House of what the Bill really signifies and what it does. The net zero strategy, published earlier this month, sets out our vision for a decarbonised economy by 2050. This will see the power sector fully decarbonised by 2035, with nuclear power playing a key role alongside renewables. As the Prime Minister set out from the Dispatch Box earlier today, he and the Cabinet are putting every effort at COP into delivering that international leadership to that end.

This Bill creates a new funding model for future nuclear projects that will support our transition to a secure, resilient and affordable low-carbon electricity system. The measures in the Bill are critical to ensuring that we have the option to bring forward further nuclear capacity, delivering a system that is lower in cost for

consumers than if we relied on intermittent power sources alone. While consumers will contribute to the cost of new nuclear projects during their construction, analysis shows that lowering the cost of financing new nuclear will save roughly £30 billion over the life of this refinancing, compared with relying on existing mechanisms.

It is good to hear that the Opposition will, sensibly, not vote against the Bill tonight. I would be surprised if any Member decided to vote against it—

Alan Brown: Will the Minister give way?

George Freeman: No, I will not give way. I am under time pressure and I need to deal with all the points that have been raised—[*Interruption.*] I have at least half an hour of questions to answer, not least from the hon. Member himself.

The Bill will make it easier to attract, and reduce the cost of, capital. However, a number of points have been raised by hon. Members. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore), who raised the urgency of tackling the downscaling and ending of the existing nuclear fleet, the urgency of getting this new financing in place and the role of nuclear in levelling up in Somerset and elsewhere in the country. My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) powerfully set out the importance of tidal. My hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) set out the importance of the nuclear cluster in his constituency and the importance of the 24/7 supply of nuclear for reliability, resilience and baseload.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) highlighted the role of nuclear in developing apprenticeships and skills, and the role of this model in funding fusion. My right hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) and my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) raised the question of security. My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne) made a very powerful speech on the failures of the environmental movement, which has put such irrational fear in the way of the nuclear industry, setting us back two decades.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Alun Cairns), the former Secretary of State for Wales, powerfully made the case that Wales stands to benefit substantially but we need to get the cost and the risk assessment right. He also highlighted the role of small modular reactors. My right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) highlighted the role of the Welsh cluster, and my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) highlighted the role of Lowestoft in this industry in tackling coastal regeneration. I should also like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie), who has been a formidable campaigner for energy in her constituency and the whole of north Wales, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Daly).

Given the extraordinary benefits of this extraordinary sector—60,000 people employed in the UK, with 90% of those jobs not in London and the south-east but across the country; each worker in the nuclear sector contributing an average of £96,000 gross value added to the economy, 73% higher than the rest; and a median salary of approximately £45,000—it is extraordinary why anyone would oppose it, particularly hon. Members

from Scotland, which has huge potential. The local economic impacts are huge: look at Hinkley Point and its well over 10,000 job opportunities and more than 3,600 British companies in its supply chain. Overall, the project is on course to create 25,000 jobs.

It is even more extraordinary to hear Scottish nationalist party Members when it is not just Conservatives, not just the nuclear industry and not just Her Majesty's Opposition who favour it. Sir David Attenborough himself said:

“I do not question the use of nuclear energy as a way of solving our energy problems in the short term”

until we can solve

“the problems of storage and transmission of power.”

The UN Economic Commission for Europe said:

“International climate objectives will not be met if nuclear power is excluded.”

If that is not good enough for SNP and Liberal Democrat Members, Zion Lights, former Extinction Rebellion activist and founder of Nuclear for Net Zero, said:

“renewables alone would require unfeasibly massive amounts of storage”—

which we do not have—

“to keep the lights on... we are in a climate emergency and need all the clean energy we can build right now”.

That includes nuclear.

The GMB, Unite and Prospect trade unions are all strongly in favour. I could not put it better than Charlotte Childs, the GMB national officer:

“Our environment, our economy and our communities need Ministers and MPs to back new nuclear.”

I hope all will tonight. Even a member of the Green party, Josh Stringfellow of the Kingston Green party, said:

“As Greens we trust the science on climate change. As Greens we should also trust the science on nuclear”.

Across the board, there is recognition that we will not hit net zero unless we accelerate our investment in new nuclear. This Bill provides the framework for reducing the cost of capital and increasing our options for private investment, which makes it all the more extraordinary that we have had the opposition we have. The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead), in a thoughtful speech, mentioned a decade of dither and delay. I assume he means from 1997 to 2007, when the then Labour Government completely turned their back on the nuclear industry.

Interestingly, the Scottish nationalists like to have their cake and eat it. The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) is opposed to nuclear power but, of course, Scottish consumers will benefit from being on the grid. They will benefit from the baseload, resilience and security it gives us. I hear loud and clear his call, and the call of others including my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester, for more investment in tidal. I reassure the House that we are looking at making sure contracts for difference provide strong support for that sector.

The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney), in a thoughtful speech, set out the importance of supporting net zero, which makes it all the more strange that the Liberal Democrats seemingly have an almost religious objection to nuclear energy. I was a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Department of Energy and

[George Freeman]

Climate Change when both the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey) and Chris Huhne were Secretary of State, and it was they who put in place the contracts for difference funding mechanism for nuclear, which did not work and which we are now having to sort out. It is easy to oppose with the benefit of hindsight, but the truth is that this is urgent and the Bill provides the basis for it.

The hon. Member for Richmond Park is right that household insulation is important, which is why we provided an additional £1.75 billion in the Budget to upgrade the homes of those on low incomes through the social housing decarbonisation fund and the home upgrade grant. The Government are consulting right now on raising the standards for home insulation in new houses that are built.

A number of Members mentioned wave and tidal, and I am delighted to confirm that not only is this Department funding great science and research in tidal, wave and other renewables but that at the global investment summit last week I visited wind and tidal technologies and we secured nearly £9 billion of private investment in the international renewables sector. We are actively considering whether we should ringfence tidal technologies in the next round of CfD, and it will be eligible under pot 2.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun challenged the £30 billion cost saving. The full analysis and methodology is set out in the impact assessment accompanying this Bill, and I confirm the current contract ensures that consumers will not pay for any overruns at Hinkley Point C.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) mentioned radioactive waste, and the truth is that we have been producing and managing radioactive waste perfectly successfully, without accident or danger to health and safety, for decades. Some 94% of the waste is very low level, and the Government, like previous Governments, have a strong plan for a geological disposal facility.

A number of colleagues raised the issue of national security. I want to make it clear that the Bill is not concerned with making it difficult for any particular country or company to apply. The quality of the bids will be considered in due course by the Secretary of State, with full accountability to Parliament. The Bill does not determine any future nuclear project's ownership structure; it simply creates a new financing model that broadens our options for new nuclear.

As a package, the legislation before Members will help to end our reliance on overseas developers for finance, which has led to the cancellation of nuclear projects in the UK. Instead, the Bill ensures that our new nuclear power plants can be financed by British pension funds and institutional investors. However, this is not about shutting out individual companies or countries, and the Government have already taken significant powers through the National Security and Investment Act 2021.

A number of colleagues have raised the issue of the scrutiny of risk assessment, and I want to reassure Members that the Secretary of State will be required to act transparently and with full disclosure to the House.

I close by thanking Members from across the House for their contributions, highlighting that I hope very much that the Scottish nationalists will not divide the House tonight on something that Scottish voters will benefit from. I strongly believe that this new funding model acts in the interests of the whole of this country, and I commend this Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 319, Noes 44.

Division No. 101]

[6.36 pm]

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Ali, Tahir
 Allan, Lucy
 Anderson, Fleur
 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
 Berry, rh Jake
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Buckland, rh Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, Feryal (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan

Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Coyle, Neil
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Creasy, Stella (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Cryer, John
 Daly, James
 David, Wayne
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 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
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elmore, Chris
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Esterson, Bill
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Foxcroft, Vicky

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
 Glendon, Mary
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Green, Chris
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Nia
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hammond, Stephen
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 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, Tom
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kane, Mike
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward

Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lloyd, Tony
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Lynch, Holly
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Madders, Justin
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Moore, Damien
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, James
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Parish, Neil
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Penrose, John
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Reed, Steve
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Robertson, Mr Laurence

Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spellar, rh John
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert

Tami, rh Mark
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Throup, Maggie
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tracey, Craig
 Trott, Laura
 Twist, Liz
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warburton, David
 Watling, Giles
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittaker, Craig
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Scott Mann and
 Michael Tomlinson**

NOES

Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, Daisy
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Davey, rh Ed
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Flynn, Stephen
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Hanna, Claire
 Hobhouse, Wera

Hosie, rh Stewart
 Jardine, Christine
 Lake, Ben
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lucas, Caroline
 MacAskill, Kenny
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Moran, Layla
 Nicolson, John
 Olney, Sarah
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Smith, Alyn
 Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Noes:

**Richard Thomson and
 Hannah Bardell**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

NUCLEAR ENERGY (FINANCING) BILL (PROGRAMME)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Nuclear Energy (Financing) Bill:

Committal

The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on 30 November 2021.

The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading

Proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—
(*Mrs Wheeler.*)

The House divided: Ayes 256, Noes 80.

Division No. 102]

[6.52 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
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
Berry, rh Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, rh Robert
Burghart, Alex
Cairns, rh Alun
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chishti, Rehman

Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
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
Dines, Miss Sarah
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, rh Michelle
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
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fletcher, Mark

Fletcher, Nick
Ford, Vicky
Fox, rh Dr Liam
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
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Green, Chris
Griffiths, Kate
Grundy, James
Hammond, Stephen
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heaton-Harris, Chris
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
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, Tom
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkyns, Andrea
Johnson, Dr Caroline
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
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Logan, Mark
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherilyn

Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Moore, Damien
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, Wendy
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Parish, Neil
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Philp, Chris
Pincher, rh Christopher
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Pritchard, rh Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Shapps, rh Grant
Simmonds, David
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian

Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trott, Laura
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa

Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Watling, Giles
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Scott Mann and
 Michael Tomlinson

NOES

Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Fleur
 Bardell, Hannah
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Clark, Feryal (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicki
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glindon, Mary
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Griffith, Nia
 Hanna, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark

Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Kane, Mike
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 Madders, Justin
 Maskell, Rachael
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McGinn, Conor
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Murray, James
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Reed, Steve
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Sobel, Alex
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thomson, Richard
 Twist, Liz
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Taiwo Owatemi and
 Lilian Greenwood

Question accordingly agreed to.

NUCLEAR ENERGY (FINANCING) BILL: MONEY

Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Nuclear Energy (Financing) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(1) any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State by virtue of the Act,

(2) any expenditure incurred by the Competition and Markets Authority by virtue of the Act,

(3) any expenditure incurred by the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority by virtue of the Act, and

(4) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

NUCLEAR ENERGY (FINANCING) BILL: WAYS AND MEANS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Nuclear Energy (Financing) Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) provisions by virtue of which persons may be required to make payments, or provide financial collateral, for the purposes of, or in connection with, enabling a revenue collection counterparty to discharge obligations in relation to revenue collection contracts;

(2) the imposition, by virtue of the Act, of charges or payments under licences issued under the Electricity Act 1989;

(3) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.

In this Resolution, “revenue collection counterparty” and “revenue collection contract” have the same meaning as in Part 2 of the Bill.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE FOR THE INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY

Resolved,

That Jackie Doyle-Price be appointed to the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, until the end of the present Parliament, in pursuance of paragraph 1(d) of Schedule 3 to the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009, as amended.—(*Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg.*)

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 (Disability Assistance for Children and Young People) (Consequential Modifications) (No. 2) Order 2021, which was laid before this House on 7 September, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (4 NOVEMBER)

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 4 November, notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (4) of Standing Order No. 14 (Arrangement of public business) in respect of precedence, the motion in the name of Wendy Morton relating to the Republic of Belarus (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2021 (SI, 2021, No. 1146) shall have precedence over the business determined for that day by the Backbench Business Committee; that business may then be proceeded with until 5.00 pm or for five hours, whichever is the later, and then shall lapse if not previously

disposed of; those proceedings may be entered upon and continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (8 NOVEMBER)

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 8 November, notwithstanding paragraph (2)(c)(i) of Standing Order No. 14 (Arrangement of public business), business in the name of the Leader of the Opposition may be entered upon at any hour and may be proceeded with, though opposed, for three hours; proceedings shall then lapse if not previously disposed of; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Kennels and Catteries: Economic and Social Contribution

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

7.6 pm

Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con): The covid-19 pandemic has been unlike anything that we have experienced since the second world war. The mandatory closure of businesses and the restrictions on where we could go and who we could meet were unprecedented in our recent history, as were the restrictions on travelling abroad for holidays or business. Most of us are used to simply booking a flight, arranging for our pets to be looked after and heading off to the sun. I will talk about those restrictions and their specific impact on catteries and kennels.

The Government's response to the pandemic made available unprecedented levels of support to businesses and to the economy as a whole. Without that urgent action, many businesses would have failed and our economy would have suffered untold damage. History will judge our actions and the support that we provided as necessary, proportionate and crucial; Ministers should be commended for putting it together so quickly.

As with any system, however, issues on the periphery inevitably meant that a limited number of specific cases fell through the cracks. After all, not everything fits neatly into a defined box or is easily categorised. I will highlight the example of kennels and catteries, which offer accommodation to pets 365 days a year and provide a vital service to travellers and businesspeople who need to go abroad.

Like other industries, kennels and catteries were affected by the lockdowns and their trade was restricted. Unlike a shop or restaurant, however, they did not simply spring back into shape after the lockdowns ended. International travel was still hugely restricted and the demand for travel was hit by a lack of confidence even when people could travel abroad. Indeed, much of the demand did not come back even after the rules surrounding opening businesses had lifted.

The difficulty is that restrictions remained in the tourism supply chain—industries directly affected by tourism—but, unlike other industries, kennels and catteries are not considered part of the tourism sector. This is where my constituents Claire and Craig Dodding, who run a cattery in my constituency, come in. In response to those difficulties, they set up the UK Alliance of Catteries and Kennels, which advocates on behalf of the industry and supports catteries and kennels across the country. They set out the problem in a recent email to me, which, if the House will bear with me, I will read in full:

“Our industry is regulated by DEFRA yet is not part of DEFRA. It is licensed by councils yet has no awarding body. Our industry is business rated yet has no guidelines regarding premises. Our industry is not recognised under any main SIC yet has Government-regulated bodies making decisions that impact it with no means of challenge. The industry falls into sub-representation with charities yet is a business, not a charity.”

In short, the industry is not easily categorised and so falls through the cracks.

Antony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con): My hon. Friend is making some interesting and important points. Businesses that have benefited from her constituents' advocacy

include Clearview Cattery in Burnley, which is run by Ryan, and the Pet Hotel. I thank her constituents for everything they do to advocate not just for themselves but for the whole sector.

Sara Britcliffe: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Craig and Claire have done astounding work with councils across the country, lobbying on behalf of all their members.

We see a discrepancy in how councils have awarded discretionary funding. Grants in Hyndburn, for example, have been different from others across the country, which can range from thousands of pounds to hundreds of pounds.

The industry has a huge number of regulations on everything from licensing and welfare to safety and staffing, yet there is no accurate number of businesses in the industry as they pay their licensing fees to local councils, and the bulk of councils do not collate that information correctly or at all. All councils are meant to have an accurate, up-to-date list of licensed animal boarding establishments available to the general public. However, the UK Alliance's research suggests that 75% of councils either do not have that or they have information that is incorrect or out of date. I spoke to constituents today who explained that, when they were given a grant by a local council, it called a cattery in someone else's patch and a lady who had not had her cattery for 49 years was still on the council's list. That goes to show the issue that we have.

We need to focus on the industry's place within the wider economy—it clearly needs to be part of travel and tourism. It is also important to consider how it is regulated and where it sits in relation to oversight and regulation. We must ensure that councils are giving it the support that it needs and that support is consistent across councils.

My constituents have specific issues and asks of the Government that they have asked me to set out. First, there is no standard industrial classification code for animal boarding establishments. I am told that, at present, the nearest code is 01.62/1, which is farm animal boarding and care—except pets. The UK Alliance proposes that we follow the USA's SIC and create a new subcategory under section A called “animal services, except veterinary” and include the following: animal shelters; boarding horses; boarding catteries; boarding kennels; boarding of other animals; home boarding dogs; home boarding cats; home boarding of other animals; breeding of animals—

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sara Britcliffe: I give way.

Caroline Nokes: My hon. Friend is clearly setting out the complexities of the industry—I will refer to it as an industry. Does she agree that businesses such as the Longcroft Luxury Cat Hotel in my constituency want certainty and that, whether they are dealing with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the local council or their tax affairs, everything should be codified in one place so that they can understand what they are entitled to and what is available to them?

Sara Britcliffe: I thank my right hon. Friend for her intervention. She is correct. I have been getting that message loud and clear from the UK Alliance. Many Members of Parliament have been lobbied to put that message to the Government by their local kennels and catteries, who have really struggled throughout the pandemic. We must consider that going forward.

I will carry on with the list; there are only a few left. The new sub-category should also include dog grooming, pedigree record services for pets and other animal specialties, and the showing of pets and other animal specialties. That would bring all other animal services under one sub-category of section A. It would also bring all businesses that follow DEFRA's 2018 boarding of cats and dogs regulations under the same sub-category.

The UK Alliance has also suggested that the Government should establish a centralised professional body, which would be responsible for issuing licences to these businesses. The system is currently fragmented and operated by individual local authorities. That professional body would ensure that a current list of inspected and regulated businesses was available to the general public, deal with requests from business owners and the general public, and maintain a database of inspected businesses to be available at all times.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case on behalf of the kennels and catteries industry. May I cheekily take the opportunity to raise the case of Eardley Hall kennels in my constituency of Newcastle-under-Lyme? It suffered not only from the impact of covid, which she has already spoken about, but from flooding caused by a broken culvert on an illegal waste dump. I am trying to adjudicate between the Environment Agency and Staffordshire County Council as to why that has happened. The Minister is in her place; perhaps she will hear what I am saying too. Eardley Hall kennels, and all the other kennels and catteries in Newcastle-under-Lyme, contribute a huge amount to our local economy and I am very glad that my hon. Friend has secured this Adjournment debate.

Sara Britcliffe: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that case and I completely agree with him. I can imagine that Claire and Craig will have been lobbying on behalf of his constituents too, because they have done a fantastic job of that.

Finally, the industry suggests that catteries and kennels should have specific guidelines for business rating purposes. At present, there is no agreed standard, and all areas of cattery and kennel businesses, including communal corridors and fire escapes, are included in calculations. Other commercial properties are exempt from paying rates on those areas.

Obviously, a lot of this is very technical and would require changes at least to regulations and possibly to legislation. It seems to me that a sensible first step would be for representatives of the sector to meet DEFRA and discuss these issues. I therefore ask the Minister whether it would be possible to broker an initial meeting between her and her officials, the UK Alliance and me. That would go a long way to opening lines of communication and starting the discussion about how we can better ensure that the needs of this sector are met and that catteries and kennels across the country are treated fairly and consistently.

7.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Jo Churchill): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe) for securing this debate. I could not agree with her more that kennels and catteries contribute an awful lot to our economy and society, but also to our lives. We were in this place only last Friday discussing some of the benefits. I apologise, because she spoke in that debate and I think she has rescue cats herself—does she not?

Sara Britcliffe indicated assent.

Jo Churchill: Yes. Some incredible names were mentioned that day, and I cannot bring to mind whether she had a Noodle, a Doodle, a Frazzle or whoever. The one that sticks in my mind is Andrew the pig—but I digress.

As I say, kennels and catteries contribute in many ways, on both national and local scale. My right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) mentioned the importance of looking to treat them as a group. Some 26% of UK adults own a dog and some 24% a cat. Their companion dogs or cats will be among the 9.6 million dogs and 10.7 million cats that reside in this country and, hopefully, are lavished with an enormous amount of love. Indeed, I will declare that I am a dog owner, and I probably over-indulge him.

Kennels and catteries provide important services to our cat and dog populations and their owners, and I know that my hon. Friend's constituency is the base for several such establishments. That situation is replicated in just about every constituency across the House.

I turn to the benefits of kennels and catteries. Locally, kennels and catteries have a positive economic benefit, stimulating the local economy through the purchase of pet food and equipment and the employing of local vets for the health of their residents, as well as tradesmen to maintain their establishments. The ripples of that economic benefit will be felt discretely regionally and nationally through medium and large-scale suppliers and manufacturers. In that way, kennels and catteries contribute to continued economic success and increasing consumer spending across the sector.

There is, of course, a further significant economic benefit to kennels and catteries, one which my right hon. Friend has taken great care to raise with us this evening: the indirect economic benefit felt by others, such as the travel and tourism sector. In this case, the services provided by kennels and catteries allow us to travel or visit locations which would not otherwise be possible. I heard her comments about re-categorisation and so on. The challenge is that several Departments are involved in what she is asking me to consider.

Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con): The security of pets is a major concern these days. I strongly compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe) for raising the issue. It is an issue that worries people and I have had meetings on it in my constituency. A strong and vibrant cattery and kennel sector is a very important part of keeping our pets secure.

Jo Churchill: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. Indeed, the Department is looking to do something about pet theft in future legislation.

The Government are aware of the sector's concerns relating to the covid-19 restrictions that were in place and understand the considerable difficulties faced not only by kennels and catteries, but by many businesses adversely affected by the fall in travel and tourism due to the pandemic. I place on record my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn for her acknowledgement that the Government acted swiftly and put a great deal of effort into ensuring that businesses were supported.

The Government's swift action to provide a range of covid-19 support measures to both businesses and charities was done at pace. We published information on how to access that support and worked with sector bodies at the time—that is the important thing I would like to stress—such as the Canine and Feline Sector Group. We worked with the group to enable grooming to start up. In the difficult days of the pandemic, it worked on regulations around safety handovers and so on, so that the industry could get up and running. That work led to the publication of advice to owners and pet businesses throughout the period that restrictions were in place.

We continue to engage with the sector to try to understand and address any residual issues. Government support included, but was not limited to, loans, small business grants available through local authorities, mortgage holidays and VAT deferral. Those, and other provisions, were maintained and extended as the situation developed. The Government also acted to protect the income of the self-employed through the self-employed income support scheme grant, and supported employees through the furlough scheme. Businesses in my hon. Friend's constituency, including catteries, will have felt the benefit of that support.

I understand that the owner of Rhoden Manor has gone on to establish the UK Alliance of Catteries and Kennels with the aim of strengthening their collective voice. I recognise that there has been a great deal of concern in the sector and we take that very seriously. We will keep a close watch on intake levels and trends. DEFRA remains committed to continued engagement with the sector and to understanding the long-term impacts of the pandemic, monitoring the animal welfare implications and offering subsequent and appropriate advice.

Local authorities were allocated £500 million in discretionary funding through the additional restrictions grant to support businesses that were significantly impacted, even though they were not required to close. That was in addition to the £1.1 billion allocated in November 2020. Local authorities had the discretion to support businesses in the way that they saw fit.

I recognise the importance of kennels and catteries and the varied roles that they play in our lives, from enabling our ability to travel to supporting key workers, allowing them to undertake their roles. The Government are also convinced that the kennels and catteries of this country provide many economic benefits. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn can be reassured by the fact that we are working with the Local Government Animal Welfare Group to improve the data that several hon. Members said was perhaps not as seamless as they would like it to be.

I hope that my hon. Friend is reassured that the Government have taken the appropriate steps throughout the covid restrictions to ensure that we supported kennels

and catteries, so that they could, and can, continue to operate. I thank her for securing tonight's debate. She spoke recently about the support that the Government have given to high streets, recognising the effort and investment that we have made.

To conclude, I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to tease out, as she said, the quite complex set of asks that she laid out this evening and to see exactly where the challenges are, because I would like my officials to check some of the details about the database, and so on. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North said, making it a simpler system to navigate is probably one of the key

asks. On that note, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn again for securing the debate and thank our cattery and kennel owners for not only all they did in the pandemic, but all they do all the time.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I was honoured to chair both Friday's debate on animals and tonight's as well. If it proves anything, we are a Parliament of animal lovers, that is for certain.

Question put and agreed to.

7.27 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 3 November 2021

[MR VIRENDRA SHARMA *in the Chair*]

Hospital Building Programme

9.30 am

Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair): Before we begin, I remind Members that they are expected to wear face coverings. This is in line with current Government guidance and that of the House of Commons Commission. I also remind Members that they are asked by the House to have a covid lateral flow test twice a week if coming on to the parliamentary estate. That can be done either at the testing centre in the House or at home. Please also give each other and members of staff space when seated and when entering and leaving the room.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the hospital building programme.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I welcome the chance to discuss the Government's £3.7 billion hospital building programme, and particularly welcome the opportunity to make the case to the Minister for my local hospital, Leighton, to be included as one of the final eight sites chosen by the Government.

Leighton Hospital was built in the 1970s, and officially opened by the Queen in 1972. I have looked back at the pictures of her visit, and it made me think about just how long Her Majesty has been serving our nation in this way—visiting, before I was even born, the hospital that serves my constituents today. At that time, Leighton Hospital represented a huge change in how healthcare was provided in the area, going on to pick up the role of several smaller hospitals spread across the patch. Its importance and role have only grown since then, serving a population that has increased significantly and now stands at more than 300,000 people.

Whether it is the hip and knee replacements it carries out, the babies it helps deliver, the thousands of cancer screening tests and treatments it undertakes, the cataracts it repairs, or the urgent GP and accident and emergency care it provides, Leighton is at the heart of our local health services. In an ordinary year, Leighton provides around a quarter of a million out-patient appointments, carries out more than 30,000 operations and more than 200,000 diagnostic imaging tests, and has more than 90,000 visits to its emergency department. Of course, none of that would be possible without its fantastic staff: Leighton employs more than 4,500 staff, and that fantastic team of cleaners, porters, cooks, receptionists, healthcare assistants, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, nurses, doctors, volunteers and many others is what turns a building into a hospital.

Those staff can be proud of their achievements in the battle against covid. Not only have they cared for covid patients, but they have also vaccinated 47,000 people under the leadership of their director of pharmacy, Karen Thomas. I had the absolute pleasure of volunteering alongside the staff during the first lockdown. I was

quite uncomfortable with the media attention on me for doing this for only a short period of time, when those staff do it day in, day out without any fuss or attention.

As I have seen again and again during my time working in the NHS, its staff have an enormous amount of dedication, often going above and beyond, and are perhaps too accustomed to working in departments and environments that make doing a really good job more difficult than it should be. That is why, although we are talking about buildings today, it is important to highlight that—as others have said—we will only be able to make the most of new facilities if we are able to carry on with the success we have had so far in recruiting more staff.

Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a strong case for Leighton, and he will know that, as a former Member for his constituency, I was able to work with that hospital very closely. All four of my children were born at Leighton Hospital, which sits in my constituency, and I also spent a week working in that hospital and cannot praise its staff highly enough. I hope that this building programme will give those staff the environment they deserve in order to provide the healthcare we know they can deliver, which is world class.

