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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Monday 18 July 2022

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: Before we start today's business, I want to say something about the exceptional heat. While the Chamber is kept at a consistently comfortable temperature, I accept that that is not the case in all offices and that Members have to move around the estate. Therefore, while the heat remains at this exceptional level and for the remainder of this week, I am content for Members not to wear jackets or ties in the Chamber, if they so choose. When the House returns in the autumn, I will expect Members to revert to wearing a jacket. The Deputy Speakers and I will strongly encourage male Members to wear ties when speaking in the Chamber—or you might find it harder to get called.

I can now announce the arrangements for the election of a new Chair of the Science and Technology Committee. Nominations are open and will close at 12 noon on Tuesday 13 September. Nomination forms are available from the Vote Office, the Table Office and the Public Bill Office. Following the House's decision of 16 January 2020, only Conservative party Members may be candidates. If there is more than one candidate, the ballot will take place on Wednesday 14 September from 11 am to 2.30 pm in the Aye Lobby. A briefing note with more information about the election will be made available in the Vote Office.

Finally, before we come to Defence questions, I want to wish a very happy 80th birthday to Peter Hipkins. Peter has worked in the House since 1973 and is a service delivery co-ordinator in the In-House Services and Estates Team. I am sure that the whole House will want to join me in wishing Peter a very happy birthday and thanking him for 49 years of service to the House.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Defence Jobs

1. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support defence jobs. [901113]

15. **Jacob Young** (Redcar) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support defence jobs in the UK. [901128]

17. **David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support defence jobs. [901131]

20. **Nicola Richards** (West Bromwich East) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support defence jobs. [901134]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): I am sorry that I did not get the memo on dress and attire earlier, Mr Speaker. What next? Flip-flops in the House?

Mr Speaker: Politicians already do that. [*Laughter.*]

Mr Wallace: Not in the Defence team, Mr Speaker. We shall leave that to others.

The Ministry of Defence's sustained investment in industries across the UK supports over 200,000 jobs. Continued high and focused defence spending, supported by the changes we are making as part of the defence and security industrial strategy, will contribute to further economic growth and prosperity across the Union.

Henry Smith: It is good to see that you are in fine, typical wit despite the heat, Mr Speaker.

As my right hon. Friend said, the UK defence sector is vital for jobs, the defence of this country and our allies, such as the Ukrainians, against Russian aggression. I am very proud of the contribution of Thales, which is located in my constituency. What is his Department doing to encourage defence contractors such as Thales to expand to meet this country's increasing defence needs?

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend asks an important question. Last week, I met the Defence Suppliers Forum, which includes Thales. We work closely together not only to indicate potential investments by defence in what we would need, but to make sure that we both meet our future requirements. Thales UK is one of Britain's biggest and most advanced defence companies. Its NLA—next generation light anti-tank weapon—systems are being used in Ukraine. I congratulate him on posing a question on Thales.

Jacob Young: Does my right hon. Friend agree that procurement rules in the UK should recognise the socioeconomic benefit of investment as well as value for money in defence spending? To that end, will his Department ensure that more defence contracts are given to businesses based in Britain, such as our fantastic manufacturers in Teesside?

Mr Wallace: Yes, the defence industrial strategy embraces the social value model from the Treasury in competitive procurement and ensures that tackling economic inequality and equal opportunity are factors that are taken into consideration in procurement. Under my direction and that of the Minister for Defence Procurement, the Ministry of Defence always has regard for onshore sovereign capability and industrial skills.

David Duguid: Scottish businesses receive more investment than average across the UK from defence procurement, so how will my right hon. Friend continue to encourage the building of the skills that we need to help Scottish businesses to continue doing their bit in defence of our United Kingdom?

Mr Wallace: Our investment in Scotland was £1.99 billion last year, on projects such as the Type 26 in Govan, the Type 31 in Rosyth, airborne radars and advanced laser munitions in Edinburgh, which all help to sustain the skills base. It is incredibly important that the Scottish Government and the UK Government work with the further education colleges and the manufacturers to make sure that they invest in the skills that we so vitally need.

Nicola Richards: The Boxer programme in Telford has a positive effect throughout the midlands, with over 60% of its value flowing into UK supply chains. Can my right hon. Friend confirm how certain we can be of future jobs and investment from defence land equipment?

Mr Wallace: Yes, the fact that the Army will invest £41.3 billion in new capabilities over the next decade—including the likes of Boxer, Challenger 3 and two new major programmes that will develop in the near future, such as deep fires—will increase production and the employment base, which is also why it is so important that we invest in the skills at the same time. That will put UK land manufacturing back at the forefront of the international defence sector. It is a part of the sector that has lagged behind air and sea for too long.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): May I make it simple for the Secretary of State? Defence jobs depend on orders, principally from his Department, and even export orders depend on British validation. He referred earlier to his support for the British defence industry, so why will he not now commit to ordering the fleet solid support ships to be built in British yards?

Mr Wallace: They will certainly be integrated in British yards, and a significant proportion will be built there. Let us have a look at what the bidders say; I have not yet seen the bids. As the right hon. Gentleman absolutely points out, British defence is dependent on British manufacturing, but British manufacturing is dependent on exports. If we are going to export our defence, as with Typhoon aircraft, Boxer and many of our exports, we often have to collaborate with international partners, because if we close the door on them, they are not going to buy British kit.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): The Defence Secretary has just said that social value will be taken into consideration when awarding contracts. I have asked numerous parliamentary questions of the Department to try to quantify that; I have had no answer. I have asked the National Audit Office this question; it does not seem to know what is being used by the Department. Could the Defence Secretary clarify exactly what social value means, in quantifiable terms, when awarding contracts? It was clearly laid out in the excellent report that the right hon. Member for Ludlow (Philip Dunne) did a few years ago.

Mr Wallace: In strategy documents such as the national shipbuilding strategy, we pledged a minimum 20% weighting for social value with naval ships. Social value is one of the weightings that we put on the contract. All contracts are obviously different from what we are seeking to buy, but within the weighting for social value, on which 20% of the total award is based, we can consider

inequalities or the economic factors that I referred to earlier. I make sure that those factors are in there, and that they are adhered to. It is incredibly important.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The hostilities of east Fife benefit hugely from having Leuchars in east Fife. Similarly, when Joint Warrior comes to the north-west of my constituency, brisk trade is done. Does the Secretary of State accept that there are spin-off jobs that benefit from MOD expenditure the length and breadth of the UK?

Mr Wallace: Yes. I am delighted that military activity in the north-west and the east of Scotland brings in not just investment and industry—the £1.99 billion that I have talked about—but economic engagement with the community, which helps to sustain jobs, often in low season rather than the tourist season. It is Britain's armed forces and British defence that help to keep us all safe, from the very tip of the hon. Gentleman's constituency right down to the south-west.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): But the defence jobs that the Defence Secretary is cutting are those of our armed forces personnel. There are 40,000 less than when Labour left office, and right now we are cutting another 10,000 jobs. At a time when there is greater global instability, we could be utilising these vital armed forces personnel to de-escalate risk using soft power, which our armed forces are so good at. Could the Defence Secretary tell the House whether this determination is driven by him, by the former Chancellor or by the professional leadership of our armed forces?

Mr Wallace: It is currently driven by an estimation of threat. As I have said a number of times at the Dispatch Box, if the threat changes, so must we. I do not call an increase of £24 billion in spending on defence a cut, in anybody's book. However, what I do believe is that as the threat changes, so must we. We will continue to review that and, if the threat changes, I will be back.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): May I congratulate the Defence Secretary and his team on ensuring that there has been continuity in defence while the rest of the Conservative Government have collapsed in chaos? Let me also say, lest this prove to be their last session of oral questions in their current jobs, that whatever our other disagreements, the Secretary of State's cross-party working on Ukraine has helped to ensure that the UK has strong, unified support for the Ukrainians.

The right hon. Gentleman has been Defence Secretary since the Prime Minister, nearly two years ago, boosted defence spending and boasted that that would create 10,000 jobs every year. Only 800 new defence jobs have been created since then. Why the failure?

Mr Wallace: I should be happy for the right hon. Gentleman to show me that 800 figure, but, first and foremost, we have started to invest that £43.1 billion, or £41.3 billion, in the land scheme, a huge amount of which will be spent on Boxer and Challenger 3. That will generate an enormous number of jobs. Obviously, replenishing some of our ammunition stocks, many of

which are made up and down the United Kingdom, will result in more jobs, and indeed the increased skills base for our work on the Dreadnought submarine.

Let me thank the right hon. Gentleman—my opposite number on the Front Bench—and, indeed, the whole House for the cross-party support on Ukraine. I also thank my team, my hon. Friends the Members for Wells (James Heappey), for Horsham (Jeremy Quin), for Aldershot (Leo Docherty) and for Stourbridge (Suzanne Webb), Baroness Goldie, and my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Ian Levy). It is not often that a team stick together in Parliament or indeed in Government and, whatever happens over the next few months, it has been a privilege for me to work with all of them.

We will continue to invest in the jobs—over 200,000. No doubt the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) will be attending Farnborough air show this week; it is an incredibly important event to showcase British industry.

John Healey: The answer is simple: direct British defence contracts first to British firms and British jobs, starting with the Navy's new support ships.

The right hon. Gentleman has been Defence Secretary since the Prime Minister also pledged, at the last election:

“We will not be cutting our armed services in any form.”

However, he then launched plans to cut the British Army by a further 10,000 troops. He uses the words “when the threats change”. With Ukraine, the threats that we face are greater and our obligations to NATO are greater, so will he now do what Labour has been urging the Government to do for more than a year, and rethink these cuts in the strength of the British Army?

Mr Wallace: As I have also said over the year to those on the Labour Front Bench, we have already reduced the original cut by 500 so that the numbers are increased from 72,500 to 73,000. As for the changing threats, the right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the defence command paper was written and delivered before the actual Russian invasion of Ukraine. I have said continually that we will review it, and we will obviously review the threat as it changes. That review of the threat is ongoing, which is why Defence Intelligence gives regular briefings, and next year, or the year after, is the Department's spending moment.

Defence Technology

2. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to develop innovative defence technology. [901114]

4. **Paul Howell** (Sedgefield) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to develop innovative defence technology. [901116]

5. **Andrew Jones** (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to develop innovative defence technology. [901117]

12. **Chris Clarkson** (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to develop innovative defence technology. [901125]

The Minister for Defence Procurement (Jeremy Quin): Underpinned by a ringfenced £6.6 billion commitment to defence research and development, we are determined to innovate effectively and at scale. In addition to the well-established Defence and Security Accelerator programme this summer, we are launching the Defence Technology Exploitation programme, geared to supporting small and medium-sized enterprises and their innovative role in defence.

Bob Blackman: As my hon. Friend will know, we face a continued and substantial increase in attacks from cyber-technology. It is important to note that that is happening every single day that our defences are being probed. What further efforts will my hon. Friend make to ensure that our defences are secure and those attacks are rebuffed?

Jeremy Quin: My hon. Friend is right about that threat, and he is right to suggest that we need to be absolutely on our toes in dealing with it. The Department continuously integrates leading-edge innovative cyber-technologies into military operations, including intelligence agents for autonomous resilience cyber-defence and cyber-deception technologies, through the National Cyber Deception Laboratory. In doing so, we make active use of DASA funding and the excellent expertise that we have in the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory.

Paul Howell: As we see in the tragedy that is happening to Ukraine, the normal boundaries of warfare are being ignored, with increasing risks of the employment of biological or viral warfare strategies. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to be at the forefront of innovation and research to deliver the best possible platforms to defend against these abhorrent strategies, and that the work that companies such as Kromek in Sedgefield are doing in collaboration with others deserves full support and indeed acceleration?

Jeremy Quin: I am familiar with Kromek and its capabilities, and my hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that it is often SMEs that produce the most brilliant ideas, often working with excellent British universities. DASA finds and supports new ideas within defence, and I am delighted that SMEs make up some two thirds of the projects that DASA supports. Funding is also available for specialist innovative projects through Defence Science and Technology.

Andrew Jones: Building on the comments about SMEs, the conflict in Ukraine has shown the benefits of technical innovation, particularly in the area of drones, and we have great SMEs in this country that are keen to help, so could my hon. Friend explain a bit more about how he is engaging with that sector?

Jeremy Quin: I thank my hon. Friend for his question, not least because it gives me the opportunity to say how keen the entire defence sector is to support our friends in Ukraine in every way we can. We recently completed the application phase of our Ukrainian innovation fund competition, and no fewer than 295 proposals designed to deliver capability to our friends in the Ukraine in the very short term were submitted from 205 different companies. Many are being closely scrutinised, including 17 that have been shortlisted for immediate attention, and I am proud to say that the majority of contributors were SMEs.

Chris Clarkson: As we have seen from recent events in Ukraine, air combat is incredibly important to maintaining our national security and also, as has been mentioned, to maintaining our economic security—supporting businesses, such as Middleton-based MSM in my constituency. Can my hon. Friend tell me what is being done to ensure that the RAF retains its cutting-edge capabilities?

Jeremy Quin: A brilliantly topical question, if I may say so, with Farnborough taking place this very week. I was delighted to announce last Friday at the Royal International Air Tattoo our £2.3 billion investment in ECRS mark 2 radar. This British-made world-leading electronic warfare capability will transform our combat air. It is just one example of how we will continue to invest in combat air as we develop our next generation future combat air system programme. We are currently investing some £2 billion into FCAS, with industry and international partners likewise investing in what will be an extraordinary combat capability.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): A few moments ago, the Defence Secretary mentioned Typhoon and the advantages of international co-operation. Is this Government, post Brexit, prepared to have a clear strategy to say that co-operation across Europe is in the interests of defence jobs here in the United Kingdom?

Jeremy Quin: It is absolutely the case that co-operation across Europe is helpful to our own defence sector and to the capabilities of the entire western alliance. A couple of weeks ago, I was there to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Organisation for Joint Armament Co-operation, a major procurement hub that we do jointly with the Germans, the Belgians, the Spanish and the Italians. There are umpteen programmes, including Typhoon, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, and Boxer, on which we work very closely. Indeed, the ECRS mark 2 programme to which I have just referred will be integrated by a P4E integration programme across our Typhoon partners. It is absolutely right that we work with all our allies across NATO and they include many of our European friends.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the shadow Minister, Chris Evans.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): If this is indeed the last Defence questions for the present Defence team, I would like to place on record my thanks to the Minister for Defence Procurement for his kindness and generosity since I started shadowing him over a year ago. He is well known in the House for his attention to detail and he has been a formidable opponent for me.

“Complacent”, “too traditional”, and “resistant to change or criticism” are some of the words used to describe the Department by the Public Accounts Committee. With a new urgency for innovation due to the clear and present danger created by the war in Ukraine, and with deep concerns that the Department cannot manage large projects such as Dreadnought, is the Minister confident that the Department can deliver the new battle-winning capabilities this country needs, on time and in budget?

Jeremy Quin: I very much thank the hon. Gentleman, my shadow, for his question, which started so well. I am very grateful and I hope that we continue our ongoing relationship across the Dispatch Box. I understand his

concerns. They have been voiced by the PAC and we have responded to the concerns raised. I am afraid that I am a details bore, and we do go through the projects project by project. Defence procurement is never easy—it is a tough thing to get right—and I have not yet found a state anywhere on earth that can really deliver to the kind of standards that I am sure the hon. Gentleman would wish to see. What I do know is that, in Defence Equipment and Support and throughout the MOD, we have people who are doing a great job. They are becoming more professional, and senior responsible owners are spending more time on the projects. We are making sure that projects are properly set up to succeed at the start and ensuring that they are properly funded. It is that combination, along with working through the defence and security industrial strategy with British companies, that will get us the results we all wish to see.

China: Countering Threats

6. Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What steps his Department plans to take to counter threats originating in China in the context of the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept and joint address from the heads of MI5 and the FBI. [901118]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (James Heapey): I hope you will indulge me, Mr Speaker, as I recognise my counterpart Volodymyr Havrylov, the Ukrainian deputy Defence Minister, who joined us in the UK this week as we went to see the Ukrainian troops and sailors in training.

The Ministry of Defence and the whole of Government are taking active steps to counter state threats from China. In line with the NATO strategic concept, we are working with allies to increase our shared understanding and to protect against China’s coercive tactics. Together with other Departments, we have strengthened investment screening, the academic technology approval scheme and our export control regimes.

Martyn Day: The director general of MI5 has said:

“The most game-changing challenge we face comes from the Chinese Communist Party.”

At the last count, the UK Foreign Office had some 63 Mandarin speakers. Can the Minister tell us how many the Ministry of Defence has?

James Heapey: No. I will have to write to the hon. Gentleman.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the emerging threats from China show NATO was right to make cyber and space among the key frontiers, along with the traditional three, and that, when looking at defence procurement and how money is spent, we are world leading in these vital areas of defence?

James Heapey: I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend, but we should not think that our competition with China is exclusively concentrated on the high-end warfighting capabilities that may or may not be required in the first and second island chains. Every single week, we compete with China for influence around the world. Maintaining the defence effort across the global south to protect our interests around the Commonwealth is every bit as important as preparing to stand alongside the US in anything that might happen in the Pacific.

Ukrainian Resistance to Russian Aggression

7. Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): What assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of Ukrainian resistance to Russian aggression. [901119]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): There have been multiple reports of Ukrainian resistance and partisan activity in areas under Russian control, particularly in the south of the country. This has likely forced Russia to dedicate additional security personnel to areas it has occupied. Russia has deported 2.5 million people from Ukraine to Russia through filtration camps, and it has also likely detained and interrogated thousands of Ukrainians to try to quell the resistance. Such action will not deter Ukraine, and it will not deter the United Kingdom from continuing to support Ukraine in her fight.

Jason McCartney: Following the Prime Minister's generous offer to train up to 10,000 Ukrainian soldiers here in the UK, I was delighted to see the first cohort arrive earlier this month. How does the Defence Secretary assess the success of this programme so far, and how does he see it evolving over the summer?

Mr Wallace: I am not sure whether my hon. Friend has visited the sites, but I am delighted to have visited one of the sites twice. The first course completes this week, and it has been a learning experience for both sides. We will continue to invest in improving the course, and I am delighted that the international community has now joined us. The Dutch have declared that they will send people to support the training, and the New Zealanders were already here to help the Ukrainians on 105-mm artillery. We are talking with a number of other international partners about delivery.

It is amazing to see men aged from 18 to 50—some women will soon be part of the deployment—who sometimes got on the plane in tracksuits, being trained in basic battlefield skills, the law of armed conflict and so on. It is quite sobering that they will go from here to a war zone, where many of them will tragically make the ultimate sacrifice.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Putin obviously thought the west would fracture at the beginning, and it is good that the west has not fractured so far. It is also good that lots of different countries in the western alliance are providing military hardware, some of it lethal, to Ukraine, but one problem Ukraine is facing is that each country has procured something slightly different, and Ukrainian personnel have to be trained in how to use each of those different pieces of equipment. If we really are to stay in this for the long haul, will we not have to start developing military equipment that we can all give together so that Ukrainian personnel need only one training session rather than 34?

Mr Wallace: Yes. One strength of NATO is its adherence to standards across all the nations in it. At the moment, Ukraine is transiting from using Soviet era calibres and so on to using western weapons systems, which is why it is important to help train Ukraine in their application; they are not one in, one out—they need to be used differently. Having helped establish the international donor co-ordination centre near Stuttgart, Britain has added training into that, so we co-ordinate that properly.

Most countries use that and engage, so that this is co-ordinated: we do not double book and we get this in the right place. I urge any other international partner who is thinking of offering training to co-ordinate through that system.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): The Ukrainians are putting up a valiant and skilful resistance against Russian aggression, but we understand that they are currently losing about 100 men a day, with many more wounded. Given that rate of casualties in modern warfare, and given that the integrated review was published long before the Russian invasion, does the Secretary of State agree with me and many other Conservative colleagues that the supposed 10,000 cuts in the Army, which the new Chief of the General Staff has called “perverse”, should not only be reviewed, but completely reversed?

Mr Wallace: As we can see from our Conservative colleagues, defence spending is a key priority in the leadership race, and I recommend to all leadership candidates who are wanting votes from Conservative Members that they recognise its importance. The threat has changed and it warrants more spending on defence, because the world is more dangerous and anxious than it was—not only when we had the defence Command Paper but before Putin invaded.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State today give an undertaking that the level of defence support to Ukraine in the next six months, both in value and in volume, will be as much as it was in the previous six months?

Mr Wallace: With all due respect to the hon. Gentleman, I will not categorise it in six-month blocks. As long as I am Defence Secretary, we will continue with the investment and the support to Ukraine, be it in hardware or software. Will it continue through third parties? Yes, it will. Obviously, I cannot speak for the next Prime Minister, but I can say that all the candidates have clearly made a statement to such effect. It is important that we do not give up on this and we carry on, whoever comes in the next Government and after the next election. Putin's one calculation is that we will all get bored and go back to doing other things. That is how Russia wins, but we are not going to let it win; we must stick at it, for as long as it takes.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson, Stewart M. McDonald.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker. May I, too, say that no matter what might happen in the reshuffle following the summer, the Ministry of Defence has worked co-operatively, particularly on Ukraine, during these past months? Whoever takes over or stays in place, it is to the benefit of all of us that that continues, whoever the new Prime Minister might be. Who knows, that job in Brussels might be what is waiting for the Secretary of State later this year. The situation in south and eastern Ukraine is getting much worse. Indeed, just in the past few days the Russian Defence Minister Shoigu has ordered an intensification of attacks on those parts of the country. With winter just around the corner, that is the point

where there is the potential for allies to be picked off, although I do not lay that accusation at the Secretary of State's door. Will he ensure that the training being given by the UK keeps pace with what is needed for that intensification and helps get the armed forces of Ukraine through the winter?

Mr Wallace: Let me thank the hon. Gentleman as well. I have never doubted the desire of anyone in this House to keep this country safe, no matter whether they are SNP, Labour, Liberal Democrat or anyone else, and I pay tribute to his constructive manner. We are learning as we go on the training. We started with a pledge to 10,000. As I said this morning in a meeting, I would be perfectly understanding if it ended up being 20,000 or if the Ukrainians sought to switch it at some stage to do something else. The casualties figures were given earlier by the former Armed Forces Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), and they have dropped for now, which is a good thing. Russia is facing the consequences of the HIMARS—high mobility artillery rocket system—and I can confirm to the House that our guided multiple launch rocket system is now in country and active, delivering the same munitions. That is having a significant effect on the Russians' ability to prosecute the war. As the hon. Gentleman rightly says, the key is to get through the summer and make sure Ukraine is ready for the winter, and then we can continue to start pushing back Russia's aggressive invasion.

Armed Forces: Size Targets

8. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential merits of maintaining current targets for the size of the armed forces in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. [901120]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (James Heappey): We continue to assess the threat posed by Russia and other competitors around the world. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has just said in response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), we are, of course, excited to see defence spending play such a prominent role in the leadership debate. We look forward to working with the new Prime Minister to assess the threat and look at what changes to defence capability might be needed thereafter.

Alan Brown: As has been said, cutting 10,000 troops came from the integrated review, which predates Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The outgoing Chief of the General Staff has said that he is

"not comfortable with an Army of just 73,000",

and Lord Dannatt has stated that the capability of the fighting force is

"well below what it should be".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 27 June 2022; Vol. 823, c. 438.]

Given the answers we have heard from the Dispatch Box about increased spending, does that mean that Government Front Benchers agree that the cut of 10,000 should be reversed and that a much larger Army is required?

James Heappey: Nobody in the Ministry of Defence will ever argue against more money being spent on defence, but let us be clear: if more money were made available, there are other things that we would do more immediately than regrow the size of the Army. There are things that we would want to do about the lethality and deployability of the current force, to get more from what we have at the moment. If thereafter there is a discussion about regrowing, great, but there are other things that we would do first.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Autonomous weapons systems are likely to be force multipliers in the future. To what extent does that impact on the Minister's assessment of manpower? What doctrine does he believe will be needed to govern their use, and how is he recruiting soldiers with the skillsets necessary to handle them effectively?

James Heappey: My right hon. Friend makes a really important point. Autonomy is increasingly the key to the successful generation of overwhelming force in the battle space. That is a key part of the integrated review and within the defence industrial strategy. It may well be that a more lethal force—even a bigger force—does not necessarily acquire more workforce in the future if that is the way in which the trend continues to go.

Cost of Living: Armed Forces Personnel

9. **Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): What recent assessment his Department has made of the impact of the rise in the cost of living on armed forces personnel. [901121]

16. **Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): What recent assessment his Department has made of the impact of the rise in the cost of living on armed forces personnel. [901129]

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Leo Docherty): Our mitigating measures on the cost of living include a freeze of the daily food charge. We are limiting the increase in accommodation charges to 1%, and we are ensuring that the council tax rebate of £150 reaches more than 28,000 of our armed forces people. We are also, of course, bringing in wraparound childcare in time for the new school year.

Marion Fellows: Will the Minister confirm that the cost of a new £250 million royal yacht, whose principal use will be for champagne receptions, is not coming out of the Ministry of Defence budget during a cost of living crisis, when personnel have not received a real-terms rise for a number of years and while bases in Scotland have been closed and we have the smallest UK standing Army ever?

Leo Docherty: The hon. Lady makes a flippant point. The serious point is that this new vessel will deliver jobs right across the United Kingdom.

Joanna Cherry: Notwithstanding the Government's cuts to the armed forces footprint in Scotland, including at Redford barracks in my constituency, over the years Scots have played a very active role in the defence of their country. Yet despite being injured in service, many

veterans over 65 in the lowest-income households miss out on pension credit because their war disablement pension is considered as normal income. What steps is the Minister taking to persuade his counterpart at the Department for Work and Pensions to address this anomaly, to help our veterans cope with the rise in the cost of living?

Leo Docherty: We take any potential anomaly extremely seriously, and I would be pleased to meet the hon. and learned Lady to discuss that specific case. If I may make a general point, it is a bit rich to be told to take lessons on the cost of living from the Scottish National party, given its tax hike on armed forces personnel. There are 7,000 personnel in Scotland who pay £850 more on average, thanks to the SNP tax hike, which should be reviewed. It is absolutely outrageous.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): The Government's own figures show that at least 33,000 veterans are on universal credit, and estimates suggest the actual figure could be double that, so why does the Government's veterans strategy cut specialist employment support in jobcentres—which would help veterans on universal credit who are out of work get back into employment—by 50%?

Leo Docherty: We on the Conservative Benches will not perpetuate the myth that receiving universal credit is a bad thing. Many of these people are in high-paid and good jobs. It is a reflection of the fact that this Government support people into work and that military service gives them skills for life.

Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy

10. **Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab):** What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the effectiveness of the Afghan relocations and assistance policy. [901122]

14. **Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con):** What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the effectiveness of the Afghan relocations and assistance policy. [901127]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (James Heappey): The Afghan relocations and assistance policy scheme has had more than 100,000 applications. Although I appreciate the desperation of many who apply, the reality is that staff numbers and even names of those who worked with us in Helmand are being shared, so it is hard to identify individual applicants. To that end—the entitlement is bound; we know who worked for us—last week, I engaged a number of non-governmental organisations and charities to help us find the people on the list of those who actually worked with us, so that we can bring them to the front of the queue and get them out as quickly as possible.

Jeff Smith: Ministers confirmed last month that around 8,000 Afghans and their families could still be eligible for relocation to the UK under the ARAP scheme. The Minister says that it is hard to identify those people, so what specifically are Ministers doing to identify them, to establish pathways to get them here, and to process their applications as quickly as possible?

James Heappey: I think the hon. Gentleman might realise that I have answered that question in my original answer. We think that there are about 2,000 principals—people who actually worked with us—yet to bring out. Rather than going through tens of thousands of applications, we are asking those with networks in-country to help us find those 2,000 people on the list. We have the capacity and the routes to bring them out. The challenge is finding them when a huge number of applications are gaming the system, with dozens of applications coming in on the same staff number, which should be the individual identifier.

Elliot Colburn: I thank the MOD's Afghan relocation team who are working tirelessly to identify and process the huge number of applications including friends and relatives of Carshalton and Wallington residents. How many individuals have made it to the UK under the ARAP scheme since Operation Pitting concluded?

James Heappey: A total of 9,962 people have come out under ARAP, 2,984 of whom have come out since Op Pitting.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister, Luke Pollard.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): We are now only a few weeks away from the one-year anniversary of the start of Operation Pitting, the evacuation from Kabul. A year on, thousands of Afghan citizens are still waiting for their applications to be properly processed, too many are still in temporary accommodation, and the promises made to many of them about relocation and family reunions have been left unhonoured. With the one-year anniversary a few weeks away, what will the Minister be doing to speed up this incredibly slow process, so the promises that this country made to those Afghans who worked with our armed forces can truly be honoured?

James Heappey: The hon. Gentleman probably just heard me answer the previous two questions. There are hundreds of thousands of applications, many of which are duplicates, and many of which are from people who have no eligibility under ARAP whatsoever. ARAP is a very tightly bound scheme. It is not the same as the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme or other mechanisms where each case might be judged on its merits. There is a list of people who worked with the British armed forces in Afghanistan, so our focus must be on finding the people on that list and bringing them out. We are doing so quickly.

The hon. Gentleman says that it has been nearly a year. That is correct, Mr Speaker, but it is not as if we can just wander around in Afghanistan and find these people. It is not straightforward. A lot of them are undocumented. He may want to speak to some of the charities that are working on this, as I know that some of his colleagues on the Back Benches do. When I spoke to them last week, they realised that the situation was exactly as I have said: it is not easy; people do not have documents; and we are working fast to get people out. We think we have found a way of doing so quicker, and we will be getting on with it now.

Defence Business Services

11. **Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab):** What plans he has to restructure Defence Business Services. [901123]

The Minister for Defence Procurement (Jeremy Quin):

The hon. Gentleman has raised this with me on more than one occasion previously. I know that it matters greatly to his constituents. As announced back in 2016, Defence Business Services will consolidate its north-west estate into a single location. Last year, a thorough multi-criteria decision analysis was undertaken, which considered a number of locations and recommended consolidation in Blackpool. The full business case is being considered within the approvals process. I expect to make an announcement soon, and will write to the Members representing the constituencies affected.

Peter Dowd: I thank the Minister for Defence Procurement for his answer, and for procuring some continuity in the Government, against the odds, by remaining in his post during this crucial time. Will he consider bringing the hubs in Liverpool and Manchester into the Defence Business Services workplace programme solution to avoid compulsory redundancies?

Jeremy Quin: What I can say is that in locating to Blackpool, as was recommended, we will do our utmost to avoid compulsory redundancies. There is a good working relationship at a local level with the trade unions, which are doing well to represent their members. There is an absolute expectation on our part that we will maximise the ability to work flexibly, with things such as deferred moves and everything else we can do to support our employees. This move was designed not to cut posts, but as an estate rationalisation scheme. That is at the back and the front of our minds, and we will work with the trade unions and our employees to ensure as few redundancies as can possibly be managed.

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): I thank the Minister for moving so many of the jobs to Blackpool and to my constituency—yet one more to add to my list of wonderful things the Government have done for the town of Blackpool. Will he encourage all Government Departments, not just the MOD, to share his vision and his confidence in the people of my constituency?

Jeremy Quin: I know we are not alone in putting Government jobs into Blackpool; it is a popular location, and it was entirely driven by the intensive work we did on finding the best location. I can reassure my hon. Friend and this House that we undertook a very serious bit of work looking at all available options, and the recommendation of Blackpool emerged as a result of that serious analysis.

Topical Questions

T1. [901138] **Chris Loder** (West Dorset) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): I would like to update the House on the exciting progress of the United Kingdom's future combat air system programme, Tempest. At Farnborough international airshow this week, our industry and international partners are showcasing the new FCAS capabilities, demonstrating the momentum we have achieved. Today, I can announce that a flying demonstrator aircraft is being developed by the UK MOD and Italian industry. This piloted combat air demonstrator will fly for the first time within the next five years and is an important step in

ensuring that our technology skills and industrial capability are ready for the future. I am delighted that the UK is working alongside Italy, Japan and Sweden on the same combat air journey. We intend to take collaborative decisions by the end of the year.

Chris Loder: Will my right hon. Friend update the House on progress being made with the new medium-sized helicopter procurement, noting that Leonardo Helicopters in Yeovil is the only end-to-end helicopter manufacturer in the UK and supports hundreds of jobs in West Dorset? I would like to make the case again for the AW149.

Mr Wallace: I reassure my hon. Friend that he will have plenty of opportunity to lobby on behalf of his constituents and others in the south-west. The new medium helicopter competition will align with the defence and security industrial strategy; the competition's contract notice and dynamic pre-qualification questionnaire were released on 18 May this year and responses are now being evaluated to determine a shortlist of credible suppliers. The second half of the competition, in which we will ask the selected suppliers to provide more detailed responses, is due to be launched later this year.

Mr Speaker: I call John Healey, the shadow Secretary of State.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): When the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Wells (James Heapey), answered my urgent question on Thursday about new public allegations about British special forces in Afghanistan, he said that,

"the Secretary of State is clear that he rules nothing out".

He also said:

"I am certain that the House will hear from him in the near future."—[*Official Report*, 14 July 2022; Vol. 718, c. 494.]

With the summer recess starting on Thursday, when will the Secretary of State make a statement to the House on this?

Mr Wallace: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's interest. It is an incredibly important allegation that has been made, which none of us takes lightly. Mr Speaker, you waived at the time the sub judice rule; as the right hon. Gentleman will know, there is a matter before the courts that may determine that timetable and precludes my guessing when I can make certain decisions. What I can say in the meantime is that I think the right hon. Gentleman is due for a briefing on this matter. We have a date for him on that, and I am happy to oblige the SNP Front Bench as well if they wish to get it. We take everything seriously. This is incredibly important, but we can only act on the evidence before us. People need to remember that we cannot act based on noises off. We will always act on the evidence put before us, but this is a matter for the independent police and prosecutor.

T2. [901139] **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): I am a member of the Scottish Affairs Committee, which recently welcomed the increase in military capacity in Scotland, especially in the light of the Russian aggression. What plans do the Government have to ensure that Scotland remains at the heart of the United Kingdom's defence capacity?

Mr Wallace: Our plans are to keep Scotland within the United Kingdom, because it is in the best interests of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales to all be part of a greater Union providing security for each other. We are better together.

Mr Speaker: I call SNP spokesperson Stewart Malcolm McDonald.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): I want to return to the issue that the shadow Secretary of State raised—not the individual allegations or even the “Panorama” programme, but the wider issue of the unanswerable case for democratic oversight of special forces. When will the Department devise proposals, bring them to the House, and allow us to debate and legislate on that issue? Surely that does not require anything at all from the courts.

Mr Wallace: Indeed it does not, and the hon. Gentleman is perfectly at liberty to table a motion and have a debate in this House. *[Interruption.]* He says, “Come on!”, but I cannot remember one. The key is making sure that democratically elected Ministers in this House have oversight of our special forces, and we are also bound by law in the same way that anyone else is. There is no exception to the law, whether through investigational powers or the operational prerogative on which we deploy our forces.

T4. [901141] **David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): I have heard from a number of Ukrainians now resident in my constituency how much they value the work of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to support their armed forces. What lessons are we going to learn from our work to supply ordnance and equipment to the armed forces in Ukraine that will inform our future plans for maintaining appropriate stocks of weapons and equipment?

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (James Heappey): We learn an awful lot from watching the way that modern conflict is being prosecuted in Ukraine, and that is indeed shaping our analysis of the stockpiles we need to hold, particularly given the intensity of the modern artillery battle.

T3. [901140] **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): This October will see the 70th anniversary of the British nuclear tests. What are Ministers doing to formally recognise our nuclear veterans ahead of that date?

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Leo Docherty): I recently met the families, alongside the Prime Minister. I committed at that meeting to instruct the MOD to look afresh at the case to be made, and that work is ongoing.

T7. [901144] **Matt Vickers** (Stockton South) (Con): At the National Memorial Arboretum, 306 wooden stakes represent the 306 soldiers who were wrongly shot at dawn and subsequently pardoned. One of those is George Hunter from Stockton, who left behind a wife and two children to enlist in the Durham Light Infantry. Despite being pardoned in 2006, Private Hunter and

his comrades have still not been posthumously awarded their medals. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss how we can get these heroes the medals and recognition that they deserve?

Leo Docherty: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and for the work he does for the armed forces in his constituency. Of course this is a very serious matter, so I am happy to confirm that we will look at it and I will write to him.

T5. [901142] **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): What steps are being taken to address the urgent shortage of translators for UK and Ukraine training exercises while ensuring that adequate proficiency in the language is a key requirement? Some concerns have been raised that the fluency level currently being accepted is not high enough.

James Heappey: Those are not concerns that I have heard reflected. I have visited the artillery training that was taking place at Rolleston camp, the Secretary of State has been to visit Warcop twice, and tomorrow I am going to Knook camp in Wiltshire with my Ukrainian counterpart. I can assure the hon. Lady that while my experience of the interpreters has been amazingly positive, if there are any shortcomings we will make sure they are rectified.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): Bracknell constituency is very proud to have a new veterans’ hub at Crowthorne fire station, and my thanks go to the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service. What additional provision might be available for communities wanting to provide local support for veterans?

Leo Docherty: I put on record my thanks to my hon. Friend for his characteristic support for armed forces personnel and veterans in his constituency. The hub is clearly an important thing, and those people should be made aware of opportunities for support coming from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, which he will know well.

T6. [901143] **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): If I gave the Secretary of State £250 million, would he invest it in another Type 31 frigate, in other defence capability we are missing out on, or in a royal yacht whose sole purpose is supposed to be for signing new trade deals?

Mr Wallace: I will invest in whatever furthers Britain’s national interest. I totally understand where the hon. Gentleman is coming from. He will understand, although perhaps not from the west coast of Scotland, the importance of the royal yacht, because the number of people who pay money to go and look at it in Edinburgh, where it is currently tied up, is incredible. It is very popular.

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): The two voluntary outflow reasons for personnel from the armed forces tend to be that there are greater opportunities outside the military and the impact on family life. The Minister has done extraordinary work, so what assessment has he made of the armed forces families strategy and how it will take account of those two issues?

Leo Docherty: The strategy is an important piece of work. We launched it in January, and we will keep the House up to date. We acknowledge that we recruit the armed forces personnel, but we retain the families. We want to give them flexibility and choice, and we look forward to reporting back.

T8. [901145] **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I have met Airspace Unlimited, which is creating an airspace optimisation tool for defence airspace, which will assist the RAF's ambition to be net zero by 2040 with an added benefit of supporting vital defence training for fifth and sixth-generation combat aircraft. Does the Minister agree about the importance of that and of supporting such initiatives through a defence and security accelerator?

The Minister for Defence Procurement (Jeremy Quin): I do agree. I think there are huge opportunities, and the hon. Gentleman correctly points out that the RAF has an ambition of 2040 for net zero. We are investing a lot of money, including £2.35 billion into the European common radar system or ECRS Mark 2, a prime recipient of which will be Edinburgh. Scottish companies have a lot of other opportunities to bring to our attention, and we will happily look at them.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I think it was at his keynote speech to the land warfare conference that the Chief of the General Staff made his oft-quoted remarks that this was "our 1937 moment", that it was "perverse" to cut 10,000 people from the Army and that we would be at risk of being "outnumbered" in the event of warfare. Can the Secretary of State tell me whether that speech was cleared through his office before CGS gave it?

Mr Wallace: Some of the characteristics that my hon. Friend mentions were not in the speech. The Chief of the General Staff did not say it was perverse to cut 10,000 troops—he did say it was a 1937 moment. The important thing about 1937 was not only that General Montgomery had talked about mobilisation, but that he had talked about ensuring that the force was relevant. If you have a big mass force that is irrelevant to modern technology, you end up like Russia, stuck on the road to Kyiv—wiped out.

T9. [901146] **Anne McLaughlin** (Glasgow North East) (SNP): Mr Speaker, you will be pleased to know I have a very short question that could be answered with one word. Will serving personnel receive an above-inflation pay rise this year?

Leo Docherty: We look forward to making an announcement in due course.

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I start by congratulating my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Defence Front-Bench team for the competence, clarity and steadfastness they have shown, particularly in recent months in proposing the UK contribution to Ukraine. When my hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement visits Farnborough, will he find time to attend the joint economic data hub hosted by the UK Defence Solutions Centre, which demonstrates to Her Majesty's Treasury that £1 invested in defence has a multiplier of more than £1?

Jeremy Quin: In a packed programme, I will do my utmost to visit the JEDHub centre. My right hon. Friend is too modest to point out that that came out of a recommendation from the Dunne report. It was a valuable recommendation, and knowing exactly what defence investment means for our economy is very good news for defence and very good news for the United Kingdom.

T10. [901147] **Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): A couple of months ago I was delighted to spend an evening with some Fijian veterans, and a good fun evening was had by all. I was able to express to them my personal thanks for their services to the British armed forces. I recognise the progress that has been made on visa fees for Fijian veterans, but will the Minister look at cancelling the costs of visas for Fijian servicemen and women's spouses as well?

Leo Docherty: The point is that it is all about fairness, and we must not disadvantage any comparable British soldier in the same circumstances, so currently there are no plans to extend that measure to family members.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): It is thanks to the team on the Front Bench and the Prime Minister that I am still able to wear this badge showing the Ukrainian flag, because had it not been for the supply of next-generation light anti-tank weapons some three to four months before the invasion, the Russians would be in Kyiv now. May I ask my right hon. Friend whether he is satisfied that we will still be able to maintain the supply of ammunition that the Ukrainians naturally need?

Mr Wallace: We are able to do that, and where we do not have our own stocks, alongside international partners and donors we scour the world to find them and make sure that we have them. Ukraine and Russia are both discovering that a prolonged battle is very hard to manage with their own stocks. Russia is now using very old equipment, some of which came out in the 1950s, and using it incorrectly—for example, using equipment designed to kill a ship to hit a building.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): Complaints about service accommodation have rocketed in the first four months of this year, and are 20% higher than last year. Can Ministers explain why, and say how they plan to rectify this urgently, given the already undue pressure experienced by families and those who are married to someone in the armed forces?

Leo Docherty: We take these issues extremely seriously. That is why we have invested more than £936 million in service family accommodation in the last seven years, and there is more coming. Under the future accommodation model, we want to give choice, flexibility, and accommodation of the highest possible standard to those living in service family accommodation.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): British nuclear testing veterans and their families met the Prime Minister, Defence Ministers, the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) and me on 8 June. The veterans told me that they felt that the Prime Minister had listened to them, and they were hopeful that they would be formally recognised. Will

the Secretary of State provide a progress report on the actions that he and the Prime Minister have taken since the meeting to secure the recognition that these veterans so deserve?

Leo Docherty: It was my great pleasure to be at that meeting, and I am happy to write to the hon. Lady with an update.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): Despite stark warnings from successive Chiefs of the Defence Staff and others about the vulnerability of our undersea cables in the light of increased Russian submarine activity, it took until 2021 for the Government to announce that they would acquire a multi-role ocean surveillance ship to protect that critical infrastructure. It was recently reported that the Government still have not decided on the capability required, a procurement strategy, or an in-service date. Why is that?

Jeremy Quin: We are looking closely at how we take forward MROSS. As the hon. Lady suggests, it was an important step to make that part of the defence Command Paper in spring '21. We said that we would ensure that we brought that capability into service, but we need to get it right, and considerable work is continuing on what exactly that capability should look like.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): “Meritorious” was the word that the Prime Minister used in this House to describe the application made under the Afghan relocations and assistance policy scheme by a former Supreme Court of Afghanistan judge who put hundreds of terrorists behind bars, undoubtedly saving British lives. I was promised a meeting with Ministers on the subject; that never materialised, and suddenly, out of the blue, his ARAP application was turned down last week because he was deemed to have not worked closely enough with the UK Government. I plead with Ministers to meet me to review this hero’s case, because I have no doubt that he will be hunted down and slaughtered by the Taliban if we do not bring him to safety.

James Heappey: The hon. Lady and I walked through the Lobby together the other week—it was one of the rare occasions on which we were in the same Lobby—and were able to discuss this case. I asked the team to look at it. ARAP is a very tightly bound scheme for those who worked with the British armed forces, and the person for whom she is advocating did not. There are other routes by which that person can come to this country,

including through the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme, and I will make sure that she is connected with the appropriate Minister on that.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): Will we be left without a low-level parachute capability when Hercules goes out of service? If so, can Ministers say how long our airborne forces will be grounded while Atlas is upgraded?

Mr Wallace: I took steps immediately to close the gap, if there was one, in that last year we purchased a significant number of new parachutes off the shelf. The hon. Gentleman will be aware, given his interest in airborne forces, that both the German and French air forces have on numerous occasions jumped out of A400s, and it is odd that we have not yet done that, so that is not the reason why this matter has not progressed. We are making sure that we have the right equipment and the right training for pilots. We are on track to do that, but I will give him an update. Just like him, I think it is incredibly important that the RAF gets on and does this.¹

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): House of Commons Library analysis forecasts that Ministry of Defence day-to-day spending will be cut by 5.5% in real terms by 2024-25. Can the Secretary of State confirm that this amounts to a real-terms cut of £1.7 billion over the next three years?

Mr Wallace: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the House. I would also like to pay tribute to his predecessor as the defence spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone). We served in the Scottish Parliament together, and he will be missed from this brief.

On the point made by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord), I think that is based on the new inflation rate. When we got our defence spending in the comprehensive spending review, the GDP deflator was at 1.5%. As a result, we have been compensated by the Treasury in the short term for inflationary pressures, but that will not show in the core budget until after the accounts are in. However, he is right to point out that inflationary pressures on a budget such as ours, with huge amounts of capital, will have an impact. We are taking steps to try to mitigate that, and I am looking forward to engaging with the new Prime Minister to make sure we get that mitigation.

Extreme Heat Preparedness

Mr Speaker: Before we come to the urgent question, I want to express my disappointment that the Government did not come forward with a general statement on the heatwave, given its potential to have wide-ranging and serious impacts on the nation. Members need to be able to scrutinise the Government on all issues arising from the current high temperature, especially as the Government felt it appropriate for Cobra to meet. If it is good enough for Cobra to sit and discuss, it is good enough for this House to hear about as well.

3.36 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on the Government's preparedness for the extreme heat in the UK.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Kit Malthouse): For the first time ever, the UK Health Security Agency has issued a level 4 heat health alert for much of the country. Temperatures are forecast to reach the low 40s° C. It looks probable that they will break the current UK record of 38.7° C, recorded in Cambridge in 2019, and they currently stand at 37.5° C in Suffolk.

I have just come from chairing the latest in a series of Cobra briefings that have been held since last week, including over the weekend, to co-ordinate the extensive preparation and mitigation measures being taken across the Government to face the next 36 hours. I am grateful to colleagues in the devolved Administrations and in local resilience forums around the country and our local authority and agency partners, which are keeping public services running and responding to any local issues that may emerge.

Thanks to our strong forecasting capabilities, the Government were able to launch a comprehensive public communications campaign ahead of the heatwave. This involved advice from, among others, the UK HSA, the Met Office, the Department of Health and Social Care, our chief medical officer, Professor Chris Whitty, and the deputy chief medical officer, Dr Thomas Waite.

While we hope people will take notice of the advice on how to keep safe in the high temperatures, the NHS has made sure that all its operational capacity and capability are available during the heatwave. The 999 and 111 services have also stood up all available capacity. There are now more than 2,400 call handlers for 999, which is an increase of about 500 since September last year. On the detail, I will defer to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, who will make a statement on the health system in this heatwave imminently.

While heatwaves are not a new phenomenon, we are adapting to temperatures not previously experienced in this country and to events such as this coming with increased frequency and severity. The Government have been in the lead on appreciating the impacts of climate change; indeed, it was a Conservative Government who enshrined net zero in law. Since the time of David Cameron, Conservative Prime Ministers have spoken passionately about the impact of climate change and the need to keep 1.5° alive, notably at last year's COP26 UN climate change conference.

As I say, we have long taken the lead on this issue. Over the past three decades, the UK has driven down emissions faster than any other G7 country, and we have clear plans to go further. We are showing the way on climate change, helping over 90% of countries set net zero targets during our COP26 presidency—up from 30% two years ago. On cleaner energy, the UK is also forging ahead of most other countries. About 40% of our power now comes from cleaner and cheaper renewables. Our net zero work is vital to create resilience. We must continue to drive forward the initiatives that help us curb the impacts of climate change and at the same time build systems that help us withstand extreme events as they arise.

Caroline Lucas: I thank the Minister for his response. As he says, this week the UK is likely to have its hottest day on record, with the Met Office issuing its first ever red warning for extreme heat for England, and Wales already recording its hottest day.

These brutal temperatures pose a very real threat to life and infrastructure, as well as to education, travel and, most importantly, health. It is indeed disappointing that the Minister did not offer his own statement about what the Government were doing, instead of waiting to be dragged here by an urgent question. Although the heatwave has now been declared a national emergency, there are real questions about how seriously the Government are taking it and how prepared they are. They seem to be turning up with a watering can when what we need is a giant fire hose.

Will the Minister say exactly how many Cobra meetings on the heat emergency the Prime Minister has missed, and why? What practical support have the Government offered to the NHS, care homes and schools, beyond the guidance in the heatwave plans? For example, what financial resources are they offering? Ten months after the consultation closed, where is the Government's national resilience strategy? Will the Government agree to maximum workplace temperature limits to give workers legal protection against working in high temperatures, and ensure that employers allow staff to work flexibly in the heat? Will he condemn those on his own Benches who have, unbelievably, sought to make a cultural wedge issue out of even this subject, with Conservative Members calling those who want to take precautions "cowards" and "snowflakes"?

The Government can hardly say that they have not been cautioned about the risks. The Committee on Climate Change has warned that heat-related deaths could triple by 2050, yet in the words of the chair of the Adaptation Committee, adaptation in this country is

"under-resourced, underfunded and often ignored."

None of the 42 adaptation-specific recommendations have been implemented in full. The committee reports that more than half a million new homes that are liable to overheating have been built in the UK over the past 10 years, even after the issue was first raised. What exactly are the Government doing to close the gap on adaptation? Finally, when will the Government finally join the dots and stop pouring fuel on the fire? It is beyond perverse that Ministers wring their hands over extreme heat one day, and give the green light to new oil and gas extraction the next. Will the Minister rule out any new oil and gas licences in the North sea, and scrap

yet more subsidies through the investment allowance as part of the energy profits levy? Will they finally turn the tap off new oil and gas?

Kit Malthouse: Obviously, our immediate concern is to ensure that we get the country through the next 36 hours or so in as good a shape as possible. The hon. Lady will be pleased to know that all our local resilience forums are standing up. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities joined the chairs' call this morning, and they are meeting today to consider what steps need to be taken. There are simple behavioural things that we can all do to help protect ourselves and look out for the most vulnerable, particularly the elderly who are living alone.

The hon. Lady raised a raft of policy issues, which will no doubt be addressed in our debates on this issue in the months to come. She asked about the Prime Minister's presence at Cobra. It is literally my job as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to chair Cobra, particularly where the Civil Contingencies Secretariat is involved, and to brief the Prime Minister accordingly, which I did yesterday morning at 8 o'clock. It is my job to co-ordinate across the whole of Government, and that is what we have been doing. As a result, I am confident that all the guidance and support needed in schools and hospitals, and for our police forces and others involved in this effort, is working its way out through the system, and they are all standing up well. In particular, our co-operation with the devolved Administrations has been strong, which is why the public health message about the next 36 hours has landed so well.