Dr Mullan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and what he has said is typical of people who live in the area, who have also experienced their children being born at that hospital and receiving excellent care there.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Speaking as a neighbouring constituency MP whose family has also made great and beneficial use of Leighton over many years, I strongly support my hon. Friend's campaign for additional resources and support for Leighton. I very much respect him for that effective campaign, which I know has strong support across our constituencies.

My hon. Friend has spoken about the number of people who seek services from Leighton at the present time. Does he agree that that number is not going to diminish: it is going to increase, due to the additional numbers of houses that are being built in our areas? I note, for example, Northwich, where there is a huge amount of house building on the former ICI site, Middlewich in my constituency and Sandbach. Altogether, in recent years, thousands of new houses have been built for people who will want to look for support from Leighton.

Dr Mullan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the great things about the plans for the new site is that they take into account those future projected increases in population. I do not know what we will do if the resources are not there to do that.

Going back to staffing, we have more nurses and doctors and more staff overall working in the NHS than ever before, but it remains a huge undertaking for the Government to continue to work on recruitment and retention to staff new facilities. I know a lot of the media and campaigning by Opposition parties has focused on pay. While it is important, my experience is that fixing staff shortages would be the priority for most staff. The obstacles for further recruitment will not simply be solved by higher pay; the challenges are more complicated than that.

[Dr Mullan]

Of course, buildings and facilities matter, but we have to remember that the material used to build Leighton was expected to last only 30 years. It might seem odd to us now to create a major public facility with that sort of lifespan, but that is the reality.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is a neighbouring MP. A reference was made to Northwich in my constituency. This proposal certainly has cross-party support. I support the hon. Gentleman and all Cheshire MPs in arguing this case with the Minister in front of us for much-needed investment in a first-class hospital facility in our patch.

Dr Mullan: It is great to get cross-party support to demonstrate to the Minister how important it is to all our local communities. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support.

As I was saying, the building was not designed to last this long or to serve the size of population that it serves. My view is clear that we can be more efficient and do more in the community, but an ageing population will have an ever-increasing demand for healthcare. We can delay the need for the most specialist hospital care in a population, but we can almost never remove it and stop the demand increasing overall.

How has Leighton managed this challenge over recent years? Rightly, it has benefited from major investment, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Edward Timpson) who is working closely with me on this campaign alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce). I remember his excellent work in helping to secure funding for brand-new theatres and a brand-new ITU.

My first campaign after becoming the candidate for Crewe and Nantwich was to reverse the decision to turn down a request for an emergency department extension, which was ultimately funded in 2019. More recently, Leighton received £15 million to build a brand-new emergency department. As the Government understand the necessity, Leighton has had funding to tackle the parts of the original building that are simply not fit for use in the short term. However, there comes a point where the costs of one-off investments, accumulated maintenance and the need to replace the original building structures become a cost that cannot be borne by the ordinary capital spending, and when a whole new building becomes the best option financially and for patient care. That is where Leighton is at.

The lifespan of the original building is coming to an end. I suggest to the Department of Health and Social Care and the Treasury that they view the funding committed to the hospital building programme as a unique opportunity to look at estates that are winding down towards the end of their lifespan and address that now.

Under the leadership of the chief executive officer, James Sumner, Leighton has done an enormous amount of work for many months to develop its plans for a new hospital. The team sought expert advice on the lifespan of the current estate and, importantly, the cost of maintaining it and to keep the existing original buildings in use. I know the Minister will scrutinise the figures and see for himself the financial sense in the case that has been made. Independent analysis demonstrates that

the ongoing refurbishment of the present failing infrastructure over the next 15 years will cost substantially more than projected new-build costs.

Importantly, the plans are ambitious in ensuring better healthcare is delivered in a better environment for patients and staff. As well as providing the mentioned much-needed bed capacity to meet the projected demand later in the decade, the new facilities will deliver single rooms to improve privacy, dignity and infection control. The new layout will incorporate the latest design advice for supporting patients with conditions such as dementia.

The site as a whole will be reorganised to remove some of the long journeys from key locations, such as the emergency department, to other parts of the hospital that have grown as a result of sporadic development to date. They will future-proof the hospital with the most up-to-date digital infrastructure, which is becoming increasingly important for delivering the best possible care and doing so efficiently. A new site will enable Leighton to play its part in the race to net zero with more energy-efficient buildings and solar power and even, potentially, a geothermal heat source, which is a technology I am campaigning for the Government to support to get off the ground across the country.

The team at Leighton have a track record of delivering improved and innovative care to back up their pledges. For example, the trust recently received an award for its same-day emergency care programme, led by surgeons David Corless and Ali Kazem. I am sure that, with improved facilities, they will continue to find new and better ways to care for their patients.

Edward Timpson: My hon. Friend has been extremely generous with his time. Will he also confirm that this project, if delivered, would save more than £400 million in backlog maintenance, as well as helping to free up a lot of the community care, which at the moment is under extreme pressure because of the lack of beds available at Leighton and in the surrounding area?

Dr Mullan: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. This is actually about saving money in the long term given the unavoidable costs at the existing site.

Of course, building the hospital will provide jobs and opportunities for local people, with apprentices at South Cheshire College and others well placed to take advantage in the parts of Crewe where employment and salaries are still not where we would want them to be. I know that the plans have the full support of my hon. Friends for Congleton and for Eddisbury. Leighton's bid is also supported by both Cheshire West and Cheshire East, as our local authorities, and the Cheshire clinical commissioning group. There is also cross-party support with the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury).

The chair of our newly formed Crewe Town Board, Doug Kinsman, has been keen that the whole board support the proposal, and the rest of the board have seen how important Leighton is to Crewe, both economically and in improving the health and wellbeing of Crewe residents. Importantly, we have the support of those residents. So far, more than 1,000 people have signed our petition supporting the hospital in its efforts to make it into the final eight. The residents include Betty Church, whose daughter was born in the hospital the year it opened, 1972, and Steve Burnham, who

explained that not only were three members of his family born there, but his mum worked there for 40 years.

I asked residents to tell me about their experiences and share why they were supporting the campaign. Janice Butler wrote:

“My husband, elderly mother-in-law and father-in-law have all received fantastic help and treatment here. The hospital serves a huge population now and help to improve and upgrade its facilities is desperately needed and has been for many years. Despite the huge pressures, we have experienced excellent help here.”

Susan Marsh wrote:

“I started work at Leighton in 1972 and worked there for 35 years. Since retiring I have been a patient there numerous times. It has changed in the care it delivers since my day, both numbers and treatments. With a new build it will be able to continue to grow along with the population in the area, which will be badly needed.”

I will finish with what a current staff member said about Leighton, both as somewhere to work and as somewhere their family received treatment. Sophie Morris has shared her perspective from what must have been a difficult time in her life, which makes her words even more powerful. She wrote:

“I have worked at Leighton A&E for 6 years now and over that time the demand on the hospital has increased massively. Our last few summers have been busier than most winters. Shortly after starting as a nurse in A&E, my husband became ill. We found out he had terminal throat cancer when I was 7 months pregnant. From beginning to end we had fantastic support and care from all over the hospital.

I think it says a lot about the place and the fabric that is the staff who work there, that I could carry on working in a place that holds so many raw memories. As a body of staff we work so hard to look after the people who come to us for help, now we need some help so that we can provide the care that is demanded of us. Now we need some help so that we can provide the care that is demanded of us.”

I could not have put it better myself.

I know that the Minister will hear the case for investment in many other sites. He will need to consider all the applications carefully. I will work with residents to campaign for this much-needed investment, whatever the outcome of this opportunity, but I hope that I have left him in no doubt today that the case for Leighton to be included is a strong one and there is a whole community of people who want to see it succeed.

9.44 am

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma, as was alluded to by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan). This debate is enormously important. Hospitals are often the heart of our communities. The staff in our hospitals, whatever job they do, do a fantastic job, and it is right and proper that we pay tribute to them. But the environment that they work in is also vital to them.

To give a little history lesson from Hemel Hempstead and South West Hertfordshire, which is my part of the world, we had three hospitals—three acute hospitals—until just over 20 years ago when St Albans was closed as an acute hospital. The promise was made at the time that the emergency facility would be picked up by Hemel Hempstead and partly by Watford. That promise was made and then, sadly, Hemel Hempstead was closed—I am not going to get into party politics, but it was by the

previous Administration—and we fought tooth and nail, as most constituency MPs would, to save it. Now we have partly elective surgery for non-emergency care at St Albans and I have a clinic—there is no other way I can describe it—at Hemel hospital. Three quarters, if not more, of my hospital is boarded up or vandalised on a site worth hundreds of thousands or millions of pounds.

I was thrilled—absolutely thrilled—when the Prime Minister announced at the general hospital in Watford, which is the only acute hospital we have left in our part of the world, that we were in the top six to get a brand-new hospital. That thrilled us not because we wanted suddenly to bring back our hospital—we understand the restrictions on doing so and what a modern hospital needs to provide for a community—but within hours of the Prime Minister announcing that we were in the top six and that there was the funding, unlike what it sounds as though the management did in my hon. Friend's constituency, the management ruled out a new hospital on a greenfield site.

As for many of my colleagues, the population in my part of the world on the edge of London is booming. We have a thriving economy, and we have more jobs than we actually have people to fill them, even after the pandemic. The population is growing massively, and I have 20,000 homes coming to my own constituency in the next 15 years. The logic of not building a new hospital on an available greenfield site is confusing to everybody, especially to those who know that Watford hospital is a Victorian hospital next to the Watford Football Club ground in the middle of a Victorian town. All we have been offered is a refurbishment of Watford and a running down even more of the Hemel site.

What fascinates me is that the West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust seems to be completely unaccountable to the politicians who are giving it the money to look after care in our constituencies. I know that the Health and Care Bill going through Parliament at the moment is going to address that going forwards, but it does not address the historical problem going backwards. The trust spent millions of pounds proving that we cannot have a new hospital on a greenfield site, rather than actually spending some of its consultancy money proving that we could have it on a greenfield site.

My constituents had been campaigning to save the Hemel hospital long before I was around, and there is cross-party support in our part of the world for saying, “Watford is not the right place, and it is not a new hospital. It is a refurbished hospital in completely the wrong place. Please see sense.” I fully understand that Watford constituents are worried they might lose their hospital, but they will not lose it because nothing is going to close until the new one opens. However, we have already lost ours, and the largest town in Hertfordshire has a clinic, with proposals for no intermediate care beds whatsoever and with pathology being taken away as we speak.

The point I want to make to the Minister is that, when we look at the bids that come in, we have to be careful that trusts have done what they were supposed to do, which is to look at the best possible options for the community they are supposed to serve, in the same way that we are serving them, rather than be blindfolded by the situation. In my case, the trust seems fixated with

[Sir Mike Penning]

one site in the middle of a town and next to a football stadium, which by anybody's logic would seem to be ludicrous.

I wish Watford every success—they may well stay up again this season. I am not a Watford fan, although most of my constituents are. I am sad to say I am a Spurs supporter, and that comes with a lot of problems, as we know. However, when Watford play at home, there is a massive knock-on effect on the hospital next door. Believe it or not the trust gives up some of its parking spaces to the football club, which is an historical agreement.

I can give an instance of when an ambulance was turned away from the route it would normally take into the hospital because Watford were playing at home. I am not blaming Watford and I am not blaming the police for this; it is just a logistical problem. The ambulance was turned away and sent on a different route as the road was closed because of the home game. I said to the police officer in charge, "If one of your officers had been injured, what would you have done? Would you have allowed that ambulance through?" He said, "Of course, we would have done." The guy in the back of the ambulance that was trying to get to hospital had had a heart attack; fortunately he survived.

That is the sort of illogical thinking that is going on in some of the trusts, though clearly not in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich. In my trust, its unaccountability to do what is right for the people it serves seems to be blindfolded. I politely ask the Minister, as he knows I have been pushing on this for more years than I can remember, please do not trust the management of my trust to give the full information. We want a new hospital on a greenfield site. I have letters showing that there is £590 million available for that, but not for refurbishment.

9.50 am

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) on securing this important debate on the new hospitals building programme. I warmly welcome the Government's commitment to 48 new hospitals and the funding that was included in the spending review.

My local hospital, the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn, serves 300,000 people across Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire, and is in dire need of modernisation. QEH is one of the best-buy hospitals that have proved to be anything but. It is more than a decade beyond its planned lifespan and has real issues with planks of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete—RAAC—that are structurally deficient.

The Standing Committee on Structural Safety issued an alert regarding RAAC planks two years ago, having first warned in 1999 of problems with them. That warning came after the collapse of a school roof. As much as 80% of QEH's decaying and ageing estate is RAAC-planked; it is the most propped hospital in the country, which is nothing to boast about, with more than 200 props supporting the cracking roof in more than 50 areas across the hospital. The trust's risk register has a red rating, with a direct risk to life and safety of

patients, visitors and staff, due to the potential catastrophic failure of the roof structure. The critical care unit had to close for two weeks earlier this year as a result, while mitigation measures were put in place.

Although the trust is managing that risk, and the £20 million provided by the Department of Health and Social Care and the Minister for some of the most immediate issues is very welcome, the funding is but a sticking-plaster for the problem. The Minister knows he has an invitation to come and look at the modular endoscopy unit that is being constructed to allow the decant and fixing of fail-safes. As well as the very real structural issues, the layout of the hospital does not meet modern care pathways. There are too few consulting rooms, there is poor co-location of services and there are wards less than half the size of national guidance. That impacts on both patient experience and infection control.

In short, the hospital needs to be replaced. There is a once in a generation opportunity to fix this and a compelling case for QEH to be one of the new eight schemes for which the Government are currently holding a competition. The Queen Elizabeth Trust has submitted an expression of interest for a single-phase new build that will meet current and future demand, with many thousands of homes planned in the area. The need is strong; QEH covers areas of deprivation, with poor health outcomes, and is in the Government's priority areas for levelling up.

The plans put forward by the trust will eliminate RAAC from the hospital, but it is not just about replacing defective buildings. It is also an opportunity to transform and modernise local healthcare, integrating primary, community, mental health, acute, social care and third sectors in a health and wellbeing village. It will also promote sustainability, using modern methods of construction and net zero principles, incorporating the digital-first approach.

The project is well advanced and highly deliverable, with a strategic outline case well developed. It is backed by 4,000 staff at the hospital, and more than 15,000 people have signed a petition in support. The borough and county councils are on board, as are the regional NHS and at least seven right hon. and hon. Members whose constituents are served by the Queen Elizabeth. An acute hospital is essential in the area and the plans would deliver major improvements in care, patient outcomes and staff experience. An alternative multi-phased plan has also been submitted, although that would not deliver the same benefits or value for money.

Now is the opportunity to deliver a new hospital and support the trust's strategy to be rated "good", then "outstanding", and to be the best rural district general hospital in the country. The Department of Health and Social Care has already committed to the removal of RAAC from the estate, and its risk will only continue to worsen. By including QEH in the new hospital programme, the inevitable need for replacement will become a funded programme, rather than an unplanned demand repeatedly requiring emergency capital funding. The people of North West Norfolk and beyond deserve nothing less.

9.55 am

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich

(Dr Mullan) on securing this important debate. I am glad to speak once again in this place about my campaign for a new Airedale hospital in my constituency. I have raised the subject in Westminster and met the Minister on several occasions.

To set the scene about why we need a new, rebuilt Airedale hospital, similarly to the case that has just been made, my hospital suffers immensely from aerated concrete. The hospital opened in the 1970s, construction having started in the 1960s. Although the hospital's original life expectancy was 30 years, we are now in its 51st year. The 1960s design sadly leaves a huge legacy of structural failings. Some 83% of the hospital is constructed from aerated concrete, which is in the roof, floors and ceilings. In total there are 50,000 aerated concrete panels in the hospital—five times more than any other hospital affected by that issue.

Aerated concrete is not the only unfortunate hangover from 1960s hospital design. The Airedale is also the largest flat-roofed hospital of any NHS asset in the country and, given that my constituency has some of the wettest weather in the UK, that leads to severe leakage. Unfortunately, the Airedale has more recorded leaks than any other hospital in the UK. Since being elected I have made several visits to the hospital, including up to the roof, where I have seen these issues for myself. I have also been shown parts of the hospital that are closed to the public to mitigate the risks from the aerated concrete and the flat roof.

Aerated concrete panels, such as those found in Airedale hospital, are prone to fail when deflections are recorded between 50 mm and 90 mm. More and more panels are constantly getting to this risk deflection. To put it bluntly, if swift action is not taken then the possibility of a collapse within the structure of the Airedale will constantly rise. We only need look back to 2019, when a school roof unfortunately collapsed because it had been constructed from aerated concrete. Such a collapse would be unthinkable, which is why we need to take swift action.

The Airedale trust has informed me that if it were to experience a closure, even a temporary one, then 45,000 referrals to treatment, 60,000 diagnostic tests, including MRI scans and ultrasound therapy treatments, and 2,000 maternity deliveries would be affected. That cannot arise and I cannot stress how important it is that it is avoided. I firmly believe that that can only be done by delivering a new Airedale hospital.

The catchment area for Airedale hospital covers a huge rural area. I have the full support of my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Julian Smith) and my hon. Friends the Members for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson) and for Shipley (Philip Davies), all of whose constituents use the Airedale hospital alongside mine. We also have to look at the wider area. The local authority has proposed plans for 3,000 new houses to be built in my area alone, which will add pressure on existing hospital services.

It is fantastic that the Government have announced that there will be a further eight new hospitals, on top of the 40 already announced. I was proud to see that in September the Airedale trust submitted its bid for one of those final places. It is an ambitious bid, detailed and affordable. The plans are convenient, in that they will not disrupt the current workings of the Airedale and are following a fully strategic outlined case.

A full appraisal recommended that the most cost-effective and future-proofed solution would be a new Airedale hospital on the grounds already owned by the trust. Indeed, the trust owns 43 acres of land and can build a new hospital while keeping existing operations until a transfer to the new build. The plans have a strong environmental case and outline the Airedale trust's vision to be Europe's first carbon-neutral and fully digitally enabled hospital, with the capability to generate renewable energy on site.

May I once again request a visit to Airedale hospital by my hon. Friend the Minister? I want to raise again the urgency of the case, as I did last week in the main Chamber to the Prime Minister. The Airedale needs and deserves a rebuild, and I will continue to do everything that I can to stand up for my constituents and press the case.

10 am

Jill Mortimer (Hartlepool) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) for securing the debate.

The coronavirus pandemic has thrown health inequalities in this country into stark relief. Those living in the poorest constituencies of England and Wales have been twice as likely to die from the virus as those in more prosperous constituencies. Figures from the Office for National Statistics covering March to May 2020 show that those living in the poorest 10% of England, which includes my constituency of Hartlepool, died at a rate of 128.3 per 100,000, whereas in the wealthiest 10% the rate was 58.8 per 100,000.

Any death in any part of the country is a tragedy, but such grotesque levels of health inequality cannot be allowed to continue in the world's fifth-richest country. That is why I fully support the bid by the North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust for a new hospital by 2030 to replace the current North Tees hospital in Stockton—another hospital crumbling with concrete cancer that has outlived its lifespan, and facing huge remedial costs.

The replacement hospital must be built in an equitable location for all residents north of the Tees, and I have a site available in my constituency—one of the most deprived areas of the UK, where health inequalities have been most apparent. The number of people suffering from a range of health problems is consistently higher in Hartlepool than the England average. Those include cancer, depression, asthma, obesity, heart disease and high blood pressure. As a result, life expectancy in Hartlepool is significantly and regrettably below the national average. If the Government are serious about tackling health inequality in the UK, they must start in Hartlepool.

Despite the sheer scale of deprivation and health inequality in my constituency, healthcare services in Hartlepool have not been expanding over the past decade, but shrinking. My constituents are often required to travel to the currently crumbling North Tees hospital in Stockton for urgent or specialist treatment. For example, owing to the lack of a doctor-led maternity ward in Hartlepool, mothers-to-be in my constituency must travel 20 miles in labour to the nearest hospital if there are potential complications, which, sadly, commonly occur with the prevailing underlying health conditions in my community. During the birth of their baby, mothers

[Jill Mortimer]

have to undertake that terrible journey to a hospital that is crumbling. A child's first experience of this world should not be health inequality.

I appreciate that the coronavirus pandemic has placed unprecedented pressures on healthcare services in this country and I welcome the record levels of investment that the Government are injecting into the NHS to tackle waiting lists and treatment backlogs, but I fear that will not be enough to reverse decades of neglect and indifference on the part of my predecessors. Only a new hospital can do that. Levelling up must mean more than simple investment in transport and general infrastructure. Levelling up life expectancy across the country should be a priority. Plans must be put in place now to abolish health inequality in the UK and to ensure that our ability to live a good and decent life is not determined by an arbitrary postcode lottery.

10.4 am

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair today, Mr Sharma. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) on securing the debate. He is absolutely right to say that our hospitals are the centre of our communities. That is absolutely the case in my constituency of Basingstoke. Of course, care is provided by our doctors, our nurses and all the staff involved in running the hospital, but it is also one of my largest local employers. I congratulate the Minister, who I am pleased to see still in his place, on all the work he is doing to ensure that the Government's commitments to build 40 new hospitals by 2030, the other eight previously committed to and upgrades to more than 70 hospitals, are being progressed as fast as they can be.

My hospital is a similar age to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich. Like his, Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital was built to last 30 years, back in the 1970s. The backlog of maintenance reflects the fact that it should have been replaced many years ago. Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, an excellent trust that serves my community, was already well advanced with plans for a new hospital when the Government also identified that the current hospital needed replacing and included it in the renewal programme.

Basingstoke hospital has served our community extremely well since the 1970s, but the buildings are reaching the end of their useful life, for many of the reasons that Members have gone through. Those buildings were not built to last any longer. Furthermore, estimates show that the population that is served by the Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust will increase by around 23% between 2018 and 2050. Unlike many areas of the country, Basingstoke has continued to build houses not just for the last two decades but for the last four decades. We have grown extraordinarily as a town over that time, served by the same hospital. Our population is therefore rapidly ageing, with all the implications that brings for our health services. Our over-75s population in Hampshire will have increased by a shocking 35% between 2017 and 2024. I should not be surprised about that, given the level of house building.

So many of the people who moved to Basingstoke when it rapidly expanded in the 1960s and 1970s are reaching an age where they are much more reliant on

the health services available. The Government need to make sure that they follow through not only on more recent commitments to building houses, particularly in the south-east, but on the commitments that date back many decades, when people were encouraged from London out to places such as Basingstoke. That is an ageing population, and the Government need to ensure that the right facilities are in place for that much bigger population.

I am fortunate in Basingstoke that all the organisations involved in planning for the new hospital are working together in exemplary fashion, through an organisation that has been formed called Hampshire Together, which is all about modernising our hospitals and health services. That organisation firmly welcomed the Prime Minister's announcements in October that all NHS trusts that receive seed funding to develop a business case for a new hospital project as part of phase 2 of the health infrastructure plan 2 programme, including Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, will be fully funded to deliver those by 2030.

The trust was especially pleased to note that Hampshire Together had been earmarked for inclusion in the first group of HIP 2 projects due for completion. The trust's plans are well developed, with a preferred site, which the Minister already knows a little about, at junction 7 on the M3, which has been identified by the ambulance services as the best location to save more lives, providing acute care for hundreds of thousands of people living in the rapidly expanding communities in north and mid-Hampshire. The planning authorities of Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council and Hampshire County Council are working actively and positively together, and Hampshire hospitals have been working to put together their business case and have forwarded their cases to the Department. They are very much looking forward to putting those cases out to public consultation as soon as possible.

Because our house building has been so rapid in Basingstoke throughout the 50 years that our hospital has been in existence, there is a need for a new hospital now. We would value a commitment from the Minister on the timelines and the next round of seed funding, so that we can continue to develop the business case and will be able to start building from 2025. I also renew my offer for the Minister to visit Basingstoke to see the site that we have already earmarked for the construction of the hospital. It is a greenfield site, so that residents' enjoyment of the hospital facilities will not be disrupted during the building process.

10.10 am

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Sharma. I congratulate the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) on securing the debate. As a fellow Cheshire Member, our paths will no doubt cross as we get involved in the megalithic integrated care system that covers our area, and it is good to see healthy representation from Cheshire Members, which shows the interest and passion that we have for improved health services in our area. He mentioned that he volunteered to use his medical skills on the frontline during the pandemic, and we thank him for his efforts, just as we thank everyone who contributed to the fight against covid, be it in the NHS, in social care or in any of the other many sectors that

played their part. We recognise and value the commitment that was made by so many people over such a long period of time.

As the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich set out, hospitals are more than the buildings themselves. It is the staff who make hospitals, and he brought that to the fore in his comments. He said that the site of Leighton Hospital has exceeded its original lifespan—I think it is as old as I am, which is a concern. Hopefully, I will not be up for a rebuild any time soon. It was a common theme of contributions to the debate that a lot of the buildings in Members' constituencies have reached the end of their natural lifespans. It would be useful to hear from the Minister whether any assessment has been made of how many hospital buildings, and buildings across the wider NHS, have already exceeded their original lifespans. The hon. Gentleman made a compelling case for why a new hospital needs to be built in Crewe, and he mentioned that the local population has grown considerably.

Mike Amesbury: I thank my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for giving way. Of course, Leighton Hospital is part of the Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which also includes Victoria Infirmary in Northwich. This would be a real opportunity to capture investment across the campuses, which serve a number of our constituents, and I would certainly welcome my hon. Friend's support on that. As a Cheshire MP, it would certainly be very welcome indeed.

Justin Madders: My hon. Friend probably needs to direct his pleas to the Minister more than me—at this stage, of course—but I would be delighted to visit the facility with him. I am sure that he will make a strong case for investment, as other Members have done. There is an issue with how the interplay works between some of the competing bids for what is obviously a very competitive process, which I will return to later. Like the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Edward Timpson), my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury) has shown that there is cross-party support for the case for a new hospital that was made by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich, who also set out why this is good for patients. He talked about some of the issues around privacy, dignity and infection control, and he said that a new build gives us an opportunity to invest in modern digital infrastructure. Of course, he also mentioned important stuff to do with COP26 and the energy efficiency of a new build. Those were all well-made points.

We also heard from the right hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning), who made a persuasive and passionate case as to why the current plans need to be reconsidered. He made a very interesting point about the accountability of trusts. He is probably not aware that the Minister and I have been debating this issue in Committee for a number of weeks, and it is fair to say that we have differing views as to how accountable the current system is and whether it will actually change at all when the Health and Care Bill receives Royal Assent. There is an issue with how large trusts have their own priorities, which are not necessarily in tune with the rest of the wider population and healthcare system.

The hon. Member for North West Norfolk (James Wild) made a very strong case for the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn; he highlighted the critical

nature of the maintenance issues there, which are clearly having an effect on patient care now. The Minister will not be surprised to know that I will be referring to the maintenance backlog during my comments today. The hon. Member also set out very well how new builds can not only improve infection control, but enhance the patient experience. We should always remember that the patient journey is central to these things. A new hospital always has to have the interests of patients, and their perspective, at the heart of its plans.