In wider terms, as I am sure the hon. Lady will have noticed, this heatwave has not just affected the United Kingdom. It has hit the whole of continental Europe. A number of countries that in many ways are more accustomed than we are to higher temperatures are having to take similar action, and in some circumstances their populations are suffering. That is why it is so important that the UK leads on this debate globally, as we did at COP26 last year.

As the hon. Lady knows, we have launched the Energy Transition Council, with 20 Governments and 15 international institutions participating. We are working hard with countries around the world to help them to move to a cleaner future, while we also shift our own energy mix in the right direction. However, as I am sure she will appreciate, as we move towards net zero we have to strike a balance between playing our part in fighting climate change in this country and keeping the lights on for people who need that.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): May I, through a question to my right hon. Friend, put to the leaders of our public services, including the ambulance service, that if their staff do not have summer gear, they should be allowed to wear their own safe and appropriate summer gear, and ask all of them to ensure that people have good equipment and clothes for the summer, given that the temperatures are changing? It is wrong that people should only have winter gear in times like this.

Kit Malthouse: The Father of the House raises an extremely important point about the ability of our emergency services to cope and their resilience. Each of

those organisations and their leaders will have to take that into account over the months to come. I have said to the team internally that we must learn exactly such practical lessons during this brief but nevertheless severe period of weather. I am sure we will see impacts on the transport network and elsewhere in the next 36 hours, some of which we can mitigate, but it is probably the case that not all effects will be mitigated; we should learn those lessons. My hon. Friend raises an important point for the future.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister, Fleur Anderson.

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for securing this hugely important urgent question.

On Tuesday, we will be in the hottest 1.2% of the world. Once again, when faced with a national emergency, driven by the climate emergency, which the Government could see coming a mile off, Ministers were asleep at the wheel. The Prime Minister is too busy planning parties, instead of planning for Britain. Is anyone else having déjà vu? As has been acknowledged, he has already missed two Cobra meetings on the red heat warning and is set to miss a third—the same man who missed five Cobra meetings in the weeks preceding the onset of the pandemic. It is clear that this finished Prime Minister has clocked off, but with 49 dangerous days to go. The heatwave is a reminder that the Government have not tackled the growing climate emergency facing our country, and the leadership election gives us little hope that that will change.

As Britain boils, will the Minister answer these questions? Where is the plan for the delivery of essential services and keeping people safe at work, on transport, and in hospitals, care homes and schools in the coming days? Where is the advice for vulnerable workers who face working in unbearable conditions? We need action on guidance for safe indoor working temperatures, and we need the Government to ensure that employers allow staff to work flexibly in the heat. We need a plan, not a panic. Labour already has a resilience plan for long-term, strategic emergency planning. Where is the Government's national resilience strategy? Will the Minister give a date for its publication? It is already 10 months overdue.

It is the primary duty of any Government to keep the public safe. Britain deserves better.

Kit Malthouse: As I am sure the hon. Lady knows, there are significant plans in place to deal with all manner of extreme weather events, and all local resilience forums have their plans in place. As I said earlier, there is guidance available for schools and hospitals, particularly on the safety and welfare of their staff, but also of other people in their facilities. The Health and Safety Executive is available to give guidance to employers, and there is already a clear obligation in law for employers to maintain a reasonable temperature at work; obviously that varies from building to building and from facility to facility, but nevertheless it is clear that employers have that obligation.

As for the Prime Minister and Cobra, as I said earlier, I have attended many Cobra meetings since 2011, and only one—during the 2011 riots in London—was chaired by the Prime Minister. Others have routinely been chaired by Secretaries of State, and, as I said earlier, it is literally my job to do so. On that issue of non-attendance, I

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gently point out that my direct shadow, the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), is not in her place on the Opposition Front Bench; obviously this is not as important as her radio show today.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend explain why the Government seem to be creating a lot of unnecessary anxiety? Is not the key issue that we should adapt to our climate as we have in the past? Is not there a real problem now that too many buildings are being built without natural ventilation—for example, many buildings on this estate? Why do we not go back to having natural ventilation, so that we do not have to rely so much on air conditioning?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend raises an important point. In all our public messaging, we have tried to be balanced and moderate in our view, and to point to the particular vulnerability of certain smaller groups. Indeed, I have asked Secretaries of State to identify those vulnerable groups and possibly to target them with more urgent communication—particularly the elderly, who often live alone, and who we know from elsewhere in Europe are vulnerable in this kind of weather. My hon. Friend raises an interesting point about our adaptation to climate change. As we see more extreme weather events, we must bear in mind that we need to protect ourselves from the heat, but at the same time we need to be able to adapt to cope with the cold as well. That often creates a challenge.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson, Steven Bonnar.

Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): I, too, commend the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for securing an urgent question on the extreme heat we are experiencing across these islands.

The Met Office has extended the amber alert in Scotland and declared a red alert for much of England and Wales. UK temperature records are expected to be broken in all four nations across the next two days, with temperatures to exceed 40° in England. We have reports that the RAF has suspended operations out of Brize Norton due to the runway melting, rendering it unsafe—these are unusual times.

The heatwave threatens to kill hundreds or even thousands of people. To ensure a continuous monitoring and response to the situation, the Scottish Government have continued to operate the Scottish Government Resilience Room. Of course, at a UK level we have heard that Cobra meetings have been held to discuss the emergency. Much as he did at the start of the covid-19 pandemic, our esteemed Prime Minister has declined to attend. We heard the Minister's excuses for the Prime Minister's continued refusal to deal with emergencies and crises, or even acknowledge them. We find it wholly unacceptable.

Lastly, I want to reinforce the message of how important it is to practise good water safety at a time like this. All too often in Scotland and in other places we hear of tragic accidents, when people, normally young or middle-aged men, enter open water to cool down or for some hi-jinks and encounter difficulties. I renew my call for caution and to think before entering any open waters.

Kit Malthouse: The hon. Gentleman is right that we need to discuss—and we have been discussing in Cobra—the different circumstances faced in Scotland, where the school term has ended. There is the possibility—let us hope it does not occur—of accidental drowning or other incidents in water in hot weather. In England, where the schools are still open, we are keen for kids to be in school, because we generally think they are safer and better managed. As for the attendance of the Prime Minister at Cobra, I gently point out that the First Minister of the Scottish Government has not attended any of the Cobras.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): People living in the Woottons, Castle Rising, Reffley and other parts of my constituency are rightly angry that they were left without water over the last 48 hours due to a burst main. I am grateful to those who worked through the night to fix the broken pipe. I am assured it will be finished later this afternoon. Based on that experience, does my right hon. Friend agree that for preparedness, it is vital that lessons are learnt by Anglian Water and other companies about the importance of open communication with the public and effective contingency plans to deliver water, particularly for vulnerable people?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend is absolutely spot on. He will be reassured to know that colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs are in close touch with water companies, along with other partners, as they seek to get us through this particular 36 hours in good shape. He is quite right that where there is a problem with water supply, the easiest and best thing that can be done immediately is to communicate as much as possible, both when incidents happen and when the resolution and timeframe can be expected.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The problem with what the Minister is saying is that he admitted we have been here before. In 1976, we hit a temperature of 36° and in 2003 we hit a temperature of 38.3°. At those points, we had 20% and 59% excess deaths, so we know how dangerous heat is. The hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) asked us all to adapt. He needs to look at the evidence from history for why the climate crisis is so dangerous. We cannot adapt in this sort of heat. We know—the Minister just accepted it—that we will have more extreme weather conditions. Given that none of us wants to see history repeating itself, does he recognise how devastating it is for our communities? Yet again in my constituency today schools are closed, there is chaos with the trains and there is no national resilience strategy. The Minister talks about wanting to keep the lights on, but is it not the truth that he is keeping this country in the dark about the climate we face?

Kit Malthouse: One of the critical things we need to bear in mind is that this period of hot weather will be short. It will be 36 hours long. The kinds of effects that the hon. Lady mentions have generally been over longer periods. For example, in 2003 in France, I think it was, there were eight days of 40-plus and, critically, the temperature at night did not drop below 20°. In those circumstances, we need to look at vulnerable groups. I hope she will be promoting the message, through all her very sophisticated and well-followed social media channels,

that we should do the neighbourly thing and knock on the door of older people who may be living alone, just to make sure they are okay for the moment, while, as I said earlier, we do our best to lead the world on making the changes we need to address climate change.

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on securing this urgent question. It is important that we discuss this issue when almost all the Members in the Chamber will have constituents who are suffering in one way or another through the heatwave. I commend to the Minister the report on heatwaves that the Environmental Audit Committee did four years ago, when the hon. Lady and I were serving on it, together with some other Members in the Chamber. We took evidence from the NHS and education officers in the relevant departments. There are elements of our recommendations that the Government chose not to endorse at the time, but the Minister may like to refresh the memories of his officials about those and consider whether that would be an appropriate thing to look at now.

Kit Malthouse: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his constructive contribution and I will certainly take a look at that document. The Cabinet Office does not lead on this issue, but nevertheless, given that we are coping with this contingency and that we need to learn lessons, perhaps that is one lesson that we need to revisit.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I thank the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for securing this important question. It must be very obvious that in this age of extremes—extreme heat, extreme cold and flooding—our infrastructure is simply not capable of dealing with it and that we have not really followed through on the commitments we have given at successive COP events. Will the Minister commit to the Government taking a long, hard look at all the decisions taken at COP that we have or have not followed and all our infrastructure requirements that need to be changed, so that we have effective public services that are properly funded and properly staffed in order to deal with these kinds of extremes? They are not one-offs. They will come more and more often as the years go on and we have to be ready for them.

Kit Malthouse: I think it is generally accepted that the UK Government and my right hon. Friend the COP26 President fought hard at COP26 to keep 1.5° alive and that we put it all out on the field in pursuit of a global assault on climate change. We have certainly done our part in the UK—for example, by virtually phasing out the use of coal in our power generation. There is always more to do as we drive towards net zero in 2050, and I hope and believe that the right hon. Member will agitate to make sure that we get there.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): I have a network of reservoirs at the head of the Holme and Colne valleys, so I join the earlier warnings about the dangers of swimming in open water. I also have the Pennine moorlands, where we have already had a number of devastating moorland fires earlier this year. It is an absolute tinderbox up there at the moment, so will the Minister join me in getting the message out there again

that it is illegal to have barbecues, fires and fireworks up on the moors? There is a £2,500 fine, but those found guilty can also face prison. We do not want any more devastating moorland fires.

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point and I am more than happy to reinforce his message. As he may know, we have issued a red alert for wildfires. We are very concerned and all fire and rescue services are stood up to deal with them as fast as they possibly can.

Mr Speaker: It might be worth having a helicopter capable of actually reaching the moors with the equipment to put the fires out, which they did not have last time.

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): Working in extreme heat can really affect people's health and can even be fatal. Spain has strict rules on working temperature: a maximum of 27° indoors and 25° when doing physical activity. Even the US guidelines are 24°, yet we have absolutely nothing here. With extreme heat becoming more regular in the UK, will the Government legislate for maximum working temperatures?

Kit Malthouse: As I said, the law, as it stands, says that employers have an obligation to maintain a reasonable temperature at work—[*Interruption.*] It is not defined because circumstances may change. If someone is working in front of a blast furnace, that is different from working in an office. We may find that for many people during this period, being at work is cooler than being at home. Although I understand the hon. Lady's point, there is already an obligation on employers to make sure that the temperature is reasonable for the circumstances.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity to praise the Meteorological Office, which was able to predict the heatwave with its Cray computers and declare a red alert days in advance? Is he aware that the Governments of France and Germany have been criticised for not giving advance warning of heatwaves in the northern parts of those countries, where heatwaves are not so known?

Kit Malthouse: I am more than happy to join my hon. Friend in praising the accuracy and professionalism of the Met Office. Its ability to predict the heatwave with some accuracy, both in respect of timing and geographically, has been remarkable. We rely on it for much of our resilience planning. There is no doubt about it: it has some of the best weather forecasters in the world.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): This is climate change, pure and simple, and the Government must get their head out of the sand. Beyond the transition period and all the rest of it, will the Government set an end date for all UK oil and gas exploration between now and 2050?

Kit Malthouse: I do not know whether the hon. Lady can cast her mind back, but I remember that the Conservative slogan more than 10 years ago was "Vote blue, go green." The battle against climate change has been central to Conservative party policy for well over a decade now. I realise that there is a battle to claim it, as

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there is a battle to claim any kind of compassion, but in fact we should all be working together on climate change.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): Will the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster accept that there are just too many climate deniers on the Government Benches, too many oil licences being granted, too many carbon budgets being missed and too many Government Members calling those who are concerned about the heatwave “snowflakes” for his Government to be considered anything other than part of the climate catastrophe? Anything that they say today means absolutely nothing when they have leadership candidates moving away from net zero. It is an absolute joke, and this Government are a joke when it comes to the climate crisis.

Kit Malthouse: It seems only five minutes ago that the hon. Gentleman was supporting the last leader of his party, one of whose pledges was to reopen the coalmines.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Although it is right that Government Departments should prepare and plan for foreseen and unforeseen emergencies and crises, does the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster agree that we have seen some hysteria being demonstrated in this House today about a couple of warm days that most of our constituents, if they are not working, are probably out enjoying? When it gets too hot, they will go and sit in the shade, have a cold drink and cool down. Does he agree that the main thing is that we explain to people their own personal responsibilities? What we should be avoiding is heaping on them more expensive climate policies, which are already costing them a fortune and draining their pockets.

Kit Malthouse: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman knows that the vast majority of the population will get through the next 36 hours in good shape, but I am sure that he also recognises that there are groups who are particularly vulnerable to the heat. I know that, as a good neighbour, if he lives next door to an older person he will knock on that person’s door and make sure that they are getting through it all right.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster’s last answer gets to the heart of what is wrong with the Government’s approach: it seems to be all about going to sit in the shade and helping neighbours out. What we need is a strategic approach, but I have not seen that.

The Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, the right hon. Member for Ludlow (Philip Dunne), referred to the Committee’s report on heatwaves in 2018. One of its recommendations was about good, green infrastructure standards to deal with urban heat islands. Is the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster planning to do anything at all to advance that agenda?

Kit Malthouse: That is obviously the responsibility of another Secretary of State; my job, as I say, is to get us through the next 36 hours in as good a shape as possible and learn the lessons therefrom. But the hon. Lady is

right: green infrastructure makes a huge difference, and planting new trees, as she knows, is a big part of our agenda into the future.

I would just say, though, that one thing we need to reflect on is that the growth of problems with climate change and the fight against it cover many, many decades. As far as I can see, in the past decade or so we have seen an acceleration in the UK’s effort in comparison with the previous decade under a Labour Government.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Last year’s advice report by the Adaptation Committee stated that

“the gap between the level of risk we face and the level of adaptation underway has widened. Adaptation action has failed to keep pace with the worsening reality of climate risk.”

Why has that happened? The Government have been in office for 12 years.

Kit Malthouse: Again, that is the responsibility of another Secretary of State, but I am more than happy to look at—[*Interruption.*] I came here to talk about the next 36 hours; about my responsibility, which is the Civil Contingencies Secretariat; and about the co-ordination that is taking place across the Government. However, as the right hon. Gentleman suggests and as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), we do need to try to adapt ourselves to the weather patterns as they emerge.

That said, this is a problem that Governments around the world are having to face. In the event of extremes of temperature, it is hard to adapt the infrastructure to deal with very cold and very hot incidents and their frequency. Much has been said about the impact of heat on the railways, and people have asked why they can continue to function in hotter countries. In Italy, for example, more concrete is put into the sleepers, with the result that the rails are less likely to warp, but that does not do the Italians much good in the event of extreme cold, when they face problems similar to those that we face in the next 36 hours.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The extreme heat is accentuating the travel chaos that is currently being experienced across the United Kingdom. Flights are being cancelled at short notice, with many of our constituents left stranded, and some trains are seriously overcrowded. I experienced that myself yesterday when trying to get from Edinburgh to London. Will the right hon. Gentleman speak to the Secretary of State for Transport to ensure that airlines such as British Airways and train companies such as Thameslink are taken to task for the failures in the service that they provide, and that they are made to compensate our constituents appropriately?

Kit Malthouse: I am sure the hon. and learned Lady will be pleased to know that I am meeting the Secretary of State for Transport this very afternoon, to ensure that our plans—not just for the next 36 hours, but for the next few weeks—are in place from a governmental point of view, and that we issue exactly the sort of challenge to the private sector that she has requested.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I do not feel that the House is any better informed about the Government’s response to this heatwave following the answer to the

urgent question than we were when we first walked in. The Government's approach seems to be that this is merely an unfortunate 36 hours of very hot weather and we will just have to soldier on through it and stand in the shade, but what we need from them is a long-term plan. What are our vulnerable and elderly constituents to do? Who should they contact in this situation? Where is the advice from the Government? There does not seem to be any urgency. Will the Minister go away and then come back and do a better job?

Kit Malthouse: There has been enormous urgency. As I said in my response to the urgent question—I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was listening—I have just come from the third COBRA meeting, in which we discussed our preparations.¹ They involve extensive work with the devolved Administrations, the communications plan which is out there, and the plethora of guidance that has been issued in the last 48 hours or so—and even in the middle of last week.

This is a short period of hot weather. The best thing we can do while we stand up public services—[*Interruption.*] I can only answer the question that I am asked. The best thing we can do is adapt our individual behaviour to get us through it while we learn the lessons from it.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): Under this Government, deaths among homeless people are becoming commonplace in extreme winter and summer weather. This week they will have no access to shade, or to water or sunscreen. Local authority emergency weather protocols that help those living on our streets are currently discretionary. Why will the Minister not resource local authorities properly, and do as *The Big Issue* asks and remove this discretion?

Kit Malthouse: I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been working on this issue, and we have considered the plight of the homeless in COBRA. The hon. Lady will be pleased to know—and my right hon. Friend has been publicising the fact—that he has been liaising closely with the Mayor of London, in particular, and that a network of cooling hubs has been set up for individuals who do find themselves on the street during this period.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): When I had the privilege of meeting colleagues at the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals animal rescue centre in Milton, in my constituency, we talked about many issues affecting animals—not only wild animals but those involved in agriculture, as well as our pets—including the critical impact of climate. The Minister has referred to COBRA. Can he tell us what discussions his Department and others are having with organisations such as the Scottish SPCA on animal husbandry and welfare as we continue into this utter climate catastrophe?

Kit Malthouse: Colleagues at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs have been in extensive discussions with those who handle animals in all settings, including in some particularly acute areas. For example, the Royal Welsh show is on this week, which will involve 200,000 people and quite a lot of animals being out and about in the open, and we have been in close liaison with the Welsh Government about

the issues that are being faced there. Extensive work is ongoing and there are extensive guidelines about animal husbandry during this period. The hon. Gentleman is quite right to raise the plight of animals as well as that of our fellow humans.

Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): It has been 1,174 days since this Chamber passed a climate emergency motion. Does the Minister feel that the Government have given this adequate attention and been able to respond? I have to say that I have been a bit confused by some of his statements today, because they have been in direct contradiction to the current medical advice that this type of weather will affect healthy people and that it is not just about the vulnerable. That is how critical this is, and I hope he can clarify that point so that people do not end up in 30° hospitals.

Kit Malthouse: I hope that the hon. Lady is not attempting to create confusion. We have been very clear about the simple message that everyone should take sensible measures to guard their own health. They should stay in the shade, drink lots of water, wear a hat and not exercise unduly, but we are focused on the groups we know are particularly vulnerable, following what happened in France back in 2003. We think there needs to be a very sharp focus on them, and our message is clear. There are steps we can take individually and collectively to protect ourselves, and that is what we are promoting.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Exposure to the sun can lead to skin cancer, and skin cancer, especially melanoma, can kill. The incidence of it in the UK has grown significantly in the last 15 to 20 years. Can the Minister make sure of two things? First, can we get rid of VAT on good-quality sunscreen so that it is cheaper and available to more people? Secondly, can we make sure that anybody who works in our emergency services, including all the police and the police officers working here outside the building, have free sunscreen?

Kit Malthouse: At last, a constructive question. The hon. Gentleman raises two important points, and I will certainly take them away and reassure myself that they are both being addressed.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Many of us are very concerned about our ambulance services, which were already working under extreme pressure before this heatwave. All 10 of the mainland England ambulance services are on maximum alert, and we hear tales of ambulances queueing outside accident and emergency for hours on end with patients sweltering in the extreme heat, which must surely make their condition much worse. Can the Secretary of State assure me that there is somebody in the Cabinet who has responsibility for co-ordinating all the Departments to ensure that the ambulance services in England get the maximum assistance at this time?

Kit Malthouse: I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care is about to make a statement on exactly that issue, and I hope the hon. Gentleman will stay in the Chamber for that. The Secretary of State and I have been reassuring ourselves about the co-ordination and

1.[*Official Report*, 5 September July 2022, Vol. 719, c. 1MC.]

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resources that are available. I think the number of personnel in the ambulance services is up 40% over the last few years, and £150 million has been put in to help them to cope with the pressures at the moment. The Secretary of State will have more to say about that imminently.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): As the planet is heating up, our infrastructure is melting down. Trains today are on go-slow, and tomorrow they will not run at all. At what temperature is our vital infrastructure, including our transport infrastructure, designed to operate, and when will it be resilient to future heatwaves?

Kit Malthouse: The hon. Lady thinks she is asking a simple question but, as I said earlier, it is actually quite a complicated one. For example, the mitigations that we put in place on the railways to deal with extreme heat may cause problems when it gets cold. Dealing with both those issues is an engineering feat that I am afraid is beyond me here at the Dispatch Box. One thing we need to do over the next 48 hours is to learn about exactly the kind of impact she is talking about. We all hope that the system will perform well, but given that if we hit the record we will never have experienced these temperatures before, we just need to be cautious and learn from the experience.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I thank everyone working in our frontline infrastructure services that have enabled us to get here today. I also thank the people I passed at an ungodly hour this morning, as I was on my way to the station, who are providing security at the Commonwealth games bowls venue in Leamington. The Minister says the Government are focused on this crisis, but how is it that frontline workers, on whom we depend, are showing up to do their job when the Prime Minister seems to be hidden away in a Chequers fridge?

Kit Malthouse: That is another completely unfair question and a misunderstanding of Cobra. It is my job to chair that committee, to co-ordinate the civil contingencies secretariat, which sits in my Department, and then to brief the Prime Minister. That is exactly what I did at 8 o'clock yesterday morning.

I am afraid this question feels like a political attempt to create an air of panic about the next 36 hours. Indeed, it seems like a politically motivated assault on the Prime Minister, which is completely unfair. He has been in touch with our work to co-ordinate across all the nations of the United Kingdom, and I am sure he will continue to do so.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Martin Luther King once said:

"Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity."

On that note, and with London boiling, I ask the Minister for his thoughts on the Tory leadership candidates who seek to hold back our commitments on net zero.

Kit Malthouse: Obviously, that is not within my ministerial remit but, as far as I can see, they are all fine, upstanding people who take climate change seriously. I would be happy to serve under any of them, particularly

given that I have been a proponent of the hydrogen economy for more than 20 years. Whoever becomes leader, I hope they will drive forward that aspect of our climate change work.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): With forest fires across Europe, and with temperatures set to exceed 40° for the first time, what more evidence do we need that the climate emergency is here? Yet the Minister's answers suggest that he and his Government are still in denial about the very real emergency we face. This Government are still building new homes that are prone to overheating and they are still not investing in a proper retrofit strategy. When will this Government take climate change seriously?

Kit Malthouse: The hon. Lady is living in an alternative universe, as this is the Government who legislated for net zero and who fought tooth and nail at COP26. How short memories are about what we saw at that global conference in Glasgow, where my right hon. Friend the COP26 President fought tooth and nail with some of the world's biggest polluters to keep 1.5° alive. When we have these debates in the Chamber, I wish at least some credit were given for the work that has been done, at the same time as challenging us on the work we are doing.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): If maximum indoor temperatures are good enough for workers in the United States, Germany and Spain, why not have those protections for British workers?

Kit Malthouse: Employers already have an obligation to make sure temperatures at work are maintained at a reasonable level for the circumstances. That will vary from workplace to workplace, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman will know as a working man. There is a lot we can improve in our work and employment regulation but, at the moment, the law is pretty specific about where responsibility should lie.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I also thank the Minister for his answers. Does the NHS 111 system, so effectively used at the height of the covid crisis to liaise with GP surgeries, have capacity to ring the vulnerable and the elderly at this time to provide advice to deal with the heatwave, as they may not have access to internet advice and many will not venture out to buy newspapers, which hopefully will be used to share information during this very warm weather?

Kit Malthouse: The hon. Gentleman raises a good point, and I have specifically asked all Secretaries of State to identify particular channels of communication that might be used to target the most vulnerable groups, and it is not just the national health service. Train operating companies, for example, know who holds particular concession cards, and local authorities and the third sector are often able to communicate. We need to gently alert the whole population that we should look out for each other, and people in specific vulnerable groups must be able to get the advice and support they need, if and when they need it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the Minister for answering the urgent question.

Ambulance Pressures

4.19 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Barclay): Following the announcement by the Met Office on Friday of a red warning for extreme heat, I would like to update the House on the impact of extreme weather on health and care, the current covid infection situation and our plans for covid and flu vaccines this autumn.

This is the first time in its history that the Met Office has issued a red warning for extreme heat. The warning covers today and tomorrow. In addition, the UK Health Security Agency has issued its highest heat alert. Its level 4 alert, issued to health and care bodies, means that the heat poses a danger to all of us, not just high-risk groups. Although for many the risk from this heat can be mitigated by simple, common-sense steps, the extreme temperature poses a particular risk in respect of cardiovascular conditions, including heart attacks and strokes. Level 4 does not change the contingency plans in place across the health system, only their likelihood.

We have taken a number of steps in response. Cobra has convened several times, including over the weekend and earlier today, to co-ordinate every part of the Government's response to this emergency, and I have held a series of meetings with the chief executives of ambulance trusts to discuss the specific measures that they are taking. Steps include increasing the numbers of call handlers; extra capacity for ambulances; and extra support for fleets, including the buddy system, so that calls can be diverted to another trust if there are delays in the area people are calling from. We have held numerous meetings with NHS leaders, including the chief executive of the NHS and her senior team, to continue to implement their long-standing heatwave plans. We had a further meeting again this morning. Meanwhile, ministerial colleagues have continued to liaise with our local resilience forums to co-ordinate across both health and social care.

Even before this heatwave, ambulance services in England have been under significant pressure from increased demand, just as they have across the United Kingdom. The additional pressure on our healthcare system from covid-19, especially on accident and emergency services, has increased the workload of ambulance trusts; increased the average length of hospital stays; and contributed to a record number of calls. Taken together, that has caused significant pressures, which are now being compounded by this extreme heat.

We are taking action in a range of areas. In May, NHS England published a tender for auxiliary ambulances to provide national surge capacity to support ambulance responses during the period of increased pressure. Alongside measures in ambulance trusts to assist with call handling and capacity, NHS hospital trusts are taking steps to address handover delays, in the interests of patient safety. On Friday, the NHS medical director, Steve Powis, and the chief nursing officer, Ruth May, wrote to the chief executives of NHS trusts, ambulance trusts and integrated care boards setting out some of the urgent interventions we need to make; most significantly the focus was on improved ambulance handovers and increased hospital bed capacity.

On ambulance handovers, we are asking health leaders to look again at the balance of risks across the system. We know that leaving vulnerable people in the community would have serious implications for patient safety. Equally, we know that keeping people in ambulances for too long carries other risks, especially from heat. NHS leaders are therefore asking hospital trusts to create additional space for new patients in their units. That may involve the creation of observation areas or exploring ways to add additional beds elsewhere in hospitals, including by adjusting staffing ratios where necessary, as we did during covid, and working to identify areas to mitigate additional workload, such as through greater support on wards with pharmacy and administration.

The NHS is executing its urgent and emergency care recovery 10-point action plan, which includes action across urgent, primary and community care to better manage emergency care demand and capacity. The NHS medical director and chief nursing officer both recognise that this will place an additional burden on some staff, so they are asking trusts to increase efforts on staff wellbeing and support. Alongside the measures being taken by the ambulance services and NHS trusts, the UK Health Security Agency is leading on public health comms to reduce the burden on NHS staff by making sure that we do not create unnecessary demand. We can do that by following the common-sense public health guidance and by looking out for others, in particular the elderly and the vulnerable.

With services under so much pressure, we must make sure that 999 calls are reserved for life-threatening emergencies. We must also consider what advice we can get through other services such as NHS 111, NHS online resources and local pharmacists. In addition to the immediate steps to mitigate the pressures on 999 calls, ambulance services and adult social care, we will keep building on our operational response, with particular attention to discharge and expanding on our pockets of best practice.

That is particularly pertinent, given the current levels of covid, which continue to rise. The latest data from the Office for National Statistics shows that the percentage of people testing positive for covid continued to increase across the UK. In England, an estimated one in 19 people tested positive in the week to 6 July, compared with an estimated one in 25 during the previous week, with more than 13,000 patients admitted to hospitals with covid-19.

Given those pressures and the expected pressures this autumn and winter from respiratory viruses, we are taking important steps to further align our offers on covid and flu. On Friday, I accepted the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation's recommendations for a covid-19 autumn booster programme, focusing on vulnerable cohorts, including everyone aged over 50. At the same time, I took the decision that we should keep offering flu jabs to more cohorts than we did before the pandemic. Taken together, this will reduce the number of people getting seriously ill this autumn and winter, easing pressure on the NHS at a critical time. Vaccines have always been, and continue to be, one of the best protections we have, both for ourselves and for the NHS.

From this heatwave to the foreseeable pressures in autumn and winter, I will continue to work closely with colleagues across health and social care, as well as with

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Members across the House, to ensure that we can address the challenges ahead. I commend this statement to the House.

4.27 pm

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of the statement and welcome him to his new role. It would have been helpful if, ahead of the current temperatures, he had responded to our urgent question last week, but I am glad that he is here now.

The Secretary of State claims that everything is in hand, but I know from my own experience and that of colleagues across the country that that is far from the truth. We have already seen ambulance wait times soar and pressure on staff spiral, all while the NHS struggles to find the essential staff needed to deliver patient care. I am sure that everyone across the House will agree that our frontline workers are truly amazing. But if nurses and doctors are so overworked and do not have the time and resources to take care of themselves in this heat, the care that they can give patients will be impacted. The Government must step up and show the urgency that this crisis demands.

The Secretary of State talks of creating additional space for new patients in hospitals. How will that happen—with what money, what resources and what staff? Will the Government try to call those new hospitals, too? Is not the reality that creating capacity elsewhere in hospital really means patients being left in corridors on trolleys or in car parks? Can he assure us today that that will not be the case?

Under the Conservatives, the NHS is simply struggling to cope. A record 6.6 million people are waiting for NHS treatment—and they are waiting longer than ever before, often in pain and discomfort. The people in our thoughts this afternoon are those waiting in queues outside hospitals in ambulances, with soaring temperatures and no air conditioning. If it were dogs or cattle, it would be against the law, but these are people in tropical heat unable to enter hospitals. People with conditions triggered by excessive heat are unable to get an ambulance, because ambulances are logjammed outside A&E. Will the Secretary of State apologise to them and their families?

This situation is impacting mental health, too. People attending A&E experiencing a mental health crisis cannot get a bed in a psychiatric hospital, so they wait in A&E, some of them for more than three days. Why? Because the Government have spent the past decade cutting a quarter of mental health beds.

I worked in A&E over this weekend and saw the amazing work being done by staff to prepare for the record heat. The heatwave and surge in covid cases are putting additional pressures on the NHS. I am glad that the Secretary of State recognised that in his statement. Without doubt, 12 years of Conservative mismanagement and underfunding have left our health service unable to cope, which not only has an impact on patients but hurts staff. Staff morale is at rock bottom. Is it any wonder that 5.7 million days were lost to mental ill health in the NHS last year?

Last week, the Minister of State claimed that the Government had procured a £30 million contract for an auxiliary ambulance service, but, moments later, it was revealed that it was yet to be awarded. Can the Health Secretary confirm whether the Minister of State has issued a correction yet?

On Wednesday, ambulance trusts were placed on their highest possible alert level. A national emergency was declared on Friday and, over the weekend, hospitals were scrambling to increase capacity. Why then has it taken until today for the Health Secretary to step up and show leadership? Can he tell us who he met over the weekend? I do not mean at Chequers; I mean from the NHS. Can he also tell us why the Prime Minister did not think it necessary to chair Cobra today? Just when we thought irony had reached a peak, the Prime Minister spent the weekend partying when he should have been dealing with a health emergency. Has the Secretary of State spoken to the Prime Minister today? The Health Secretary has been too slow. The Prime Minister has not even bothered to turn up and the Government have gone AWOL.

If the Government will not step up now, then Labour will. As temperatures reach a record high, all we are getting from the Government is more hot air. This is a crisis. The country has one message for Ministers: stop squabbling and plotting, do your jobs and get a grip.

Steve Barclay: Let me start with the area on which the hon. Lady was correct, which is that I recognise the increased pressure on ambulances and hospitals. That is why we put in place the long-established contingency plans. Since the heatwave in Paris in 2003, it is the case that each year in May, we put in place our heatwave plans. That is what has been activated. Those plans were refreshed as recently as two months ago and sit alongside the work that has been done on urgent and emergency care, including the 10-point action plan that was set out last September.

The hon. Lady is right: the House as a whole will recognise the significant pressure on the system, which is why we are taking the steps from our contingency plans. It is also why we have put in specific funding, such as: the additional £150 million of support targeted at the ambulance service; an additional £50 million for 111 calls to build capacity; and as she said, an additional £30 million for auxiliary ambulances, which is what the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), was referring to in the House last week.

The Met Office and the UK Health Security Agency went to level 4 on Friday. As you will know, Madam Deputy Speaker, I updated the House on the first available sitting day after that. The irony will not be lost on the House that this issue is seen as so important that the shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has failed to turn up to this statement in the middle of a heatwave. [Interruption.] Well, he is not here, which speaks for itself.

The hon. Lady also suggested that these challenges, which are being faced across Europe as a whole, were in some way due to the overall investment in the NHS. I remind the House that, to take the resource departmental expenditure limit alone, RDEL in 2010 was just under £99 billion and last year it was £150 billion. That is a good indication of the significant funding. We could

also come on to capital investment, not least with the 40 hospitals programme, part of a £22 billion package to 2030, which underscores this Government's commitment to investing in our NHS—an investment that, most recently, the Labour party voted against when we brought it to the House.

The hon. Lady asks about an apology for operational levels of performance. I do not know whether she is asking for that apology from the Welsh Government or just from the English Government. She may want to clarify that, given the performance of the Welsh ambulance service under the Welsh Government.

On the hon. Lady's point about auxiliary, the Minister of State, Department for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes, said in her statement that we had seen improvements in May. I referred to that as context, but on auxiliary in particular I can clarify for the House that a contract is being procured for auxiliary ambulance services and is expected to be concluded shortly.

Finally, the hon. Lady asked what meetings I have held over the less than two weeks that I have been in post. I am happy to share with the House that I have been on visits to four different hospitals, in Whipps Cross, Hillingdon, King's Lynn and Bedford; I have been out on two different ambulance shifts, been to three different ambulance centres, been out to see GPs to look at boosting access to their services and been to look at life sciences. I have been engaging, and that sits alongside, for example, the meeting with chief execs of ambulance trusts on Saturday, Cobra on Saturday and other such meetings that I have had in the course of my duties.

Finally, the hon. Lady asked about the Prime Minister's engagement. Just as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster set out that he was engaging with the Prime Minister in his role chairing Cobra as Minister for the Cabinet Office, I am happy to confirm to the House that I also engaged with the Prime Minister over the weekend, updating him on the health plans we have put in place. He has been closely engaged on the contingency we have put in place.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, Jeremy Hunt.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on taking up his post as Health Secretary. Since no one ever thanks you for doing that job, I thank him for doing this tough job. I am delighted that someone with ministerial experience in the Department of Health, who therefore knows what he is talking about from the outset, is doing the job. I welcome his saying in his statement that the ambulance service is under pressure not just because of the heatwave. Does he agree that one of the main reasons for that pressure is that hospitals find it difficult to discharge patients who are fit to discharge into the social care system, and that it is financial madness to look after someone in a hospital at £300 a day when the social care system can often do it at £50 a day? Will he, in his new role, finish the job and put in place a 10-year plan for the social care system and the funding for local authorities needed to go with it?

Steve Barclay: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that warm welcome. I was Minister of State when he was Secretary of State, and hugely valued the expertise, diligence and insight that he brought in that role, which provide useful context as I take on my new duties. He is absolutely right; indeed, he will recall, in 2018, looking in detail at delayed discharge, and work on that key issue continues. For example, on 1 July the NHS launched a 100-day sprint looking at all the known interventions. One issue that he and I have discussed in the past is how to socialise best practice and industrialise innovation at scale, and we are looking specifically at that. There is also a call for expressions of interest in pioneer science to better use tech and innovation on delayed discharge, and of course there is £2.6 billion of investment in the better care fund to support that integration work through the integrated care boards.

Mrs Paulette Hamilton (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Although I welcome the additional resource in response to the heatwave, it is simply not enough. Does the Secretary of State agree that until the Government address the systematic problems in social care to ensure that it is properly funded and people can be discharged quickly into the community, and we no longer see the revolving door service that is proving so damaging in the sector, we will not truly be able to reduce the pressures on the ambulance service?

Steve Barclay: The hon. Lady brings great practical insight on these issues from her profession as a nurse. The point she raises, as did my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt), is absolutely right—delayed discharge has long been a key issue. That is why we have made the tough decisions we have on national insurance and why we brought forward the changes on integrated care boards. It is an area of common ground across the House that we need to work better to address delayed discharge, which blocks the pipe and, in turn, delays ambulance handovers and causes problems at an earlier stage. It is a key issue. I have set out a number of practical measures that we are taking, and further work is ongoing.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): On Friday afternoon, I spent a shift with the A&E staff at the fantastic Worthing Hospital, which is clearly being impacted, in particular, by older people affected by the heat. The staff said to me—the Chairman of the Health Committee mentioned this—that more than 15% of the beds are being occupied by people medically fit to be discharged. They also said that a huge amount of their time is being taken up by people with mental health problems, including those being brought in by the police, most inappropriately. What more can be done to make sure that people with mental illness are being looked after away from A&E departments, as is far more appropriate, and to speed up the process of freeing up those beds?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on mental health and where a patient is violent, as I saw for myself on my visit to Bedford, for example, that can be unsettling for A&E. I am happy to have further conversations with him on what measures can be taken. The fact is there is no single intervention in this space; it is a question of looking at the integrated approach. That is what the call for evidence is about. Also key is

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understanding the data and seeing where it can better target action on areas such as mental health that can have a disproportionate impact.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): It is absolutely right that we limit the amount of time that patients must spend in the back of ambulances, and I welcome that measure, but it is putting intolerable pressure on hospitals. This morning, health leaders told me that they simply do not have the space or the staff, and the one thing they need in the next few hours is more staff. Can the Secretary of State commit himself to ensure that in the next few hours there are no financial or other barriers to the NHS being able to access more NHS bank staff, paramedics and ambulance drivers from the fire service, and, if necessary, from the military?

Steve Barclay: The principle of subsidiarity is that, as part of the extreme heat plans, local trusts make decisions locally on targeting resource, whether that has an impact on outpatients or other services, to meet the increased pressure. The hon. Lady is absolutely right that there is significant increased pressure, as we see in the call volumes coming in to 999 and 111. Part of the contingency plans that are in place is to surge resource, but it is also partly about being clear where risk best sits. At the heart of the letter from NHS medical director Stephen Powis on Friday was the importance of not pushing risk out into the community where it is an unmet need, or into the ambulance, where it is best that patients are, but having that risk more on the ward, where a patient is known and can receive care. Local contingency plans are in place to allocate resource to meet that.

Mims Davies (Mid Sussex) (Con): I pay tribute to all my Mid Sussex constituents on the frontline of all our emergency services in this extreme heat. They are absolutely continuing their heroic efforts, whether on the NHS backlog, managing discharges, as we have heard, or managing the impact of covid. Following recent media reports, will the Secretary of State note the constraints in certain ambulances, which my constituents have also raised, with cabs being too small and seatbelt use impacted for those over 6 feet tall? The impact of those new ambulances is on the agenda at a meeting for West Sussex MPs with SECamb—South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Trust—this Friday.

Steve Barclay: First, I am happy to join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the work of the local staff in her ambulance trust. She raises an important point about the fleet, and I was very interested in this issue four years ago when I was ambulance trust Minister and discovered that there were, I think, 32 different types of ambulance. When I was out with crews over the past fortnight, one of the issues we discussed was the merits of tailgates so that people are not suffering work absence and musculoskeletal injuries because they are trying to push heavy loads on to an ambulance. I am interested in exploring with her and colleagues how we get the right standardisation and the right fleet in place. Indeed, we have been targeting additional money to support that work.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Since March, West Midlands ambulance service has been on the highest level of alert, and I understand that it was

joined by the other ambulance services across England last week. In May, Mark Docherty, the director of nursing for West Midlands ambulance service, predicted that the service would collapse by 17 August—that is a month away from now—if hours lost by crews delayed outside hospitals kept increasing, which of course they have. Can the Secretary of State give some specific answer on what he is doing to address the issues in the west midlands, and also in our care homes, which are a root problem of trying to get people out of hospitals?

Steve Barclay: The hon. Gentleman is right that the west midlands in particular has been under significant pressure, and 111 ambulance service response times are significantly challenged, which is driven by wider system pressure and delayed handing over of patients. The measures taken through the national support that is going in include handover delay improvements, on which works is taking place across all integrated care boards. NHS England has allocated an additional £150 million to support the system, and an extra £20 million of capital is going into fleet. Given that I am new in post, I am happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss any specific issues about the West Midlands ambulance service's performance.

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his new role and say how important, given this particular crisis, his previous experience as Minister of State for Health is? He took over that role from me, and he had ministerial responsibility for ambulances.

On Friday, I attended an ambulance summit with other Shropshire and Telford MPs, West Midlands ambulance service and NHS leaders in Shropshire, where we were told that one of the critical issues in ambulance response is the handover wait times at hospitals. Royal Shrewsbury Hospital was averaging two and a half hours for handover in the first two weeks of July, and the Princess Royal Hospital in Telford was at three hours.

The problem is not so much conveyance by ambulance because it is hard to reach patients, but ambulatory walk-ins at our hospitals increasing the volumes of patients being seen in A&E. The problem with that increase in patient volume is patient flow and discharge at the far end. May I suggest that the quick win would be to increase resources for social care, particularly for domiciliary care workers who at present, particularly in rural areas, have to pay for their own transport to get from one patient to another? If we could improve those conditions, it would boost the ability to discharge patients.

Steve Barclay: My right hon. Friend, partly through the direct experience he brings to these issues, highlights the integrated nature of the challenge we face and in particular the importance of getting the right domiciliary care and care home support in place. Part of that challenge in the coming weeks, ahead of any autumn and winter pressure, will be to understand what the capacity is and what the constraints on it are, so that through the integrated care boards we can better focus on unlocking that capacity to relieve the pressure on ambulance handovers, as he sets out.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Older and more vulnerable patients can become medically compromised very quickly in extreme heat. In Yorkshire, category 1 calls can be waiting for 9.5 minutes over the

expected time, category 2 calls can be waiting for 18 minutes over, and those with other medical conditions can be waiting 2 hours 41 minutes over. People clearly need support and assessment far earlier. What is the Secretary of State doing to deploy first responders in such areas so that people can get a medical assessment and early intervention far quicker?

Steve Barclay: I broadly agree with the hon. Lady on providing targeted support, particularly to those in domiciliary care; we are working with those in primary care on that. In coming days, that will happen specifically through local resilience forums, but in the medium term it will be more through the integrated care boards. That is part of a wider package of support measures that need to be put in place. It will include working with primary care, looking at mental health support, and looking at what can be done to raise productivity through better use of innovation and technology. We will look at all the interventions available across the board to assist us in dealing with the pressures that she highlights.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I spent this weekend on duty, in my role with the Yorkshire ambulance service. I remind my right hon. Friend of the important work and extra resilience that community first responders will provide in the next few days, as they are stepped up and attend the most serious 999 calls. The reality is that even before this situation, when attending very serious cases, we were often waiting much longer than we did in the past for back-up from the crew. Will he look at a model that I have pushed before: the advanced paramedic model, which gives paramedics more clinical confidence to discharge patients to their home, and so reduces demand on hospitals?

Steve Barclay: I am happy to look at that, and I thank my hon. Friend for his service locally. I am keen to follow up on his point, because it is absolutely right. From the feedback from ambulance trusts so far, it seems that category 2 average response times were broadly stable at the weekend, but how we triage, how we categorise calls, and what additional support can be given by considering the skills mix are all factors in improving performance.

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): I also attended the meeting on Friday morning about Shropshire's health crisis, and I echo the comments of the right hon. Member for Ludlow (Philip Dunne) on that. Quite apart from this week's heatwave, there is increased demand on Shropshire's ambulance service, and the local team are clearly working hard to find solutions, but I did not feel reassured that they had any quick fixes for this crisis. One of their big problems is with recruiting social care workers; the team say that they have never seen a market like it. What is the Secretary of State doing to address the critical workforce problem in social care, not only in rural areas but across the country?

Steve Barclay: Through initiatives such as the better care fund and the £2.6 billion of investment, we are looking at how to allocate funds in an integrated way. That requires better integration of data between the care sector and the NHS, and that is an area that I am keen to explore.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con): I recently had the good fortune to spend a few hours with an ambulance driver from Ashfield who drives for the East Midlands ambulance service. He told me that he is so frustrated, because a lot of the time, the ambulance gets to the caller, and the person simply does not need an ambulance. He raised this with his bosses, but they are scared to admit that. Is it not about time that somebody from the Department of Health and Social Care had an honest conversation with the people who actually do the graft—the drivers and the ambulance staff?

Steve Barclay: I know from conversations in recent days that there has been significant work around dispatch, the assessment of calls and the role of clinicians, particularly in 111. There is further work with frequent callers. I went out with the London ambulance service, and one of our visits was to someone who had had 140 ambulances visit him over the past year and a half. There are initiatives, and work going on, on how we assess calls and get dispatch right, but I am very happy to take forward the comments that my hon. Friend makes.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I, too, congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his new post.

The Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee raised the question of what happens when people are ready to go into the community, but there is nowhere there for them to go. There is an even worse example: people who have major brain injuries, for instance as a result of a road traffic accident. The ambulance staff will get them to the major trauma centre, which will save their life, but if they are to get back their life with any degree of independence, they need a prolonged period of neuro-rehabilitation. Some of that will happen in hospital, but across large swathes of the country, there is nothing—absolutely no provision—outside hospital. With any other condition, we would not expect treatment, once started, not to be finished. How can we make sure that neuro-rehabilitation services, which give people back their life, are available across the whole country, and that there is no postcode lottery?

Steve Barclay: I know the hon. Gentleman is co-chairing, with the Minister for Care and Mental Health, a strategy board looking at these issues, and I would be very keen to explore that with him in due course. There is an opportunity—not just from a health perspective, but from a levelling up perspective—to look at the pockets where there are gaps in the way he sets out, and to see how we can get better coverage geographically as well as address the very real health needs he identifies.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): My constituents attribute the deteriorating response times in Rugby to the decision of the West Midlands ambulance service to close our community ambulance station at the Hospital of St Cross—a decision taken without reference to doctors, councillors, residents or the local MP. Does the Secretary of State agree that decisions of that nature should be made only after consultation and with the support of local stakeholders?

Steve Barclay: I do not know the specific circumstances of the case my hon. Friend highlights, but in general good consultation and engagement with stakeholders will of course lead to better and more informed decision

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making. Where decisions have been taken and the outcomes proceed in a sub-optimal way, I know from my knowledge of my hon. Friend that he will make such a case in the strongest terms.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): It is worth remembering that the 2010 to 2015 Conservative Government took £6 billion out of social care, so it is no wonder that we are facing a logjam. Since 2015, not once have the Government hit their four-hour target at A&E, and it is down to less than 72% on average right now. This logjam is created by the Conservative Government's mismanagement of our national health service, so what is the Secretary of State going to do to get back to the four-hour target for A&E?

Steve Barclay: This Government are investing in our NHS. That is why the resource departmental expenditure limit, which in 2010 was £99 billion, went up last year to £150 billion. It is why we are investing more than £10 billion in capital this year alone. It is why the NHS will get an uplift of about £38 billion over the five years from 2019-20 to 2024-25, and it is why this Government have invested in our 40 hospitals programme as part of a £22 billion commitment.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): We have seen some serious issues with the West Midlands ambulance service and congestion at the Royal Stoke University Hospital, and it is only a few years ago that we saw people dying in the corridors at that hospital. Will my right hon. Friend look at what we can do to address

these issues, and ensure that we do not just move people from queuing outside the hospital back on to high-risk corridors?

Steve Barclay: That specific point about where risk best sits within the system was addressed in the letter from the NHS medical director on Friday. Of course, the best way of addressing that risk is to address the issue of delayed discharge. We are getting people out of hospital through initiatives such as the better care fund, the £2.6 billion of investment and the use of integrated care boards. Their use will enable us to take a more integrated approach to unblocking those who are in hospital unnecessarily, which is not only very expensive but fundamentally bad for their care. It is important that we address delayed discharge as a key priority.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State very much for his responses to the questions that have been asked. To give an example that I hope will be helpful to him—this is a devolved matter—when one of my constituents fell and badly hurt her leg last week on rocks offshore, she was able to send a photograph of her injury, and as a result an ambulance was dispatched urgently and she was rescued. My concern is about those who are not high-tech enough to send photographs of injuries to prove that they are ambulance-worthy. Can I ask the Secretary of State how it would be possible to triage calls in a way that does not put pressure on people, but addresses the potential misuse of emergency ambulance requests?

Steve Barclay: I am happy to look at any specific issues that flow from the hon. Gentleman's constituency case. The more we can use tech and innovation better to address those issues at pace, the more that will ultimately lead to better patient outcomes.

Point of Order

4.59 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On 22 June at Prime Minister's questions, the Prime Minister agreed to look at the urgent case of Afghan nationals who I am trying to help, and whose lives are at daily risk; they include Chevening alumni. I immediately sent him the details of our four cases, and I have chased him repeatedly and asked a written question. Today I did receive a reply, but it simply said that a reply would be sent "in due course." Can you advise me, Mr Speaker, on what avenue I might take to elicit a serious response, given that it makes a mockery of promises made at the Dispatch Box at PMQs if there is still no response more than three weeks later?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Member for giving notice of her point of order. Although the Chair is not responsible for ministerial answers or the actions taken following them, Ministers should of course follow up on the commitments they make in this House. Not to do so is discourteous, especially when the cases concerned are urgent. Those on the Government Front Bench, including the Prime Minister, will have heard what the hon. Member said, and I hope they will achieve a quick response for her.

BILLS PRESENTED

DATA PROTECTION AND DIGITAL INFORMATION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Nadine Dorries, supported by Secretary Priti Patel, Secretary Steve Barclay, Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng, Matt Warman, Jacob Rees-Mogg, Stephen McPartland, Tom Pursglove, and Heather Wheeler, presented a Bill to make provision for the regulation of the processing of information relating to identified or identifiable living individuals; to make provision about services consisting of the use of information to ascertain and verify facts about individuals; to make provision about access to customer data and business data; to make provision about privacy and electronic communications; to make provision about services for the provision of electronic signatures, electronic seals and other trust services; to make provision about the disclosure of information to improve public service delivery; to make provision for the implementation of agreements on sharing information for law enforcement purposes; to make provision about the keeping and maintenance of registers of births and deaths; to make provision about information standards for health and social care; to establish the Information Commission; to make provision about oversight of biometric data; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the first time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 143).