The hon. Member for Keighley (Robbie Moore) made a strong case for why a new hospital is needed in Airedale. Again, it is a building that is past its original lifespan; it has critical infrastructure issues. Describing it as the "leakiest hospital in the UK" is not something the hon. Member will want to repeat for much longer. It shows again that many of these issues have been building up for some time.

I was very interested in what the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Jill Mortimer) said about health inequalities; it was an important point, and perhaps a broader one than some of the others that have been made. She is absolutely right that the pandemic has shone a light on the existing health inequalities in this country. I agree that if we are serious about levelling up, reducing health inequalities has to be central to any policy.

The right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) made a compelling case about how investment is needed for her new hospital, and how the change and growth in local population has created additional demand. It is an important point that, because of the way that her town has built up, there is more demand from an increasingly ageing population.

All the Members have made very good cases today; if it was based on the commitment and passion of individual Members, the Minister's job would be quite straightforward. However, I know there will be many other demands on the departmental budget. There is a serious point here. We need to have transparency on the criteria that will be applied when the decisions are made. It would be fair to say, if we look at levelling-up bids, there has been some consternation that the decisions are not always made on the merits of the case. It is important that the Department is crystal clear on why particular projects are getting the go-ahead, and why others may have to wait a little longer.

I am sure that the Minister would be disappointed if I did not make a reference to whether the Prime Minister's claim to be building 48 new hospitals is in fact an accurate one. We take with a large pinch of salt the definitions from the Department's playbook that the following count as a new hospital: they say this includes

"a new wing of an existing hospital (provided it contains a whole clinical service, such as maternity or children's services)."

They also say this includes

"A major refurbishment and alteration of all but the building frame or main structure, delivering a significant extension to useful life which includes major or visible changes to the external structure."

That may well be investment in buildings—which is of course welcome—but it stretches credibility to say that those are new hospitals. I will not repeat the whole debate again on whether those descriptions can be classed as new hospitals, except to say that the Minister will no doubt rely on his VAT notices to reach that

[Justin Madders]

figure of 48: we will rely on the good sense of the British public to judge whether a new hospital is indeed a new hospital. When we get to 2030, we will see how many new hospitals we actually have—although it is possible that both the Minister and I will have moved on by that point.

Let us return to the present day, move away from the headlines and the spin, and ask some specific questions about the programme. I will start with the cost issue. It is my understanding that the projects identified in phase 1 have been promised a total of £2.7 billion, although some reports suggest that a £400 million price cap is being applied to each scheme, even though some of the published plans for those schemes have exceeded that limit already. Could the Minister comment on whether there is in fact an upper cash limit on particular projects, and whether it is indeed £400 million?

Almost exactly a month ago, the Prime Minister made an announcement on round 2 of the health infrastructure plan, in which, incidentally, only three out of the 25 hospitals are in the whole of the north of England. I think that says something about the Government's commitment to levelling up and bolsters the case made by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich to push forward for a new building in Crewe. Could the Minister advise what period and how much of the total programme the £3.7 billion mentioned in that announcement covers? Could the Minister also advise if the £4.2 billion, announced in the spending review last week in relation to new hospitals, is the same money the Prime Minister announced on 2 October or in addition to that? If it is additional, what period does that £4.2 billion cover? We want a little clarity on how much has actually been allocated and the period that it covers. I am sure the Minister realises that, even if we add up all those figures, it would not be the total cost of all those projects moving forward to 2030.

We have had three separate announcements over the last year. I make that point because the foreword to the health infrastructure plan talks about ending the “piecemeal and uncoordinated approach”. We have an investment plan spanning a decade, but the necessary investment has been announced for only the first half of that decade, at best, to come out in dribs and drabs. I suggest that the Minister might need to read the foreword to the plan again to see whether the ambitions set out there are being met.

NHS Providers has said that the actual cost of the planned building projects would be around £20 billion, most of which will need to be found in the next few years. Even building an average-sized new hospital costs around £500 million, which rather puts the spotlight on the supposed £400 million cost limit I referred to earlier. I wonder if the Minister could put a total cost—

Sir Mike Penning: I think we have to be slightly careful when referring to costs such as that £500 million. Built into that is inflation, because of the way the Green Book works, because of the risk. I had to deal with this on the roads programme as roads Minister: what happens is that a figure is set out, but it is not the same as the actual cost of the build project. That is probably where some of that cost anomaly comes from. The Treasury Green Book insists on inflation of that price when the

build price is much lower; in my case, £500 million was £420 million in the Birmingham build. We have to be careful of trusts that do not want to do that; for example, my trust—the West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust—inflates the cost into £600 million because it does not want to do it.

Justin Madders: I will reflect on the right hon. Gentleman's comments. That leads on to another point I wanted to raise with the Minister: we are aware that the economy is currently in something of a flux in a whole range of sectors, in terms of finding the right people and the right skills, and construction is not immune to that. Do the plans include any wriggle room to take account of the fact that the cost of labour and materials is unfortunately going up quite rapidly at the moment?

NHS Providers said that

“there are still significant questions on whether the NHS will be able to meet the government's manifesto pledge to upgrade 70 hospitals and build 40 new ones given the lack of clear, long term, funding commitments beyond 2024/25.”

It also said that it awaits

“confirmation of the money that will be available to providers to tackle the £9.2bn maintenance backlog that has built up.”

The Minister will know that that has shot up in recent years, leading to cancelled operations and a 23% increase in treatments being delayed or cancelled in the last year because of infrastructure failures, and yet we are hearing very little on what is being done about that. I think the hon. Member for Eddisbury mentioned something in the region of £400 million being identified as the maintenance backlog costs at Leighton Hospital alone. We have also heard from other Members about infrastructure issues causing difficulties in their own trusts.

These problems are not new; they are the result of a decade of underfunding on both capital and revenue, with the Health Foundation reporting that

“the UK is investing significantly less in health care capital as a share of GDP compared with most other similar European countries.”

Of course, we have also seen frequent revenue raids on capital in the last few years. If these plans are to be successful, those raids must stop. I hope the Minister will be able to guarantee that there will be no revenue raids on capital for this programme in the next decade. I would also be grateful if he could set out the Department's plan to tackle the maintenance backlog.

A few moments ago, I mentioned the interplay between large infrastructure projects and other capital requirements at a system level, particularly around how we get capital investment into primary and community care. Taking my own patch, Ellesmere Port, which I know best, we have several GP premises in the town centre that are past their best—past their useful life, perhaps—they are not really suitable in these covid-conscious times. We are not short of more modern, available premises in the town centre, where there might even be greater potential for integration with other services

However, these projects take time and money, and some decision must be taken at a system level to prioritise them. I think that would be an important step forward for improving access in my community and dealing with some of the health inequalities we have talked about. I

recognise that sometimes it is a fact of life that the bigger players—the acute trusts—will always be higher profile than individual practices for attracting funds and investment. In many ways, this is an echo of the debate that the Minister and I have had in recent weeks on the Health and Care Bill Committee. I mention it again because, particularly with capital investment, there is a danger that primary and community services will struggle to have their voices heard against some of the bigger players in an extremely large integrated care system.

I will end with a few comments from stakeholders regarding the Chancellor's statement last week. The King's Fund said that

"the real game changer would have been clear funding for a workforce plan. Chronic workforce shortages across the health and care system heap further pressure on overstretched staff who are exhausted from the pandemic. Yet despite pledges, promises and manifesto commitments, the government has failed to use this Spending Review to answer the question of how it will chart a path out of the staffing crisis by setting out the funding for a multi-year workforce strategy."

The Health Foundation said that

"new money for technology and buildings, although vital, is of limited value without additional staff. A workforce plan backed by investment in training are critical and we await details of both so that the NHS's recovery can be secured."

The Nuffield Trust said:

"It is striking that there is a lack of strategic workforce investment alongside this boost in funding for facilities. Staffing is recognised as the number one issue for the sustainability of the health service. Recovery from the pandemic not only rests on investment but on hard-working staff as well."

Finally, the NHS Confederation said that

"to ensure the extra money delivers for the public, a strong and supported NHS workforce is needed. This is why training and increasing the supply of doctors, nurses and other health and care professionals is so important at a time when public polling recognizes that staffing is the biggest problem facing the NHS."

While we welcome the investment in new buildings, we hope that none ends up being a white elephant, because the elephant in the room is that we could find ourselves in the remarkable position by 2030 that brand-new hospitals, extensions, or refurbishments are delivered, but are not fully operational because of a failure over the preceding decade to tackle the workforce crisis. That is here and now, and it needs to be tackled in the short, medium and long term. That is the final plea I make to the Minister: these investments are welcome, but we must ensure that we have a plan so that these buildings are fully staffed when they are up and running.

Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair): Before I ask the Minister to contribute, I will just say that I will be joining that long queue very soon to lobby for Ealing Hospital's future, but not this morning.

10.29 am

The Minister for Health (Edward Argar): I am very grateful to you, Mr Sharma; that was a deft and adept use of the Chair. It is a genuine pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

I pay particular attention and pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) for securing this debate. The case that he makes for Leighton Hospital has cross-party support, as we have

seen, including from the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury) and, indeed, from the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders). This has been a cross-party and very well-tempered debate, and as ever I am grateful to the shadow Minister for the tenor and tone of his comments. We have spent the past couple of months sitting opposite each other in a Bill Committee, which reported yesterday. Clearly, so shocked were we at the prospect of not continuing to sit opposite each other that here we are in Westminster Hall this morning.

I am also grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for her kind words in highlighting the fact that I am still in this role. In the same vein, I should say that the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston is still in his role, having served as shadow Minister even longer than I have served in my role. There is some value in that, because too often in this place we see a very rapid churn of Ministers and shadow Ministers. Issues such as those we are grappling with today need, by their very nature, a long-term view and a long-term understanding.

I join the shadow Minister in paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich, not only for introducing this debate but for his work on the frontline. He was typically humble about that work, but his contribution was significant and he should be proud of it. He quite rightly paid tribute to all of those in our health and care system, as we all should—and should continue to do—for the work that they have done; not only the work they have done throughout the pandemic, which has been incredibly challenging, but the work they do every day, year in and year out, on the frontline to help to keep our constituents safe.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the importance of the topic that we are debating today. Buildings are hugely important. They give our clinicians, our frontline staff and our ancillary staff the context or the environment in which they can do their best. Therapeutics, research, new diagnostic kit, technology: all these things are hugely important because, as the shadow Minister alluded to, they allow the beating heart of our NHS—the workforce; the people—to do their job and for want of a better way of putting it, to make the magic happen in those environments. It is incumbent on us to give them that environment and these tools, so that they can do their best.

Various right hon. and hon. Members have highlighted the context in which we approach this debate. Many areas are undergoing significant development, growth in housing and increases in demand. There are demographic changes, with ageing populations in some areas needing increased hospital facilities.

Coupled with that, the context was set out again by many right hon. and hon. Members, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Robbie Moore), who spoke about the state of the estate, for want of a better way of putting it. There are hospitals that have, in a sense, served for far longer than they were designed to serve. They have been kept going, but that poses challenges, not just with reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, or RAAC, planks, which I will turn to in a moment, but operationally with the task of running them, given the day-to-day choices that clinicians and managers have to make to put fixes in place, so that they can continue to provide services.

[*Edward Argar*]

The shadow Minister asked several questions. I will address one or two of them now, then come on to the others later. He talked about the workforce, whom I have just mentioned. I say to him that the number of doctors is up, the number of nurses is up, and the number of radiographers and radiologists is up since 2010. We have continued to grow our NHS workforce. Do we need to continue to do more to do that? Of course we do. That is why the Government are committed to, for example, the 50,000 more nurses that was a manifesto commitment, and we are on course to deliver that by the end of this Parliament.

We need to be conscious, and I know that the shadow Minister is, that as we talk, for example, about elective recovery and getting waiting lists and waiting times down, we need to be honest with our electors and the British public that that is a huge job that will take time. That is because the workforce who will deliver those things are the same workforce who have been through the pandemic, and they need time to recover, emotionally and physically, from what they have had to do over the past year and a half. Often, we hear some commentators saying, “Ah, yes, but some were in the ICU wards, or in A&E, and a lot of others wouldn’t have been on the frontline.” Well, the reality is that, for example, surgeons who may not have been operating on their usual lists will have gone back to the wards to assist their colleagues, and we know that a team is needed to perform surgery. The anaesthetists will certainly have been working flat out during the pandemic, as will the theatre nurses, so we need to ensure, as we deliver our recovery plan for the NHS, that we give the workforce the support they need to recover.

Let me turn to the specifics of the programme. My hon. Friends the Members for Crewe and Nantwich, for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and for Eddisbury (Edward Timpson), and the hon. Member for Weaver Vale all made, as one would expect, a passionate, well-informed and cogent case for investment in a new hospital at Leighton. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich will not be surprised when I say that the expressions of interest period has closed. The expressions of interest are all being considered carefully and a decision will be made next spring on the long list to whittle them down, with further work to determine the final eight. I therefore hope that he will allow me not to be drawn on the specifics of the merits or otherwise of his case while that process is under way, but as ever he makes a strong and powerful case on behalf of his constituents.

In the context of the next eight, the shadow Minister asked about criteria and how the process would take place. That is set out and published on the programme website, but the key considerations are these. Does a scheme or proposal have the potential significantly to transform and improve the quality and quantity of care available to a community? Is there a safety or other pressing need that has to be addressed in the system? Equally, we will be looking to achieve a degree of geographical spread to ensure equity and fairness—levelling up. With any of these schemes, as hon. Members would expect, we will look at whether the proposals are clear and can be delivered on budget, and whether there is the capacity and capability to deliver on them.

Mike Amesbury: One such scheme, for which I and my hon. Friends the Members for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) and for Halton (Derek Twigg) and the hon. Member for Warrington South (Andy Carter) have been campaigning, is two campuses for Warrington and Halton trust. They seem to meet those criteria, so I look forward to an assessment and conclusion in the not too distant future.

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who quite rightly never misses an opportunity to champion his constituents’ interests.

Hon. Members will be aware that the interest around the country is significant. A significant number of expressions of interest have been submitted, so whittling them down will be a competitive and challenging process, but we undertake to be as clear and transparent about that as we can be. I suspect that, when the final list is announced, if I do not come to the House with a statement, the shadow Minister may well UQ me, to give colleagues an opportunity to say they are very pleased or to ask why their hospital is not on the list.

Let me turn to points made by other hon. and right hon. Members. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning) will not be surprised that I will not be drawn on the specifics of the internal politics and the plans for his trust at this point. However, he quite rightly made the extremely important point that when trusts develop their plans and bring them forward, they need to carry the communities they serve with them and genuinely reflect on stakeholder input from elected Members and others, rather than—I am not saying that this is or is not the case with this trust—automatically having a preconceived idea of what the right answer is.

Sir Mike Penning *rose—*

Edward Argar: I may regret this, but I give way to my right hon. Friend.

Sir Mike Penning: The Minister might not be willing to say that my trust has preconceived the decisions it was going to make; I will, because it made its mind up long before the latest announcement. However, we are in a slightly different position from other colleagues here. We are in HIP 1—part 1 of the health infrastructure plan—and we do not want that money to be wasted. We do not want a sticking-plaster; we do not want a refurbishment in the middle of Watford. The community in my part of the world is absolutely solid on that, and if that meant that we slipped out of HIP 1 into HIP 2—I will put my neck on the block—I would be happy with that, as long as we get the right facility on a greenfield site, rather than the wrong facility as a refurbishment in the middle of Watford next to a football ground.

Edward Argar: I did not regret giving way to my right hon. Friend quite as much as I feared I might, although he may yet come back to me. As ever, he makes his point powerfully and clearly, and I suspect that, as well as my having heard it, his trust will also have heard it.

As the shadow Minister said, my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Jill Mortimer) made broader points, in addition to points about her local hospital and trust, about health inequalities and the role that the right infrastructure and staff—the right people in the right place—can play in tackling that. I have to pay

tribute to her. Within a day of her arriving in this place following her fantastic by-election victory, she had pinned me down so she could come and see me and talk about Hartlepool and health services there. Her constituents are extremely lucky to have her. She hit the ground running and has not stopped working since on behalf of her constituents.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke and I, as she alluded to, have spoken a number of times about her trust. How can I not accept her kind offer of going to the site and seeing her in her constituency? I have known her for a long time, so it is a pleasure to say yes. I would like to go there and do that, then perhaps we can discuss the plans further. She and I have met on several occasions. She is a great champion for the new hospital in her area, so I am grateful for the invitation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley—I almost said “my hon. Friend the Member for Airedale”, given the frequency with which, he raises and champions in the House at every opportunity the need for a new hospital at Airedale—is right to highlight the challenges that his trust faces, as he has done on many occasions, particularly in the context not only of the needs of his population and, the challenges of an old building that has long exceeded its intended lifetime, but also the RAAC plank issue. I know that his trust is keen to be one of the eight. I will only say to him, I am afraid, what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich, which is that the bids will be considered very carefully. I know that he will continue making the case, as he has done in the past.

Robbie Moore: Will the Minister give way?

Edward Argar: I will give way briefly to my hon. Friend, then I will turn to the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk (James Wild).

Robbie Moore: Can the Minister clarify how the final eight will be decided and will structural risk profile be a key consideration?

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend, quite wisely, presses his advantage. I can give him some reassurance on that, as I did to the shadow Minister when talking about the criteria, that safety and risk will not be the only criterion, but that will be a key factor in the consideration.

I turn now to the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk. The other day in the Chamber, I inadvertently paid tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Duncan Baker) for the work being done by my hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk in one of my responses. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for North West Norfolk, who has quite rightly raised with me on several occasions the Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn and the challenges posed by RAAC planks there. I know he is campaigning both in Parliament and locally on that issue. Courtesy of him, I have met his trust in the past and we have provided more than £20 million in this financial year for critical risk remediation. I know that, quite understandably, my hon. Friend is saying very clearly that that is welcome and will help, but it will not solve the problem. He will continue to press the case for a new hospital. He, too, has kindly invited me to his constituency, so I think I am due to go on tour around the country at some point, visiting various hospitals and colleagues.

Turning to some of the broader underlying themes that have emerged in the debate, I will seek to answer some of the questions posed by the shadow Minister. He gently tempted me on definitions. I am clear that the definitions we have—the three key elements he alluded to—not only pass the common-sense test and the understanding of what the reasonable person in the street would consider a new hospital. Equally, he teased me gently about VAT notice 708. I mentioned that at the Dispatch Box because—he says that we should be transparent and have a logical reason for how we define, do and choose things—our starting point was that there can be a VAT exemption for new builds, but not necessarily for refurbishment. I took that as a starting point for developing the common-sense definition. A lot of what he sees in the definitions is reflected in the same one used there, so there is consistency.

The shadow Minister talked about skills and inflation and whether we will have the people to build the hospitals. He is right to do that, because, as we have seen following the bounce back after the pandemic, builders and construction firms are very much in demand. There is pressure on materials as well, not just inflationary pressure, but on quantities. That is one of the reasons why, even before the impact of the pandemic, this is a phased programme. These hospitals will be built over a period of years up to 2030, allowing for market capacity.

Equally, one of the reasons why we have set out this long-term plan is so that we can make the market aware of what our plans are. If there is certainty in the market that the hospitals will be coming through, we will see firms investing, because they know there is potential for long-term business and work for them. That is one of the ways in which we have helped to handle that.

The shadow Minister asked about funding, and what would be available for what period. He will be aware of the initial £3.7 billion that has been allocated to this project, which takes us to 2024. Future funding will be subject to future spending reviews for that period. Between the 2024 period and 2030 there will be a general election at some point, and I suspect that may play a part in the spending review as well. We have the funding up front to get going with this programme, and off the top of my head, I think we already have eight hospitals in construction. The Cumberland Cancer Hospital has already been opened by my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary. Over this period, we will continue to start further construction of new hospitals.

The shadow Minister also alluded to geography and the distribution of the hospitals. Off the top of my head, 30 of the 40 are outside London and the south-east, so we have sought to achieve geographical spread for the new hospitals and, equally, will seek to do that with the new eight. He also asked about the quantum needed for a new hospital, and he had a particular figure in mind. If he looks at the list of 40, many of them are very different hospitals, from the major acute district general hospital to a community hospital with in-patient beds; it is clearly a new hospital. The costs vary in the nature of what is built, its scale and size.

The shadow Minister also asked whether there would be a cap and whether trusts have complete freedom. No—as he would expect, there is a balance to be struck between delivering what a trust wants for its plans and the need for financial prudence and recognition of the need to safeguard taxpayers' money; it is not a limitless

[*Edward Argar*]

amount. Conversations are going on between the national team and local projects to ensure that their schemes are affordable and not hugely over budget. That is a pragmatic, ongoing process.

The shadow Minister also touched on some of the criteria for the scheme and how we are making the national scheme work. We include in this modular build modern methods of construction. We have a national set of standards for what we would expect from a new hospital, but a degree of local flexibility for the delivery of that. We recognise that each trust is slightly different, but we want to standardise where we can, because that keeps costs down and provides certainty in the market and speeds up construction. We have also built into our plans, since they were originally announced, even more ambitious green targets and energy efficiency targets for those trusts.

Justin Madders: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. He has made a valiant attempt to answer all my questions.

Edward Argar: I thought the hon. Gentleman would lob another one at me.

Justin Madders: No, but there is one that the Minister has overlooked, on the sum announced in the spending review last week. Was that additional money on top of what had been previously announced?

Edward Argar: I omitted to mention two things to the shadow Minister: the spending review and backlog maintenance—he always avails himself of the opportunity to gently raise that issue. We have seen a confirmation of the money already in place for the new hospital programme, but we have also seen further moneys announced for capital in the spending review—new money—for example, just over £5 billion for community diagnostic centres, surgical hubs and the IT infrastructure around that. We have therefore seen a reconfirmation of money, plus new money in the capital space.

I turn now to maintenance, which the shadow Minister rightly always highlights. He will know—he occasionally quotes it at me at the Dispatch Box—that backlog maintenance across the entire estate is around £9 billion-worth. That is pretty constant from the previous financial year; it has not particularly increased. It may have gone up by a tiny fraction, but it has remained broadly constant.

Mrs Miller rose—

Mike Amesbury rose—

Edward Argar: Let me just finish this point before I take interventions from my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke and then the hon. Member for Weaver Vale.

Our investment in new hospitals will also significantly reduce the backlog maintenance, because it will take out of the total a number of hospitals, some of which have been mentioned, that are being propped up day after day, with money being spent just to patch up and mend.

Mrs Miller: I thank the Minister for agreeing to come to our new, preferred site in Basingstoke—we will be grateful for that—and for his comment about backlog

maintenance. I think Basingstoke is in the top three in the country for backlog maintenance.

May I press the Minister on the timelines of the next round of seed funding to develop business cases and to be able to start building our new hospital in 2025? Clarity on some of these timelines is essential not only for our communities but for the people developing the plans, because they need to know what will happen next and have clarity on that.

Edward Argar: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, and I entirely understand her call for clarity. Each case is being looked at on an individual basis, in the allocation of the £3.7 billion. The senior responsible officer of the new hospitals programme, Natalie Forrest, is in regular discussion with each trust, but business cases, more funding to develop business cases, and movement from outline business cases to final business cases are done on a case-by-case basis by trusts. It is not the case that every one must submit them by a fixed time.

Mrs Miller rose—

Edward Argar: Let me take the hon. Member for Weaver Vale first, because I promised him that I would give way. I also want to leave a few minutes at the end for my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich to wind up.

Mike Amesbury: On the point about maintenance, several hospital buildings built in the 1970s have used Grenfell-style aluminium composite material cladding and high pressure laminate, so I assume that is part of the assessment criteria. Some have roof systems that are in a critical state.

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who raises a couple of points. Yes, roofs are a factor. In some cases—my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley talked about Airedale—there is a flat roof, which is vulnerable to heat and water, and aerated concrete planks, which is extremely challenging.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned cladding. I might be slightly out, but from memory I think that there are no hospitals with cladding in need of remediation. We put a programme in place following the Grenfell findings. Off the top of my head, I think every hospital trust has either had it removed or been assessed by the fire brigade as not having a risk. If I am wrong about that, I will of course write to him to correct the record.

Sir Mike Penning: On the point the Minister has just made, Natalie Forrest has taken on her new role. I notice that the Minister said she has been in communication with the trusts, but she has not been in communication with the MPs who have emailed her and asked her to respond to them, including me. My hospital action group and I met her predecessor and had very fruitful discussions, and Natalie Forrest would be very welcome to have a discussion with me.

Edward Argar: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. Understandably, the approach we take with right hon. and hon. Members is that correspondence is replied to by Ministers. Occasionally it is a little belated, but that is the conduit for responses.

On meetings with senior officials, I am always happy to facilitate that. Normally, the approach is that I would attend as the Minister in order to reflect the respect that

I have for right hon. and hon. Members—and I suspect that he may be about to ask me whether I will therefore do that.

Sir Mike Penning: The Minister is being very generous in giving way again. Yes, that would be great. However, I did meet Natalie Forrest's predecessor without a Minister present, and I just want an email back to say, "I acknowledge you." That might be quite nice.

Edward Argar: I suspect that the Department will have heard my right hon. Friend's point.

Mrs Miller: Will the Minister give way?

Edward Argar: Very briefly, because I want to leave some time for my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich.

Mrs Miller: This is really important. What the Minister has just said is that no part of the process should be held up because certain projects might be ahead of others. Therefore, the public consultation that stands ready to go live in Basingstoke should not be delayed for any reason other than hopefully getting ministerial approval.

Edward Argar: I take the point, and I think I understand where my right hon. Friend is coming from on this. I said that business cases will be considered on their own merits, but of course there has to be phasing of different trusts at different times and different phases of this programme, because of the profiling of that funding. Only £3.7 billion has been committed so far, with more to come in further spending reviews, so if every trust came forward and said, "We are ready"—as my right hon. Friend knows, many will do so, although I suspect she would say that her trust is genuinely ready compared with some others—we could not commit to every one of those, because we have to look at the financial profiling that the Treasury has given us about when that money becomes available. That is the point. I hope she will forgive me if I did not understand what she was getting at in the first instance, but I hope that is of some help.

I will conclude, in order to leave my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich a little time to wind up. As a Government, we are proud that we have committed to arguably the largest and most ambitious new hospital building programme in decades, with initial moneys of £3.7 billion put in place to get that programme going. Eight of those new hospitals are in construction and one is completed, and we look forward to delivering on that commitment in full by 2030.

10.56 am

Dr Mullan: I thank the Minister and the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), for the time they have taken to listen to us all in Westminster Hall today. I particularly

thank the Minister for his openness and frankness in discussing this issue. I am sure that, as Members, we all understand why he cannot commit today to the various programmes we have put forward.

I particularly thank my hon. Friends the Members for Eddisbury (Edward Timpson) and for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), who have worked very closely with me on pushing forward this campaign for Leighton Hospital. I also thank the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury) for showing cross-party support for Leighton. The contribution from my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning) reminded us all of what a unique role an MP plays in their constituency, having that individual voice on behalf of their constituents. My hon. Friends the Members for North West Norfolk (James Wild), for Hartlepool (Jill Mortimer) and for Keighley (Robbie Moore) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) all spoke powerfully and passionately about their commitment to their local hospital and the investment they are seeking.

There were a couple of common themes that I want to pick out, the first of which was about house building and population growth, which touches on work I have been doing in my constituency to address the postcode lottery when it comes to the voice of the NHS in the planning system. Very often, schools' education provision is supported by housing development, but it is not very often that our local hospitals are supported financially by developers. Those developers have a role to play, and I encourage the Minister to look at what more he could do centrally to spread best practice. I have been doing that locally, but we need that central drive to make sure that hospital developments, mental health and primary care get the money they deserve where there is new housing.

We are all facing a similar challenge when it comes to the shelf life, so to speak, of our hospital buildings. There is no shame in that—when things are built, they have a timeline—but it is very important that the Minister makes sure that for those of us who may end up disappointed, particularly in relation to the RAAC plank issue, the Government have a clear and strong story about how they are going to tackle that issue and what investment will be put in place, regardless of which hospitals make it into the final round of the hospital building programme. I will finish by inviting the Minister to Leighton Hospital, if he does not mind,

Edward Argar: What is one more visit on a tour? I am delighted to accept; it would be a pleasure.

Dr Mullan: I look forward to seeing him there with my hon. Friends the Members for Eddisbury and for Congleton. I thank the Minister for his time, and thank you, Mr Sharma, for chairing proceedings today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the hospital building programme.

Trophy Hunting Imports Ban: Endangered Species

11 am

Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair): Before we begin, I remind Members that they are expected to wear face coverings. This is in line with current Government guidance and that of the House of Commons Commission. I remind Members that they are asked by the House to have a covid lateral flow test twice a week if coming on to the parliamentary estate. That can be done either at the testing centre in the House or at home. Please also give each other and members of staff space when seated and when entering and leaving the room.

11.1 am

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered banning trophy hunting imports and the protection of endangered species.

It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma, as I do not believe I have had the pleasure before. I also welcome the Minister to her place. Before I properly begin this important debate, I would like to take the opportunity to pay tribute to a dear friend and colleague, Sir David Amess. Sir David was incredibly passionate about the problem of trophy hunting imports, and inspired colleagues across the House with his enthusiasm and leadership on the issue.

This debate takes place in the context of COP26, a conference on protecting the future of our planet and showing British leadership on global issues. Unfortunately, the Government's lack of action on their commitment to ban trophy hunting demonstrates a failure to show global leadership in protecting our planet, which is not just about carbon emissions but about protecting and preserving biodiversity and endangered species.

I would like to make three key points. First, trophy hunting damages conservation efforts around the world; therefore, the Government's commitment to ban trophy hunting is extremely important and welcome. Secondly, it is a policy with overwhelming public and parliamentary support; there is no reason to delay its implementation. Thirdly, this is not just a domestic issue. It is about Britain showing leadership in conservation on a global stage.

Action is needed urgently to show that, as well as convening world leaders in Glasgow this week to talk about protecting the planet for future generations to come, we are also giving those generations the chance to live alongside magnificent animals such as African lions, polar bears and many others that are being hunted to extinction. I will conclude by asking the Minister to assure the House that legislation is imminent and that this practice, which nobody doubts is wrong, will be banned immediately, demonstrating global leadership and significantly impacting on the practice of trophy hunting by UK citizens.

Taking each of those points in turn, the impact of trophy hunting is enormous. It threatens the already tiny populations of endangered species such as African lions. Even putting aside the morality of killing animals for fun, it is not a sustainable industry. Zimbabwe was forced to impose a moratorium on hunting lions in 2013 because numbers were so low. During that moratorium,

the survival rate of lions in the Hwange national park, the home of Cecil the lion, almost doubled. A similar moratorium in Zambia saw lion numbers double, showing the damaging effects of hunting on endangered populations.

It is not just about extinction. Trophy hunting is damaging evolution and rendering these magnificent animals less fit for their environments. Hunters seek to kill the biggest and most magnificent animals, which in turn means that only the smaller and weaker animals breed and reproduce. Humans are interfering with Darwin's principle of the survival of the fittest because the fittest are not surviving. This puts these animals at serious risk of changes, such as climate change, or of predators. The gene pool of the African lion has shrunk by 15% in the last century. Heads and bodies of lions today are significantly smaller than they were just 30 years ago.

In the Addo elephant national park in South Africa, 98% of adult female elephants have been reported as tuskless—without the tusks they use to find food and water as well as to defend themselves. In the nearby Kruger national park, where hunting is prohibited, just 3% of elephants are tuskless. Many of those elephants will now have died, and as climate change accelerates, the same fate may befall many others.

It is a long-held argument of hunters and hunting lobby groups that shooting animals actually preserves animal populations through the fees that the hunters pay to kill these majestic animals. This is far from the truth. A report co-authored by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation and international hunting group CIC—the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation—has found that hunting companies contribute only 3% of their revenue to local communities.

The fees paid by hunters for killing an animal do not even cover the cost of keeping that single animal alive up to that point. To take the example of Cecil the lion, about which we have all heard—he was killed in 2015 in the Hwange reserve in Zimbabwe—the cost to the park authorities of protection to keep Cecil alive until he was 12 years old was about \$1.5 million, but the dentist who killed him paid just \$50,000.

Furthermore, it is not true that allowing trophy hunting deters poaching. A US congressional study has found that rhino poaching in the last decade has soared even as the South African Government have encouraged trophy hunting. Nature tourism is much more effective as a tool to support conservation. It not only generates much greater revenues than trophy hunting, but creates more and better-paid jobs for local people. Since Kenya stopped trophy hunting and prioritised nature tourism, tourism in Kenya is generating nearly \$1 billion per year. Kenya has benefited financially from stopping hunting.

Trophy hunting is a reprehensible practice that goes against nature. By killing the biggest and best of the race, it is leaving entire species doomed to suffer the evolutionary consequences. It does not bring economic benefit to the area or support conservation in anything like the way that nature tourism does. Does the Minister agree with me that trophy hunting is abhorrent and that we should do everything we can to stop it?

Turning to my second point, I know this is only a 30-minute debate, but I hope the Minister will appreciate that a great many colleagues would have wished to participate if we had had longer. This is an issue of

great cross-party significance. Polls consistently show that over 80% of the British public wish to ban trophy hunting imports, and a March 2021 poll noted that 85% were in favour of this happening as soon as possible.

It was heartening to see the commitment to bring forward a ban on trophy hunting imports in the Queen's Speech earlier this year under the animals abroad Bill, but I and other parliamentarians are dismayed at the progress—or lack of progress—it is making. Every month that passes is another month during which British hunters are killing majestic animals such as lions, leopards and polar bears, and bringing their gruesome trophies back to the UK. Over 170 Members, on a cross-party basis, have signed the early-day motion in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) calling for action on trophy hunting imports as soon as possible. Many people such as me do not sign EDMs, and there would be many more signatures if we did.

Will the Minister explain why we are yet to see the animals abroad Bill, despite the fact that the consultation on trophy hunting imports closed in February 2020, nearly two years ago? Covid is no excuse: people do not need to be together to consider the consultation document. It is rumoured that the animals abroad Bill has been shelved indefinitely. Will the Minister please explain exactly what the reservations are? After all, the Bill commands overwhelming public and parliamentary support, which leads to my third point.

As mentioned previously, this week our Government are hosting the COP26 conference in Glasgow, where world leaders and others have gathered to discuss how we can protect the planet for generations to come. That is not just about protecting the planet for humans; we have a responsibility not to eliminate magnificent and powerful species and to conserve the work with nature. We cannot make the laws of other countries, but we can in this Parliament reduce the number of British people taking part in trophy hunting. If we ban the import of trophies, we will have a significant impact on the number of British trophy hunters killing endangered species around the world.

Furthermore, our Government talk about the importance of being a global leader in the conservation and protection of endangered species, yet it remains legal in this country to import the body parts of animals killed for entertainment. Sadly, we are not a world leader in this sphere. France and Australia have already implemented bans on trophy hunting imports of endangered species and have seen no negative consequences on their conservation efforts as a result. The Netherlands has gone further, as we would like the UK to, and has banned virtually all imports of trophies from hunting abroad. Making a commitment such as the Netherlands has will enable us to push other countries for stronger commitments on animal welfare and conservation.

I want to see Ministers pushing other Governments to end trophy hunting imports too. It is a global problem. Will the Minister confirm whether the Prime Minister or any other Government Members at COP26 this week have raised the issue of banning trophy hunting imports with the United States Government? The US is by far the largest importer of hunting trophies in the world, but we will not be able to put pressure on it to stop until we ban the practice ourselves.

I urge the Government to act now to ban in full the import of trophies from the hunting of all animals abroad. That is necessary because it is a barbaric practice. I recognise and welcome the Government's intention to ban it, but that needs to happen now. There is no reason not to legislate. Legislation has broad and widespread support, and the Government have had plenty of time to consider the consultation.

Finally, we are at a crucial juncture and we must show global leadership on conservation and biodiversity. We cannot convince other countries to end the hunting of endangered animals if it is legal here in the UK. If at the end of this debate the Minister has only one thing to say on this matter, I would like her to tell me when the legislation will come into force. If she cannot say when, why not?

11.13 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Jo Churchill): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I assume you are happy if I remove my mask while speaking.

Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair): While speaking, yes.

Jo Churchill: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) on securing this timely debate. I also associate myself with her comments about our colleague, Sir David. She is right: he was passionate about animal welfare, and he would have taken part in this debate.

My hon. Friend is also right to say how timely this debate is, because nature and land use is a core theme of the COP26 presidency. It is essential in adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change and in supporting lives and livelihoods. We seek to lead a global transition towards the sustainable use of land, ocean and natural resources to tackle biodiversity and climate issues together, which as she so eloquently put it affect both humans and animals. I commend her on her success over the past few years in bringing this issue to the fore and in maintaining the spotlight on this important agenda, which has rightly attracted considerable interest and attention.

I agree with my hon. Friend's remarks at the start of her speech and I hope to talk to one or two of them directly in my response. She knows as well as I do that there are strong views on both sides of the debate. On one side, there are those who consider that well-managed trophy hunting can benefit conservation and support livelihoods. On the other, there are those who find the hunting of endangered species for trophies completely unacceptable.

We received 44,000 responses to our consultation and call for evidence. My hon. Friend is right that the consultation closed in February 2020 and I do not dispute that. As she mentioned, she and the British public want us to get on with delivering the Government's manifesto commitment to ban the import of hunting trophies from endangered species. The outcry that often accompanies the reports and photos of trophy hunting of threatened animals is clear. To see that, we need only think back to the huge response to the cruel killing of

[Jo Churchill]

Cecil the lion in 2015 or to last weekend's reports of trophy hunting of threatened species—this time the polar bear.

That strength of feeling came through loud and clear in our consultation and I look forward to hearing the comments of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee in due course. The Committee is running an inquiry into the animals abroad Bill and is in the middle of its evidence gathering, before the Bill goes through the usual parliamentary process. I appreciate my hon. Friend's push for urgency around this matter.

As I say, the strength of feeling came through loud and clear, so we will get on and deliver the change we promised in our manifesto. We will introduce a ban that is comprehensive, robust and effective and that protects many thousands of animals. We will set out our detailed plans and our rationale for action. On timeliness, the only comment I can give my hon. Friend is that we will set those things out soon, including our response to the consultation.

Arguably, this is just the tip of the iceberg because biodiversity is declining at an unprecedented rate. Around 1 million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction—many within decades—which is more than ever before in our history. Across Government, we are committed to playing our role in protecting the environment, including animals, both at home and abroad.

Internationally, we are investing over £46 million to counter the illegal wildlife trade over the timespan of 2014 to 2022. That includes our well-respected illegal wildlife trade challenge fund, which is a competitive grant scheme established to tackle the illegal trade in wildlife and, in doing so, to contribute to poverty

reduction in developing countries. My hon. Friend has a wealth of experience in overseas development and poverty, and her speech intertwined the arguments about the importance of us playing our part internationally to sustain communities. In Malawi, for example, our support from the challenge fund in developing law enforcement capabilities has helped increase protection for endangered species such as elephants and rhinos. The £100 million biodiverse landscapes fund will also tackle the direct drivers of species loss, protecting habitats and supporting local communities as well.

At home, in the Environment Bill, we will set a new and ambitious domestic framework for environmental governance. This Bill will ensure that we leave the environment in a better state than we found it in. It requires a new and historic legally binding target to be set to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030. We are driving forward our ambitious agenda of animal welfare and conservation reforms during the current parliamentary Session and beyond. Further legislation will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows—my hon. Friend knows as well as I do that it is not always in her gift or mine to say when that will be, and I am afraid I cannot give her more information than that—to strengthen and secure our position as a global leader in championing the welfare and protection of animals abroad.

I thank my hon. Friend for bringing attention to this topic. I know that she also regularly talks to Lord Goldsmith in the other place. I am sure she will be resolute in continuing to focus on making sure we adhere to that commitment.

Question put and agreed to.

11.21 am

Sitting suspended.

Ethiopia, Sudan and Tigray: Humanitarian Situation

[HANNAH BARDELL *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Hannah Bardell (in the Chair): Before we begin, I remind Members that they are expected to wear face coverings. Given the recent outbreak in Parliament, I expect to see everybody wearing a face covering if they are not speaking, in line with current Government guidance and that of the House of Commons Commission. I also remind Members that they are asked by the House to have a covid lateral flow test twice a week if coming on to the parliamentary estate. That can be done either at the testing centre in the House or at home. Please give each other and members of staff space when seated, and when entering and leaving the room.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia, Sudan and Tigray.

I am delighted to serve with you in the Chair, Ms Bardell. I am very pleased that Members have come to debate the humanitarian situation facing Sudan, Ethiopia and Tigray. The debate could not be better timed for the news that we have had today and in the last few days. I will open with a few reminders of the size of the humanitarian crisis facing people in that area.

In Sudan at this very moment there are 60,000 Tigrayan refugees, who have crossed the border from the fighting in Tigray, and there are still in Sudan, which is not a wealthy country, 1.1 million refugees from historical conflicts in Darfur and other places. As all Members will know, Sudan suffered a coup recently. Huge protests are going on in Khartoum and other cities, the elected Prime Minister is under house arrest and the military are patrolling the streets and trying to restore the previous regime's methods. I wish the people of Sudan well in their demands for democracy, and I send a message of support to the demonstration that was held outside Downing Street last Saturday.

Ethiopia can now be described only as a country in a state of war. The Prime Minister has gone on national television to ask people to be mobilised to defend the capital and the society as a whole, and is busy enlisting large numbers of often very young people—he is complaining that they are ill-trained—into the armed forces in order to continue the conflict. That was preceded by—indeed, it continues—many people from Tigray or other parts of Ethiopia who have made their homes in Addis Ababa being attacked, arrested and persecuted by the authorities. There is a whole popular mood against the people of Tigray, who are seen as separatists within the country of Ethiopia. I say that as somebody who is a friend and an admirer of the amazing history of Ethiopia—the one country in Africa that never became part of the European colonisation system.

In Tigray, 2.1 million people are displaced, 5 million are food-insecure, which is about 80% of the population, and at least 400,000 are literally starving, but because of the conflict, aid trucks, relief trucks and support simply cannot get through. Only 15 minutes ago, before I came to the debate, I was watching Michelle Bachelet of the

United Nations. She is a wonderful woman and an old friend of mine; I have known her ever since the dark days of Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile, before she became the President of Chile. A report that I have just received states:

“Michelle Bachelet, the UN high commissioner for human rights, said there were ‘reasonable grounds to believe’ that ‘all parties to the Tigray conflict have committed violations of international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law. Some of these may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.’”

She is a very intelligent and normally very cautious person. She does not throw those kinds of allegations out willy-nilly. They are very serious indeed.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is making a powerful opening speech. He is talking about the Tigrayan situation, which I think we would all agree amounts to war crimes and crimes against humanity. He mentioned starvation and so forth, and I just want to highlight the issues facing young women and girls. There have been reports that many have been subject to rape, gang rape and other forms of sexual mutilation and torture. Does he agree that, while there is a potential breach of international law, our Government must also show some leadership in bringing an end to what is happening?

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention—I was actually going to come on to that point next—and she is absolutely right. The abuse of women and girls by the forces in Tigray has been abominable and appalling. The crime of rape has been used as an act of war, and multiple rapes, sexual slavery and the abuse of women have been the order of the day. It is utterly disgraceful, and I hope that when the conflict is over, and all conflicts have to be over eventually, there will be the most thorough investigation of every one of those cases. We have seen rape as a weapon of war in so many places—in Congo and many other parts of Africa, as well as in many other wars around the world—and I hope there is the most thorough investigation and that prosecutions will follow as a result.

To return to the account I was quoting, Michelle Bachelet has said:

“The investigation recounts a report of a massacre of ‘more than 100 civilians’ in Axum, Tigray by Eritrean forces”—

note: the Eritrean forces—

“on 28 November 2020. The victims were ‘mostly young men’ but one witness told the joint investigation team that others were targeted too. ‘EDF soldiers took a 70-year-old man and his two sons out of their homes. They took them to the nearby water tanker, ordered them to lay on the ground and shot all three of them in the head.’”

and so it goes on about a series of other occasions. Again, note that the Eritrean defence forces have become involved in the conflict as well, which is more than unfortunate in the sense that it indicates the danger that the war is about to spread.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Jeremy Corbyn: Yes, I will in a second. I do think that we have to recognise the seriousness of the situation we are in at the present time—that is why Michelle Bachelet has said what she has said—and I want to put that into historical context, once I have given way.

Mr Robertson: Is the right hon. Gentleman as confused as I am about the reports of the involvement of Eritrean forces? There are very strong reports that they are indeed involved and committing some of the worst atrocities, but at the same time there is also a denial that they are in that country.

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank the hon. Member for his intervention, and he is absolutely right. The reports of Eritrean forces being involved are very disturbing because that clearly internationalises the conflict. Verification is obviously difficult when the Ethiopian occupying forces and the conflict itself make it impossible for independent investigators to get there to understand exactly what is going on. One plea I am going to make at the end of my contribution is that international observers be allowed in, so that they can assess what is going on.

If I may, I think we should put this in the context of the tragic history of Ethiopia. It has been through all kinds of things, right back to the Italian fascists' invasion in the 1930s and their removal by British and other forces during the second world war. It has been a party to the cold war, and there has been a massive flow of armaments into Ethiopia from the Soviet Union, the United States, Europe and arms dealers all around the world. It is a country that has seen the most appalling conflict and the most appalling humanitarian disasters, such as the famine of the 1980s.

I pay tribute to the International Development Committee for its report on the humanitarian situation in Tigray. I am delighted that its Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), is here, and I hope she is going to speak in this debate. If I may say so, I think the Select Committee puts the history of Ethiopia in summary form very well, and of course the enormous conflict that took place before Eritrea gained its independence and the further conflict that went on during the border dispute.

For goodness' sake, there has been enough death, wars, conflict and loss of development opportunities without there now being a descent into a massive civil war across Ethiopia. It is always the most vulnerable and the young people who die as a result. The points in the Select Committee report about gender-based violence, on which my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) intervened earlier, are so apt and well put. I hope they become centre stage in any UN human rights investigation into the causes and continuation of this conflict.

The most immediate response to this conflict is the two events of 2019, when the Government of Ethiopia were pursuing a more democratic and participatory course and getting a lot of international support for it. There was then, effectively, the break-up of the Government by a change in the ruling party and by the Tigray People's Liberation Front removing itself from the Government. The Government in Addis then delayed the election that was to be held in Tigray. The TPLF in Tigray then decided to hold its own election, which it did.

It was claimed that this was illegal under the terms of the Ethiopian constitution and the whole thing descended very rapidly into armed conflict. We then get the deaths, rape and occupation, and huge refugee flows as a result. That is the immediate tragic history that Ethiopia and Tigray have descended into. I hope that in our debate

today we can, at least, find out what the British Government think about this and what action they are prepared to take.

The issues we face are fourfold. First, we need to somehow or other get an immediate ceasefire in this conflict so that the food aid, medicine, water and all the other things can get in and so that the thousands who have gone mainly to the Sudan—and some who apparently have also gone to South Sudan, although I am not sure of the numbers—can return home.

Secondly, we need to recognise the consequences for those countries of the massive refugee flows. At the start of my contribution, I gave figures for the numbers of people who are refugees in Sudan—60,000 from Tigray and 1.1 million from Darfur. The media in this country complain about a few hundred refugees coming in across the channel. I am talking about a poor country hosting more than 1 million refugees without the infrastructure or wherewithal to cope with them. That, sadly, is the story of so many poor countries around the world.

Thirdly, who is going to be the interlocutor to bring about a ceasefire? The UN obviously must and should have a role in this. The African Union must and should have a role in this, but it appears that the degree of mistrust, particularly by Tigrayan forces towards the African Union, which is housed in Addis anyway, is one of the problems in bringing about a meaningful ceasefire. I do think there has to be involvement with the African Union, perhaps brought about by the UN itself. It is extremely important that we send that message today.

Fourthly, the arms sales to Ethiopia, Eritrea and Tigray are not huge on the global scale of things—I am not pretending there are massive arms sales—but nevertheless, in a conflict of this nature, rapid-fire machine guns and all those kind of armaments are the instruments of war. We are not necessarily talking about planes and drones and things, but more about those things. The UK sells quite little to Ethiopia. According to the figures I have from Campaign Against Arms Trade, UK arms exports approved to Ethiopia in the last three years amount to only £58,000, and most of that was related to armoured vehicles. Those questions were put. The three known military export applications are from Safariland Group, Harrington Generators and Boeing. I look forward to the Minister saying that there will be no further exports there. EU arms exports to Ethiopia over the last three years are more considerable, amounting to £36 million. I hope we put pressure on the European Union not to allow those arms sales to continue.

The urgent need, as I said, is for food aid to get through. Hundreds of thousands—nay, millions—are suffering from malnutrition or lack of food. There is a huge lack of medicines all across the country, as well as the war crimes investigations and all the rest going on. The situation is that well-armed and presumably well-fed and watered soldiers are able to kill each other in Tigray. Forces of the TPLF are active in Ethiopia and Ethiopian forces are active in the conflict against them. Arms are available for soldiers to kill civilians in a conflict that has to be resolved by a ceasefire and a coming together, so that people may decide their future in peace. All those soldiers are passing starving people—babies who are dying because of malnutrition; women who have suffered the most abominable abuse by those very same soldiers—and the war carries on with the

arms that come from God knows where, from all around the world. It is the poorest people who suffer, in the worst possible situation.

I hope that we can send a message: we will give all the necessary aid and support that we can to get through this and, above all, we will take the political initiative and support Michelle Bachelet in her determination to bring about a ceasefire and some hope for the future. I am pleased that the Joint Committee on Human Rights, the all-party parliamentary human rights group and the all-party group on prevention of genocide and crimes against humanity are meeting tomorrow afternoon at 2 o'clock to go through all the issues. I urge Members to attend that meeting, which I understand will be online. It will be helpful for us to be better informed.

My purpose in calling the debate was not necessarily to blame the British Government for the whole situation there, but to thank the International Development Committee for what it has done and to ask our Government to give what aid is necessary and, above all—I repeat this—to use our political clout, whatever we have and wherever we have it, to get a ceasefire, to stop the killing, to stop the refugee flows and to let the people of Tigray, the rest of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan decide their own future in peace. That is the best message that we can give.

Hannah Bardell (in the Chair): Before I call Members, I have requested that the temperature be turned up, because I am conscious that it is very cold in here. I intend to call the Opposition spokespeople, including the shadow Minister, and the Minister from 3.28 pm, depending on the votes that we are expecting.

2.48 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship again today, Ms Bardell.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) not only on securing the debate and his kind words to the Select Committee, but on the fact that he will not let this go. We need to keep raising the atrocities happening in the region, particularly in Tigray, again and again, because too often the news just moves on while the people stay and the desperation gets worse. I thank him personally for calling the debate.

A peaceful resolution of the conflict seems far off, with fighting intensifying and a state of emergency declared overnight. As my right hon. Friend said, the Select Committee has been monitoring with increasing concern the deteriorating situation in the region and the escalation of humanitarian needs as a direct consequence. Earlier this year the International Development Committee published a report on the situation in Tigray, which included moving evidence from agencies working in the region to address the increasingly complex humanitarian situation. We heard shocking reports of the impact of the conflict, including killings, the systematic use of sexual violence and the use of hunger as a weapon of war. In our report, my Committee urged the Government to use the combination of the UK's diplomatic clout and development funding to seek a peaceful political resolution to the conflict, and to ensure that aid reaches communities in the region that are in such desperate need for it.

I was pleased to receive the Government's constructive response to the report, which set out the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office commitment

to working with regional partners in seeking an end to the conflict and focusing on getting humanitarian supplies to Tigray. It is with great sadness that I note that the scale of the challenge in Tigray seems greater than ever. Alongside a deteriorating military situation, the humanitarian crisis is becoming acute and the consequences of inaction increasingly catastrophic.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): A constituent of mine has been unable to contact her family since the beginning of the conflict. Their stories are terrifying and upsetting. Does the hon. Lady agree that the Government should outline not only how they will provide aid to the people there, but how to communicate with relatives living in the country?

Sarah Champion: I completely agree. Many of us, if not all, have constituents with family members over there, and hearing their stories makes it so real and such a live issue for us all; one cannot fail to be moved. Trying to get reliable information is one of the big problems we have had all the way through this conflict.

The UN estimates that at least 5.2 million people need emergency food assistance, with almost half a million people in Tigray living in famine-like conditions. The UN reports indicate that just 1% of those in need of food are being reached, with only half of those receiving more than two food items a week. The UN says that an alarming number of children are suffering with severe acute malnutrition, with numbers increasing by the day, because just a fraction of the humanitarian aid needed in Tigray is reaching that region. Fuel shortages and limits on access to cash have forced a reduction of what remains of humanitarian assistance, with barely \$800,000 of the \$6.5 million needed per week getting through. Ongoing restrictions on entering the region and an escalation of fighting means that trucks simply cannot get in. Each day, Tigray alone needs around 100 trucks of fuel, food and other supplies, but since 18 October not a single truck has entered. The UN Humanitarian Air Service has been suspended. The situation in Amhara grows more alarming by the day due to the large-scale displacement of people, with reports that electricity and communication lines have been cut.