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCE (EXTERNAL REVIEW) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Paul Maynard presented a Bill to make provision for an annual appraisal of the performance and competence of individual Ministers, conducted outside the Cabinet Office, to inform the Prime Minister in recommending ministerial appointments; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the first time; to be read a Second time Friday 9 September, and to be printed (Bill 144).

Confidence in Her Majesty's Government

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that I have not selected the amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey).

5.2 pm

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

That this House has confidence in Her Majesty's Government.

I have no idea why the Leader of the Opposition has insisted that we must have a confidence motion today, when we could be sparing people from online harms—*[Interruption.]* That's what he wanted. We could be fixing the defects in the Northern Ireland protocol, ending pointless barriers to trade in our country—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. It might be helpful to say that it is the Government who put down the motion.

The Prime Minister: The Leader of the Opposition wants one, Mr Speaker, and since Labour Members want one and it is the right hon. and learned Gentleman's constitutional prerogative, we will comply and we will win.

Let me tell the Leader of the Opposition why I believe that this is one of the most dynamic Governments of modern times, not just overcoming adversity on a scale we have not seen for centuries, but delivering throughout adversity. If he wants evidence of the temper and mettle of this Government, I remind him of how we began, when Parliament was deadlocked and he was shadow Brexit Secretary. Labour were the first Opposition in history to be absolutely petrified of calling a general election, and when they finally capitulated and agreed to submit to the verdict of the people, we sent the great blue Tory ferret so far up their left trouser leg that they could not move. We won the biggest Conservative victory since 1987 and the biggest share of the vote since 1979. We won seats they never dreamed of losing, from Wrexham to Workington, and from Bishop Auckland to Barrow. We turned Redcar bluecar, we saw 54 seats go straight from Labour to Tory, and we won by 80 seats. Then we worked flat out to repay that trust. With iron determination we saw off Brenda Hale and we got Brexit done. And although the rejoiners and the revengers were left plotting and planning and biding their time—I will have more to say about the events of the last few weeks and months in due course—we delivered on every single one of our promises.

Several hon. Members rose—

The Prime Minister: I will not give way; I am going to make some progress.

We took back control of our money, we took back control of our borders and we installed a points-based system for immigration. We took back control of our laws. We on this side of the House took back the sovereign right of the British people to determine their own laws and their own future in Parliament, and for that I say to colleagues on the Government Benches: your place in history is secure. I say to the Leader of the Opposition: it will never be forgotten that 48 times he tried to overturn the will of the people—48 times he

[The Prime Minister]

tried to strike down the biggest expression of popular will. It will be remembered in the history of this country. Be in no doubt that if he were ever to come to power with his hopeless coalition of Liberal Democrats and Scottish nationalists, he would try to do so again, at the drop of a hat.

It was only a month or so later that the Government were forced to show their resolve again, when we began to lose thousands of lives in the worst pandemic for a century; a global pandemic whose origins we did not fully understand and were nothing to do with the British people—if anything, they were the result of distant misbehaviour involving bats or pangolins—and whose spread was appallingly difficult to manage. Through wave after wave, this Government never gave up, and thanks to the courage and indomitable resilience of the British people, we protected our NHS and saved thousands of lives.

We were finally rescued by the genius of British scientists, by a vaccine that was licensed faster than any vaccine in the world and by a roll-out that was faster than that of any comparable country—faster, of course, than we would have achieved if we had listened to the Leader of the Opposition. It was so fast that the EU Commission actually tried to expropriate 5 million doses of Astra to try to slow us down, it can be told—[*Interruption.*] Yes, “shame” is right. And still they failed. In so far as the Opposition came up with any ideas at all, they quaveringly called for more lockdowns. We trusted to British science and the vaccine roll-out. They vacillated, we vaccinated, and we vaccinated so fast that we came out of lockdown quicker than any other European country. When I look at that achievement, Mr Speaker, I tell you I have confidence in this Government and in what they can do.

As a direct result of the actions of the Government, we had the fastest growth in the G7 last year, which is why we are able now to help people across the country with the latest challenge: the global inflation in energy prices triggered partly by post-covid blockages but made far worse by Putin's vile war in Ukraine. It is because we have sensibly managed the economy that we have the fiscal firepower to give £1,200 to the 8 million most vulnerable households and £400 to help every household with the cost of energy. We can do that because our economic fundamentals are strong, with British companies hiring talent up and down the country, with unemployment at or near a 50-year low, with 620,000 more people in payroll employment than there were before the pandemic began and youth unemployment at or near a 45-year low, and with people coming off benefits and getting into work, including 500,000 just in the six months to June.

That is the fundamental difference between this Government and the Opposition: we believe that the best answer to poverty is not benefits—that is what they think—but the security, happiness and dignity that goes with a job. I am proud of what we have done throughout the last three years to champion working people: lifting the living wage, cutting tax for those on universal credit, and just in the last couple of weeks, the biggest tax cut in 10 years for the vast majority of people on lower incomes who pay national insurance contributions.

I will give you a fact, Mr Speaker. That is why today, under this Government, the poorer households in this country get more of their income from their earnings, and under Labour they got more of their income from benefits. That is the reality of the difference between them and us. There has never been a Labour Government that left office with unemployment lower than when it came in. That is why I have confidence in Her Majesty's Government.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. I personally think that our party is making the same mistake the Labour party made when it knifed Tony Blair. Is my right hon. Friend aware that the excess death rates in Europe show that, thanks to his early intervention with the vaccine, fewer people died in the United Kingdom than in the majority of other European countries? And thanks to his intervention, Kyiv is still a part of Ukraine and not a part of Russia.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend very much. He is absolutely right in what he says about the record of the NHS and the record of this country in beating back covid. What a pity it was that the right hon. and learned Gentleman, the Leader of the Opposition, came so many times to this place and said that we had the worst record in Europe. He has never taken it back, Mr Speaker. Perhaps he will do so in the course of the debate to come.

Several hon. Members rose—

The Prime Minister: I will give way again in a moment.

In spite of the pandemic, we did not for a moment lose our focus on the huge manifesto commitments we made in 2019, beginning with making our streets safer. With the help of now 13,576 more police—we will hit 20,000 more by 2024—we have rounded up those county lines drugs gangs, 1,500 of them so far, and we will continue. We have taken thousands of knives off the streets of our country using stop and search. I know that people on the Labour Benches oppose stop and search, but I think it is the kindest and most loving thing you can do, when someone is going equipped with a bladed weapon, to take that knife off him. It was by tough policing, giving the police the powers they deserve and putting more out on the street, that we helped to get neighbourhood crime down by 31%.

As we promised, we invested massively in our amazing NHS. We got nurses into hospitals—I think another 10,000 this year on last year—and we are on track to recruit 50,000. We have record numbers of people working now in our NHS tackling the covid backlogs. At the same time, we are getting on with our long-term programme of the improvement of our national health service. The Opposition constantly say that we are not going to build 40 new hospitals. Well, I can tell the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) that we are. They will be done by 2030 and if he is still around in 2024 he will see measurable improvement.

I will tell you something else, Mr Speaker. Seventy-five years after the foundation of the NHS, we have been the first Government to have the nerve and a plan to fix the gulf between the NHS and social care, ending the cruel lottery that brings destitution on families with a member

suffering from dementia. Governments promised it for decades; we did it. We are raising the funding to do it, which the Opposition oppose.

Of course, we have been investing massively in our schools and young people, introducing hundreds of thousands of kids—kids who have potential, kids who are in danger of being left behind—to the kind of tutoring that is currently only available to those whose parents can pay for it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Prime Minister: I am going to give way to my former opponent, the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn).

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I am grateful to the Prime Minister for taking a break from his fantasy tour of this country. Could he take one moment to explain why 14 million people in this country are living in poverty, why there are more food banks than there are branches of McDonald's, why there is a mental health crisis, why big pharma has made so much out of owning the patents of the vaccines, and why his Government are presiding over the enriching of the richest, the impoverishment of the poorest, and the greatest job insecurity in industry after industry? He has created poverty, inequality and insecurity. That is his legacy.

The Prime Minister: I am thrilled to be debating again with the right hon. Gentleman. Since our last encounters, I am proud to tell him that we have got unemployment down to record lows. I know that he would rather have people on benefits, but I do not think that is the way forward. He talks about 14 million people, but let me tell him that 14 million voted for this Conservative Government, and this Conservative Government are undefeated at the polls—never let that be forgotten. At the same time—

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD) *rose*—

The Prime Minister: Just a moment. At the same time, we have been investing massively in schools, making our streets and our communities safer, making our population healthier and ensuring that our kids are literate and numerate at the age of 11—our goal is to get up to 90% by 11, rather than the current 65%.

We have been driven throughout these last three years by a very simple vision: we Conservatives believe that there is genius and talent everywhere and energy and imagination distributed in every corner of this country, but we do not think that is the same for opportunity. Our immense programme of levelling up is driven by the simple mathematical observation that if per capita GDP and productivity were as evenly distributed in the UK as they are in our major competitors, this would be by some way the most prosperous economy in Europe. Of course, it would also be the morally right thing to do. That is why we have kept going with the most colossal infrastructure programme ever seen, with three new high-speed rail lines—and, by the way, how many miles of electrified line did Labour build in its 13 years of office. Does anybody know? Virtually none. We are putting in hundreds of miles of road improvements and massive investments in buses and cycling.

Of course, we gave and are giving people skills, skills, skills. The lifetime skills guarantee means that the Government will support them to get an A-level equivalent skill when they are an adult. We are also giving them the technology to use those skills throughout the country. I am proud to say that gigabit broadband now sprouts through virtually every wainscot. We have gone from 7% to 69% coverage in this brief three years.

It is only by putting in the infrastructure—[*Interruption.*] The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) says that they do not have wi-fi in the north. This Government are putting in wi-fi across the whole—[*Interruption.*] How little she knows of the very area she purports to represent. It is only by putting in the infrastructure that we enable people to live where they want. I am proud that not only have we seen record numbers of homes being built, but last year, there were 400,000 first-time buyers. Unlike the Labour party, we believe in home ownership. We believe in getting people on the property ladder—[*Interruption.*] You can tell they do not like it, Mr Speaker. The better the infrastructure, the skills and the technology—there were 400,000 first-time buyers—the less intrusive the regulation in our country and the more the investment flows in.

We are seeing huge sums coming in now from the private sector. Every other week, there is another £1 billion unicorn, not just in London, Oxford or Cambridge, but across the whole country. We have more tech investment than France, Germany and Israel combined, and now, in the first quarter of this year, in attracting tech venture capital, we have actually overtaken the Chinese with £12.5 billion coming in.

This Government will continue to make the UK the place to come for the industries and businesses of the future. This year, Newquay will join Cape Kennedy and Baikonur as a functioning spaceport, I am proud to say. For the first time ever, under this Government, a British satellite will be launched into space from Britain. Next year, the spaceport in Shetland will roar into life, thanks to investments from Lockheed Martin and others, as local crofters—I mean humble crofters, almost as humble and local as the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford)—have withdrawn their opposition because they can see that it means jobs and growth for their area.

People in this House may not know it, but this Government have made an investment in low earth orbit satellites—hundreds of them. It was a risk, but it has paid off for the taxpayer. Hundreds and hundreds of them are now circling the earth, offering all sorts of opportunities, including the potential for internet connections for the people of sub-Saharan Africa.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Prime Minister: I will give way one last time.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): It is highly unconventional for the Prime Minister to put down a confidence motion in his own Government, although I suppose he is an unconventional person, since only an unconventional man would want the opportunity to speak at his own funeral. Is not the essential problem that despite the litany of what he thinks are his fantasy achievements, the bottom line is that this country is supposed to operate on the good chap theory of government, but it does not operate when there is a bad apple at the core?

The Prime Minister: Look, if the hon. Gentleman is saying that he is going to vote for confidence in this Government, I will certainly welcome his support. What I can tell him is that I believe that the achievements of this Government over the past three years have been very remarkable. As for his personal criticism of me, I am proud of what we have done and I am proud of the way I have been able to offer leadership in difficult times—let me put it that way.

The investment in the low earth orbit satellites has paid off. As I said, people in sub-Saharan Africa now have the chance to get an internet connection. It is a massive, massive success for global Britain. People around the world can now see the renewed ambition of this country, with the record £22 billion that we are investing to become a science superpower again and the new Advanced Research and Invention Agency. At the same time, the scientific solutions that we are providing are helping to solve the fundamental problems facing humanity.

On this sweltering day, let me remind the House that there are very few Governments in the world who could have organised a COP26 summit so far-reaching in its impacts. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma) for what he did: committing 90% of the world to net zero by 2050, moving the world beyond the use of coal, moving from fossil-fuelled cars to electric vehicles, planting billions of trees around the world and launching the clean green initiative as we did at Carbis Bay, by which G7 Governments will now leverage the trillions of the private sector to help the developing world to use the clean, green technologies that offer economic as well as environmental salvation.

I think that people around the world can see more clearly than ever before that we have in this country—and, I think, in this House—a renewed willingness as global Britain to stand up for freedom and democracy. There could be no better proof of that than our campaign to help the Ukrainians. If it is true that I am more popular on the streets of Kyiv right now than I am in Kensington, that is because of the foresight and boldness of this Government in becoming the first European country to send the Ukrainians weapons—a decision that was made possible by the biggest investment in defence since the cold war. Although I think that that conflict will continue to be very hard, and our thoughts and prayers must continue to be with the people of Ukraine, I do believe that they must win and that they will win. Although that may, of course, be of massive strategic importance in the face of Putin's adventurism and aggression, when the people of Ukraine have won it will also be a victory of right over wrong and of good over evil. I think that this Government saw that clearly, saw it whole and saw it faster than many other parts of the world. That is why I have confidence in this Government. By the way, I have absolutely zero confidence in the Opposition. Eight of them—I never tire of saying this, and everyone must be saying it right up until the general election—eight of them, including the shadow Foreign Secretary, voted to discard this country's independent nuclear weapon. I do not believe they would have done the same thing in standing up to Putin in a month of Sundays.

Last week I went up in one of our 148 Typhoon fighters, and I flew out over the North sea, over Doggerland. The drowned prairies are now being harvested again with tens of gigawatts of clean green energy. We will have 50 GW of offshore wind by 2050, and thanks to

this Government's activism I am proud to say that offshore wind is now cheaper than onshore wind. I looked down at that ghostly white forest of windmills in the sea, financed with ever growing sums from international investors, and I thought, "This is how we will fix our energy problems; this is how Europe should be ending its dependence on Putin's gas." I am proud of the way we have responded to the challenge, with a nuclear reactor every year rather than one every 10 years—or none at all, as was the ridiculous and catastrophic policy of the last Labour Government.

And then the wing commander interrupted me, and for a glorious period I was at the controls of the Typhoon. I did a loop the loop and an aileron roll and a barrel roll, and then—I am coming to the point, Mr Speaker—I handed back the controls. In a few weeks' time, that is exactly what I will do with this great party of ours. After three dynamic and exhilarating years in the cockpit, we will find a new leader, and we will coalesce in loyalty around him or her, and the vast twin Rolls-Royce engines of our Tory message, our Conservative values, will roar on: strong public services on the left and a dynamic free-market enterprise economy on the right, each boosting the other and developing trillions of pounds of thrust. The reason we will keep winning is that we are the only party that understands the need for both.

Whatever happens in this contest, we will continue to fight for the lowest possible taxes and the lightest possible regulation. The Opposition's problem is that they would try to fly on one engine, kowtowing to the union barons, endlessly inflicting more tax and more spending, endlessly giving in to the temptation to regulate us back into the orbit of the European Union, and flying round in circles.

Some people will say, as I leave office, that this is the end of Brexit. Listen to the deathly hush on the Opposition Benches! The Leader of the Opposition and the deep state will prevail in their plot to haul us back into alignment with the EU as a prelude to our eventual return. We on this side of the House will prove them wrong, won't we? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] Some people will say that this is the end of our support for Ukraine. [*Interruption.*] That is exactly the analysis. The champanskoye corks have allegedly been popping in the Kremlin, just as the Islington lefties are toasting each other with their favourite "Keir Royale". But I have no doubt that whoever takes over in a few weeks' time will make sure that we keep together the global coalition in support of our Ukrainian friends.

Some people will say—and I think it was the Leader of the Opposition himself who said it—that my departure means the eventual victory of the Labour party. I believe that those on this side of the House will prove the Leader of the Opposition totally wrong, and that in due course we will walk the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras into the capsule at Newquay that I mentioned earlier, and send him into orbit, where he belongs. And I tell the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), who speaks for the Scottish nationalists, that it is time for him to take his protein pill and put his helmet on, because I hear it will not be long before his own party is taking him to Shetland and propelling him to the heavens.

This Government have fought some of the hardest yards in modern political history. We have had to take some of the bleakest decisions since the war, and I believe that we got the big calls right. At the end of three years, this country is visibly using its newfound independence to turbocharge our natural advantage as the best place in the world not just to live and to invest but to bring up a family. With a new and incontrovertible spirit of global leadership, I believe that we can look to the future with rock-solid confidence not just in what this Government have done but in what they will do and will continue to do. I commend this motion to the House.

Mr Speaker: I now call the Leader of the Opposition, Keir Starmer, to respond.

5.31 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): The delusion is never-ending. What a relief for the country that Conservative Members have finally got round to sacking the right hon. Gentleman. In many ways the chaos of the last fortnight is familiar. This is the third Tory leadership contest in six years, the latest bumper summer for graphic designers and brand managers, the latest parade of pretenders promising unfunded tax cuts, the latest set of ministerial jobs handed out on a wink and a shake in return for a nomination, and TV debates so embarrassing that even the contestants are pulling out. Every other year, they switch out a failed Prime Minister. It is like a once-secure premier league side burning through managers as it slides inevitably towards relegation. The end of the season cannot come soon enough.

But besides the déjà vu, things are different this time. David Cameron left office because he lost a referendum. The right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) left office because her party could not agree on how to leave the EU. There were serious policy and political disagreements, and the Labour party had our own profound disagreements with both former Prime Ministers on how to grow the economy and how to run our public services, but no one seriously disputed that they were fit for office or that they could be trusted to carry out their own—[*Interruption.*] I suggest that some of those on the Conservative Benches reread their resignation letters. No one seriously disputed that those former Prime Ministers were fit for office, that they could be trusted to carry out their responsibilities, that the information they gave their Ministers was true to the best of their knowledge or that the policies they proposed were the ones that they believed were best for the country. So no one objected to them staying on while a successor was found.

Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Keir Starmer: Not at the moment.

There are clearly policy disagreements between the Prime Minister and his party. I know that he spent the weekend throwing another party—obviously a very good party, judging by the last 20 minutes—but can I suggest that he uses catch-up TV to see what they have been saying in the leadership debates? The Foreign Secretary, who has now left the Chamber, said the Prime Minister's economic policy

“is not going to drive economic growth.”

The Minister for Trade Policy, the right hon. Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt), said the Government have left public services in a “state of disrepair.” And the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Kemi Badenoch) said junior Ministers raised concerns about fraud that were ignored and cost the taxpayer £17 billion. This is what that side are saying in the leadership debates. The people behind the Prime Minister are not happy with his record, whatever they say and jeer now.

Unlike his predecessors, this Prime Minister has not been forced out over policy disagreements and, despite the delusions he has fostered in his bunker, he has not been felled by the stampede of an eccentric herd. Instead, he has been forced out in disgrace, judged by his colleagues and peers to be unworthy of his position and unfit for his office. He promoted someone he knew to be a sexual predator. [*Interruption.*] It might be an idea to listen. And he then denied all knowledge when it inevitably went wrong. He lied to his Ministers about what he knew, and he allowed them to repeat those lies to the country. It is the same pattern of behaviour we saw when he and his mates partied through lockdown, denied it for months and forced his Ministers to repeat those lies until he was found out. He cannot change.

Even last week he was tearing up the rules by insisting that an Opposition motion of no confidence could not be heard. He promoted an ally to the ministerial payroll as she literally gave the public the middle finger. And he appointed a Chancellor with questions to answer about tax avoidance and his personal finances. [*Interruption.*] They all know—

Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Chair has been very clear at times about being conscious of language. From my understanding, the Chancellor has denied that accusation. Perhaps you could guide the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) on how to temper his language.

Mr Speaker: What I will say is that I want everybody to think carefully about what they say in this Chamber and the effect it has on people, which does concern me. Neither the Clerks nor myself can hear a lot of what is being said. Could the House just turn it down so we can hear?

Keir Starmer: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

They all know it cannot go on. Just read their resignation letters. The right hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) went after saying this is

“The last straw in the rolling chaos”.

The hon. and learned Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) had enough of “defending the indefensible.” And the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher) simply said the Prime Minister is an

“apologist for someone who has committed sexual assault”.

When the right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak) resigned, he accused the Prime Minister of not conducting Government “properly, competently and seriously.” I presume he was talking about their appalling joint economic legacy of the highest inflation and the lowest growth in the G7, leaving us with the highest tax burden since rationing and with diminished

[Keir Starmer]

public services. That is the record, but the rhetoric does not match it. He suggested the Prime Minister is not prepared to “work hard” or “take difficult decisions,” and he implied that the Prime Minister cannot tell the public the truth. They all read the letter, and they know what he said.

But this week, the right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) is trying to convince us to ignore all that—apparently, he has changed his mind; asked a straight question, he will not tell his party that the Prime Minister is dishonest. Now he is saying that the Prime Minister is actually a “remarkable” man with “a good heart”. It is pathetic; there can be no one worse placed to rebuild the economy than the man who broke it. There can be no one worse placed to restore trust than the man who propped up this totally untrustworthy Prime Minister.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con)
rose—

Keir Starmer: I will make some progress and then I will give way. Instead of rewriting history, Conservative Members need to face up to what they have done—what they have put this country through. Despite knowing exactly who he is, despite knowing that he always puts himself before anyone else, despite knowing that he had been fired from job after job for lying, they elected him to lead their party, and he behaved exactly as everyone feared when he got into Downing Street. He lurched from one scandal to the next; he demeaned his office; and he started to drag everyone and everything down with him. So, belatedly, they found him unfit for office, too untrustworthy for government.

Mr Holden: The right hon. and learned Gentleman sounds as though he is describing his own actions. For year after year, he sat there while the Labour party was found guilty of breaching the law by the Equality and Human Rights Commission on the antisemitism of the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). Why did the right hon. and learned Gentleman not have the courage to stand up at the time for what was right?

Keir Starmer: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman realises why we are having this debate. It is because so many—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Holden, you, quite rightly, asked a question and, like yourself, I would like to hear the answers. Let's move on.

Keir Starmer: We are having this debate because dozens of Front Benchers resigned their posts because they would not serve this Prime Minister. They are sacking him because he is untrustworthy. That is why we are having this debate. Normally in a debate such as this the Prime Minister asks for a vote of confidence so that he can carry on, but this one—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I am very bothered about where this is going. The use of language needs to be brought into a more temperate manner and we need to calm it down. Let's see how we can try to progress in a more orderly way, while being more temperate in what we are saying.

Keir Starmer: So, Mr Speaker, why are they leaving him with his hands on the levers of power for eight weeks? This is eight weeks where the British public must trust the word of a Prime Minister who has been sacked because he can't be trusted; eight weeks where Britain will be represented abroad by someone who has lost all respect at home; and eight weeks of a caretaker Government led by an utterly careless Prime Minister. Anyone who thinks that doesn't matter, and that these are just the quiet summer months when everyone goes to the beach, is in denial about the severity of the challenges our country faces.

The war in eastern Ukraine drags on; the Nord Stream pipeline has been shut down; flights are being cancelled left, right and centre; and Britain is facing an unprecedented heat wave, as our climate changes in front of our very eyes. These are serious challenges—[*Interruption.*] Conservative Members do not think that these are challenges. These are serious issues that will require serious leadership. Hard decisions will have to be made. This is not the summer for Downing Street to be occupied by a vengeful squatter mired in scandal. Every day they leave him there, every hustings they refuse to distance themselves from his appalling behaviour and every vote they cast today to prop him up is a dereliction of duty. It is a reminder that the Prime Minister has only been able to do what he has done because he is enabled by a corrupted Conservative party every step, every scandal and every party along the way.

I know that there has been fearmongering that this motion might lead straight to a general election. Sadly, that is complete nonsense, but you can see why they fear the electorate. After 12 years of failed Tory Government, Britain is stuck—stuck with a low-growth economy; stuck at home, unable to get a passport or a flight; stuck on the phone, trying to get a GP appointment. Our taxes are going up, food and energy bills are out of control, and the public services we rely on have simply stopped working. And every Tory standing to lead their party has given up on trying to defend—[*Interruption.*] Prime Minister, they have no confidence in you—that is why you are going. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. We really are struggling to hear. I want to be able to hear, and then we can make better judgment calls. Both the Clerks and I are struggling. Please, can we calm it down and think about what we are saying?

Keir Starmer: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Britain deserves a fresh start with Labour, free from those who got us stuck in the first place, free from the chaotic Tory party and free from those who propped up this Prime Minister for months and months. And here is the difference: under my leadership, the Labour party has changed, and we are ready to do the same for the country—to get our economy growing, to revitalise our public services, and, after this Prime Minister has damaged everything around him, to clean up politics. This House should make a start by voting no confidence in this Prime Minister this evening.

5.46 pm

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): In June 2016, there was a vote of no confidence in the then leader of the Labour party. I do not know whether the

present leader of the Labour party voted yes or no. If he can remember, did he vote confidence or no confidence in his predecessor?

In 2019, his predecessor moved a motion of no confidence in the Government, saying that the issue should be put to the people. It was put to the people in the 2019 general election, and the present Government came in with a majority of 80.

I have it on reasonable authority that the deputy leader of the Labour party has said today that Boris was, in effect, the magic that helped. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) has confirmed that.

The issue before the House now is whether people would have any more confidence in the Labour party becoming a Government, and the answer is no.

In June 2016, when the then leader of the Labour party lost the no confidence vote by 172 votes to 40—the 40 may have included the current Leader of the Opposition—20 of the shadow Cabinet had walked out, but the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) walked in. The interesting question is whether the way in which he has spoken today is part of a leadership bid to take over the Labour party properly rather than just in name.

He describes himself as red and green, but mixing red and green together produces an unpleasant kind of brown. Does he accept that the Labour party is not yet trusted by the British people?

By voting confidence in the Government, this House will be saying, as the British people did in 2019, that we prefer us in government, not them.

That is not to say that the Government have got everything right. If I were taking part in the Thursday Sir David Amess debate, I could list the things on which the Government could make changes.

I want them to drop the privatisation of Channel 4, as there is no point in it, and I want them to reconsider the question of whether the Holocaust Memorial should be in Victoria Tower Gardens. There are a number of other issues that I could take up.

The issue today is: do we want to change the party of Government, and the answer is no. I rest my case there.

Mr Speaker: I call the leader of the SNP.

5.49 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I see that the Prime Minister is leaving the Chamber. In this particular case, Prime Minister, leave means leave.

We all know that the Government have spent the past week trying to delay, reword, and, ultimately, avoid this debate, but, as is the way these days, the herd has moved. Today, we finally have a chance to cast our verdict on a failed Prime Minister and a Conservative party that is collapsing before our very eyes. I know the Government want to use this debate as some kind of dignified—although I have not seen any dignity from the Prime Minister this afternoon—obituary for the political legacy of the leader that they buried last week. If the Government are determined to debate the legacy of the Prime Minister, let us allow ourselves the opportunity to be that one thing that he singularly failed to be: let us be very, very honest.

Let us reflect on a man who should never have been put in office in the first place—a man who simply should not be here for a minute longer, because he has demonstrated no dignity in office in the highest office in the land, and he has shown no dignity today in departing. Every single Member of this House needs to ask themselves a very simple question: why on earth does the Prime Minister deserve the dignity of a long goodbye and a seven-week chance to rewrite his own legacy? Apparently, the one and only reason being offered up by Tory MPs to justify keeping him in place is that that is the precedent—that is the way that it works down here. It is the Westminster way. But those citing any kind of precedent have clearly forgotten the exact reason we have been brought to this point, which is that the behaviour of this Prime Minister has no precedent.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I am relieved that we can hear the right hon. Gentleman's speech, and that we no longer have the Prime Minister bawling at those who are speaking as he leaves the Chamber. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that what we want over this period of change is dignity? We want dignity in the House and dignity in the country, and we did not see that from the Prime Minister in his behaviour on the Front Bench today.

Mr Speaker: Order. I think I make that decision, and I do not need any recommendations. The behaviour on both sides has not been exceptional today. Come on, Ian.

Ian Blackford: Thank you, Mr Speaker, although I have to say that I agree with the hon. Gentleman. This is important. These are matters that are of interest to the public, and we need to treat each other with a degree of respect and dignity.

Let us come back to the Prime Minister. He broke his own laws in office and he broke international law, but the thing that ultimately brought him down was the fact that he could never, ever be trusted with the truth. That is the record, and that is now the Prime Minister's legacy. He should not be allowed any room to rewrite that record and that legacy—even for seven weeks. It has not escaped anyone's notice that this Prime Minister has lived his life thinking that the world owes him a living. He has not had the grace to stay today to hear the opening speeches in this debate. That tells us everything that we need to know.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): The right hon. Member is making an excellent speech. The Prime Minister today spoke for 30 minutes, and not once in what could be his last speech did he make reference to the real fact that because of the political decisions that he has made, children are living in poverty, working families are using food banks and our communities have been devastated. Does the right hon. Member agree that, in his last speech, the Prime Minister should at least have had the dignity to apologise to the children in our country?

Ian Blackford: I agree with the hon. Member, and I commend him for the passion that he brings to this topic. The fact that so many people in this country are struggling, and that so many people will be struggling over the cost of living crisis, should concern us all.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Will the right hon. Member give way on that point?

Ian Blackford: I will give way one more time.

Jamie Stone: I do thank the right hon. Member for giving way. We talk about food banks and we talk about poverty, but it is a fact that many households—the Prime Minister referred to them as some of the poorest in the land—including those in my constituency, have no alternative but to use fuel oil, because they are off grid. When I asked the Minister of State for Energy in March whether a cap could be placed on the price, he said no, because there had been some survey in 2011. Today is a very hot day, but winter is coming and it will be cold. May I suggest to the right hon. Member that it is the mark of a civilised and caring Government that these people are helped and that a price cap is put on the cost of fuel oil—domestic heating oil?

Ian Blackford: I agree with the hon. Member. We both represent highland constituencies. They are beautiful constituencies, but they are constituencies where the rain falls on a regular basis and the wind howls through the windows and the walls of the houses. Indeed there should be equity and fairness for everyone, regardless of where they live. We talk about the heatwave that people are suffering from today in many parts of the United Kingdom, but when I looked at the weather in my own constituency in the Isle of Skye this morning, the temperature was 14°C. People in parts of Scotland will still have their heating on. The fact is that people are being penalised and not being looked after as they should be, for the very simple reason that they have to rely on off-grid heating oil.

Sir Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Ian Blackford: I will give way one last time, and then I must make progress.

Sir Robert Goodwill: I am sure the right hon. Gentleman appreciates that the Chancellor provided assistance on electricity bills and not gas bills because people may use fuel oil or other types of fuel, but almost everyone in the country is on the electricity grid.

Ian Blackford: My goodness! The right hon. Gentleman knows that I have respect for him, but there for all to see is the lack of compassion, decency, humanity or recognition that people in highland constituencies are not getting the benefits that other people are getting. That is what happens with this Conservative Government.

Let us come back to the Prime Minister and his sense of entitlement—that he deserved to be Prime Minister, that he deserved to be above the rules and that he deserves the dignity of staying in office over the summer. But this place and the public owe him nothing. Only this weekend, he again showed why he is unfit for office by skipping Cobra meetings to do his favourite thing: attend yet another party. Another party! That is one thing that we might have thought he would learn. After being caught breaking his own laws and being fined by the Metropolitan police—the only Prime Minister in history to be fined in office—he turns his back on his obligations at a time of emergency over the effect of

global warming, and he attends parties. That tells us everything that we need to know about the priorities of this Prime Minister. People have suffered enough under this most careless, casual and reckless inhabitant ever to have been entrusted with the office of Prime Minister. He does not deserve another day, never mind another seven weeks.

As well as casting verdict on the Prime Minister, today is also the chance to hold to account those who propped up his Government for so long. With every new candidate and every new campaign video for the Tory leadership, we are bombarded with talk of fresh starts and of hitting the reset button. I hate to break it to those candidates, but it is not lost on any of us that most of that talk is coming from the same people who backed this Prime Minister from day one and sat around his Cabinet table until the very end. Try as they might, they cannot hide the uncomfortable truth that they want us all to magically forget—that their party has been in power for 12 deeply damaging years. Fresh starts, new starts or clean starts simply do not exist after 12 years of the chaos that now defines their time in charge, and definitely not when they have already failed to get rid of the Prime Minister they put in power.

The herd might have moved last week, but it has very quickly fallen back in line and reverted to Tory type, as we have seen this afternoon. The Tories have stayed with this Prime Minister until the bitterest of ends, and today proves that they are staying with him still. Their failure to get rid of him means that we now finally need get rid of the lot of them, because today proves another thing: the only fresh start that will work is a general election—an election that will offer the Scottish people the chance and the choice of an independent future. On these Benches, we relish that campaign and the choice that is coming.

The need to put an end to this Tory Government is underlined by the terrifying spectacle of the leadership race under way throughout this building. No sooner had the race begun than it became clear that it was not just a race to get into Downing Street; it was a race to the toxic right. The policy proposals so far have amounted to tax cuts for the rich at the same time as millions of families are struggling to put food on the table, to watering down our climate targets when we can literally feel temperatures soaring, particularly in this place, and to doubling down on the hostile environment when the Rwanda policy has already gone beyond the point of morality.

The new Tory vision of these candidates is every bit as disturbing as the old one. While they are tearing lumps out of each other in this contest, they are ignoring the very thing that they are all responsible for: the Tory cost of living crisis ripping through every household on these islands. The contest has also exposed that they are completely out of credibility. Never again can those on the Conservative Benches claim economic literacy. During this leadership campaign, the Tory candidates have not just discovered a magic money tree; they have apparently found a magic money forest. The billions in tax breaks for the rich that they are bidding over always come at a price for the poor.

One of the most telling insights of the contest came from the current Chancellor, whose policy is to cut 20% from all public spending. That means 20% cuts to the NHS, to welfare and to our Scottish Parliament.

The Tories imposed one decade of devastating austerity, and now it seems the new Tory vision is gearing up to inflict another. If ever there was a reason to vote no confidence today, surely that is it.

Of course, we on the SNP Benches are now well used to our country's constitutional future being discussed and dictated by Tory politicians and Governments, who Scotland has not voted for or had any confidence in since 1955. The last number of weeks have been no different. It turns out that democracy denial was not just an attitude of the Prime Minister; it is now official Tory policy. The idea of a voluntary union of nations was clearly dead and buried long ago according to the Tory party, because every single candidate for the Tory leadership has fallen over themselves to tell us just how they are going to deny Scottish democracy—and we know why. They have long since run out of ideas and run of road in defending the Union, so now they are running scared of democracy.

I am genuinely sorry to say that the Labour party has now joined in that too. In the space of the last week, the leader of Labour party told us he was ruling out two things. The first was an independence referendum that—let us not forget—the Scottish people have voted for. The second was a return to the European single market and freedom of movement. He did not rule that out for now; he ruled it out forever. So not only will this place and these parties try to deny our right to a democratic vote on our future, but they will forever deny our return to the European Union.

If ever there were two motivating arguments to secure our independence, surely there they are. If that is really the Better Together strategy, it is in worse trouble than I even thought. The crucial point that those reunited Better Together parties need to understand fully is this: not only does Scotland have no confidence in this Tory Government, we have no confidence in Westminster control over our country. The parties here might not like it, they might try to deny it, but that is democracy—and them's the breaks.

We want a different future—a future where we get Governments we vote for, where our democratically elected Parliament cannot be overridden and undermined, and where we have a secure foundation on which to build the economic and social future that we want. We want a new Scotland at the heart of the European Union. That is the future we can have confidence in. We have lost control in this place; we have lost confidence in Westminster.

Mr Speaker: Lots of Members want to speak in this debate. To try to accommodate them, can we start off by aiming for four minutes per speech?

6.5 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The motion before us on the Order Paper is about confidence in Her Majesty's Government. Since we face this cost of living crisis, war in Europe and all the other challenges, I was rather hoping when I arrived here that we might have a serious debate about how to deal with those issues. Instead, I heard a speech from the Leader of the Opposition that, in terms of vituperation, insult and sheer nastiness, was like nothing I have ever heard before, certainly about a Prime Minister who will be leaving office in a very few weeks.

Where is any sense of kindness or magnanimity? Why do we need to throw these insults around and claim—

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Edward Leigh: I am going to proceed, if I may. Why do we need to claim that this is the worst sort of mass murderer and criminal in political history? It is complete rubbish. The fact is that when this Prime Minister took power, Parliament's reputation was in tatters.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Edward Leigh: No.

Virtually everybody in this Chamber had voted to have a referendum, yet many Members were doing their level best to frustrate it. Had we not had this Prime Minister, and had we not delivered Brexit, I believe we would have had a meltdown in political trust. He got Brexit done, though I agree that personally I would have liked to have done a lot more with it, and we will do, given time. That is the first issue, and that is why the Prime Minister was given a majority of 80.

The second issue is the pandemic. We have had all these insults against a Prime Minister who was working on our behalf and nearly died in office. It is a disgraceful attack. He was working flat out to save lives. Our record on the pandemic is frankly second to none. Again and again the Opposition tried to force us into more and more severe lockdowns, but this Prime Minister, with his vaccine roll-out, got us out of that mess, and thousands of people are now alive because of him.

Speaking for myself, I wholly regret the departure of this Prime Minister and I remain completely loyal to him to the very end, as I remained loyal to Mrs Thatcher. I think we will ask ourselves, "What have we done? What have we done to a man who gave us this 80-seat majority?"

The third point is that, but for this Prime Minister—the first western leader to arm Ukraine—Kyiv would now be in the hands of the Russians. We led Europe and the world in saving that country. That is the record of this Prime Minister, and I am proud as a Back Bencher to have given him all the loyalty I possibly could, as I will give loyalty to the next leader.

Of course there are challenges. Anybody would think that we lived in a vacuum—that despite the fact that we had the pandemic and the fact that we have a war in Europe, somehow the Government are to blame for all our ills. That is complete rubbish. When the next leader of the Conservative party—the next Prime Minister—comes into office, within weeks the Labour party will be calling for another general election, as we have already heard from the Leader of the Opposition. They will say, "This new Prime Minister is unelected, or elected by a fairly small number of people." They never said that about the previous Prime Minister, because he was elected by the people with an 80-seat majority.

The problems are not going to go away. We all know that if the Labour party had been in power, the outcomes of the pandemic may not have been a great deal different. We do not know what will happen with Ukraine or with the economy, but the Conservative party, as the Prime Minister explained, is turbocharged because we believe

[Sir Edward Leigh]

in the power of the free economy, in freedom and in low taxation, although of course we cannot deliver that now. I say to my friends who are competing for the leadership: be responsible. I know it is popular to call for tax cuts now, but we have record levels of borrowing, and we do not solve the problem by borrowing more and more. It is said that we can put the covid expense in a particular box and forget about it for 50 years, and it does not matter, but we all know in our private life that we cannot say to NatWest, "I've got this debt on my car—I want to put it in a different box and I won't have to pay for 50 years." Debt is debt.

The Conservative party's reputation is built on economic competence. We have to be careful with the economy. I personally was very unhappy about the rise in national insurance contributions. I am not in favour of tax rises. I believe that the reputation of a Conservative Government depends on low tax. We want to cut tax, but I say to the leadership contenders that we must be responsible.

In conclusion—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hooray!"] I am only trying to give a speech loyal to my party, which is surely no bad thing, and to the present leader of my party.

Shaun Bailey *rose*—

Sir Edward Leigh: No, I had better stop now, because they have had enough of me. Ultimately, the secret weapon of the Tory party is loyalty.

6.12 pm

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): The right hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) is right that these confidence motions can descend into pointless political attacks, but the reality is that this Government and this Prime Minister, and what they have done, make us oppose today's motion, which is fundamental for anybody who wants to uphold democracy, defend integrity and restore trust.

It is not just about partygate, dreadful though that was, nor the failed attempt to defend the indefensible behaviour of Owen Paterson, nor the abhorrent culture of tolerating bullying and sexual harassment from political allies; these contribute to a loss of confidence, but they do not stand alone. There is also the endless list of incompetence and waste—taxpayers' money being tossed around like confetti, with £16 billion fraudulently squandered on covid business support. There are the shameful failures in ambulance waiting times, 6 million citizens waiting for hospital treatment, people unable to travel because of the crippling delays at the Passport Office, and a stream of rail strikes and chaos at the airports.

All that is unforgivable, but it is the creeping culture of corruption and the determination to close down those whose job it is to keep a check on Executive power that makes this Government unfit for office. There is a growing body of evidence of corruption: dodgy Russian money funding MPs and the Tory party; an explosion in illicit finance, with Londongrad now the international capital for dirty money; peerages for pals like Cruddas and Lebedev; jobs for mates, from those like James Wharton to people from the Prime Minister's City Hall days; and contracts for cronies, with only £0.2 billion of the £17.3 billion in contracts for PPE subject to open competition. This is not the Prime Minister's money

and not the Conservatives' money. It is our money—taxpayers' money, earned through hard work—and we expect it to be honestly and efficiently spent.

This Government have no moral compass. Look at their reaction when criticised by institutions that provide a check on their power. When the courts found that the Government had illegally prorogued Parliament, the Government looked to limit judicial review. When international laws prove inconvenient, they break or ignore them. Parliament's role in holding Government to account has been eroded, with Ministers refusing to appear at Select Committees, the Prime Minister interfering in parliamentary elections, and legislation being rushed through with scant scrutiny. The independence of the civil service has been undermined, with permanent secretaries sacked for speaking truth to power and Ministers appointing their cronies as non-executive directors. Those in the press who dare to criticise the Government get sidelined. The Government tried to keep sections of the press out of No. 10 briefings. Their answer to criticism from Channel 4 is to privatise it, while the BBC's reward for unbiased public service broadcasting is the licence fee slashed. A free press, a strong Parliament, an independent judiciary and an impartial civil service are essential to a healthy democracy. This Government have undermined these institutions, and it is shameful. This debate is essential to call a halt to the dangerous Trumpian assault on everything we value in our British democracy.

This should not be about Conservatives against Labour. Every MP needs to ask themselves, "Can I have confidence in a Government who mislead with impunity, abuse office to reward friends with jobs and lucrative contracts, put self-interest above the national interest, allow their party to accept cash for access, influence and honours, and whose members indulge in egregious lobbying or sex, bullying and sleaze scandals?" Can any hon. or right hon. Member in good conscience walk through the Lobby and declare their confidence after the litany of bad behaviours that have marked this Government's time in office? The answer must be no.

6.16 pm

Sir Bill Wiffin (North Herefordshire) (Con): I think I can be very confident in predicting that we shall never again hear a Prime Minister describe their phenomenal electoral victory as putting a blue ferret up the trouser leg of the Opposition.

Since this Government entered office in 2019 on the back of the Prime Minister's historic election victory, the world has been turned on its head. Let us not lose sight of what has been thrown at the Government since March 2020. We have lived through a once-in-a-century pandemic, the first major war in Europe for a generation, and worldwide economic turbulence. Yet at every turn, this Government and the Prime Minister have put their back to the wheel and gone to work for the British public. Of course, by their own admission, mistakes have been made. At every opportunity, the Prime Minister has shown contrition and a desire to get on with a Conservative agenda. However, the mud-slinging and the relentless nature of politics and the media eventually take their toll on even the steeliest character.

The Labour party and some in the media are glad to see the Prime Minister go, as we are losing a political communicator and leader of historic proportions. At

the 1997 general election, I stood for Burnley. While I believe I did as good a job as possible in restricting the Labour candidate to a majority of a mere 17,062, I never thought that Burnley would be a Conservative seat. Nevertheless, 22 years later and thanks to this Prime Minister's leadership, I am proud to see that Burnley has its first Conservative Member of Parliament since 1910—and a very good one at that. The British public put their overwhelming faith in our Prime Minister and his Government to get Brexit done. Finally, we have escaped the grasp of the European Union's clutches and we have our freedom. Because this Government made the right calls at the right time during the pandemic, we are learning to live with covid. Over 39 million people have received a booster jab across the UK. We had the fastest vaccine roll-out in Europe and were the first to unlock and begin our recovery.

On a smaller, no less important scale, some years ago I brought forward a private Member's Bill to allow motorcycles to use bus lanes. The evidence showed that when motorcyclists were in bus lanes, pedestrians were considerably more careful, and as a result people were no longer hurt or seriously injured. During his tenure as Mayor of London, my right hon. Friend heeded my call and he made it happen, and as a result in London motorcyclists are allowed in bus lanes.

Karl Turner: We know that when he was Foreign Secretary, the Prime Minister managed to slip his security detail; we do not know why and there were no officials there. Does the hon. Gentleman have any concerns about what meetings the Prime Minister may have had as Prime Minister without officials or security detail?

Sir Bill Wiggin: I genuinely have no idea what the hon. Gentleman is talking about, probably not for the first time, so I am not going to speculate. I am sure he would agree that motorcycling remains one of the best ways to travel around the capital.

Jim Shannon *rose—*

Sir Bill Wiggin: I will give way, but that will be it.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Does he not agree that like most of us here, the Government are not perfect? None of us is, and certainly not me. This motion appears to be a genuine attempt to change that approach. While it is not my form, I remind hon. and right hon. Members that kindness and respect in this place is the responsibility of every individual Member. This debate must have that underlying principle at its very core.

Sir Bill Wiggin: I agree that none of us is perfect—if we were, this would be a very dangerous game to be in, because there would be very quickly someone pointing out that we are not. It is helpful for our constituents to understand that it is absolutely right for the Opposition to be able to call a confidence vote in the Government at any time. If they made a mistake last week and therefore we are having it today, like all of us they are fallible too, and we should be very clear that that right is being defended. The hon. Gentleman is right to insist that kindness and respect are fundamental for this job—after all, it is hard enough anyway.

Another aspect of this Government and its leader that cannot be overshadowed is the reach and the likeability. My right hon. Friend remains one of the rare politicians who is on first-name terms with the public; this reflects a rapport with the public that is frankly astonishing, given the extent of smears from all corners of society. Many will never get their head around the fact that the Prime Minister remains immensely popular across the country. He loves his children, he is caring and he is loyal. My in-laws would agree, because he was their MP in Henley. Despite all the horrible things said about him, he is never rude back. Many people would not have been able to handle the vitriol he has experienced over the past few years, but that is a testament to his character. It is a great shame he is going, when he has done so much for the free people of Ukraine. I hope we will all try to live up to that example of protecting freedom, which is so crucial, and that is why I am proud to have supported him. He is right to leave with his head held high.

6.23 pm

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Like so many of the British people, we on the Liberal Democrat Benches have absolutely no confidence in this whole Conservative Government. This Government have plunged our great country into three serious crises: the cost of living crisis, the healthcare crisis and a political crisis. Before the Prime Minister was forced to resign, there was absolutely no plan to tackle any of these crises, and now the candidates to succeed the Prime Minister are proving comprehensively that they have no idea of the scale of these crises, let alone how to tackle them.

I mention the scale of these crises because it is shockingly evident that the Conservative party is totally out of touch with the financial and healthcare catastrophes facing millions of British families and pensioners later this year. Let us start with the cost of living. Already families and pensioners are struggling to pay their soaring energy, petrol and food bills, and inflation is accelerating away. Energy bills alone were up £700 in April, with an even bigger rise coming in October. So many of our constituents are already asking how they are supposed to pay next month's bills, and their fear about winter's heating bills is understandably growing every day. Millions of people are facing a financial catastrophe over the next few months, yet the Conservative party seems blissfully ignorant.

In the so-called debates between the leadership candidates, there is this massive elephant in the room, the energy bill catastrophe, yet they have no serious answer to that. The Liberal Democrats have showed what could be done. For months, we have been calling for an emergency cut in VAT, which would save families £600 a year. Instead, this Government have chosen to raise taxes, to raise national insurance, to freeze income tax thresholds and to hit hard-working families, making the crisis worse, not better.

Then there is the healthcare crisis. Health crises used to occur for a few weeks every winter, but not with this Conservative Government. This Prime Minister has brought healthcare crises for winter, autumn, summer and spring. Just look at the stats: a record 6.5 million people on hospital waiting lists, cancer treatment targets missed by miles, and record long delays in ambulance response times. This Government have ignored the

[Ed Davey]

ambulance crisis, hoping it goes away: they have failed to employ the GPs, the NHS dentists and the care staff that the British people need and deserve. Now, leadership candidates argue about how much to slash the NHS budget, which brings me to the political crisis.

It would be easy to blame all the political crisis on the Prime Minister, and he must certainly take a large part of blame—he has debased the high office of the British Prime Minister and he has shattered the public's trust in our politics—but he did not act alone. For three years, Conservative Members have backed him to the hilt. When he was at the Dispatch Box telling us that there were no parties at No. 10, or claiming that crime had gone down when it had gone up, they were all there behind him, nodding along with every word of it. Conservative MPs defended the indefensible and excused the inexcusable. It is not just the Prime Minister we have no confidence in; it is all of them.

The people of Chesham and Amersham showed that they have no confidence in the Government when they elected my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sarah Green) last year. The people of North Shropshire showed that they have no confidence in this Government in December, when they voted for another of my hon. Friends, the Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan). The people of Devon showed they have no confidence in these Conservatives just last month, when they so wisely elected my hon. Friend the new Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord).

We think it is time we gave everyone across the country the chance to have their say and to end this shameful, shambolic Conservative Government through a general election. When Conservative Members decide how to vote today, I urge them to ask themselves these questions. Do they really have confidence in a Government who have raised taxes by more than £1,000 per family in the middle of a cost of living crisis? Do they really have confidence in a Prime Minister who was fined by the police for breaking his own law, who forgot about serious allegations against his Deputy Chief Whip, and who is now under investigation for contempt by a Committee of this House? Do they really have confidence in a Government who are running our NHS into the ground and taking local communities for granted? I believe that the British people have lost confidence in all of them, and if the Conservatives have any decency left, they will back this motion tonight.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Mr Speaker indicated that there would be an informal limit of four minutes, and that clearly is not quite working. I am not speaking with reference to the leader of the Liberal Democrats, the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey), because as leader of his party he is allowed a certain leeway. We now have to have a formal limit of four minutes. I call Mike Wood.

6.29 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Yes, this House can have confidence in Her Majesty's Government, because faced with unprecedented challenges over the past three years, it has got far more of the important

decisions right than wrong. Have there been mistakes? Of course. I am not aware of any Government, of any nation, even in the most benign times, who could claim to have made none. Of course, these have not been benign times. On the big questions facing the Government, our country is in a better position, with the Prime Minister having been in charge for the past three years, than it would have been in if the Leader of the Opposition had had his way.

On the decision to respect the referendum result, the Prime Minister broke the deadlock over Brexit that threatened to leave the country paralysed with indecision. There are still important issues to resolve, but it is clear that any of the five Conservative candidates to replace him will continue that work, and will secure Brexit, not reverse it. We know what the Leader of the Opposition wanted to do if he became Brexit Secretary in 2019: hold another referendum to overturn the first one. We know what he promised Labour party members in order to become its leader: free movement across the EU. However, he is now telling voters that he would not take us back into the EU internal market. People are bound to ask: who is he telling the truth to? This Government and this Prime Minister called it right.