The international community and Ministers must press the Ethiopian Government and regional partners to ensure that humanitarian agencies have unimpeded access to Tigray despite the current state of emergency. The longer the delivery of aid is obstructed, the deeper and more complex this humanitarian emergency will be to solve. Communities will continue to be decimated by war, and hunger will spread. This shows why the Foreign Office must have a robust approach to atrocity prevention. Embassy staff must be empowered to raise concerns about the likelihood of a situation deteriorating and trained appropriately so that they can recognise red flags and escalate concerns before a situation falls into complete disarray. That is why my Committee called on the FCDO to embed an atrocity prevention strategy in its updated country strategy for Ethiopia and neighbouring states.

Our report found:

"A failure to adequately resource the response to this crisis increases the risk of a ripple effect of instability throughout the region."

[Sarah Champion]

The Government identified the east of Africa as a priority region for UK aid spending but cut aid to the region by almost 50%. Aid to Ethiopia has been slashed from £240 million to £107 million, and aid to Sudan and South Sudan is set to be halved. That is having a real impact. Failure to support communities in the region, combined with the lack of an inclusive political settlement, is compromising hard-won gains in security, stability and prosperity in Ethiopia. We are seeing the impact of that failure, with refugees fleeing to Sudan, itself in the grip of a military coup. The Government are right that the east of Africa should be a priority, but it is time they backed their words with action and engagement. We must step up, mobilise and work with partners in the region to meet the humanitarian needs of communities and prevent the further spread of instability. If we fail to act now, we will count the costs for years to come.

2.55 pm

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Ms Bardell, although it is very depressing to be addressing this subject again. I asked an urgent question on the issue a while ago and took part in the debate led by the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion). As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Ethiopia, I thank the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) for introducing this debate and for his continued interest. I have spoken with him and have attended debates with him. I know he approaches the debate as a friend of Ethiopia, as does the hon. Member for Rotherham.

The situation is very depressing. I am very pleased that the new Minister for Africa is with us today to reply to the debate. All too often we see the media and the world focus on other conflicts, understandably perhaps—in Syria, the Balkans or other areas of the world. Conflicts in Africa tend not to be focused on. They tend not to be reported as much as those in other areas.

I remember feeling ashamed in 1994 of the fact that the world stood back and watched 800,000 people killed in Rwanda. I visited Rwanda shortly after. I do not want to be too graphic, but I walked through the bones of some of the people who had been slaughtered in that terrible conflict. The world stood and watched. We cannot do that again—we cannot just watch, as we see the crisis growing and the tragedies increasing. We have heard reports of forces moving through Ethiopia towards the capital, Addis Ababa, just recently. The report produced by the Joint Investigation Team highlights the most horrific crimes that are taking place. We have to focus on what is happening—we have to concentrate—so I am glad that this debate is being held today, with the Minister present, but it is not easy to know what to do.

As I said in my intervention, reports are conflicting. For the reasons that the right hon. Member for Islington North gave, it is very difficult to know exactly what is going on, who is to blame or how we stop it happening. There is, however, a growing humanitarian crisis, and it is also heading towards an economic crisis. The right hon. Gentleman touched on the problems that Ethiopia had in the mid-'80s. Since then, the country has made

great strides and is far more resilient, but millions of people are still dependent on food aid every year. That situation is likely to get so much worse, the more the conflict grows.

I have the privilege of being the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Zambia and Angola. On my recent travels, I have spoken to companies who want to invest in Ethiopia. They have told me they will not and cannot do that when the conflict is raging—indeed, getting worse. That situation will make people in Ethiopia even poorer than they are now. We cannot simply stand by and watch that happen.

It is difficult to know what to do. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned Ethiopia's past. It has a troubled past, but also a very proud past, as I said in the debate led by the hon. Member for Rotherham. Sizeable Christian and Muslim populations have lived peacefully together for many years. There are more than 80 tribes and 80 languages in the country, which have not in themselves led to problems. The country has enjoyed a great deal of peace, and economic growth that is the envy of the western world. It has so much going for it; it is seen as a country with huge potential. There is an awful lot in favour of Ethiopia and the way it can develop as a country. However, as we have so often seen—the right hon. Member for Islington North expressed great exasperation and frustration at this—we see the descent into war, which cannot benefit anybody. Even the victors, if there are any victors in this conflict, will not win overall; they will lose, too. That message must get through to all the players in this conflict in Ethiopia.

I do not have any solutions, but I repeat the questions I have asked before. Could the United Nations be doing more? I am not an expert on this, but is it time for a peacekeeping force to be sent by the United Nations? I really do not know the answer to that question, but I put it to the Minister: is that what we should be looking at now, before the situation becomes unmanageable? Could the African Union be doing more to bring about peace and a ceasefire in this conflict? Could more pressure be put on the Eritrean Government to withdraw any forces they have in Tigray? As we have heard in previous debates, many of the worst atrocities are being laid at the feet of people coming in from Eritrea.

Can we somehow find a way to get aid to the people who so desperately need help? We often hear people say that we should not be giving aid to countries that are dictatorships—actually, we do not, but it is important to note that the people in greatest need in the world are those in war-torn countries. The secret is to get under the radar and try to help those people as best we can.

The right hon. Member for Islington North also mentioned the arms that are getting through to the sides in Ethiopia. There was a very brief BBC report last night, showing what I think were rebel groups, who seemed so well armed. Who on earth is providing arms at such a level to those people? That needs to be addressed.

This is a deeply worrying situation. I do not expect the Minister to have any easy answers or to come up with any solutions today. All I ask of her—I know she will do it—is to speak to our Prime Minister and the Cabinet to see whether there is more that we can do to try to bring about the ceasefire that the right hon. Member for Islington North correctly called for, before this situation becomes an absolute catastrophe.

Ethiopia is a great country and one I am very proud to be a friend of. I have visited it many times and I want to visit again as soon as possible. I do not want to see Ethiopia disintegrate into an absolute shambles. We do not need that. There are more than 100 million people in that country, and they need some help. They need us to do everything we can to help them. That is not easy, as I say, but I know the Minister will do everything in her power to raise this matter at the highest levels of Government in this country, and hopefully we can try to find a way through.

3.2 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a genuine pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Bardell, albeit on a very sobering topic, as has been outlined by the speakers we have heard so far. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) on securing this opportunity to consider the issue again.

We considered the conflict back in September, and one of the messages of that debate was the risk of deterioration of the situation. In fact, one of the questions I asked was:

“What if the worst has yet to come?”—[*Official Report*, 8 September 2021; Vol. 700, c. 95WH.]

The speeches we have heard and the evidence that has been presented, particularly the findings today from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, show that the situation has got considerably worse, and that must be of real concern to us. Bringing the issue back to the Floor of Westminster Hall keeps it alive and gives a new Minister an opportunity to respond and to think again, as the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) has just said, about what opportunities there might be for the UK to exercise some influence.

I spoke in the last debate about the particular challenges in Oromia. They have become more acute as a result of the developments in recent weeks and months. I have a constituent who is from that area and who is passionate about the right of the people there to have democratic self-determination and the kind of political autonomy that regions, countries and nations in our part of the world enjoy. However, we enjoy that peacefully and democratically. We resolve our differences in forums like this, not by taking up arms or through the horrific war crimes being reported. Even people who hold those genuine aspirations ought to live up to the standards that they are seeking.

That also speaks to the deep-seated and historical regional and tribal tensions across the whole of Ethiopia and the wider regional context. As the right hon. Member for Islington North said, Ethiopia was never a colony in the way that many African countries have been, but that does not mean that it has not been affected by the colonisation and map-drawing that went on in the continent all those years ago. That is why the issue of Eritrea keeps raising its head.

Not long ago, I was in the right hon. Member's constituency for the photo exhibition by Eritrea Focus, commemorating the 40th anniversary of the political imprisonment of journalists and politicians in that country, the deterioration and ending of democracy in any meaningful form, the militarisation of the country, the influence that it still apparently seeks, and the destabilising effect that appears to be having in the conflict in Ethiopia.

I should say that my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara), who we will hear from, was also at that important event.

I would draw the Minister's attention—I think I sent it to her predecessor, and I will certainly send it to her—to the report produced by the Oromia Support Group detailing the atrocities and extrajudicial killings of the people of that region, mostly by the national Government, by their assessment. However, it is very clear, from other reports and today's debate, that all sides must take responsibility for the violence that has been experienced.

The hon. Member for Tewkesbury said that he saw the BBC report; I heard it on Radio 4, because the BBC these days multitasks in that way. It was incredibly sobering, and very worrying to hear of the spiralling effect that now appears to be happening. Violence is begetting violence. There was a woman who had to flee because her son had been brutally murdered.

Wera Hobhouse: Is it not the case, time and again, that women are often the worst victims of violence in that form? Sexual violence against women is also something that we should point out when we talk about this terrible conflict.

Patrick Grady: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. Hearing any story from mothers, like that one, is heartbreaking. She is right; women are affected—they are victims, if she wants to use that word. Women could also be a big part of the solution. If women's voices were heard more frequently in these debates, in the peace forums and in the democratic institutions—such as exist—in those countries, perhaps we would not be seeing this level of violence. I think that is an incredibly important point.

As I said, violence is begetting violence; the attempts by the Ethiopian Government to root out the Oromo Liberation Army lead to further resentment of the central Government and less willingness to engage with processes. That leads to displacement across the region and into neighbouring countries, including Sudan, which is also a topic for this debate. It is increasingly clear, as others have said, that there needs to be an external brokering of peace. Whether that is the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union or some other body, the UK is a key player—either directly, as a member of some of those institutions, or through important relationships to them—and it must play its role.

I want to echo some of what the Select Committee Chair said about aid. The Library briefing shows—even before the aid cut from 0.7% to 0.5% of GDP—the decrease in overall bilateral aid since 2015 to Ethiopia, but within that, the increasing amount of money being spent on humanitarian response. That is a very stark lesson in basic development theory: if we stop spending money on long-term development projects—on long-term peacebuilding, infrastructure, education and so on—then all of a sudden we find ourselves spending money on humanitarian relief, on trying to resolve the problems of conflict and war, and at the end of the day, the problem is not being resolved; it is spiralling.

The Government must look again at their budget. It is all good and well for the Chancellor to say in the Budget that we will get back to 0.7% before the end of this Parliament; but that will not undo the damage that

[Patrick Grady]

is already being done. Every time the Government say that they will increase support to Ethiopia, that is great, welcome and necessary but it means that, by definition, somewhere else is suffering; somewhere else is experiencing a cut because the overall budget has declined. It was going to decline anyway because GDP had gone down as a result of the pandemic—we all understand that—but this is adding to that unnecessarily.

At a time when the Government are supposed to be showing global leadership, which we are all calling for in this debate, the stark facts are there for anyone to see who has picked up the Library report or reports by the International Development Committee. Sadly, I will not be able to make tomorrow's APPG being organised by the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson), which the right hon. Member for Islington North mentioned, but I am looking forward to reports from it. I strongly encourage the Minister to pay attention to that. When we had a briefing before the last Westminster Hall debate, some very useful points, with strong and clear recommendations, were made, and I suspect some of those will be heard.

This has been an important opportunity to consider these issues, especially given how rapidly the situation is changing. We appreciate that the opportunity for the UK Government is limited, but that does not mean that it does not exist. I very much hope that the new Minister will be willing to look at this afresh and I look forward to hearing what she has to say in response.

3.11 pm

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Bardell, and to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady). I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) for securing this debate. It was only a couple of months ago that we last talked about this region and it is timely to talk about it again. Every day the news is getting worse, and the situation is extremely worrying. We need to give as much airtime as possible to what is happening in the region, because it is truly shocking.

I agree with the hon. Member for Glasgow North that Ethiopia is a beautiful country. I have been to Addis Ababa and enjoyed great hospitality there. While it is already a beautiful country, it also has potential. We want it to have a better future—that is our hope for the people of Ethiopia, Tigray and Sudan.

I speak as a member of the all-party parliamentary groups on Ethiopia and Djibouti and on Sudan and South Sudan, and I am also chair of the APPG on the prevention of genocide and crimes against humanity. I am delighted that there have been two advertisements for our meeting tomorrow, at which Alice Wairimu Nderitu, the UN special adviser on the prevention of genocide, will speak. What she will have to say will be very pertinent to the current situation.

The eyes of the world are not on Ethiopia, Tigray and Sudan, but they should be. It is an important time to put on the record what is happening right now, and to hear from the Minister what the Government are doing about it. I welcome her to her new role and look forward to hearing about the meetings she has been

holding and what has resulted from them; what visits she has planned to the region and what she hopes to get out of them; and her plans for aid. We have been talking about aid cuts and the false economy they create. There are different decisions to be made about aid to the region.

As a country, we were so proud at the time of Live Aid to stand up together to support the people of Ethiopia in their time of crisis. We want to do the same again. We want to know what is happening in the region, with which we have a great bond. Like other Members, I have constituents with family members in the region. On Monday I spoke to a Tigrayan constituent who is very concerned about her family. She has not been able to hear any news for so long because of the blackout, which must be very worrying. As we stand here today, we know that many people in this country are concerned about their relatives in the region.

The UN Secretary-General has said of Tigray:

"A humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding before our eyes."

It could be argued that the previous Foreign Secretary took his eye off Afghanistan, but I hope to hear from the Minister today that that is not the case with Tigray. More than 5 million people in Tigray require immediate humanitarian assistance. At least 54 organisations are providing aid and services. I join other Members in paying tribute to the brave humanitarian workers on the ground right now, in very difficult circumstances, at great risk to themselves.

However, there are significant gaps in assistance, which disproportionately affect Ethiopian women and girls. I echo what we have heard in today's debate: it is women and girls who are disproportionately the victims of war. Rape is being used as a weapon of war and we need to know more about that. They have virtually no access to livelihoods, often living in insecure environments.

We are also witnessing a refugee crisis because of the violence. In December 2020, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that 46,000 Ethiopian refugees had arrived in Sudan since the start of November and they were continuing to arrive in their hundreds. It is hard to imagine what that is like. If we could see it more clearly, if we knew more about the situation, I am sure there would be more demand for more action to be taken.

The numbers are now estimated to be more than 60,000, including Eritrean refugees. More worrying still, a famine is looming. According to the Tigray external affairs office, 150 people died of hunger in August. The UN believes that around 400,000 people are facing famine-like conditions. Millions are also on the brink of hunger in the Afar and Amhara regions, which share a border with Tigray. UNICEF recently alerted that more than 100,000 children in Tigray could suffer from life-threatening severe acute malnutrition in the next 12 months, which will affect them for the rest of their lives. That constitutes a tenfold increase to the annual average.

Deaths are also occurring due to sickness that could previously have been treated or prevented. Prior to retreating, Eritrean forces had looted Tigrayan infrastructure extensively and destroyed clinics, equipment, medicines and medical records, putting years of development back instead of forward. In March, Médecins Sans Frontières reported that 70% of the 106 medical facilities that its teams had been allowed to visit had been looted

and only 13% of them were functioning fully, undermining medical treatment for those in need. That is truly frightening and it is happening on our watch.

As mentioned earlier, Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, reported that

“all parties to the conflict in Tigray have...committed violations of international human rights...and refugee law, some of which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.”

Those crimes need to be investigated. We need to know we have the strong evidence to bring to justice those who are committing these crimes. We cannot let this go untried. The justice we need means that we need to get the evidence, so independent investigators need to be there on the ground.

Turning to Sudan, I am distressed at the graphic reports of the use of excessive and lethal force against protesters, the arbitrary detentions, their enforced disappearance and torture, and other forms of ill treatment. Those patterns of violations are consistent with Sudan's long and extensively documented history of abuses against protesters, human rights defenders and perceived political opponents. Sudanese forces have regularly used excessive force, including beatings, tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition against protesters, including during the transitional period.

When the new country of South Sudan was formed, the world cheered. It was exciting to have a new country with a proud future looking forward to peace. That long conflict had been put to one side; the peace process had won out. I want to put on the record that it had been led by a lot of local women, who were successful in winning that peace. The joy with which South Sudan was welcomed was amazing to see, but it is so disheartening and worrying that the instability in the region is now threatening that peace.

I want to hear from the Minister that the UK is stepping up and leading on Sudan. The Government need unequivocally to call on the Sudanese military to immediately end the arbitrary detention of all detained political leaders, journalists and human rights activists, and refrain from torture and other forms of violence against protesters; to impose targeted sanctions on those responsible for the coup and for ongoing human rights violations; and to demonstrate global leadership at a special session of the UN Human Rights Council by calling for an independent UN fact-finding mission on Sudan.

As I have made clear time and again in this House, the Foreign Secretary and the Minister need to have their eyes firmly fixed on what is unfolding in Ethiopia and Tigray. In particular, I call on the Minister urgently to consider the imposition of sanctions on the leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea, who bear ultimate responsibility for human rights violations committed with impunity by their respective armed forces. No one comes out well from this conflict. Atrocities are definitely being committed by both sides—I want to be clear about that—and we need to make sure that their leaders are investigated and stand trial.

We need to lead international efforts, including at the UN Security Council, to ensure an immediate cessation of hostilities, the complete departure of Eritrean forces, and unimpeded access to Tigray for local and international aid agencies—those lorries must get through.

As was said earlier, we need an atrocity prevention strategy at the heart of our funding for those countries. We need to stop the aid cuts. What meetings has the Minister had with civil society groups working in the region, the African Union and leaders in Sudan, Tigray and Ethiopia? Finally, I urge the UN Human Rights Council to mandate a truly independent inquiry into alleged human rights violations in Tigray and to secure justice.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North again for securing this debate. I pledge to do all I can to keep what is happening in Ethiopia, Sudan and Tigray on the global agenda. Millions are suffering. We cannot forget them. We must act now.

Hannah Bardell (in the Chair): I thank Members for being so succinct. I am conscious that the temperature has dropped further, so if Members or staff need to don further layers, they have my support. I call the first of our Front-Bench speakers, the Scottish National party spokesperson Brendan O'Hara.

3.21 pm

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): It is a genuine pleasure to see you in the Chair for today's extremely important and particularly timely debate, Ms Bardell. I thank the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) for securing this debate and for the manner in which he opened the proceedings this afternoon, on the day that the joint report of the United Nations Human Rights Office and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission has been published. And as we have already heard from several Members, the debate falls on the anniversary of the first day of the start of the armed conflict in Tigray.

As we heard from the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson), this debate also gives us the opportunity to discuss last week's military coup in Sudan and the consequences it will have not just for the unfortunate Sudanese victims but for the region as a whole, which seems to be descending further into conflict and violence.

As the right hon. Member for Islington North said, the joint report of the UN Human Rights Office and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission was published this morning. It points the finger of blame at all sides, saying unequivocally that all parties to the Tigray conflict have committed violations of international human rights, and of humanitarian and refugee law. Some of these may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. It also says that most violations in the period covered by the report were committed by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces, but recently there have been increased reports of violations by Tigrayan forces as well. No one emerges with clean hands. As always, it is innocent civilians who suffer at such times.

Over the past 12 months, the people of Tigray have had to endure unimaginable horrors as war has raged through their country. Tens of thousands of people have died, millions have been displaced, and reports of crops being destroyed, property looted, massacres and summary executions of civilians are all too common. Almost inevitably, as the hon. Member for Putney said, there have been reports of widespread humanitarian abuses, including the use of rape and sexual violence against women and girls as a weapon of war. In the words of Sir Mark Lowcock, the former UN under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, it is being used

[Brendan O'Hara]

"as a means to humiliate, terrorize, and traumatize an entire population today and into the next generation."

Six months ago, the UN reckoned that around 22,500 women would require support as a consequence of conflict-related sexual violence. Therefore, we have to assume that today, sadly, many more Tigrayan women and girls are going to have to seek help. They join that depressingly long list of women and girls from just about every part of the world who have been raped and abused by men carrying guns.

What is worse, those men carrying guns act in the almost certain knowledge that they will never be held to account for their actions. At the very least, the women and girls who have suffered those awful crimes deserve justice and those perpetrators not being allowed to believe that they act with impunity. I urge the Government to work with the UN, the non-governmental organisations and other international partners to ensure that all countries have legislation to ensure effective prosecution of sexual violence as a stand-alone international crime.

Despite the Ethiopian Government's attempted communications blackout, reports continue to filter through of appalling crimes being perpetrated against the civilian population. We have heard that about all sides—let us be clear that all sides are responsible—but in particular about Ethiopian and Eritrean forces. In May this year, the US-based Catholic News Service ran a piece on the testimony given by an Ethiopian Catholic priest, who said that killings, abduction and rape by Ethiopian soldiers and their Eritrean allies were commonplace. The priest, who for obvious reasons did not want to be identified, accused the Ethiopian troops and their allies of ethnic cleansing:

"They want to annihilate Tigray. By killing the men and boys, they are trying to destroy any future resistance. They want to make sure that nobody can question their actions in future... They are raping and destroying women to ensure that they cannot raise a community in future. They are using rape and food as weapons of war."

His observations echo those of the Patriarch Mathias, head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, who accused the Ethiopian army and its allies of the highest form of cruelty and brutality in Tigray.

War and conflict, however, do not exist in a vacuum. As the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) said, on top of everything else people have suffered, they now face the prospect of famine. Ninety per cent. of the Tigrayan population are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including 400,000 people who face famine-like conditions already. Millions are on the brink of hunger, food stocks that ran out at the end of August are not being replaced, fewer than one in 10 of the trucks required to carry food and fuel to the people of Tigray has made it through, and 100,000 children in Tigray are suffering from life-threatening acute severe malnutrition and could die in the next 12 months.

The hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) was absolutely right to draw a parallel between what is happening in Tigray and what happened in Rwanda in the '90s. We cannot allow history to repeat itself. By any measure, this is a deep humanitarian crisis. As the head of the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs said in September, it is a "stain on our conscience".

Similar to the Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Rotherham, and my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), I ask the Minister in her response to the debate to tell us what assessment has been made of the impact of the Government's cut to the overseas aid budget on the situation in Tigray. Also, what initiatives have been taken by her Department to support the United Nations and other agencies to prevent the humanitarian crisis from deepening? What have been the most recent discussions between the FCDO and the Governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea to bring the conflict to an end? What is her Department doing to ensure that those who use or encourage rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war are brought to justice?

At the start, I said that the crisis took a turn for the worse last week when there was a coup in Sudan. The military dissolved the transitional Government and seized control, arresting and imprisoning Government members and putting Prime Minister Hamdok under house arrest, in chilling echoes of the oppressive regime of Omar al-Bashir. It is extremely worrying that members of the former Government have now found themselves in hospital. We have all seen or heard reports of excessive illegal force being used against civilian protesters, with at least three people killed last week. Exact numbers remain unknown, as a result of an internet blackout. Sudanese doctors have reported a series of other injuries from beatings, suffocation on tear gas and being run over. [Interruption.]

Hannah Bardell (in the Chair): Order. The sitting is suspended for 15 minutes if there is one Division in the House, or 25 minutes if two Divisions happen, as expected.

3.29 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

3.55 pm

On resuming—

Hannah Bardell (in the Chair): The debate may now continue until 4.26 pm.

Brendan O'Hara: Thank you, Ms Bardell. It is a pleasure to be back. Picking up where I left off, as we have heard from the right hon. Member for Islington North, the types of human rights violations that we are currently seeing in Sudan are entirely consistent with that country's long and documented history of abuses against protesters, human rights defenders and those perceived as political opponents of the regime. In addition to the questions I asked regarding Tigray, I would appreciate if, in replying to the debate, the Minister would tell me what contact, if any, has been made with the leaders of the military coup regarding the detention of the Prime Minister and members of his Cabinet. What assessment has her Department made of the impact of the coup on the stability of the region as a whole? Has she or her Department had any contact with Sudan's nearest neighbours about the potential impact they think this coup will have on them? Would she clarify the current position on UK arms exports to Sudan and if and how, in light of the coup, that will be reviewed? Likewise, on the levels of military support currently being provided by the UK to the Sudanese army, how does she see the coup affecting that?

To follow up the point from the hon. Member for Putney, what use is the Government planning to make of Magnitsky sanctions against military leaders in Sudan? If I could add to that Ethiopia and Eritrea as well, which are complicit in these appalling violations of human rights, both in Sudan and Tigray. Finally, I want to thank once again the right hon. Member for Islington North for securing this debate and the hon. Members for Rotherham, for Tewkesbury and for Putney for their contributions. It is vital that this debate is not allowed to slide off the agenda and lose public attention. People are depending on us to keep it in the spotlight. I am glad to be part of that this afternoon.

3.58 pm

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Bardell. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) for securing this debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), the hon. Members for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) and for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), and my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson), who have contributed to an excellent and timely debate on recent events in both Ethiopia and Sudan, and the first anniversary of hostilities in the Tigray region of Ethiopia.

These issues have, sadly, received far too little attention globally. I want to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), who could not be here today, and other Members for all that they have done to raise awareness of these issues, challenging the UK Government on their response over many months. I cannot emphasise enough the moment of peril we face in the region, or the ordinary civilians who, as ever, bear the brunt of instability and conflict and, indeed, of the wider risk to peace, prosperity and stability in a crucial region of Africa.

We have a long and complex history and responsibility with both Sudan and Ethiopia and a strong interest from the British people in both countries. The human-made famine in Ethiopia in the 1980s is seared in the hearts of the British people, as stated by my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North. Sudanese and Ethiopian communities across the UK are right to be deeply frightened and concerned by recent events and what they may mean for their loved ones, as stated by my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham, who is Chair of the International Development Committee. The Labour party stands in solidarity with them for peace, democracy, human rights and the humanitarian principle, and urges the UK Government to do all they can to ensure that that is upheld, rather than cutting our aid, our influence and our international leadership at such a crucial time.

I begin with the situation in Ethiopia, in Tigray and beyond. I am deeply concerned about events in recent days that appear to suggest a further descent into conflict and instability, which can only harm the people of Ethiopia, regardless of their politics, ethnicity or regional origins. Reports of the conflict widening, a state of emergency and the risk of conflict reaching the capital, Addis Ababa—the home of the African Union—should be a wake-up call to the world.

I want to state, as I am sure the Minister will, our desire to see, first, a return to peaceful dialogue; secondly, full humanitarian access and an end to attacks and

restrictions on humanitarian personnel and operations; thirdly, urgent, full and independent investigations into the atrocities that have been committed, and the full force of international justice brought to bear on the perpetrators, whoever they may be, including the use of targeted UK sanctions under the Magnitsky regime.

It is nothing short of a tragedy, and we need an immediate ceasefire. Ethiopia had been a global success story, moving towards a democratic society, lifting millions out of poverty and acting as a bastion of stability. Ethiopia had been one of the largest recipients of UK aid, which has grown steadily along with our partnership in trade and other areas.

It is approaching a year since the clashes broke out in Tigray between the Tigray People's Liberation Front and the federal Government. Ethiopia now risks falling into a lethal civil war, undoing decades of peace and prosperity, especially for those in the regions of Tigray, Afar and Amhara. Tens of thousands of refugees have already spilled over the border into Sudan, whose own Government have now been hijacked by a military coup, or have been coerced back into Eritrea, the very country so many were running from, given the history of conflict between the two countries. I am also deeply alarmed by reports of disappearances and targeted attacks on Tigrayans outside of Tigray.

This comes on top of existing economic and health crises and a growing food crisis, with tens of thousands facing the risk of famine. Thousands of Tigray's children face life-endangering acute malnutrition, a condition that will likely affect their development if they survive. Some 100,000 could die from the condition in the next year alone. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recently stated that in one week in early October only 52,000 people were reached with food, or 1% of the 5.2 million

"targeted population in Tigray, in which half of them received only one or two food items."

Some 400,000 people in northern Ethiopia are now facing famine-like conditions, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Putney. In addition, thousands face the prospect of no banking services: no cash, and complete disruption to commercial activities. Little fuel has gone into Tigray since August; organisations cannot work without fuel as they cannot travel to more remote areas. Medicines have not been going into the region either.

I therefore welcome the Government's announcement that they have increased aid to Ethiopia by another £29 million, but the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs has reported that it still faces a funding gap of some £270 million. Staggeringly, UK aid to Ethiopia has in fact decreased by 64.3% between 2018 and 2021 estimates, as stated in the FCDO budget reports.

Would the Minister say what financial assistance the UK has provided to Ethiopia since the onset of the crisis? Has that support been part of the regular official development assistance budget? Will the Government further increase their support, given the worsening situation? As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth has repeatedly asked Ministers, has total support for Ethiopia gone up or down?

We have also heard shocking reports of 10,000 rapes—an estimate that does not take into account the past several months—in a region where only around 9% of health

[Preet Kaur Gill]

facilities are functional; of those, only a third have the capacity for clinical management of rape. Amnesty International's recent report on sexual violence in Tigray is damning. It highlights the sadistic brutality that is being inflicted on women by parties to the conflict, including members of the Ethiopian national defence force, the Eritrean defence force, the Amhara regional police special force, and Fano, an Amhara militia group. In the report, Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International's secretary general, says:

"It's clear that rape and sexual violence have been used as a weapon of war to inflict lasting physical and psychological damage on women and girls in Tigray. Hundreds have been subjected to brutal treatment aimed at degrading and dehumanizing them,"

Yet this is only the start of the crisis facing Tigray and other affected regions.

Ethiopia is also facing the fifth largest covid-19 outbreak in Africa. OCHA reports that only 3% of Tigrayans have been reached with essential sanitation and hygiene messages. Since Members last met to discuss this disaster, little has changed in terms of the human suffering other than that its extent has worsened. The UN recently stated that, from 18 to 28 October, no trucks with humanitarian supplies were able to reach Tigray, and from 1 July to 28 October, only 15% of the trucks needed were able to enter the region. Senior UN staff have been denied access, including the country heads of UNICEF and the head of OCHA. The UN recently announced that it has cancelled flights to the capital, Mekelle, and suspended aid delivery activities as a result of Government-led airstrikes in the area. UN aid chief Samantha Power has said:

"This shortage is not because food is unavailable, but because the Ethiopian Government is obstructing humanitarian aid and personnel, including land convoys and air access."

I ask the Minister what assessment she has made of humanitarian access for civilians caught up in this conflict, and what consideration is being made of the growing evidence of serious human rights abuses and crimes against humanity? How is evidence such as that brought to public attention by the BBC World Service and human rights organisations being used to ensure that those responsible do not escape justice? She will know that the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has now released a joint report with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission that investigated abuses between November 2020 and late June 2021. Given the continued gravity of this situation, we call on the UK urgently to support the establishment of an independent investigation by the UN Human Rights Council.

As we all know—and my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North raised this—the Sudanese transitional Government have been hijacked by a military coup, and I welcome the common view across the House and the international community condemning these events. For Labour, I repeat our complete condemnation of this coup, joining the Government, the UN and other international partners. This is nothing short of a betrayal of the hopes of the Sudanese people after decades of repression and the denial of human rights.

This comes at a critical time for the people for Sudan, after reports that heavy rainfall has led to hundreds of thousands of people being affected and that relief stocks,

especially of WASH—water, sanitation and hygiene—products, are depleting. The country currently has 9.8 million severely food-insecure people and 1.1 million refugees. In addition, we know of at least 60,000 refugees from Ethiopia who have fled a war zone to those famine-like conditions. Can the Minister comment on the condition of those refugees, and what humanitarian support and assistance is being provided?

Last Monday, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan took power from the Sudanese transitional Government and declared a state of emergency. Thousands have taken to the streets to protest against this attack on democracy, and reports suggest that several people have been killed and hundreds injured in clashes with armed forces in the capital. Live ammunition has reportedly been used on civilian protesters. Can the Minister confirm whether contact has been made with the general since the urgent question last week, and what action is being taken?

While UK overseas development aid depends on the recipient country upholding its people's rights—and this military Government have not done so—millions are in need. It is shocking that the UK Government have in effect cut Sudan's aid by £580 million for 2022, based on estimates, so will the Minister now reconsider those cuts to vital humanitarian assistance for both Sudan and Ethiopia? What assessment has the Minister made of the risk to international judicial processes against former President Bashir for crimes committed in Darfur and elsewhere, as well as against those responsible for more recent massacres?

While the Government pivot to the Indo-Pacific, cut our development budget and weaken our alliances and influence, the situation in east Africa and the horn of Africa goes from bad to worse, with consequences reaching far beyond the regional environment. If we are to avoid catastrophe for the ordinary women, men and children of Ethiopia and Sudan and avoid a descent into even worse consequences across the region, the Government must end their retreat from the world stage, step up, and show some desperately needed moral and political leadership.

4.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Vicky Ford): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Bardell. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) on securing this important debate, and I thank all hon. Members for their contributions.

The situation in Ethiopia is truly dire. It is worsening and very fast moving. In recent days, we have seen a further expansion of the conflict to the town of Dessie and beyond, and states of emergency have been called, first, in the Amhara region and, yesterday, nationwide. The provisions of those measures are deeply concerning; increased military powers place restrictions on gatherings and call for civilians to bear arms. We updated our travel advice last week, and again last night. We are reviewing this continually; British nationals in Ethiopia should check the gov.uk website to make sure that they have the most current advice.

We should remember that this has been going on for a very long time. We are at the first anniversary of the start of this conflict. Right now, 7 million people in Tigray and the neighbouring regions need humanitarian

assistance—the highest number of people in catastrophic food conditions since the 2011 famine in Somalia. The risk of widespread loss of life is high. Furthermore, humanitarian operations in Tigray are effectively suspended; no food or cash has been able to enter Tigray since 18 October. There have been no fuel deliveries since the beginning of August. There are currently 369 trucks trying to get aid, including medicines, into Tigray. On top of this, Government of Ethiopia airstrikes over the last three weeks are reported to have killed more than 20 civilians, including six children, and injured more than 70. This appalling ongoing situation is causing acute human suffering.

Before the violence had even started, Ethiopia was already suffering from the impacts of climate change and ecological issues—the issues we are discussing in Glasgow this week, and I just got back overnight. We should be focusing our attention right now on combating these long-term climate impacts and on how we can use our £2.7 billion adaptation budget—about half of which will go into Africa—to help countries such as Ethiopia. Instead, we are seeing increased conflict, which is simply compounding human suffering. Today, children in Tigray are dying from malnourishment.

The response to the humanitarian crisis continues to be hampered, not only by the intolerable blockade, which in itself is intolerable. At the end of September seven key UN officials were expelled, and in October an airstrike took place while a UN humanitarian air service flight was in the air, putting humanitarian workers in grave risk. That should never have happened. Shockingly, 23 humanitarian workers have been killed in Tigray this year, including staff working on UK-funded programmes. The UN and NGOs are now withdrawing their staff from the region.

In seeking this debate, hon. Members are right also to consider the impact of what is happening in Sudan, which is facing significant internal challenges. I visited Sudan two weeks ago and I met representatives from many different parts of the Government, but also from civil society, including women activists, entrepreneurs and community leaders. I saw at first hand how the UK school feeding programme is enabling children, and especially girls, to attend school. That was before the coup. As I made it clear to the House on the day of the coup d'état in Sudan, the UK strongly condemns the arrest of civilian members of Sudan's transitional Government by the military.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) asked what we were doing with international partners. With them we are absolutely continuing to maintain public, international pressure on the military to restore the democratic transition. I personally commended the African Union's leadership in its decision at a joint AU-UN Security Council meeting on 28 October to suspend Sudan from all activities. Together with partners we are also seeking a special session of the UN Human Rights Council as soon as possible to discuss the situation and maintain pressure to return Sudan to the democratic transition. Its people demand it. Furthermore, as part of our engagement with Gulf countries we are looking to release a statement with partners shortly. Our position is very clear: we continue to call for the military to release all unlawfully detained civilians and fully restore the civilian-led Government. Violence against civilian protesters must stop.

The right hon. Member for Islington North suggested that 60,000 Ethiopians have fled from conflict in Ethiopia to Sudan. It is actually more than 80,000. Refugee camps are struggling to absorb so many people. I also want to make it clear that the crisis in Ethiopia is man-made. It has been caused by human actions and decisions. There is no military solution. We have consistently called on all the warring parties to end hostilities and seek a political dialogue and a peaceful solution. We have made these points repeatedly to the Ethiopian Government and the Tigrayan authorities. We have also called for Eritrean troops to withdraw. When I became the Minister for Africa, I prioritised meeting the Ethiopian ambassador as my first meeting with a London-based ambassador. During the meeting, I pressed the need for urgent humanitarian access and an end to hostilities. The British ambassador in Ethiopia saw the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister last week and reiterated that call.

The UK has been very active on the world stage. We led the call for the first Security Council discussion on the conflict in November last year, and we have kept a spotlight on this at the UN. There have been six closed meetings and two open meetings of the Council to date. The Government have also called for consistent action at the Human Rights Council. In October, the UK led a joint statement signed by 43 partners, calling on the Ethiopian Government to reverse their decision to expel seven senior UN officials.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) pressed the need for the Ethiopian situation to have focus at the highest levels, and I reassure him that that is happening. The Foreign Secretary joined her international counterparts, including Secretary of State Blinken, in conversation with AU special envoy Obasanjo on 12 October. I also discussed the situation with Kenyan counterparts, including President Kenyatta, yesterday at COP and with a number of African leaders during my two days in Glasgow. It is a principle of the African Union, which is based in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, that African solutions should be found to African problems. It is, of course, right that African partners are taking the lead on trying to find an end to the conflict, but I want to be utterly clear that the UK is working to fully support them in their efforts.

The right hon. Member for Islington North mentioned arms sales. I reassure him that there are no exports of arms from the UK on available records. The UK Government will not grant an export licence if to do so would be inconsistent with the consolidated EU and national export licensing criteria, which have respect for human rights and international humanitarian law. Arms for the conflict are sadly likely to come through formal arms sales and some smuggling routes. We are concerned about reports of arms arriving in Ethiopia and continue to push all international partners to call for an end to the conflict and support the peace effort.

The Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), asked about atrocity prevention. The FCDO is committed to atrocity prevention in all contexts. FCDO staff can draw on the expertise of a new FCDO conflict centre, which was announced in the integrated review in March. We are in the process of fully establishing that centre. It will draw on expertise from across Government and beyond to develop and lead the strategic conflict agenda, harnessing the breadth

[Vicky Ford]

of conflict and stability capabilities and working with partners to increase our impact. It will work on thematic issues, including preventing sexual violence in conflict, sanctions, women, peace and security, girls' education, children in armed conflict, and freedom of religion or belief.

Sarah Champion: Will the Minister give way?

Vicky Ford: I will not take interventions until I clear a few more important lines.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) mentioned our commitment to long-term projects in Africa. This week, right at the outset of COP26, the UK demonstrated our long-term commitment to the continent. We have mobilised international support and finance from donor countries to protect the Congo basin. I remind the hon. Member that many parts of the Congo basin have long suffered from conflict. We are committing new funding to support African countries in rolling out critical projects to adapt to climate change, and in partnership with South Africa, the USA, the EU, Germany and France we announced the ambitious Just Energy Transaction, which is mobilising \$8.5 billion to support decarbonisation efforts in South Africa—a big project for South Africa's stability and the future of our planet.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) mentioned prioritising humanitarian aid. As a result of last week's Budget, we were pleased to announce that we will be increasing our funding for our highest priorities, including using more bilateral investment. That means spending aid money directly on our priorities, including life-saving humanitarian aid, and especially prioritising the UK's world-class organisations and our own frontline work. That is absolutely a focus for the Foreign Secretary.

On 16 October, the Foreign Secretary and I announced a further £29 million of humanitarian aid for northern Ethiopia, taking our commitment to more than £76 million. The UK is the second-largest donor there, and our finances provided water, healthcare and nutrition to hundreds of thousands of people facing famine. It is truly heartbreaking to see the continuation of this terrible conflict, which is also pulling resources away from the long-term development areas that Ethiopia had started to make such impressive progress in.

Fleur Anderson *rose*—

Vicky Ford: I really want to get my important statements out. I will come back to the hon. Lady at the end.

As many hon. Members have mentioned, the conflict has been marked by intolerable levels of sexual violence. They are appalling, and we are appalled and outraged at them. The UK is delivering essential services to survivors of sexual violence and to those at risk of sexual violence in northern Ethiopia. Our programmes provide individuals with critical support and care, including support for emergency mental health services. However, without sustained humanitarian access, these vital

programmes for those horrifically abused women and for women at risk of abuse cannot be delivered.

We have strongly supported the joint investigation by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. Their report was published just a couple of hours ago; we are studying it carefully and will push for justice and accountability as the situation demands.

All sides must protect civilians and put humanitarian needs first. That means prioritising negotiations over military activities. I call again on all parties to allow humanitarian supplies to flow. Without that, we fear that many thousands of people will die. When the UK ambassador spoke to Deputy Prime Minister Demeke and Prime Minister Abiy in recent days, he made it clear that we must see an immediate improvement in humanitarian access and meaningful engagement in peace efforts. The expansion of hostilities by the TPLF and now the Oromo Liberation Army are displacing hundreds of thousands more people and further destabilising the country.

I call on all parties, in particular the TPLF, the Government of Ethiopia and the Oromo Liberation Army to stop fighting. The continued advance of TPLF and OLA forces must stop. They should not enter Addis Ababa.

Fleur Anderson: I want to ask the Minister about the Sudanese aid funding. The Department for International Development was a long-term investor in the Sudanese peacebuilding process. That funding was entirely cut. Will she look into that cut and commit to returning to funding peacebuilding in Sudan, given what has happened recently?

Hannah Bardell (in the Chair): Briefly, Minister, so that the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) has an opportunity to sum up.

Vicky Ford: The UK has not only been a significant funder in Sudan, but has provided the bridging loan to help Sudan clear its arrears with the African Development Bank as part of that restructuring. We are a leading donor to Sudan. In addition to humanitarian assistance, our support had been focusing on the Sudanese Government's twin priorities of the economy and peace. Importantly, we were putting support into the family programme, which helped to support those on the lowest incomes.

We really need to stabilise the situation in Sudan. Right now we need to see a return to civilian Government and the stabilisation of the situation, and we need to see aid coming through. We have spoken to the UN food programme today to see whether it is getting food aid, because of the blockade in Port Sudan. That is the key priority.

To sum up, we are under no illusions about the gravity of the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia. We will continue to provide aid to those who need it, and we call for that aid to be able to be delivered. We keep pushing the Government in Ethiopia, the TPLF and all—

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Adult Dependent Relative Visas

4.27 pm

Hannah Bardell (in the Chair): Before I begin, I remind Members that they are expected to wear face coverings. Given the recent outbreak in Parliament, I expect to see everybody wearing one if they are not speaking. For those who do not have face coverings, I will ask the Doorkeepers whether they can source some spare masks. I remind Members that they are asked by the House to have a covid lateral flow test twice a week if coming on to the parliamentary estate. That can be done either at the testing centre in the House or at home. Please also give each other and members of staff space when seated and when entering and leaving the room. I assure the right hon. Member moving the motion that he will have his full 30 minutes. For those watching outside, we are somewhat delayed because of two votes in the House.

4.28 pm

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered adult dependent relative visas.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Bardell. I want to talk about an important topic that deserves more attention than it has had, and I want to urge the Minister to change the current hostile environment policy on adult dependent relative visas, which is undermining the national health service. The immigration system should treat overseas nationals working in the UK and their families abroad more fairly than it does at the moment. I want to focus particularly on the impact on people working in the NHS.

Nine years ago, in 2012, the Government changed the immigration rules to establish their hostile environment policy. Under one of the changes, elderly parents or grandparents of British citizens are permitted to join them in the UK only if they can demonstrate that they require a level of long-term personal care that their home country cannot provide. Before 2012, a dependent relative needed to show only that they were living alone “in the most exceptional compassionate circumstances”.

Now, the rules state that doctors are prohibited from bringing their elderly relatives to the UK from overseas unless they meet a very strict set of conditions. The problematic rules are set out in paragraphs E-ECDR.2.4 and 2.5, and I will read them. Paragraph E-ECDR.2.4 states:

“The applicant or, if the applicant and their partner are the sponsor’s parents or grandparents, the applicant’s partner, must as a result of age, illness or disability require long-term personal care to perform everyday tasks.”

Paragraph E-ECDR.2.5 states:

“The applicant or, if the applicant and their partner are the sponsor’s parents or grandparents, the applicant’s partner, must be unable, even with the practical and financial help of the sponsor, to obtain the required level of care in the country where they are living, because (a) it is not available and there is no person in that country who can reasonably provide it; or (b) it is not affordable.”

In practice, those conditions are extremely hard to meet. Home Office data shows that in the four years from 2017 to 2020 inclusive, 908 visa applications were made under the adult dependant rule. Only 35 were approved at the first attempt. Over 96% of them were refused. Some were subsequently granted after the difficulty and expense of an appeal. In 2017, I understand the

Home Office did not issue a single adult dependent relative visa. Before the rule changes, thousands were approved.

What is the justification for the change? Ministers have argued that the rules are to stop adult dependent relatives from entering the UK and burdening taxpayers. Other ways to avoid any burden on the NHS and local authorities do not appear to have been considered. The existing immigration health surcharge could be incorporated into adult dependent relative applications—Canada, Australia and New Zealand have that sort of model in their schemes for elderly migration—or applicants could be required to have private medical insurance. Instead, we have made it virtually impossible for elderly relatives to come.

Over the past two years, we have all been reminded just how important the national health service is. I know I speak for all of us when I say how grateful we are for the extraordinary efforts of doctors, nurses and other NHS staff to protect and care for all of us throughout the pandemic. They should be rewarded for their hard work and dedication. Instead, many are being punished with these hostile immigration policies.

One doctor, a British national based in Birmingham, told me about the impact on him. He came from India to train as a GP in 2004. The UK is now his home. He studied here, he is working here, he is bringing up his children here. Sadly, he lost his father to covid in India earlier this year. Now, his 70-year-old mother wants to join her son and his family in the UK, but she is not allowed to do so, because of these rules. He tells me that “no matter how much I earn and pay in taxes, my inability to look after my mother makes me feel incomplete and unfulfilled.”

He also feels his children are being denied a proper relationship with their grandmother. He says that

“my children should not be penalised for a decision I took 17 years back to move to the UK.”

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for raising such an important issue. His account from the doctor echoes that of a constituent of mine, a British national of Indian birth. She faces the same very difficult personal dilemma of having to consider, on the one hand, her patients and her service to the local NHS and, on the other hand, her parents in India. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that when we discuss this difficult issue, we should bear in mind not only the potential impact on the NHS, but also the tragic personal stories and the trauma that it inflicts?

Stephen Timms: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We are putting these dedicated public servants in an impossible position. I received an email yesterday referring to

“yet another consultant who has left the NHS (to live in Oman so that his mother could be with the family again).”

Six thousand doctors left the NHS to go overseas in the five years from 2015 to 2020. We do not know the reasons why they all went, but a significant number went for this reason.

The Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, the right hon. Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt)—a former Secretary of State, of course—pointed out to the Prime Minister at Prime Minister’s questions today that

“there are now severe shortages in nearly every specialty.”

[Stephen Timms]

The policy we are debating this afternoon is part of the problem. We should be bending over backwards to keep doctors here. Instead, we are forcing them to leave the country. Many doctors feel very strongly, as the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) has just reminded the House, that they are being denied a family life. The emotional toll increases the risk of burnout.

In August this year, the British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin and the Association of Pakistani Physicians of Northern Europe carried out a survey of nearly 1,000 doctors in the UK, and 90% reported feelings of anxiety, stress and helplessness because of this issue. Is that really how the UK should treat doctors who have risked their lives to care for us throughout the pandemic?

The rules also have a severe impact on children in the families affected, not least through making it very difficult for them to have a relationship with grandparents. Equally, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants sampled a group of professionals in the UK. Of the 121 children affected, 20% came from families living in lower-income households, more likely single-earner households. It points out that having a grandparent who can help with childcare will enable parents to work in cases where childcare costs would rule that out.

The Government have said that the rules on adult dependent relatives are in place to protect the NHS. They are actually undermining it. Medical professionals have busy, stressful lives, even more so in the pandemic. Those with vulnerable relatives abroad often have to take leave, sometimes extended leave, and travel overseas often to arrange care for their elderly parents, at a time when the NHS needs them here, and we need them here more than ever. Some doctors have been forced to leave the UK altogether. In the survey I referenced a moment ago, eight in 10 respondents were looking at leaving due to these rules.

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend, who has done terrifically well to secure this very urgent debate. Coming from Birmingham, I know both the associations he referred to. To train a junior doctor costs about £230,000 and to train a GP or consultant costs about £500,000. Every time we lose one of those consultants or GPs, or even a junior doctor, it is a huge cost to us. Should the Government not understand when they are looking at value for money that these people are well paid and able to support the parents they bring over, and will contribute towards the health insurance that they have already agreed? This would give them peace of mind. They are hugely stressed at the moment and most are still thinking of leaving at a time when we need their expertise.

Stephen Timms: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Having invested so much in their training, we need to keep those experts here, not force them to leave the country. There are more than 96,000 non-UK graduates on the General Medical Council register. The evidence of the potential loss to the NHS if these restrictions stay in place is enormous. We simply cannot afford that loss. The investment made in their training is a very important point; I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising it.

This is a real threat, not a theoretical worry. The Association of Pakistani Physicians of Northern Europe said that

“in many cases, highly trained and competent”

members of staff are leaving the UK to return to their home country or go somewhere else where the rules are more accommodating in order to care for their elderly family members.

Of course, these rules will apply to EU citizens arriving to live in the UK post Brexit. They will deter skilled doctors from European countries from working here, as they are forced to opt instead for countries with a less hostile and more accommodating policy. I remind the House that adult dependent relative entry clearance applications to the UK are among the most expensive type of visas that there are. The cost of a visa application for an adult who requires care from their relative here is £3,250. The Government say these rules are to avoid burdening the NHS; I wonder whether the Minister can put a figure on the cost of a more accommodating policy. What is the estimate that we are talking about? What will be the cost of losing all these highly trained staff who are forced to leave to fulfil their family responsibilities?

The British Medical Association represents and negotiates on behalf of all doctors and medical students in the UK. In January, together with other leading medical bodies, it wrote to the Home Secretary asking her to remove this restrictive adult dependant rule for doctors. Soon after its letter, I wrote to the then Immigration Minister asking him to meet to discuss the issue. He declined my request to meet and simply told me, “those most in need of care remain the most likely to qualify.”

The problem is that enormous numbers are not able to come. According to the Home Office, just 70 adult dependent relative visas were issued in 2020. The Government need, at least, to review their application process to determine just why so few applicants succeed. I am certain the Minister will have received representations from the Health Secretary about this issue, and I hope they will undertake a review.

The BMA has consistently raised concerns about the potential impact on patient care and on the wider NHS if doctors have to move because of these rules. Ministers do not seem to take much notice of the urgent concerns of those working on the frontline of our health service, but it is time to start taking notice before serious harm is inflicted on the NHS. Doctors must not be kept waiting any longer. There is no justification for forcing committed, dedicated NHS doctors to choose between their work and their home in the UK, and their deeply felt duty to their elderly parents to support and care for them in difficulty and old age.

Will the Minister commit today to review this unfair policy? Why have so few applicants been successful in the past nine years? Why are Ministers weakening the NHS in order to prevent elderly relatives from joining their key worker families here in the UK?

4.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Rachel Maclean): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Bardell. I thank the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) for securing this debate. I also thank the other Members who contributed. I recognise the strength of feeling on

the topic, as the right hon. Gentleman so eloquently articulated. I will respond to his points as best I can in the time I have, but it will be helpful if I set out some background on adult dependent relative visas.

The family immigration rules were reformed in July 2012 to ease the burden on the taxpayer, promote integration and tackle abuse, thereby ensuring family migration to the UK is fair to migrants and the wider community. Costs associated with cases under the route for adult dependent relatives can be significant. The Department of Health and Social Care has estimated that a person living until the age of 85 costs the NHS on average about £150,000 in their lifetime, with more than 50% of that cost arising from the age of 65 onwards. It is important to note that this figure does not take account of any social care costs met by local authorities.

Under the rules, adult dependants must demonstrate that they require, as a result of age, illness or disability, a level of long-term personal care that could be provided only in the UK by their sponsor here, and without recourse to public funds. They must apply from overseas and not while in the UK as a visitor. The rules in place before July 2012 in essence provided an expectation of settlement in the UK for a parent or grandparent aged 65 or over where they were financially dependent on their UK sponsor, subject to the provision by the sponsor of a five-year undertaking that they could maintain and accommodate the adult dependent relative without access to public funds. They also enabled a parent or grandparent under the age of 65 and other adult dependent relatives of any age to apply to settle permanently in the UK in the most exceptional compassionate circumstances, as the right hon. Gentleman said. The old rules allowed an application to be made in the UK, including while here as a visitor, as well as overseas.

The current rules for adult dependent relatives seek to ensure that only those who need to be physically close to and cared for by a close relative in the UK are able to settle here. Those who do not have such care needs can be supported financially in the country in which they live by their relative in the UK. Those in most need of care remain those most likely to qualify, compared with those who have a preference to come to live in the UK with a relative here. The lawfulness of the rules was upheld by the Court of Appeal in May 2017.

Mr Mahmood: Does the Minister understand that this is not just a question of finances and money? This is an issue of relationships, of parents, children and grandchildren, and of building and understanding a family. We can support someone on their own abroad, but we cannot have that family linkage growing.

Rachel Maclean: Yes, I fully understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but the Government's duty is to formulate rules that are fair to the British taxpayer and to the NHS, and that ensure a fair system. I will come on to the specific issues about the health service to which the right hon. Member for East Ham alluded, but it is vital that our immigration policies do not place an unfair burden on the taxpayer.

We want to ensure that people here legally are welcomed and celebrated—which we do in this country—as part of a fair and sustainable immigration system. All family migration to the UK, including that of adult dependent relatives, must be on a properly sustainable basis that is fair to both migrants and the wider community.