Going into the global pandemic, the Government recognised that normal procurement and distribution systems would not get personal protective equipment to the people who needed it most urgently. The Leader of Opposition attacked the Prime Minister for putting in place too many checks, being too slow, and not awarding contracts quickly enough. Later, that criticism was reversed; suddenly there were insufficient checks and bureaucracy. Again, the Government called it right and struck the correct balance. They put in place the biggest job and business protection schemes in British peacetime history to make sure that our economy could build back once the need for lockdowns had passed: 9 million workers' wages were paid; nearly 3 million self-employed workers were helped; and businesses right across our economy were supported. If the Leader of the Opposition had had his way, and the plans of the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) had been put in place, bankrupting the nation, we simply would not have been able to borrow the money for that emergency help.

Back when a covid vaccine looked a distant prospect, the Prime Minister and the Government backed a range of potential vaccines, as well as Kate Bingham's superb taskforce, which the Opposition decried as waste and cronyism. The Opposition were wrong; the Prime Minister was right; and Britain got more vaccines more quickly than any other European country.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mike Wood: I really do not have time.

It was the Prime Minister's personal intervention—he sent back early drafts of the roll-out strategy—that brought together the NHS, the armed forces and the private sector to get vaccines out quicker than other large countries did.

We can be proud that when Russian troops invaded one of our European partners, our Prime Minister did so much to lead international support for Ukraine. It is simply not credible to imagine that Britain would have stood as firmly against Russian aggression if it had

been led by a man whose response to an assassination attempt on the streets of Salisbury was to demand that evidence be sent to Moscow.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): Was it the right response to that poisoning to fix a meeting with a former intelligence agent of the KGB—a meeting without officials, minutes, or any report to this House of what the hell happened?

Mike Wood: I will tell the right hon. Gentleman what the right response was: it was to co-ordinate the biggest diplomatic response since the end of the cold war. The Prime Minister, then Foreign Secretary, got more diplomatic responses than have been seen in decades. The Prime Minister has many achievements of which he should be proud. His successor will have a strong foundation to build on, thanks to the decisions that he has taken over the past three years.

Mims Davies (Mid Sussex) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mike Wood: I really should not.

It is for that reason, and many others, that the House should continue to have confidence in Her Majesty's Government.

6.33 pm

Dame Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): We do not currently have a functioning Government; it imploded two weeks ago, when there were over 50 ministerial resignations in 36 hours. The decision of those Ministers to render their Government incapable of governing forced the Prime Minister to concede that the end was nigh, but he did not resign. Shamefully, he was allowed to make over 60 new ministerial appointments to a caretaker Government. Many of those appointees will be Ministers for only three months, in this drift through a national crisis.

The Prime Minister has been told that he must be gone by 5 September. That is 50 days from now—50 days in which the Government will be led by a disgraced Prime Minister, and in which Parliament will be in recess. It is not in the interests of our country or our democracy to allow this discredited Prime Minister to squat in Downing Street one day longer. He is a security risk, having admitted to attending KGB agent Alexander Lebedev's Italian villa alone, en route home from a NATO summit. He is trying to install more of his cronies in strategic jobs before he goes. He is ending his tenure in Downing Street much as it began—by going AWOL from emergency Cobra meetings; he prefers to party at Chequers instead. Also, there are rumours that he is planning a bumper resignation honours list of 40 Tory peers. Such powers of patronage should not be available to a man driven from office in disgrace by Members on his own side of the House.

If the motion is not carried, it will bring about a general election. It is voters, not Tory Members, who should be given the chance to pass a verdict on this catastrophic Government and their failures of probity and competence. Of course, the Tories do not want to face the voters yet. They are hoping that they can ditch their third leader in a row and crown a new Prime Minister without bothering to ask the country. They prefer to have the next Prime Minister chosen by their

tiny and completely unrepresentative party membership—the very same people who chose the disgraced incumbent barely three years ago.

The Tories hope that they can evade any blame for giving a man they knew to be wholly unfit for his great office the keys to No. 10, but they cannot. Tory MPs are as culpable as the Prime Minister for the chaos and catastrophe that he has caused. They gambled with our democracy, and with respect for the law, truth and morality in public life. They lost, and now the voters must judge them. If we are to believe the dangerous pitches of the wannabe Prime Ministers still in the leadership race, the minuscule Tory membership appears to be obsessed with fantasy promises of billions of pounds of unfunded tax cuts, and haunted by the fear of so-called wokeness.

It is crystal clear that the Tories are not addressing any of the real problems and challenges facing this country after 12 years of Tory misrule. They have not addressed the cost of living crisis facing millions of our fellow citizens. They have said nothing about soaring levels of child poverty as they vie with each other for who can concoct the biggest fantasy tax cut. They have left the country weaker and more ill prepared for the future. Their neglect has caused chaos in the NHS, the Passport Office and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, at the border, and in our schools and courts.

As the leadership race lumbers on and more of the 2019 manifesto is ditched, the Tories are shredding our constitution, their manifesto and their mandate for government—and now they will not even debate in public. That is why we urgently need a general election. In evidence last week, John Major said of the Cabinet:

“They were silent when they should have spoken out and then spoke out only when their silence became self-damaging.”

The only democratic way to respond to what has happened is to have a general election now.

6.38 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): I certainly, most emphatically, have confidence in this Government, and no confidence whatever in Her Majesty's official Opposition, the Liberal Democrat party, the Scottish National party, or any other Rag, Tag and Bobtail. First, I pay tribute to the Prime Minister, who has led on all the historic matters that he has carried through so successfully since becoming Prime Minister a mere three years ago: Brexit, standing up for Ukraine, and covid.

The general election was based on a manifesto that gave us a great democratic majority, and the Labour party a well deserved drubbing. On the handling of covid, from which the Prime Minister nearly died—*[Interruption.]* Don't you dare speak like that. With courage and resilience, he battled through. AstraZeneca and the expertise of our great scientists led the way, with the support of our Government under this Prime Minister.

Then there is Ukraine—Putin's brutal and unprovoked aggression, and the murder and killing of innocent citizens, not to mention even Russian soldiers sent to fight on false pretences—on which the Prime Minister of this country has led the world.

Then there is Brexit, on which the Prime Minister led a democratic victory in 2019, endorsing the vote of the British people in 2016 and freeing us from the subjugation

[Sir William Cash]

of the European Union, other than with the unfinished business of Northern Ireland. That is now being addressed in the Committee stage of the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill, which had a majority of 74 on Second Reading.

Brexit itself, with the freedoms generated by leaving the laws of the European Union and the means to unleash the potential of the British people and their businesses, innovation and worldwide commercial ambitions, will create new horizons in our economic history.

All this is based on stable economic foundations. The fact is that, if we look at the unemployment rate in the other member states we see that, while our unemployment—now we are out—is 3.8%, in Germany it is 5.3%, in Italy 8% and in Spain 13%. The eurozone is imploding and on life support. All these problems of the cost of living were induced by the uncontrollable global and external forces causing inflation throughout the western world.

Under all the strident rantings of Labour Members, this Government have succeeded where, on every count, they would have completely failed miserably. The essential foundations of sovereignty and democracy have now been re-embedded in our national DNA. This success cannot be taken away from the Prime Minister, and it never will be when the history books are written.

Job vacancies are now at a mere 1.3 million in this country, which is far better than in the other member states. The G7 and similar countries are affected in a similar way. Thanks to this Prime Minister, this Government and this party, we have made a success of one of the greatest revolutions in British constitutional history, certainly since we entered in 1973 and stretching back over 400 years.

I have confidence in this Government because they have achieved. Opposition Members have failed every single time they have ever been given an opportunity to do so, and they will do so again.

6.42 pm

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Well, what a man to follow! [Interruption.] I am not sure that Fran and Anna here quite agree with me on that.

Let me say that we are here debating a confidence motion in the Government, but as has been said by other speakers before me, we do not have a Government. They are a Government in name only. It is essentially now a form of organised Tory hooliganism that squats in these offices of state, squats in these Departments and squats most of all in Downing Street.

One of the canards that is often advanced—[Interruption.] If the hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey) wants to get to his feet and intervene, he is more than welcome. I am happy to have the extra 60 seconds from him. The canard often advanced by Government Members—people would not know it, but we are only having this debate because they wielded the knife on their leader just a couple of weeks ago—is that the Prime Minister “gets the big calls right”. Let us examine that proposition.

As a few Conservative Members have been asked, did he really get a big call right when, post-Salisbury and straight after a NATO summit, he went to the palazzo

in Italy of a former KGB agent? Was that him getting a big call right, and he did not even have the decency to do it properly with security and logging it with his Department. That was when he was Foreign Secretary, and before he even got to Downing Street.

Did he get all the big calls right when he was partying all over the place and our constituents had to adhere to the rules as strictly as they did? Indeed, it resulted in him being the only Prime Minister—the only Prime Minister—to have received a fixed penalty notice while in office.

Sir William Cash: Oh, come on!

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I have witnessed the Scottish Conservative party at close quarters over the years, as you have, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I always thought, going back to the days of the hon. Gentleman's old pal the late Sir Teddy Taylor—that tenement Tory of my constituency—that he believed in law and order, but he sits there decrying anyone who draws attention to the fact that we have a criminal in Downing Street who has the keys for another five weeks in office.

Sir William Cash: Is the hon. Member aware that the Lord Chief Justice himself said, in a case on fixed penalty notices when the payment was made within 28 days, that it was not a crime, that the individual could not be prosecuted and that he had left the court without a stain on his character?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: The hon. Gentleman has educated me, because I did not know that, but it does not change the facts. Facts are chieftains that winna ding, and those are indeed the facts.

The Prime Minister has presided over a shambles. Two weeks ago, in this very building and not so far from here, we witnessed a Government in meltdown, and yet we are asked to believe that somehow all the MPs, Ministers, Parliamentary Private Secretaries and trade envoys who resigned got it wrong, and this Prime Minister is still fit for office.

Nothing says that quite like the acres of empty green Benches on the Government side of the House tonight, so while they—[Interruption.] Well, it is a Government motion. It is a Government motion brought forward by the Prime Minister himself, and is it not telling that none of the leadership candidates have turned up to defend him here tonight? One could only imagine that several of those who have come here—[Interruption.] If the hon. Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) wishes to get to his feet, I am happy to be educated once again.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): The hon. Member is making a fantastically farcical speech, but I am enjoying it immensely. It is a little bit rich, when there is an election open now, to have a go at candidates for not being here at this moment. This is a fair place and he knows the process; he has been here longer than I have. This is a six-hour debate, and I think it is fair to give some courtesies in this House.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Not all interventions are best made on your feet, as the hon. Gentleman has showed with great grace.

As far as this is viewed in Scotland, for all that we have heard not just from the leadership candidates, but from the Prime Minister himself—indeed, he was at great pains to name the various red wall constituencies that his big blue Tory ferret paraded through—it is worth noting that in Scotland, his party continues to go backwards any time the electorate face a ballot paper in their constituencies. The Tories have not won an election in Scotland since the 1950s, and the idea that we are frightened of any of these contenders now is for the birds. They will lose more elections in Scotland.

The chaos actually started with David Cameron; it is not all the fault of the current incumbent of No. 10, let us be honest. I can see that the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) at least agrees with me on that. All the chaos that has flowed from the 2016 referendum has only made the case for a strengthening—a strengthening—of Scottish democracy, which I know the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) takes seriously. There will be a referendum on Scottish independence.

Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con) *indicated dissent.*

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: The right hon. Member can shake his head as much as he likes. The reason why there will be one is that, like many Government Members, the public are free to change their minds. They are free to give a Government in Edinburgh a mandate, as they did in 2011, to ask that question on Scottish independence again. We rejected this rancid, squalid Brexit, which he sits there smiling about, and that is how we will reverse it in Scotland. Labour has shown us that there is no route to do it via Westminster. The only way to do it is for Scots to take their future into their own hands and create such a path back into the European community, where we belong. We will do that with our independence referendum in 2023, and I look forward to the Scottish people voting for it with enthusiasm.

6.48 pm

Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con): I rise to declare my confidence in Her Majesty's Government. There are myriad substantial reasons for doing so, but I am going to focus on just three, because of the time allowed to me.

The first, of course, is the ending of the Brexit impasse, which the dead Parliament of 2017 to 2019 showed itself to be incapable of doing. Under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, the Conservative party won a landslide victory at the 2019 general election, when I had the privilege of being elected for the first time to represent my constituents in Orpington.

It is undeniable that a significant reason for the national result was the mandate to deliver on the largest democratic exercise in this country's history—an exercise that had hitherto been thwarted by arrogant elites, some of whom I see sitting opposite me this evening. On 31 January 2020, Her Majesty's Government delivered on the will of the people, and we left the European Union. The Labour party claimed that a Conservative Government would not achieve a Brexit trade deal, and yet Her Majesty's Government announced on 24 December 2020 that Britain and the EU had agreed a post-Brexit trade deal, ending months of disagreement. A clear manifesto commitment that the previous dead Parliament

had failed to deliver had been completed within a few weeks of the election. In the months that followed, the Government announced more than 70 trade agreements with countries all around the world.

That is achievement No. 1, and I will now move to achievement No. 2. Shortly after we left the European Union, the worst pandemic in a century hit the entire world. Her Majesty's Government put their arms around the people, at great pace and under enormous pressure, and introduced a comprehensive package of support for individuals and businesses. Component parts of the support deal, such as the furlough scheme, saved millions of people from being made redundant when businesses could not trade because of the spread of the virus. Although our economy was on life support, it was kept alive thanks to the actions taken by the Government. As a direct result of decisions taken by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, this country was among the first to begin to emerge from the pandemic.

Her Majesty's Government made the right call when it came to the vaccine. Thanks to the Government's quick action to secure the most promising vaccine doses in advance, more than 120 million doses were administered in the first year in the UK alone. It should be noted, however, that the leader of the Labour party wanted Britain to remain in the European Medicines Agency, which would have delayed the roll-out of the vaccine. Countries in the EMA were much slower with vaccine production and roll-out than the UK was. Had Labour remained in power, the vaccine success that we experienced in this country would not have occurred at anything like the speed it did, with potentially dire consequences.

Her Majesty's Government made the right call when it came to reopening the economy last year—something that, of course, the Labour party disagreed with. Time after time, senior Labour figures called for the maintenance, and even an extension, of restrictions. The Leader of the Opposition even said that he would vote for a circuit-breaker lockdown over Christmas, and then days later pretended he had never backed a Christmas restriction. Had he been in power, it would have been less Captain Hindsight, and more Major Catastrophe.

Finally, this Government and this Prime Minister have led to the west rallying international support for Ukraine. Her Majesty's Government have kept our country safe. They have led the world in response to the first ground war on the European continent since the second world war, and they have got Brexit done. It is therefore patently obvious that the House should have confidence in Her Majesty's Government, and I will be supporting the motion.

6.52 pm

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): It is an unusual thing to be in the Chamber listening to all this praising of the Prime Minister from the people who have just got rid of him. I wonder whether they have buyers' remorse. One reason why our Prime Minister was got rid of, with heartfelt letters from Conservative Members, has been completely forgotten about since the leadership hustings started—it is as if it did not happen. The reason I do not have any confidence in the Government, and the reason I do not have any confidence in the Conservative party, is because of the dreadful record they have overseen on sexual harassment and violence in their own ranks.

[*Jess Phillips*]

Since I was elected to this House, two Conservative Members have gone to prison for perpetrating sexual crimes. In one of those cases, I repeatedly begged various Conservative Members with power, including the Chief Whip, to intervene, to stop and not to give him the Whip back, telling them how serious were the accounts I had heard. Every single time, that was ignored—[*Interruption.*] If hon. Members would like to intervene on me, I would be more than happy to explain the very fine details.

A victim of child sexual abuse came forward to the Conservative party and said that they had been abused by the candidate in Wakefield, after which the Conservative party lost the complaint, or it went somewhere. That candidate was then elected, and he is now in prison for sexual crimes. This is deeply serious. The hon. Member for Delyn (Rob Roberts)—I have informed all the people I will be mentioning that I will be mentioning them, Madam Deputy Speaker; I imagine there are some Members checking their inboxes right now—was cleared by the Conservative party's processes. Then the Prime Minister was toppled because he promoted somebody who he knew had undertaken sexually harmful behaviours. While everybody here is now dancing on the head of a pin about how great the Prime Minister was, and how he got all “the big calls right”, they should remember the reason that every one of those Members wrote those letters. Where, from every single one of the candidates—[*Interruption.*] If the Justice Secretary would like to intervene, I am more than happy to take an intervention.

The Deputy Prime Minister (Dominic Raab): Total rubbish.

Jess Phillips: The Justice Secretary says it is total rubbish. Would he like to get to his feet and tell me what I have said that is total rubbish? No, he would not. Shall I tell him what's total rubbish? The rape statistics that he has overseen as Justice Secretary. That is what is total rubbish, and it is not a surprise when his political party turns a blind eye.

Dominic Raab: Does the hon. Lady recognise the fact that in the last year, the volume of rape convictions has increased by two thirds? A simple yes or no.

Jess Phillips: That is the convictions, but how is the charging, Secretary of State? Again, I am happy to take an intervention. Has the charging gone up or down? Currently, 1.3% of rapes that are brought forward result in a charge. That does not surprise me, when the institution that is currently in government constantly turns a blind eye to sexual misdemeanours.

A lot of people have mentioned antisemitism in this debate, because they are all desperate to make it about something wrong with the Labour party. However, when the Labour party was holding a leadership election, every single candidate was asked, “What will you do to stamp out antisemitism?” and rightly so. It is vital that we were held to account. So what did any one of the candidates do when the Member for—I can't remember where, but Pincher by name, pincher by—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I have given the hon. Lady quite a lot of leeway. We are discussing matters that are or perhaps will be sub judice, and I think the hon. Lady knows that. Let us guide this in a different direction.

Jess Phillips: I would like to know what the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time did when the right hon. Member for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher) was given that position. I would like to know what the Foreign Secretary did. Did they all sit back? I wouldn't have. I would never have sat back. I want to know what every one of the candidates who wants to be Prime Minister did when that happened. I want to know what the Conservative party is going to do about its institutional problem, when it cannot deal appropriately and independently with complaints about sexual harassment. I have absolutely no confidence.

6.58 pm

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): Today's motion is on whether we have confidence in the Government, and obviously I will be speaking in favour of that. I want to register my exasperation with the way that we arrived at having to table this motion, after the botched stunt by the Labour party last week. By attempting to table a vote of no confidence in the Prime Minister, Labour Members sought to do away with constitutional precedent and decades of convention. Whatever their personal animus towards the Prime Minister—I have listened to the speeches, and I can tell it runs very deep—the office is bigger than any one person, and the institutions around it, and our constitution, are bigger still. To seek to upend that in a fit of petty spite just shows how irresponsible and deeply unfit the Leader of the Opposition is to lead. He is a man who should know better, and a man who, as a lawyer, does know better, but he simply cannot do better.

This is the mother of Parliaments, not a sixth-form debating society. However, that is not what the debate is about. I appreciate this is a popular debate, so I want to touch briefly on why I will be supporting the Government tonight.

Government Members were elected on an ambitious manifesto, which was not just about Brexit, as some would like to claim. It was also about how we use that opportunity to change the way in which our country is working, because frankly, for a very long time in a great number of places, it simply has not been. Areas like mine were left in abeyance, written off, put in the “too hard” basket and subjected to their own passive form of managed decline, and that is not right. It cannot be the case that all the talent and ability is clustered in one part of the country—we know it is not—so why should all the opportunity be focused in a postage stamp-sized area of the country? Our manifesto promised to address that, and we have already made great strides.

That job has undoubtedly been complicated by the pandemic, which nobody's manifesto contained. The pandemic has meant that it has been necessary to do extremely difficult things, but it was years of making tough choices since 2010—restoring our public finances—that enabled us to put our arms around the nation at the darkest of times. There will undoubtedly be those who want to talk down the pandemic response, but the simple fact is that this country went further and faster than most to protect, vaccinate and unlock. It was not all that long ago that Opposition Members were demanding that we emulate the EU, New Zealand and a host of other countries, only to then see them grappling with surging infections and repeated lockdown measures.

I have always believed that levelling up—or whatever we want to call it—is about different things in different areas. For me in Heywood and Middleton, it meant improving educational opportunities and transport links—seemingly simple things that will open doors that are currently just out of reach of so many. In my borough alone, about £130 million was injected into the local economy to protect lives and livelihoods at the height of the pandemic, and, after a genuine fight to stop the Labour Rochdale Borough Council siphoning most of that into its reserves, we got the money to the people who needed it. During my first 18 months as an MP, I closed more cases than my Labour predecessor did in her five years. That is the level of intensity that this Government have put into supporting the country, and the amount of disinterest shown by my predecessor and her party.

As we emerge from the pandemic, what next? Rochdale borough has bids in for £40 million of levelling-up funding. Greater Manchester has been allocated £98 million from the shared prosperity fund, in addition to over £1 billion earmarked to improve public transport, which is a game-changer. More than £1 million has been given to cultural recovery in the borough, and the Government have designated us as one of their priority education investment areas, with a share of more than £40 million. Despite everything that has happened in the past few years, we are getting on with the job.

I have been extremely proud to sit on these Benches for the past two and half years, and I genuinely believe that what we have done has been with the best intentions—to make this country a true partnership of people, all of them engaged in a common endeavour, and all of us equally able to achieve if we are willing to put the work in—and that is why I will be voting confidence in the Government tonight.

7.2 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): No, I don't have confidence in this Government, because they have manifestly failed to govern efficiently or effectively. They wasted billions on fraudulent covid loans, unusable PPE and a test and trace system that never, ever worked, and they have completely mismanaged the Passport Office, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and the railways.

No, I don't have confidence in this Government, because they lied about Brexit and they have not got Brexit done.

No, I don't have confidence in this Government, because they have not got any of the big calls right. When we were warning—when I was warning—about Putin's Russia, the Prime Minister said the days of tanks rolling across Europe were over, and he cut our Army by 10,000. When covid started, the Government failed to protect people in care homes, sending thousands unnecessarily to early graves. When everyone issued warnings about inflation, the Prime Minister said that it was nothing to get worried about.

No, I don't have confidence in this Government, because a massive shortage of personnel and skills is holding Britain back. Asparagus and courgettes are ploughed back into the field, strawberries are left to rot and pig carcasses are destroyed, all while British families rely on food banks and—worst and most shameful of all—NHS hospitals run food banks for their staff. Many

schools have no applications at all for teaching posts, especially in key subjects such as science, maths and modern languages.

No, I don't have confidence in this Government, because they refused to put Magnitsky sanctions in place for years; because they still have not tackled dodgy Russian money and London's massive money laundering industry; because they failed to take Putin's initial invasion of Ukraine seriously enough in 2014; and because their delight in Putin's bling emboldened Putin.

No, I don't have confidence in this Government, because they are obsessed with all the wrong things. They spend more time and energy protecting statues than protecting women from domestic abuse. They deliberately drive wedges between people over gender identity and trans rights, and ignore the fact that their own Equalities Minister resigned because he thought the Government were creating a hostile environment for LGBT people, which is why the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) should be ashamed to defend this Government.

No, I don't have confidence in this Government, because they have no plan for the NHS or social care. England has a backlog of 6.6 million patients, and that excludes patients' multiple treatments. And no, it is not all to do with covid; we had a 4.8 million backlog before the pandemic.

Chris Clarkson: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): It is quite bad to have points of order that disrupt debates. The hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) has had a chance to speak. I am not sure whether he tried to intervene on the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), but he may go ahead with his point of order.

Chris Clarkson: The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) just pointed at me and said, "and that's why he should be ashamed." Is that in order, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Well, yes, if that is the opinion of the hon. Member for Rhondda. Did you try to intervene?

Chris Clarkson: No.

Madam Deputy Speaker: No, you did not. That would be the appropriate thing to do.

Shaun Bailey: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The occupants of the Chair have consistently talked about temperance of language. I do not think it fits within the ruling given from the Chair to say that my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson), as an LGBT man, should be ashamed to defend this Government. Could you just clarify to the House whether that is temperate language?

Madam Deputy Speaker: First of all, that is not a point of order. Secondly, Mr Speaker, the Chairman of Ways and Means and I have all said that we should try to conduct this debate in reasonable terms. I think we all need to calm down and discuss the important matters before the House. I call Chris Bryant.

Chris Bryant: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

No, I don't have confidence in this Government, because they play fast and loose with numbers. They boast that they are recruiting 20,000 more police, but they cut police numbers by 20,000. They boast of a single tax cut now but forget that they have increased taxes 15 times in two and a half years, giving us the highest tax burden for 70 years. They boast of the covid vaccination as if they personally developed it in the Downing Street kitchen, but France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Singapore have higher vaccination rates than us, and Wales managed it faster than England.

No, I don't have confidence in this Government, because not even Conservative MPs really have confidence in this Government. They know that this Government are a massive conceit, an organised hypocrisy, a house built on sand—and the fissures run deep. They are not even very good at being Conservatives these days, tearing up conventions and the constitution like student revolutionaries. Of course, that is not how Conservative MPs will vote today. Oh no—they would not dare risk a general election. But even as they troop through the Lobby to indicate that, yes, they do still have confidence in the Government, they will be privately plotting that Government's demise. They will be making themselves look foolish today. I do not mind that, but they cannot take the British public for fools as well.

7.7 pm

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con): I thank the Prime Minister for his dedication to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, his aspiration for all in this country, and his expectation that we can achieve great things as individuals and as a country. This Conservative Government, working as a team, have delivered hundreds of achievements over the past two and half years. They have delivered and continue to deliver on the people's priorities: Brexit, for starters. In March 2020, the country faced an alarming health crisis—the covid pandemic—which the Opposition have conveniently forgotten about. The Government have taken decisive action to shield the public from the worst effects of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. It is very easy to criticise, but far more difficult to make tough and hard decisions.