Our position on adult dependent relatives remains that we have rules in place to support those who are most in need, but we are clear that the rules cannot provide a route for every parent to join their adult child in the UK and to settle here. It is simply not sustainable for the economy or the health service for there to be a routine expectation of settlement in the UK for parents and grandparents aged 65 or over. Therefore, only those who require long-term care that cannot be delivered in the country in which they live should be eligible to settle here.

We fully understand that such cases provoke strong feelings, as Members have articulated, and they can result in difficult choices for individuals, but it is essential that the rules are fair and balanced for the taxpayer, given the significant NHS and social care cost that can arise when those adult dependent relatives settle in the UK. Failure to maintain that balance puts the legitimacy of the entire system at risk.

I now turn to the issue of the NHS. Of course, we are hugely grateful for the vital contributions of all NHS staff, in particular during the pandemic. The Government have no intention whatever of punishing that group. By contrast, we have introduced a range of unprecedented measures to ensure that the health and care sector is supported fully. However, it is only fair that I address the points that have been made.

The impact of medical professionals potentially leaving the NHS was an issue that was raised five years ago and considered as part of the Home Office review of the adult dependent relative rules published in December 2016. That report considered the number of NHS staff who support adult dependent relatives overseas. It is likely to be a small proportion of the total population of professionally qualified clinical staff.

Furthermore, there is no evidence to show that significant numbers of medical professionals have left or been deterred from applying to work in the UK since the revised rules were implemented. It was concluded that, while some who might sponsor someone to come to the UK might choose to leave as a result of the revised rules, including some in skilled employment, the impact remains proportionate to the policy aim.

The latest figures show a 19% increase in skilled worker visas in the year ending June 2021, and that the majority of that increase was due to the new health and care worker visa, which saw 45,722 grants, accounting for 44% of the total skilled worker visas granted. In fact, such was the demand of overseas doctors and nurses wanting to work in the UK, in 2018 the Government lifted the cap on doctors and nurses. The Health Secretary at the time said:

“Overseas staff have been a vital part of our NHS since its creation 70 years ago. Today's news sends a clear message to nurses and doctors from around the world that the NHS welcomes and values their skills and dedication.”

As I said, there is no evidence that significant numbers of professionals have been deterred from applying to work in the UK since the new adult dependent relative rules were implemented, and nor is there evidence to show that professionals have left the UK.

The NHS has made significant savings since the rules were introduced. The 2016 report notes that once assumptions were taken into account, the figures suggested potential NHS savings of around £249 million over

[*Rachel Maclean*]

10 years. This policy will be kept under review. We are of course sympathetic about the impacts on individuals and families, but the policy must apply fairly across our society. It would not be right to provide a more generous approach for healthcare professionals than for other groups.

Ben Lake: Just to elaborate and perhaps add to the considerations, there is of course an impact on the family, but there is also an impact on the community. In many rural areas, such as mine, if we lose a solitary GP, who has to go back, we will not have a GP practice for a very large area, so there is that wider impact too. We should bear in mind that even though it may be an individual example, it has quite a widespread impact.

Rachel Maclean: Of course, I recognise the impacts of the issues highlighted by the hon. Gentleman. On the point made by the right hon. Member for East Ham, that we have not considered other ways to avoid the burden on the NHS and local authorities, making comparisons with other countries and their systems, I advise him that we did consider other ways. The Home Office published a review of the adult dependent relatives rules in December 2016. As I said, we continue to keep this under review. The report is published on gov.uk, so I encourage him to look at that.

As part of the review, specific considerations were given to alternative methods of achieving the main aim, which is reducing the burden on the taxpayer and NHS costs. Those alternatives were mandatory medical and care insurance, amendments to the immigration health surcharge and a bond scheme, requiring up-front payment, which would be offset against the cost of any later NHS care. Particular consideration was given to how far each of those would achieve the policy intention, be feasible to administer, and continue to allow an adult dependent relative, with significant long-term personal care needs that could not be met in their home country, to join their relative.

Those options were considered to place a potentially unreasonable administrative burden on the NHS, while also raising significant concerns over affordability and discrimination. For example, mandatory private healthcare insurance was considered likely to be prohibitively expensive, especially if it was to cover NHS emergency treatment and/or social care and residential care. It would also benefit only those applicants whose sponsor had substantial means. Those without a close relative with such means would be excluded from the UK, even if they required long-term personal care that could only be provided by their relative here. There is also no guarantee that insurance taken at the date of application would not be later cancelled or not renewed, including in circumstances outside that person's control, such as a significant deterioration in their health or a change in the financial circumstances of their sponsor making the insurance unavailable or the premiums unaffordable.

Any alternative scheme requiring an up-front payment of many thousands of pounds would, by definition, exclude those cases unable to pay it, regardless of the level of their personal care needs. Similarly, in the light

of the estimates I mentioned earlier—that a person aged 65 to 74 costs the NHS £2,287 per year—such a scheme for adult dependents would likely need to be set at significantly more than its current level. That is why it was concluded that the revised rules were set at the right level to provide immediate settled status in the UK and free access to the NHS to those relatives whose care needs could not be met in their home country, while protecting the NHS and the tax burden.

Stephen Timms: The Minister makes the point that there is no evidence of doctors leaving the UK for this reason. We do know that 6,000 doctors left to go overseas in the five years between 2015 to 2020. She is right that we do not know the reason why they all left, but it is clear that at least hundreds went for this reason, and possibly more of those 6,000. Is she not concerned about that loss of skilled, committed doctors from the health service, at a time when—as the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, the right hon. Member for South West Surrey, pointed out at lunchtime today—there is a shortage in nearly every speciality?

Rachel Maclean: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his point. He is right to ask the question. As I said earlier, we do not have verified evidence of those numbers, and nor do we have specific evidence pointing to this specific reason. There may be a number of reasons why people choose to leave and work in another country. Moreover, I point to the evidence in front of us about the people who are choosing to take up those skilled visas to come to this country, so these rules are clearly not a deterrent. I refer to my earlier remarks about the policy intention behind introducing these changes to the rules, which is to make sure that only those people who genuinely need to come here are covered by these rules, and therefore would be able to come here under the system that we have.

In conclusion, I recognise that this is an emotive subject, and I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for East Ham for the way in which he has articulated it. Of course, I and the Government want to support the NHS. We keep our policies under review, as I have said, and we have given considerable care and consideration to the factors that he has mentioned.

Stephen Timms: The Minister is being very generous with her time. She has made much of the cost issue; I think she indicated that for somebody elderly arriving in the UK, we would expect health and care costs of something like £175,000, but a GP has had £500,000 invested in them. I wonder whether an assessment has been made somewhere of the value for taxpayers—the straightforward financial cost—of forcing somebody who is highly trained out of the country, versus the cost of care for their elderly relative.

Rachel Maclean: I can reassure the right hon. Gentleman that the costs have been considered in the round, including the costs he refers to and others. In fact, those figures I quoted at the beginning of the remarks did not include care costs, which I am sure he will agree are significantly higher than the other figures I have referred to, which are purely for treatment and costs.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Medical Cannabis under Prescription: Children with Epilepsy

4.57 pm

Hannah Bardell (in the Chair): Before we begin, I remind Members that they are expected to wear face coverings, given the recent outbreak of covid-19 in Parliament. I expect all Members to be wearing masks if they are not speaking; if there are Members without a mask, masks can be found to my right, on top of the cupboard. This is in line with current Government guidance and that of the House of Commons Commission. I also remind Members that they are asked by the House to have a covid lateral flow test twice a week if coming on to the parliamentary estate. This can be done either at the testing centre in the House or at home. Please also give Members adequate space when seated and when entering and leaving the room.

Members will be aware that we have been delayed as a result of two votes, so this debate is due to end at 5.56 pm.

4.58 pm

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered medical cannabis under prescription for children with epilepsy.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Bardell, and I am very grateful to open this debate on an issue that affects many of our constituents. I do not propose to speak for long, because I can see that quite a large number of colleagues are in the Chamber and would like to speak as well. If they have not already done so, I invite them to inform the Chair that they wish to speak.

I wish to mention my constituents Maya, who is nine years old, and Evelina, who is just four. Maya and Evelina suffer from rare forms of epilepsy and rely on medical cannabis to improve their quality of life. Their families are currently having to pay up to £2,000 a month for private prescriptions of medical cannabis, as they are unable to access that medicine on the NHS. Their families are also having to go to unbelievable lengths to raise money, something that has been made more difficult during the pandemic as there has been less opportunity to fundraise. Maya's family have set up a Facebook page called "Mercy for Maya", where her mum Samantha runs monthly fundraisers and raffles to help with the enormous monthly costs. My constituents should not have to do this for something that is legal on the NHS.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): The picture that the hon. Member paints is one that I and many other hon. Members are familiar with, because we also have constituents going through the same ridiculous hoops to get a legally available medicine. Is he aware of any other medication in this country for which that has ever been the case—it has been legal and available, but people have had to raise the money for it themselves in this way?

Alberto Costa: I am not sure, but I doubt that our constituents would have to put their hands in their pockets to the tune of £2,000 a month to pay for any other medication that was extremely important for their

severely ill children. My constituents, and indeed all Members' constituents who have children in this situation, should not have to pay for this medication themselves.

Medical cannabis has had lots of benefits for Maya, including preventing her from having prolonged seizures, which has meant less time in hospital. Medical cannabis has also improved her alertness and engagement. She used to spend a lot of time asleep during the day, but she is now able to attend school, which she very much enjoys.

Both I and colleagues have lobbied the Government tirelessly to widen access to this life-changing and life-saving treatment. I am sure that I speak for many Members here today in expressing delight that medical cannabis was made legal in specialist cases in November 2018. This week marks three years since that law change.

I welcome the new Minister to her place and the good progress that the Government have made on widening access to medical cannabis. I am also grateful to her for agreeing to meet me, as co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group for access to medical cannabis under prescription, along with my colleague the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi), later this month. I look forward to discussing the issues in greater detail with her.

You may be interested to learn, Ms Bardell, that since the very welcome law change three years ago, which should have improved the lives of children who suffer with rare and intractable forms of epilepsy, only three prescriptions have been issued on the NHS—only three prescriptions. At this point, I would like to clarify that we are talking about whole-plant extract. This type of medical cannabis, containing CBD and THC—cannabidiol and tetrahydrocannabinol—together with many other active ingredients, has been life transforming for a small cohort of families and their children. It is vital that that point is understood, as there have been several hundred prescriptions for a fully licensed paediatric drug known as Epidiolex, but that is primarily CBD-only. There is an acknowledgment that that drug has a role to play, but it was not the subject of the appeals that were so eloquently and passionately made by the families concerned when they visited Parliament at the start of this week.

Access to medical cannabis was legalised after high-profile campaigning by me and other Members across the House, who are here today, and the hard work of the group End Our Pain. It and other campaigners, along with some of my colleagues, worked with the then six-year-old Alfie Dingley, who also suffers from rare, intractable epilepsy, to help him secure access to medical cannabis. In 2018, after intensive campaigning, Alfie was granted the first ever long-term licence for the type of medical cannabis that is life transforming. Medical cannabis subsequently became legalised in specialist cases on 1 November 2018. Since Alfie secured the prescription, his transformation has been significant. He has gone from suffering up to 150 life-threatening seizures a day to recently celebrating being 500 days seizure free. The change in health and quality of life for Alfie is nothing short of transformative, and that transformation has been evident in many others, too.

I am very grateful to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, who in 2018 was the Home Secretary who granted the licence for medical cannabis to Alfie Dingley. I know that my right hon. Friend cares deeply about this issue. Now that he is Secretary of State for Health, I urge him to consider the recommendations

[*Alberto Costa*]

that I am mentioning today on what further action could be taken to help children like my constituents to access medical cannabis on the NHS. The law change has been a change in legislation, but not in practice. That has been reflected in the number of NHS prescriptions that have been issued. My constituents and many others were greatly reassured by the steps that this Government took to legalise these treatments in 2018, but they are understandably dismayed that actions have not followed words in this case.

There are a few reasons for this blockage on NHS prescriptions. At the same time that the law changed, a number of bodies issued guidance on how and when medical cannabis should be prescribed. Those bodies included the British Paediatric Neurology Association, the General Medical Council, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and the Royal College of Physicians, but let us be clear: nothing—absolutely nothing—in any of the guidance states that it is wrong or not allowed to prescribe this medicine, either privately or on the NHS.

However, I am advised by the families and advocates on this issue that the guidance paints a somewhat confusing picture. In my capacity as co-chair of the APPG, I have attended a number of meetings with senior NHS leaders. In those meetings, they tell me that if an NHS consultant wishes to prescribe medical cannabis, they are able to do so. The British Paediatric Neurology Association does not currently support the use of whole-plant medicinal cannabis, which includes the THC ingredient, and has published guidance stating that only neurologists should be allowed to prescribe cannabinoids containing CBD. That guidance has been criticised for being overly restrictive.

The high level of caution in the guidance issued is likely to have played its part in preventing the prescribing of those products and making NHS trusts unwilling to provide funding. Currently, there are only three paediatricians in Britain who prescribe the whole-plant oil to children with drug-resistant epilepsy, and one of them is to retire imminently, meaning that families are at risk of losing their prescriptions.

A few months ago we had a breakthrough, as NICE issued clarification of its guidance relating to the use of medical cannabis for drug-resistant paediatric epilepsy. It has now made it clear that clinicians can prescribe medicinal cannabis in appropriate cases. However, even since the clarification of the guidance, the hesitancy among the medical profession remains.

I am aware that this issue continues to receive a high degree of media, public and political attention, and I am concerned that some of those involved—perhaps some of the medical professional bodies such as the BPNA—may be experiencing a temptation to entrench and dig in. If that is the case, I make a plea to them and their medical professional colleagues to reject that temptation and instead to reach out to work with the Department of Health and Social Care, the Minister and her colleagues, the families and interested politicians to find a way forward to help these vulnerable families and their children.

I also strongly encourage the Government to ensure better education for paediatric neurologists on whole-plant extract medical cannabis and its benefits for children

with drug-resistant epilepsy. I am aware that the previous Secretary of State for Health and Social Care tasked the NHS with undertaking a review of the blockage on NHS prescriptions. The review reported in August 2019 and made two main recommendations: first, that an expert panel be set up to advise on the prescription of medical cannabis in cases of paediatric epilepsy; and secondly, that a trial should be set up to inform the evidence base on safety and efficacy, and to act as a way of getting these families access to the medicine for free.

The families and campaigners have told me that those recommendations offered them great hope and a way forward. However, things have not worked out as the families hoped. Yes, the expert panel was set up; it is called RESCAS—the refractory epilepsy specialist clinical advisory service—and its members are indeed experts in paediatric epilepsy, but as far as the families can see they are not experts in the way that whole-plant extract has worked both here in the UK and overseas.

Imagine, then, the enormous disappointment when one of the very first cases considered was turned down for medical cannabis. The young boy in question is experiencing a life transformation similar in positive impact to that which Alfie is experiencing. The panel is not working. I know the Minister cares deeply about this matter. I hope she will agree that the make-up and terms of the panel are in need of urgent review so that it includes expertise not just in the condition itself, but in the medicine too.

The other main recommendation of the August 2019 review was the establishment of trials. I understand that the Government's position is that there needs to be more research in the area before prescriptions can be available more freely. The proposed trial was to be observational, which meant the children could continue on the medicine and their condition be evaluated by medical professionals. It soon became clear last year that plans for the observational trial had been dropped and replaced with a randomised control trial. RCTs are not appropriate in this case, as I am sure hon. Members agree, as they require some of the cohort to be taken off the medicine and given a placebo.

That is simply not possible, and we have to ask ourselves why anyone would take their children off a medicine that was already working for them and improving their quality of life. RCTs can also be incredibly costly and take years to complete. That is time that my constituents and others do not have. I therefore suggest that the Government consider conducting an observational trial or an alternative study as a means of enabling the children to have continued access to medical cannabis at no cost. That would be possible for the Secretary of State, and the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), here today, to commission under the National Health Service Act 2006.

Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab): The cost of having medicinal cannabis for children is astronomical, at between £800 and £2,000, and that is for those who can afford it. The very children who need the medicine to improve the quality of their lives where it has been proven to be effective and who cannot afford it cannot be put on the scrapheap to further delay. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Alberto Costa: I think it is imperative that we work cross party and we encourage, cajole and push the Government to do the right thing. The right thing is what? While acknowledging that the Ministers have these powers, I understand that there are concerns about whether such action might lead to unintended consequences in the form of legal challenge relating to other drugs. I am a lawyer; I understand that. I used to work in government and defend the Government from judicial review. I understand.

However, I believe that any such concerns and risks could be mitigated. I also suggest in the meantime that the Government use the discretionary fund that they have at their disposal to cover the cost of the private prescriptions. There are a small number of children and families across the country in this desperate financial situation. The Government can intervene financially to reduce the burden every month, so that families such as those of my constituents Maya and Evelina do not have to rely on the uncertainty of fundraising. That is my favoured option, and I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to access that fund.

During the pandemic, Maya had to be rushed to A&E a few times due to her condition. Surely these children needing to go to hospital to have urgent medical treatment is more costly to the NHS than providing them with the prescription they need. Therefore, I suggest, only as an interim measure—I plead—that the Government consider covering the costs of the private prescriptions for the most vulnerable children in our country suffering from severe epilepsy who need this medication, until the Government find a solution with the bodies and particularly the medical profession.

In conclusion, I urge my colleagues in Government to consider the recommendations that I and other colleagues across the House have made and are making here today, as well as listening to the families affected. While I appreciate the good work that the Government have done on this issue, they can and should go further. I and many colleagues across the House will continue to champion better access to medicinal cannabis on the NHS for my constituents, all the constituents affected across our country and all the children suffering from this awful illness, so that they get the drugs necessary, free at the point of need on the NHS.

Hannah Bardell (in the Chair): Before I call speakers, I want to acknowledge those who are with us in the Chamber today and those who are watching. I also acknowledge the importance of this subject. Because it is such an important subject and I want to call the Front Bench by 5.34 pm, with the Labour and Scottish National party spokespersons having five minutes each, I will impose an initial time limit of four minutes to ensure that every Member has the opportunity to represent this very important issue.

5.15 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair this afternoon, Ms Bardell. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) for securing this debate, for his articulate and forensic analysis, and for the coherent account we have heard from him.

It is three years since we were able to celebrate the change in the law that should have helped the children and families we have been hearing from this week.

Sadly, after three long years, they are no further forward. As we have heard, since 2018, only three NHS prescriptions have been issued for the type of medical cannabis that was shown to be so life-transforming for the likes of the then six-year-old Alfie Dingley, whom the hon. Member spoke of earlier. It was Alfie and his mum who were at the forefront of this campaign. They and many others achieved the change in the law that they had all worked so hard for.

Heartbreakingly, while the law has changed, it has not been properly implemented and utilised for those crying out for help. Families have been left at breaking point emotionally and financially, having to find up to £2,000 a month to pay privately for this medicine. I cannot begin to imagine how on earth these loving parents cope with such massive monthly costs—£2,000 a month is the equivalent of an additional and very substantial mortgage. In fact, it would dwarf many people's mortgage payments. Not even we MPs on over £80,000 a year could cope with that. How on earth can we expect those families to withstand such huge costs, simply trying to keep their children alive and free from the ravages of seizures by accessing a known and proven prescriptive solution?

That these families cannot secure NHS prescriptions for their children, when it has been proved beyond any doubt that cannabis is efficacious, is a monumental shame. The campaign group that the hon. Member mentioned, End Our Pain, rightly said that this saga has dragged on for far too long. Those families have petitioned, marched and campaigned with such dignity. They should not and must not be ignored.

The new Secretary of State for Health and Social Care was pivotal in the change in law when he was Home Secretary. I urge him and his Department to give effect to that change and remove all barriers to getting medical cannabis to those patients. The campaigning families will do whatever it takes to help Government remove any barriers to doing the right thing and give them and their loved ones access to medical cannabis as they would any other therapeutic drug.

We lost our 16-year-old son to epilepsy over 15 years ago. I do not know whether medical cannabis would have helped him, had we even known about it then, but I will do everything I can to assist these families in their determination to get the medication that their children need. The memory of seeing our beloved Rory locked in status; to hear my wife scream for me to get an ambulance; to see the paramedics come upstairs to his bedroom; to hear the consultant in the hospital tell us that we better call a priest; and to hold my child as he died is something that I never want any of these families to suffer. I beg the Government to do the right thing and remove whatever barriers there may be and guarantee them access to this life-changing, life-saving treatment.

5.19 pm

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): May I say what a moving speech that was by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald)? That sort of personal experience is exactly what this issue is all about.

I came into politics to help. To my knowledge, I do not have a single constituent who benefits from a prescription for medical cannabis, but that does not make it any less important that I campaign on behalf of the all-party parliamentary group. I could not disagree with a single

[Sir Mike Penning]

word in the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa), who succeeded me as co-chair when I stepped down. It was the most coherent speech on the subject I have heard in a long time.

In 2015, as the Home Office Minister responsible for drug policy in Government, and sat where the Minister is sitting now, I made a speech saying that the Government were minded to allow the prescribed medical use of cannabis. I did not say that for the sake of it; I said it because the then Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), gave me permission to do so. She went on to be Prime Minister, and one of the reasons why Alfie got his medication, and why the Caldwell family's campaign was so successful in the Province, was that she picked the issue up and said, "We are going to do something about this." In 2018, the then Home Secretary was able to change the law for that reason.

I say to all colleagues, and to anybody listening to the debate, that this issue is not about rolling a cannabis joint. It is not about reforming drug law in this country. It is about a group of children, some of whom have clicked over into adulthood now, who may well not have been here today were it not for some very brave consultants turning their backs on what the profession was telling them to do, and doing instead what was right for those children. Those consultants have come under enormous pressure not to sign the prescriptions.

When we drafted the legislation, we were very careful to ensure that it was not up to GPs alone to issue the prescriptions. We did not want to get into another opioid situation—I will not say that opioids are prescribed willy-nilly, because that would be unfair, but we know there is an opioid epidemic. We specifically said that the GP had to refer the child to a specialist, and that it would be for the specialist to decide. A few have been brave enough to do so.

Sadly, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire mentioned, and as the parents were telling us only yesterday when they were here lobbying colleagues, some of those consultants are retiring, and of those who want to prescribe medical cannabis, some are too frightened that they will be referred to the professional body. If they do prescribe it, their employers are refusing to honour the prescription. I thought we had an NHS that was free at the point of delivery when an NHS prescription is issued.

I have no notes—I have no need for them. I have discussed this issue so many times in this Chamber, as well as in the main Chamber, where I will be tomorrow. Politicians get it; Secretaries of State get it; the Minister gets it. But parts of the medical profession do not get that they are responsible for keeping these young children alive, and that they need to get off their butts and do so.

5.23 pm

Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Ms Bardell. I thank the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) for securing this incredibly important debate and for his extremely powerful contribution. I am also grateful for the other contributions that we have heard, especially that of my great friend, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald).

I pay tribute to those of my Liverpool, West Derby constituents who are living through the devastating consequences caused by the lack of access to medicinal cannabis. I pay tribute to the families, their friends and all those in our community who have campaigned relentlessly for those people. They should not have to fight that hard and they should not have to endure so much. It was a real privilege to meet some of the campaigners at the End Our Pain event. One of my constituents wanted to be there, but it is extremely difficult for her to be away from her child at the moment—their time together is so precious.

I was proud to sign End Our Pain's letter to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State yesterday, which asked for immediate action to find a way to help the families with children with severe epilepsy, who continue to be denied NHS access to medical cannabis, as we have heard so powerfully so far. I know that the Minister was listening intently, and I can see the empathy in her eyes. I urge her, on behalf of my constituents, to take immediate steps and do whatever it takes to help these families. I ask that the Minister intervene to help adults who require access to medical cannabis under NHS prescriptions. I spoke to some families yesterday. There are siblings going through the same unimaginable pain. I am happy to discuss this at any time with the Minister.

The law was changed on 1 November 2018 to allow access to medical cannabis under prescription. This brought hope to many families. In my first meeting after becoming an MP in 2019, I spoke to families and they had an air of optimism. They thought there was change coming, but the reality three years on, as so eloquently put by the hon. Member for South Leicestershire, is that only three NHS prescriptions have been written for whole-extract cannabis oil. Families are having to raise £2,000 a month to buy this medicine privately.

We need to remember that we are in the middle of a pandemic, so funds that those families had raised previously had gone. The people I spoke to yesterday were talking about mortgaging or selling their house, doing whatever they can to raise the money. Tragically and heartbreakingly, there are families who believe that this medicine will help their child, but they will not put the child on it because of the limitations to starting the process and having to take the child off, as well as the financial issues. I cannot imagine what is going through their minds.

My constituent Lauren wrote to me last night. Although I cannot do full justice to everything she put in the email, I would like to impress on the Minister just some of what she is going through and what she is asking from the Government. She says:

"My time together with my son is precious, and I shouldn't have to keep fighting. I want to make memories for whatever time we have left. In March NICE reiterated their guidelines about prescribing medical cannabis and these guidelines are certainly not being enacted. The Health Secretary must help now before it's too late. Allow GPs to prescribe, and if that can't be done instantly, then establish an emergency fund for the children already benefiting from private prescriptions."

Lauren is a truly awe-inspiring mum and campaigner, like many I met yesterday. Her asks are simple and need to be listened to. Families are being pushed from pillar to post, and this injustice cannot continue. The interests of patients should be put first, and the system must start delivering the enormous benefits that this medicine can offer.

5.27 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure, once again, to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Ms Bardell. I would not often say that I agree with every word said by a Conservative Member, but in the case of the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa), it is accurate. He gave an incredibly considered speech. It is great to hear the consensus that exists in this room.

We have today's debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) has a more general debate tomorrow on the medical use of cannabis, rather than in cases of epilepsy, and the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) has introduced a private Member's Bill on the issue. That shows the cross-party consensus, the momentum and the urgency of the issue. Everyone today is speaking about their constituents' experiences. I pay tribute to all the families and campaigners who have come forward and are prepared to speak out. I met some yesterday at the End Our Pain lobby. Plenty of my own constituents have lobbied on the issue, because they have been moved by the stories they have heard, and I have a particular case.

The name of the campaign, End Our Pain, says so much. It is the pain that the individual children, and the adults, are experiencing with their medical conditions. It is the psychological pain the families are going through as well, having to watch the physical pain that their children are suffering. All that pain can be, at the very least, mitigated, if some of the steps that we have heard about are properly taken.

I have spoken previously about my constituents John and Laura and their beautiful daughter Bláthnaid, who is affected by Aicadri syndrome, which is a very severe and rare form of epilepsy. There are only several thousand cases worldwide. It is very difficult for clinicians to know what might or might not work. It is incredibly distressing for both the parents and the children, who do not understand what is happening when they go through these seizures. Many of the conventional medicines that are tried have their own side effects that cause particular difficulties, or resistance builds up, which increases a different kind of suffering.

Sir Mike Penning: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that doctors are prescribing off-label drugs that work for adults, particularly steroids, to these children, but they are not willing to look at medical cannabis?

Patrick Grady: Yes, and a few years ago we had the Off-patent Drugs Bill, which sadly did not make as much progress as it could have done. That had the potential to give doctors more freedom, which is clearly one of the messages coming out of the debate. Of course there will be an element of risk, but there has to be a way of managing and mitigating it so that doctors can feel more confident about prescribing cannabis-derived treatments.

When my constituents see the positive effects that CBD can have, they wonder what effects a drug with THC might have. When they see the benefits to other children, even though every case and condition is unique, the potential must exist there, and when the alternative is to go private and pay incredible amounts of money, which is not without its own risk, the frustration becomes

very real, so the Government have to speed up the trials and the opportunity for people to take part in them. They have to look at how the licensing can improve and how we can increase the confidence of doctors. Above all, they have to listen to the voices of parents and patients, and their carers and advocates in Parliament.

5.31 pm

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Bardell. The debate is a bit like groundhog day for many of us—Members will forgive the expression. We have made the arguments about the children in our constituencies, and about the pain that their families are going through, knowing that there is a drug that not only can but does help them. In my constituency, Murray Gray has been transformed from a wee boy who was constantly ill, in and out of hospital and missing school, and whose parents feared for his life almost daily, to a happy wee boy who pays football with his dad, and has been to my office and explained to me exactly what dinosaurs are—not that I am one of them.

Seeing that transformation makes me only more determined to give what support I can. For me, and I am sure for many others, the question remains: why did the Government make medicinal cannabis legal if they did not intend it to be for the benefit of these children? I am sure that they did. When the then Home Secretary made that move, I am sure that the motivation was to improve the lives of these children, so why are the Government not taking the last step to encourage the medical profession to make that happen?

Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con): I met the father of Jorja Emerson the other day. He was literally in tears because his lovely daughter has multiple fits daily. The frustration is that the last remaining consultant who could make the prescriptions has retired. There is a real danger that some of these children will no longer have access to a drug that the Government intend them to have access to. I hope that the Minister has heard my intervention.

Christine Jardine: The hon. Member makes a pertinent point. This is the nub of the issue: we need consultants to be encouraged and enabled to write national health service prescriptions for these children. We have pestered the Government and will go on pestering the Government. There will be no resting place for them on this issue until we have the assurance that these children will get the help that I am sure that the Government originally intended them to have, and that is still just outwith their reach.

5.34 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) on securing the debate. It is great to see a Minister from the Department of Health and Social Care responding today, because for far too long we have been talking to the Home Office about these issues. I believe that the Minister is an ex-nurse, if there is such a thing; perhaps it is "Once a nurse, always a nurse."

Yesterday in Portcullis House, family members came to tell us their heart-rending stories, yet again. As we politicians listened, the feeling of, "What can we do?"

[Ronnie Cowan]

sank into us. We went over to No.10 Downing Street and delivered a letter—another letter—explaining the situation to the Prime Minister. During the course of the day I talked to a number of parents, and one of them asked me a question that I have been asked many times, but every single time it hits home: “What would you do if it was your child? What would you do if your child was suffering 30 seizures and more a day? Would you reach for the rulebook, or reach for the medicine—if you could afford it, because right now, in this country, if you cannot afford it, you are not getting it?”.

There have been only three NHS prescriptions, as was mentioned, despite the now Health Secretary promising to do everything he could to help. I am fascinated by that; three means that there is precedent. We have broken the dam. If there were none, it would be a different argument—but there have been three. Why not 30? Why not 300? Why are we still scrambling around for these things? Hannah Deacon, who has been mentioned often in this debate, and whose son Alfie is in receipt of one of those NHS prescriptions, has written to the Health Secretary three times asking him to help, as he promised to do when, as Home Secretary, he wrote to her. All three letters have gone unanswered. Some politicians are hiding behind medical professionals, and some in the medical profession are hiding behind politicians. The parents of these children have no place to hide. They have to manage the reality of the situation day in, day out. We need progress. We need to accept the validity of real-world evidence. Asking kids to take part in trials with a placebo is abhorrent.

Many barriers would be broken if GPs were allowed to prescribe medical cannabis. At the moment, they cannot initiate prescriptions but can follow up. Cannabis is largely a GP medicine, given its efficacy in GP conditions such as pain and anxiety. It would be of enormous help to allow GPs to initiate prescriptions. A recent survey showed that about a quarter of GPs would be happy to prescribe it. This would require a simple change to the relevant misuse of drugs statutory instrument; it would not require parliamentary time.

I look forward to tackling this issue in much more detail tomorrow in the Chamber. I hope that we can investigate all the problems, and ultimately come up with solutions. We have talked round and round this subject for a long time. Three years and three months on from a promise by the UK Government to make medical cannabis available, we are still no further on. It is a crying shame that these people are still living in hope—living, I have to say, in desperation at the situation they find themselves in. They are looking to us politicians to do something about this. In my privileged position, I am sick to death of having to say to those people that we are no further forward.

Please, Minister, take on board what we have heard today. Politicians are asking the Minister, cross-party—a very rare thing—to look at the situation and do what she can, now and in the longer term. On what could be done now, if there was a fund that we could reach into to pay for these prescriptions, that would be a massive step forward, including for the parents and guardians of these children, who, day in and day out, are asking us to do something for them.

5.38 pm

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Bardell. I congratulate the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) on securing this important debate. We have worked together over many years on health issues, and he has done very important work alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) through the all-party parliamentary group on medical cannabis under prescription.

I start by saying to those who have spoken in the debate and those watching elsewhere that I cannot begin to imagine how difficult it must be to be the parent of a child with serious epilepsy. The fear that they go through every day, and the difficulties that they experience, must be beyond terrifying. I also recognise the huge financial burdens that many parents face, and the anxiety of parents who want access to these prescriptions, but are still denied it.

As the hon. Member for South Leicestershire said, it has been three years since the then Home Secretary, now Health Secretary, changed the law on this very important issue. As we all know, that change came about after a number of very high-profile campaigns in utterly heartbreaking cases of children suffering from epilepsy, including Billy Caldwell and Alfie Dingley. I pay tribute to the families who campaigned relentlessly on these issues. It gave hope to people that things would change. Yet three years later, we do not seem to be very much further forward. As the hon. Member for South Leicestershire said, the law has changed, but the practice has not.

I will focus on three things that need to happen to put this right. The first, which many hon. Members have spoken about, is the desperate need for more research and evidence. One of the barriers to clinicians prescribing is that they feel they lack knowledge, or are not really sure about the evidence on both the benefits and the risks. That point has been made time and again over the last three years. It was made during the original review, back in 2018, particularly by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs. It was repeated by the Health and Social Care Committee in its review of why things had not changed, back in 2019. Six of its 11 recommendations were about providing more research and evidence. Indeed, that was called for by the then chief scientific adviser, now chief medical officer, Professor Chris Whitty, and in the NHS England review commissioned by the last Health Secretary, the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock).

I hope that the Minister will say where we have got to on that issue, and particularly on the point about more research and evidence from clinical trials being needed. However, that last point absolutely cannot mean taking children off these products if they are on them; that would be completely wrong. How will she make progress on all those issues?

Secondly, what other steps are being taken to improve access? I will focus briefly on three of the 10 recommendations made by NHS England. One was that the national medical director and chief pharmaceutical officer for England should write to doctors and pharmacists, reminding them of the guidance on prescribing, how they can access a cannabis education package produced by Health Education England, and how to get the message

out about what can happen at present. NHS England also recommended much clearer information for patients, and that a specialist clinical network be established, so that everybody is aware of the real evidence. Could the Minister comment on what further action the Government have taken on that?

Finally, a really difficult but important point: as we move forward with the research and evidence, and as we try to improve understanding among all professionals—GPs as well as specialists, because we can have a partnership approach—what will we do to support those parents who are paying such huge amounts of money? Have the Government considered what support might be made available to them?

Changing the law is essential, but getting that to work in practice—changing hearts and minds, as well as the law—is the only way we will make progress. I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken. I hope that the parents out there listening know that they have champions in this place, and that we will carry on doing our best to make sure we get the best results for their children.

Hannah Bardell (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister, I say gently and kindly to her that I would expect her to finish by 5.54 pm, so that I may call the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) to sum up for two minutes.

5.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): I would like to start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) on securing the debate. He lobbies on this issue almost daily, representing constituents such as Maya and Evelina so well. I fully appreciate the strength of feeling and the impact that this issue has on some of the most vulnerable children in their daily struggle with drug-resistant epilepsy. That is why, three years ago, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, who was then Home Secretary, changed the law to recognise the need to allow unlicensed cannabis-based products to be prescribed by specialist doctors. The Government are supportive and have used many levers, which has been quite challenging at times.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning) hit the nail on the head when he said that this is now more a clinical issue than a political one. In many cases, doctors are unwilling to prescribe medicinal cannabis; we heard from a number of Members that we may be down to just one clinician left who is willing to do that. The main reason is that these products are still unlicensed. The way that medicine works in this country is that the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency will license a product after significant research, not just into the efficacy—we have heard from many Members that there is a strong feeling that these medicines work—but into the adverse events and potential side effects. In prescribing these medications, the clinicians will take responsibility both for the drugs working and for any impact of those drugs.

Sir Mike Penning: This is the argument that always comes up in the briefings for Ministers. If it is not safe, how are prescriptions being given for free on the NHS?

If it is safe, give it to the rest of them. It cannot be right that time and again Ministers use the argument about safety, when prescriptions are given free on the NHS.

Maria Caulfield: These are clinical decisions. No one is saying that these products are not safe, but there is not the evidence base to get the licence. The MHRA does this for every single medicine, not just medicinal cannabis.

I want to set out how we can get to a place where we can get these drugs licensed and clinicians will feel confident in prescribing them. We recognise that, for many children, these drugs improve their quality of life—individuals have reported improvements—but without that research evidence base, the MHRA will not give a licence. The MHRA is an independent body—it is not controlled by the Government—and the clinicians will take advice and guidance from it. We may agree or disagree with how the MHRA licenses a medicine, but that is the process for all drugs. It is not just the MHRA—no country in the world has licensed this product. The Food and Drug Administration has not; the European Medicines Agency has not; the MHRA has not. The solution is in pushing the clinical research needed for a licence to be granted, which would open up prescribing for clinicians around the country.

Andy McDonald: Do the Minister and the MHRA not recognise that there is an abundance of practical evidence from the families who have scrimped and saved and raised money through charitable activities to fund the administration of the drug, and that it works? Surely that is persuasive. These families have not got time to wait for the research that the Minister is talking about, and I am yet to hear anybody tell me what harm would be done if that drug were to be given to those who need it and want it.

Maria Caulfield: There are concerns, particularly around the THC element, that there could be some effect on the developing brain and on heart conditions. Research is needed not just on the effect of the drugs, but on their safety.

I want to point out that the Government have made funds available for good-quality research. That does not have to be done by the manufacturers; it can be done by charities, clinicians or researchers. A range of people can come forward to carry out clinical research. The MHRA—

Ronnie Cowan: Will the Minister give way?

Maria Caulfield: I will not; I have only a couple of minutes left.

The MHRA is well equipped to provide advice to any applicants wishing to conduct clinical trials.

Christine Jardine: Will the Minister give way?

Maria Caulfield: I have literally got two minutes left.

Currently, 13 trials are ongoing across the United Kingdom. In the previous 12 months, six of the other trials of cannabis-based products were completed, so some research is coming through the pipeline to help

[*Maria Caulfield*]

with that evidence base. I want to touch on one—the randomised clinical control trial mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire.

It is true that one study has three arms, one of which is a placebo. Having worked in clinical research myself, I reassure my hon. Friend that there are strict ethical guidelines for any clinical research. If someone is allocated to the placebo arm but it is clear when monitoring the research that one arm is doing significantly better than another, the trial has to be unblinded. Anyone on a placebo arm is automatically put on the arm that is doing best. I worked on clinical research for breast cancer, when we were trying to get Herceptin licensed, and for some patients that was the quickest way to get the drug. If there is clear evidence that one arm is working far better than others, patients can be moved on to that arm. It is a way of fast-tracking the drug for licensing.

I reassure Members that I absolutely understand the issue. The Government have changed the law to allow use of medical cannabis, but unless we give clinicians the confidence that the drugs, first, work—a feeling that they do seems to be the consensus in the Chamber—and, secondly, have a safety profile, they will not prescribe them. We can debate it forever in the House, but the clinicians have to be convinced. The way to do that is to get the product licensed, and the way to do that is to get good-quality research that the MHRA can look at to feel confident in licensing that drug.

The Government's view is that there is funding for such research. My commitment to Members present today is that I will work with other colleagues to see whether we can speed up applications for research, encouraging them to come forward. For many Members, that is not the answer that they wanted to hear; they want me to stand up and say, "The drugs will be available tomorrow and we have people to prescribe them."

Ronnie Cowan: We have to re-categorise cannabis from schedule 2 to schedule 4. That will open the gateway to medical research. Right now, it is hard for a lot of medical researchers to gain access to the product in the first place.

Maria Caulfield: The licensing process is independent of Government, but we have levers to speed that up to ensure that the research coming through the pipeline—I have outlined some studies already in progress—will help the evidence base. We have been here before with other drugs in other sectors and we have managed to get there. We have another debate on Thursday, at which I am sure Members will press me further, but my commitment is that we will use every lever possible to get the research and the licensing process through, so that doctors across the country feel confident to prescribe this medicine, which makes such a difference to young people's lives.

5.53 pm

Alberto Costa: I thank all Members for contributing this evening. I thank the Minister for her response. Clearly, it is not the response that I was hoping for, but I know that she genuinely wants to find a solution.

I have offered a temporary solution. Doctors are prescribing this medication, but they are prescribing it privately. Many private prescriptions are being given by the medical profession to kids such as Evelina and Maya. My request once again to the Minister in my summing up is about her having a discretionary fund. Why do I know that? Because her predecessor told me so in answer to one of the debates that we had. The Minister has that discretionary fund and the executive authority to permit private prescriptions—which the parents of Evelina and Maya, and all the other parents across the country, have to pay for—to come from that pot, as a temporary solution until the Government, the regulatory bodies, the medicinal bodies and the medical profession sort out the issue.

I will be coming back to the Minister, I am afraid, once again requesting access to that fund.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered medical cannabis under prescription for children with epilepsy.

5.54 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 3 November 2021

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

UK Community Renewal Fund

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Neil O'Brien): I will shortly announce 477 projects supporting people and communities across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland which are set to receive a share of over £200 million, helping support local areas to pilot imaginative new approaches and programmes that unleash their potential, instil pride, and prepare them to take full advantage of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund when it launches in 2022. The UK Community Renewal Fund is part of the Government's plan to level up our regions and create a more united country.

This is levelling up in action—investing in projects across the whole of the UK that will make a real difference to people's lives. Supporting those on low incomes to become budding entrepreneurs, investing in local businesses and councils at the forefront of our decarbonisation drive, and funding new education and training facilities that will help people go far but stay local. Through this fund we are also empowering local leaders to shape the places they live, guaranteeing that these investments have a lasting impact.

Below is a selection of UK Community Renewal Fund projects that will be funded:

Over £1 million to upskill people in retrofit and modern construction skills in Devon to support the decarbonisation drive in the property sector, helping people get construction jobs and ensuring businesses have the skills they need.

£201,064 to support unemployed and disadvantaged residents in Carmarthenshire into self-employment or to start their own business, by investing in digital, employability and entrepreneurial skills. The programme will also fund a bootcamp for female entrepreneurs, developing a networking group for women in business.

£67,626 to deliver deaf awareness training and basic British Sign Language to customer facing staff at a range of organisations throughout Rhondda Cynon Taf. The money will also be used to set up local community groups for the elderly who are hard of hearing, tackling loneliness and isolation.

£72,501 to support neurodiverse people with conditions such as Tourette's, OCD, ADHD/ADD and Dyslexia in Antrim and Newtownabbey to secure employment and prepare for the world of work.

£612,000 shared between Inverclyde and Aberdeen City for a pilot to support 16–24-year olds from deprived areas to upskill and secure jobs.

Delivering on the commitment to level up all of the UK underpins the choices made in the Budget and spending review. The historic levels of investment confirmed through SR21 will improve living standards for people and places across the UK, helping ensure that people's opportunities in life are not determined by where they live. Investing in people will boost employment, wages and prospects. The Budget and spending review launches

the UK Shared Prosperity Fund worth over £2.6 billion, to help people access new opportunities in places of need. Funding will rise to £1.5 billion a year by 2024–25.

[HCWS369]

TREASURY

London Capital & Finance Compensation Scheme: Contingencies Fund Advance

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): On 19 April 2021 the Government announced the detail of a compensation scheme for London Capital & Finance plc (LCF) bondholders (HCWS922). The scheme provides 80% of LCF bondholders' principal investment up to a maximum of £68,000 and will be open to all bondholders who hold bonds that have not already been compensated by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS).

Now that the necessary legislation has passed through Parliament, final preparations are being made so that the scheme can begin making payments in November. The Government have appointed FSCS to run the scheme on its behalf using part 15A of the Financial Services and Markets Act. The Government and FSCS are committed to providing all eligible bondholders with their compensation within six months.

I would like to emphasise that bondholders do not need to do anything at this stage and should wait for FSCS to contact them about their compensation payment. Further detail on exactly how the scheme will operate, including the scheme rules and frequently asked questions, are available online at www.gov.uk/LCF-compensation-scheme

The Compensation (London Capital & Finance plc and Fraud Compensation Fund) Act received Royal Assent on 20 October 2021 but provision for this was not included in the main estimate for HM Treasury at the start of the financial year. In accordance with normal procedures, HM Treasury will therefore be using a contingencies fund advance to enable bondholders' access to their compensation payments, ahead of the provision being provided in the Treasury's supplementary estimate.

Parliamentary approval for additional resources of £120,000,000 for this new expenditure will be sought in a supplementary estimate for HM Treasury. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £120,000,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the contingencies fund.

[HCWS370]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Fishing Licence Numbers: UK and the Crown Dependencies

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis): This statement sets out, for clarity, the numbers of fishing licences

issued by the UK and the Crown dependencies since the trade and co-operation agreement (TCA) was signed. The information is correct as of 9 am on 3 November 2021.

The position does change as applications can be made or withdrawn at any time. Requests to withdraw licences by the European Commission can also be made at any time and therefore the number of active licences will be slightly different.

UK waters

Under the Fisheries Act 2020, all foreign vessels fishing in UK waters are required to have a licence. Article 2(1) of annex 38 to the TCA sets out the level of access which applies during the adjustment period, until 30 June 2026. This includes both the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and particular zones in the territorial sea (6 to 12 nautical miles from the shore in ICES divisions 4c and 7d-g). Access to the territorial sea is limited to “qualifying” vessels: those that fished in those zones in at least four of the years between 2012 and 2016, or their direct replacements. The TCA also places some limitations on access in terms of which stocks can be targeted, where and by which member states.

In the UK 6 to 12 nautical mile zone, our approach has been to license vessels once sufficient evidence has been provided that they have fished in UK waters on at least one day in four of the years between 2012 and 2016.

The number of licences that have been issued to EU vessels to fish in UK waters is as follows.

Overall total:

UK		
Applications received	Licences issued	Licences pending further information from the Commission/Member State
183 ^[1]	1793	38

[1] Licensed vessel was withdrawn at the EU's request.

UK 12-200nm zone

The majority of these licences were granted on 31 December 2020 with 1,285 EU vessels licensed.

Applications received	1,673
Vessels licensed	1,673

By member state

Member State	Applications received	Licences issued	Applications pending
Belgium	65	65	0
Denmark	121	121	0
France	736	736	0
Germany	49	49	0
Republic of Ireland	358	358	0
Lithuania	2	2	0
Netherlands	192	192	0
Poland	2	2	0
Portugal	49	49	0
Spain	90	90	0

Member State	Applications received	Licences issued	Applications pending
Sweden	9	9	0

UK 6-12nm zone

Vessels over 12m

Applications received	109
Vessels licensed	102

By member state

Member State	Applications received	Licences issued	Applications pending
Belgium	21	17	4
France	88	85	3

Vessels under 12m

Applications received	50
Vessels licensed	19

By member state

Member State	Applications received	Licences issued	Applications pending
France	50	19	31

Crown dependency waters

The TCA provides for different arrangements for the Crown dependencies of Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man, all of which are responsible for issuing their own licences. Article 502(1) of the TCA provides that:

“Each party shall grant vessels of the other party access to fish in its waters reflecting the actual extent and nature of fishing activity that it can be demonstrated was carried out during the period beginning on 1 February 2017 and ending on 31 January 2020 by qualifying vessels of the other party in the waters and under any treaty arrangements that existed on 31 January 2020.”

A “qualifying vessel” is one which fished in the relevant CD waters on more than 10 days in one of the periods defined by the TCA.

Both Jersey and Guernsey have extended transitional arrangements to enable EU vessels to continue to fish in their waters, while evidence of relevant fishing activity during the reference period is collected and they move to a full licensing regime.

Licensing figures for the Crown Dependencies are as follows:

Jersey

Total live applications	Permanent licences issued	Temporary licences granted. Valid until 31/1/22. Further information from the commission/member state required for them to be made permanent	Lapsed on 30/10 due to lack of evidence
217	113	49	55

Jersey has also received 11 applications for replacement vessels, which are pending the finalisation of a methodology for such vessels.

Guernsey

Guernsey's transitional arrangement which allows access for 167 French vessels will continue until 31 January 2022.

Full licences will be issued to eligible vessels on 1 December 2021. 58 applications have been received.

Isle of Man

No applications received.

Additionally, a further 37 applications for direct replacement vessels have been received from France. Processing of these will be carried out once a methodology has been finalised for such vessels.

[HCWS372]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Adult Social Care: Winter Plan

The Minister for Care and Mental Health (Gillian Keegan): On 3 November 2021, the Department of Health and Social Care will be publishing the "Adult Social Care: Winter Plan 2021 to 2022." This plan has been developed in conjunction with the NHS and social care sector stakeholders, drawing on the recommendations of Sir David Pearson's review of last year's adult social care winter plan; advice from SAGE and UKHSA; and extensively on lessons learned so far in the pandemic.

The adult social care winter plan 2021-22 will set out the actions that national Government will be taking to support the sector, along with the steps that local authorities, the NHS, and care providers should take to prevent and control covid-19 outbreaks. The plan focuses not just on covid-19, but also on other viruses such as flu and norovirus, to ensure that those who receive social care are protected this winter.

Thanks to the huge success of the UK's vaccine rollout, we are in a favourable position as we approach this winter, and I am determined to ensure that those in all social care settings remain protected while maintaining their quality of life. The UK Government have already set out a comprehensive package of measures to support the adult social care sector throughout the winter. These are:

£388 million in further funding to support infection prevention control, testing and vaccination uptake in adult social care settings. This is in addition to a further £478 million to continue enhanced hospital discharge support until March 2022.

A new £162.5 million workforce recruitment and retention fund to bolster the dedicated care workforce. This funding will support local authorities, working with providers, to recruit staff and retain the existing workforce—through a range of measures which could include local recruitment activity, the creation of staff banks, additional overtime hours and payments to incentivise joiners and recognise loyalty—to ensure the right number of staff with the skills to deliver high quality care to meet increasing demands.

Free flu vaccination for eligible frontline social care workers and carers and ensuring pharmacists can vaccinate staff and recipients of care in care homes.

Covid-19 booster vaccinations to those in JCVI cohorts 1-9 that received their second dose more than six months ago. Older adult care home residents and staff will receive covid-19 boosters within their home.

Continuing the designated settings scheme, in order to provide appropriate care for in a covid-secure environment for those likely to be infectious with covid-19 who are discharged from hospital. The designated settings indemnity support has also been extended to cover the winter period until 31 March 2022, in order to maintain the current level of support for these vital settings.

Continuing to provide free PPE for covid-19 needs to the adult social care sector until the end of March 2022, with sufficient stock to cope throughout winter. Regular asymptomatic covid-19 testing will be maintained, with the availability of more intense testing regimes for higher risk settings.

We are also publishing the evaluation from the workforce capacity fund. The fund which saw £120 million support provided to the sector in January 2021, helped the sector to deal with the challenges of covid-19 last winter, delivered 7.3 million additional hours with over 39,000 new recruits. It was deemed, by the overwhelming majority of LAs, as either "somewhat" or "very" effective in supporting them to strengthen workforce capacity last winter.

The Department of Health and Social Care has worked closely with the NHS to ensure the adult social care winter plan is co-ordinated and integrated with their planning. NHS England and NHS Improvement's winter planning guidance is already available at: NHS England » 2021/22 priorities and operational planning guidance: October 2021 – March 2022. The adult social care plan and NHSEI's planning guidance enable the providers of care across both sectors to prepare for winter.

[HCWS371]

ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 3 November 2021

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
PRIME MINISTER	904	SCOTLAND—continued	
Engagements	904	Scotland's Shipbuilding Industry	898
SCOTLAND	895	Scottish Fishing Industry	898
Government's Plan for Jobs	900	Scottish Parliament: Legislative Competence	902
Renewables and Green Energy: Onshore		Scottish Seed Potato Industry	900
Employment	903	Turing Scheme: Young People in Scotland	902
		UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement	895

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Wednesday 3 November 2021

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS.	26WS	LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND	
Fishing Licence Numbers: UK and the Crown		COMMUNITIES	25WS
Dependencies	26WS	UK Community Renewal Fund	25WS
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	29WS	TREASURY	26WS
Adult Social Care: Winter Plan	29WS	London Capital & Finance Compensation	
		Scheme: Contingencies Fund Advance	26WS

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
Wednesday 10 November 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

Wednesday 3 November 2021

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 895] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Scotland
Prime Minister

G20 and COP26 World Leaders Summit [Col. 917]

Statement—(Prime Minister)

Schools and Educational Settings (Essential Infrastructure and Opening During Emergencies) [Col. 935]

Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Robert Halfon)—agreed to
Bill presented, and read the First time

Committee on Standards [Col. 938]

Amendment—(Dame Andrea Leadsom)—on a Division, agreed to
Motion, as amended, on a Division, agreed to

Nuclear Energy (Financing) Bill [Col. 974]

Motion for Second Reading—(Greg Hands)—on a Division, agreed to
Programme motion—(Mrs Wheeler)—on a Division, agreed to

Kennels and Catteries: Economic and Social Contribution [Col. 1026]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Hospital Building Programme [Col. 345WH]

Trophy Hunting Imports Ban: Endangered Species [Col. 371WH]

Ethiopia, Sudan and Tigray: Humanitarian Situation [Col. 377WH]

Adult Dependent Relative Visas [Col. 401WH]

Medical Cannabis under Prescription: Children with Epilepsy [Col. 409WH]

General debates

Written Statements [Col. 25WS]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