We have delivered the biggest reforms to our railways in 25 years, with simpler, modern fares and reliable services. We have begun the accession process to join the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership, giving UK businesses access to one of the world's largest and most dynamic free trade areas. We hosted COP26 in Glasgow last year, helping to drive ambitious climate change action around the world, and we passed the world-leading Environment Act 2021, ensuring that the environment is at the heart of this Government's agenda. We also passed the Agriculture Act 2020, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, the Building Safety Act 2022, the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, and the Nationality

and Borders Act 2022. We have seen the plan for jobs, upskilling and reskilling, and a focus on education, giving every pupil in England a funding boost so that all children have the same opportunities to succeed. We have invested in levelling up parts of the country that have been long overlooked and neglected, including through the levelling-up fund and the towns fund deals. Hastings received £24.3 million, leveraging another £85 million in private sector funding. I could go on.

Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con): My hon. Friend mentions the towns fund. Does she agree that it will transform and regenerate the towns and cities left behind by Labour in the past?

Sally-Ann Hart: I completely agree. That is why the previous Conservative Government had the northern powerhouse, to try to lift people left behind for generations by the Labour party.

It is a fundamental principle of our constitution that any Government must retain the confidence of the legislature. That is us. The Conservative party won an 80-seat majority. That majority may have been reduced slightly, but the Government operate effectively, as votes on legislation in the last couple of weeks alone prove—healthy majority votes in favour of the Government, backing the Government. The Prime Minister may have lost the personal confidence of some of his MPs, but he has not lost the legislature's mandate.

I pity those on the Opposition Benches. They have resorted to the petty low of personality politics because they have nothing else. With this Prime Minister gone, what will they do? We can feel their panic seeping across the Floor of the House. Their hate-fuelled moralistic posturing has made them all vulnerable. The Government continue to function as a strong team, and I have full confidence in them to deliver the priorities of the people and businesses in my constituency, as well as in the country. On the Conservative Benches, we keep calm and we carry on in the British way.

7.12 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): The most disturbing aspect of this entire debate is that the Prime Minister is still in office. After all the lies, the rule-breaking and the defence of sexual predators, and after his own Cabinet turned on him, he is still in office. Clearly, this House has no confidence in the Prime Minister.

The reason I have no confidence in this Conservative party is that Conservative Members have enabled the delusion and they continue to enable it. In the Prime Minister's mind, he thinks he has done no wrong. He probably even thinks that he is the victim.

Chris Clarkson: Does the hon. Gentleman know of any other party represented in this Chamber whose leader tried to protect a sexual predator and is still in post?

Tommy Sheppard: I am sorry, but I did not hear what the hon. Gentleman said. My apologies. Will he repeat it?

Chris Clarkson: Does the hon. Gentleman know of any other party represented in this Chamber whose leader is still in post after protecting a sexual predator?

Tommy Sheppard: No, I do not, but if there were, it should certainly be investigated. If the hon. Gentleman is trying to say something, perhaps he should say it and not be quite so coy and insinuating.

What is even more concerning is the manner in which the Prime Minister's successor is being selected. What started out as a sort of political beauty pageant has become a carnival of reactionary ideas, as the contestants vie with each other to see who can be the most right-wing. The reason is simple. They are not appealing to the Conservative parliamentary party, they are appealing to a narrow and narrow-minded section of the electorate quite unlike the people among whom they live: the Conservative party membership. How else can we explain that, as the country burns, not a single candidate has anything to say about the climate emergency? How else can we explain that they are talking about tax cuts on business profits, rather than action to help ordinary families with the cost of living crisis?

There will be Conservative Members who will hope that that is just an aberration, that those things will disappear once the contest is over and that some of this economic illiteracy, in particular the drivel about small states and tax cuts, will pass into history.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I would just like to point out, for the benefit of the House and the hon. Gentleman, that in fact earlier today every single one of the candidates spoke and was questioned at length by the Conservative Environment Network on precisely the issues he has just described.

Tommy Sheppard: My point is that when they set out their stall it was not on their agenda. This was not something they chose to put in their prospectus, because they know who they are appealing to. It is worrisome in the extreme that people who ought to know better are massaging prejudices among the Conservative party membership to gain political office.

Some will hope that this will disappear once the election is over and that much of the drivel about tax cuts and small states, and the economic illiteracy that comes with it, will pass away, but there is a worrying trend here. Some of those ideas may gain traction and may change public policy. I am concerned that the Conservative party is attempting to do that—change public policy in this country, without consulting the electorate. If it does that, that would be undemocratic and illegitimate.

When it comes to Scotland, I am also concerned. I do not expect any new Conservative leader or this Conservative Government to support a Scottish independence referendum, but I do expect—I do expect—a degree of civility and respect when it comes to appreciating Scottish public opinion. It is distressing that what we have seen from quite a number of the candidates, and what now seems to mark the character of the Government, is to ignore it and override it. Hence, we get statements about how the UK Government think that they need to save the Scottish people from the SNP-led Government in Edinburgh. What a monstrous contempt that is of the people who elected that Government just 14 months ago. Surely it is not too much to expect that there should be some dialogue, some respectful conversation? If there is not, that in itself will ensure the destruction of this Union.

This attitude is fuelling the campaign in Scotland for an alternative. We come here, mandated by the communities who sent us here, to say that people in Scotland want another choice on whether they should be an independent country. It is their right, their democratic right, to have that aspiration and to demand that it be listened to. We will not be going away. We will keep coming and we will keep demanding. The more this Government, in whom I have no confidence, refuse, the more the argument for the alternative, a new independent country, will gain ground. I say to the Conservative party and to the Conservative Government: Scotland clearly has no confidence in you. Everything you are doing makes Scotland believe there is a better alternative to come.

7.18 pm

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): Just a few moments ago, one of colleagues of the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) talked about Tory hooliganism. The definition of hooliganism is the SNP trying to smash up the United Kingdom—that is hooliganism.

The motion we are debating tonight asks whether “this House has confidence in Her Majesty's Government.”

Absolutely yes, we have confidence in this Government. Why do I say that? This Government are delivering for British people, delivering for my constituents in Warrington South. We left the European Union. We invested and innovated in life sciences to deliver a vaccine rollout. We supported families and businesses with the furlough programme during the worst health crisis for 100 years. We lifted restrictions, allowing our economy to get back to business. We supported Ukraine in a way that most other European countries failed to do. We put billions of pounds of support into families as the long tail of covid affects the cost of living. This Government are absolutely backing the people of this country.

Our first duty as Members of Parliament is always to our constituents and the areas that we are honoured to represent in this place. What have the Government been doing for the past two and half years for Warrington? We have been levelling up transport, with Warrington benefiting from £42 million of Government investment. We are replacing our entire fleet of buses with 120 new zero-emission electric buses. We have been tackling environmental issues and ensuring that we have cleaner and better air quality. We have been improving services for local people and reducing the cost.

What are we doing on schools? Last week, I had a message from the principal of Penketh High School, John Carlin, who said how thrilled he was to receive £6 million from the Government to rebuild his school. He has been trying to achieve that for the past 10 years. The £6 million rebuilding programme will finally mean that students in Penketh get the facilities that they deserve.

In March this year, I was delighted to welcome the Prime Minister to Warrington to open a brand-new scan centre at Warrington Hospital, funded with £5 million from the Government. It is a fantastic addition, delivering new MRI and CT scanners, and the imaging suites and facilities have been reconfigured. That means that the backlogs that we faced as a result of covid have been almost entirely removed.

[*Andy Carter*]

While the Government put in place policies and funding to help constituents in Warrington South, we are beset by Labour-run Warrington Borough Council, whose priorities appear to be building huge logistics centres on the green belt and introducing terrible low-traffic neighbourhoods that simply increase the congestion in our town.

For all the Opposition parties' talk of a general election, let us remind ourselves that we have a parliamentary system, not a presidential one. We were elected on a manifesto to level up the areas of the country that for too long have felt unnoticed and have been left behind. I am incredibly proud to represent my home area in this place, and I am proud to work with this Conservative Government, who have done so much to benefit constituencies such as Warrington South. Tonight, I will vote to support the Government on this motion.

7.21 pm

Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): I decided to have a quick look at this Tory Government's record in order to prepare for this debate. I found that child poverty has gone up by 300,000 since 2010. According to the Government's records, 860,000 children do not know where their next meal is coming from. That is all before we factor in the cruel cut to universal credit or this year's inflation rate—so no, I have no confidence in this Government.

Crime is up by 18% and prosecutions are down 18%, and that is just in the past three years. Less than 6% of offences lead to a charge, and that is a record low—so no, I have no confidence in this Government.

The Prime Minister promised 40 new hospitals. Where are they? Ambulance waits are going through the roof. Every single ambulance service has declared a critical incident. People having a heart attack or a stroke are waiting on average 50 minutes for an ambulance, and for many the wait is far longer. One patient waited 24 hours in an ambulance before a space in the hospital was found. These waits are deadly—so no, I have no confidence in this Government.

Let us get to the man in Downing Street. He spent the past years as he spent his whole life, corrupting and destroying confidence in everything he touches. This is not just about the parties, the law-breaking, or whether he misled the House; it is his casual approach to our democracy and our society. He has spent the past six months pretending that everything is going great and we know it ain't. Inflation is skyrocketing and the economy is on the verge of recession.

What is the plan to deal with the root causes of that? We have workforce shortages blighting our NHS, all our public services and much of the private sector. We have massive trade problems linked to the mismanagement of the Tory Brexit, but all the Tory party leadership knows how to do is pretend that immigration is somehow the problem and that bashing the EU is some kind of solution. Well, it ain't.

The Tory party has finally done the right thing, but frankly it is too late, and it is superficial. There is not going to be real change. The Tory record of destruction, division and chaos continues. The country is boiling but the leadership candidates will not credibly address climate

change. They have said little to nothing about it—I think they must live on a different planet. All they can manage is to argue against the tax hikes that they voted for just weeks ago. When they are not doing that, they are trying to divide our communities based on frivolous nonsense. We would be better off if they talked about stopping climate heating or how to stop the NHS falling apart, but that does not seem to match the priorities of Tory donors.

So do I have confidence in this Government? Hell no. The truth is that our country will be able to recover only once the lot of them are out of office. For that we need a general election. Let's get on with it.

7.25 pm

Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con): The manifesto on which the Government were elected was entitled, "Get Brexit Done, Unleash Britain's Potential", and the first part of that has been achieved. It has been difficult and protracted but we got there, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on achieving perhaps the most significant single piece of constitutional change in the post-war era. When one sees, for example, unrest in places such as Catalonia, I think we sometimes do not give ourselves enough credit for this country's ability to effect change peacefully, smoothly and, considering the far-reaching implications of Brexit, at some pace. The Prime Minister achieved that and although his premiership is ending sooner than many would have liked—sooner than I would have liked—his place in history is undoubtedly assured, and he has begun to unleash Britain's potential.

I welcome the creation of an east midlands freeport that will create up to 60,000 jobs in the region—made possible by Brexit. I welcome the Government's ambitious vaccination policy—made possible by Brexit. I further welcome the more than two dozen police officers on the streets of Gedling, the plans to overhaul the Queen's Medical Centre and City hospitals in Nottingham, and the increased school funding in Gedling—made possible thanks to the sound finances that only a decade of Conservative Government can provide. That is the Prime Minister's legacy, which will be taken forward in the remainder of this Parliament.

The Leader of the Opposition instigated today's confidence motion. If it fails, there will be a clamour for a general election. So what is his European policy? For starters, he is the man who said no—the man who was happy to tell the people of Gedling, "You may have voted to leave the European Union, but I'm going to ask you to do it again." To him, the good folk of Gedling put their X in the wrong place on the ballot paper. They were to be admonished and told to correct their mistake.

The Leader of the Opposition is seeking to look like a Prime Minister in waiting. To establish his European credentials, he went to the continent this week, turning up in Berlin where the Bundestag is in recess. He committed what many considered to be a serious faux pas by recording a party political video at a holocaust memorial. In that video, he declared that he wants the Labour party to follow in the footsteps of the German Social Democratic party. Given that the SPD's position in the opinion polls has fallen by a fifth in the past three months, I wish him well in those endeavours.

As I speak, there are five contenders for the Conservative party leadership—almost as many as for the Labour party leadership—and one of the things that they have in common is that none of them served, or would serve, in a shadow Cabinet led by the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), who is hostile to NATO, called for collaboration with Russia after a chemical attack, and is a proponent of a reckless economic agenda. The prospect of a Labour Government led by the right hon. Member scared people in Gedling at the last election. Notwithstanding the many achievements of this Government, of which there are many, it is surely inconceivable that anyone would have preferred, or placed greater confidence in, the alternative Government who might have been elected in 2019 to take us through the pandemic, Brexit and the war in Ukraine.

I will support tonight's motion because I have confidence in the programme of this Government, I have confidence in the Cabinet, I have confidence in the manifesto, and I have confidence that the Labour party remains unfit to govern.

7.29 pm

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): Well, I certainly do not have confidence in this cobbled-together, bottom-of-the-barrel Government. If we are supposed to be voting tonight on whether or not we have confidence in them, people out there will surely be asking if that is some sort of rhetorical question. When we add all the Opposition MPs, all the Ministers who resigned and all the Tory MPs who voted against the Prime Minister in their vote of confidence, I think we know where Parliament sits on this Prime Minister. It is not a positive report card in any way, shape or form.

Scotland never took this Prime Minister seriously for a minute. I am a testament to that: when it went to the country in 2019, Angus said, "No, we're not going to have a Tory MP. We're going to have an SNP MP in Westminster, speaking up for the values of fairness and opportunity and underscoring our mandate for an independence referendum"—and it will happen, I can assure you of that.

I will not miss this Prime Minister talking up the UK economy and gaslighting the people of these islands about it. He makes it sound like a land of milk and honey, but there is £2.2 trillion of sovereign debt in the UK's name. Let us be really clear: when this Government came to power, there was £0.8 trillion of sovereign debt. We are getting on for three times that figure, which took nearly 100 years to build up; this Government have nearly tripled it in 12 years. The Government have lost complete control of the economy. The term "working poor", let us not forget, should be a contradiction in terms, but it is not—not in the UK, where two people in one house can go out to work for 40 hours a week and still not have enough money to put food on the table.

The Prime Minister cloaks himself in the NHS in the most shameless, unedifying way possible—it is absolutely abhorrent. Then there are these phantom numbers about building new hospitals, and all the while people cannot get access to an ambulance or make their way up a waiting list for an operation.

The Prime Minister shamelessly exploits the UK armed forces, who should be above politics but have been dragged mercilessly into it by this Prime Minister

and his cronies in the Cabinet. Thousands have been cut from the Army on his watch. Nuclear weapons and their delivery systems are getting on for consuming a sixth of the armed forces budget. The Government have cut the E-7 Wedgetail programme to three. The Ajax £5.5 billion debacle has been rumbling on for the entire duration of this Government's term. Yet they are supposed to be the Government who stand up for the defence of these islands. It is a disgrace.

Worst of all, how dare they deny democracy in Scotland? The people of these islands in Scotland are not confused. They do not vote SNP out of some sort of habit or tradition; they vote SNP because they recognise our values in their values, and they do not recognise the values of the Conservative party, one iota.

Conservative Members are smirking and laughing, Madam Deputy Speaker. Well, laugh up your sleeve, I'll tell you that, because the people of Scotland are watching you. They are watching the disdain that you have for the decisions—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Too many times now, you have used the word "you". It is one thing to use it in a general sense, but you are implying things about me when you use it with the word "disdain".

Dave Doogan: I would not dream of doing so, Madam Deputy Speaker.

They are laughing up their sleeve. The people of Scotland are recognising that, and they do not like it one iota. We will have our say, and we will divest from this broken United Kingdom once and for all.

7.32 pm

Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): You have asked for a more moderate, positive tone, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I will endeavour to achieve that.

I have full confidence in this Government, for three reasons. First, no captain is more important than their team, and on the Government side of the House we have a very strong team. Secondly, the Government have delivered for the country as a whole; a lot of my colleagues have rehearsed the arguments about Brexit, covid, Ukraine and, indeed, net zero. Thirdly, this Government have delivered for my constituency of South Cambridgeshire. I was elected to represent the interests of my constituents, and the Government have had a real impact on their lives.

The Government have delivered for healthcare in South Cambridgeshire. We have the new Royal Papworth Hospital—a gleaming, state-of-the-art hospital, the most important heart and lung hospital in the UK. Just a couple of weeks ago, we opened the Heart and Lung Research Institute in South Cambridgeshire, with the biggest concentration of heart and lung researchers in the whole of Europe. More is coming: the Cambridge Cancer Research Hospital will be opened in 2025, and the Cambridge Children's Hospital—the first such facility in the east of England—will be opened shortly afterwards. It will be the first hospital of its type to combine the mental and physical wellbeing of children.

The Government have delivered for transport in South Cambridgeshire. Cambridge South station will be opening in 2025; it is going through the processes now. The A428

[Anthony Browne]

has started dualling, we have finished dualling the A14, and the Government have started looking at the Girton interchange.

The Government have delivered for the environment in South Cambridgeshire. One of the big issues for us is protecting the chalk streams. The Government have set up a chalk stream taskforce and passed new legislation on sewage discharge, which all the Lib Dem MPs voted against. Shame on them—they voted to dump sewage into chalk streams. We have brought in new laws on hare coursing, which is a really big issue in South Cambridgeshire. I had meetings with the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about it, and we finally brought in laws to stop that terrible crime.

Education spending is a really important issue in South Cambridgeshire. Historically, we had one of the lowest levels in the country, but we have had a 21.3% increase in real-terms education funding in Cambridgeshire since 2014. Just in the past two years, there has been a £453 per-pupil increase in education spending, and schools are starting to feel the difference. We need more, but it has already made a difference.

When we had the covid pandemic, the Government delivered support for businesses and individuals. Some 17,000 people were on furlough, with their jobs saved by the Government. There was more than £50 million in funding for businesses. A lot of my small businesses, especially in hospitality—pubs in particular—were saved by the intervention of this Government and the support they gave.

Research is a very big thing in South Cambridgeshire, where we have literally hundreds of research institutes and companies. The Government have increased funding for research and development to £22 billion a year by 2025, which is making a real difference for South Cambridgeshire.

Finally, we now have record numbers of police officers in Cambridgeshire: 1,671 as of March. We have never had more than we have at the moment.

For all these reasons, the Government are delivering for South Cambridgeshire. I have full confidence in this Government.

7.36 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): When I was door-knocking in Newcastle yesterday, a young mum of two told me that she had never found it so hard to manage. The cost of living crisis meant that she could barely afford to get her kids to school. The Government were doing nothing to help, and she and her friends had joked that they would have to start selling their kidneys. That is the gallows humour of a country in crisis; it does not belong in one of the richest nations on earth. I have no confidence in a Government who do not support working families in Newcastle.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. I would just like to add that the same issue can be found across the country, in every part of it including the south of England. She is making an excellent point, and I hope that the Government listen to her.

Chi Onwurah: I thank my hon. Friend for underlining that point—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. A lot of Members have put in to speak, and it is important that we get to them. If colleagues wish to take interventions, that is absolutely no problem, but I strongly encourage them to stay within four minutes.

Chi Onwurah: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I have no confidence in a Government who do not support working families in Newcastle. When people have no confidence in the Government, it drains their confidence in politics and democracy generally. After all that has tested our country—the financial crisis, austerity, Brexit, covid, inflation—it is more important than ever that we have confidence in our leadership. But I have no confidence in this Government, because the Prime Minister repeatedly told Parliament that there had been no parties, and he was then fined for partying.

I have no confidence in this Government, because as our Queen contemplated the loss of her life partner of 73 years, alone, Downing Street partied. I have no confidence in this Government because each and every Minister, whether they resigned or not, is tainted by the support that they gave to the disgraced but still presiding Prime Minister. I have no confidence in this Government, because the Prime Minister does not find formal sexual misconduct complaints against a serving Government Minister to be memorable.

I have no confidence in this Government, because when the Minister for Brexit Opportunities and Government Efficiency was asked to justify slashing 91,000 civil servants, he said that technology would enable them to do more with less. The right hon. Member for the middle ages agreed only reluctantly to a digital Parliament and is happy to give the impression that the printing press is a recent and debatable innovation. I have no confidence in the Government, because when giving a valedictory assessment of his meteoric rise and fall, the expensively Eton and Oxford-educated Prime Minister said “them’s the breaks”.

I have no confidence in this Government because they have decided to do without a science Minister, even as they say that science is essential to our economic recovery. I have no confidence in this Government because, as our nation faces a lethal heatwave—one so severe that the rail links between Westminster and my constituency have been severed, and the NHS is braced for a wave of heatstroke victims—the Prime Minister prefers to play “Top Gun” rather than turning up for Cobra meetings. I have no confidence in this Government because the candidates to replace the disgraced Prime Minister are so mired in mud-slinging that they barely mention health, education, jobs or the environment, and have now cancelled further debates because they are so embarrassing. I have no confidence in this Government because they appear to be in an arms race to slash taxes, cut the state, and “postpone”, or abandon, our commitment to net zero carbon emissions.

As we swelter in this country, we should remember that the whole of Europe is less than two thirds the size of the Sahara desert. If we do not meet the climate challenge, the Sahara is coming for us. If the Government think that net zero commitments are “expensive”, they should try costing the retrofitting of air conditioning in

every home and school and every other building in the country. That will be but a small part of what it will cost us.

I have no confidence in this Government because they have no ideas and no convictions. They are a zombie Government; worse, they are a vampire Government, effectively dead but still continuing to suck the lifeblood from my constituents. Only a Labour Government can provide the fresh start that we deserve.

7.41 pm

Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con): May I begin by saying that my colleagues on the Government Benches look very much alive to me?

Looking back over the last two and a half years, I think we can say with confidence that the Government have done a lot of things well. We left the EU when so many said that that was not possible. Our covid response has been one of the best in the world. The furlough scheme, delivered at extraordinary speed, prevented the horror of mass unemployment. Early decisions taken on vaccine procurement saved countless lives, and enabled the UK to leave lockdown sooner than almost any comparable nation. On Ukraine, this Government and our Prime Minister have led from the front, not only in terms of sanctions but in providing military and moral support.

In my constituency, the Government are delivering on our manifesto promises to level up. The towns fund will see £24 million invested in Stocksbridge and Deepcar. Government grants have rescued cultural assets such as the Paramount cinema. A new “fibre in the water” project in Penistone offers the possibility of rolling out high-speed broadband to rural homes. The Prime Minister’s personal intervention on behalf of the steel industry, in particular to keep the steel safeguards, has been a boost for local industry and an important demonstration of this Government’s commitment to areas that were once the powerhouse of this country, and can be again.

No Administration is perfect, and ours has made its fair share of mistakes, but this Government have done many things, nationally and locally, to inspire confidence. Of course, I speak in the context of huge uncertainty at the heart of Government. The Prime Minister has resigned—I have lost track of who has not resigned—and we are in the middle of the process of choosing a new leader. The events of the last six months will be chewed over relentlessly in the coming years, but let us not forget that, despite the Prime Minister’s mistakes and misjudgments, 14 million people voted for our party under his leadership, securing the biggest Conservative majority for three decades. Unlike so many other politicians, my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) has the ability to inspire, to uplift, and to connect with those who feel that the British establishment does not represent them, their communities or their values.

After 2016, the reputation of Parliament suffered, as ordinary people looked on while “the establishment”—as they saw it—sought to overturn the biggest popular mandate of all time. My concern is that when a coalition of the media, the Opposition and, sadly, some within our party work relentlessly—and, now, ultimately successfully—to destabilise a Prime Minister with such

an extraordinary democratic mandate, we may once more be accused of trying to thwart the democratic will of the people.

As we on these Benches are engaged in the process of choosing our next leader, let us consider this. No one is without fault. No one is without a past. No one who has the skills, experience and charisma to lead our great nation will never make a mistake. No one has never lied. We have been told that the Prime Minister had to go because of his lack of integrity and a tendency to change his mind. The previous Prime Minister had to go because she had too much integrity and refused to change her mind. Perhaps, like Goldilocks, we will now find our “just right”. But our party is a broad church, and we have a broad range of candidates vying to lead it. Whoever wins, we must unite behind his or her leadership, and stand firm against attempts to throw us off course. Perhaps the question is not “Who is ready to lead?”, but “Are we ready to be led?”

So yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, I do have confidence in this Government. I have confidence in the British people who put this Government in place, and I wish the new Prime Minister—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. The hon. Lady’s time is up. I call Hannah Bardell.

7.45 pm

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

“O wad some Power the giftie gie us

To see oursels as ithers see us!”

The words of the great Scots poet Rabbie Burns are as resonant now as they were when he wrote them, because if we cannot, as politicians, see ourselves as others see us, we have little hope of governing responsibly or with credibility. I suspect that if the Prime Minister and some others on the Conservative Benches, with their delusions of grandeur, could see themselves as people in my constituency—and in all our constituencies—see them, and could see the damage that their Government have done to those people, they would be, and should be, horrified.

That is the problem with this Government and this Prime Minister. Some have become so used to the privileges, the entitlement and the trappings of government that they have become utterly insulated from reality. Our citizens have the right not to have confidence in this Government, this political system and these political institutions at Westminster, because—as this Government and this Prime Minister have shown—they are utterly broken.

We should not be surprised that we have ended up with a Prime Minister who has gone from one elitist institution to another, from Eton to Oxbridge to the House of Commons. In fact, 50% of Conservatives were privately educated. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) wants to intervene, he is welcome to do so.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con) *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Okay, but remember what I said earlier about Members who were trying to catch my eye and chose to intervene—down the list.

Jonathan Gullis: The hon. Lady is casting aspersions against people who attended private school. I find it quite disrespectful that my mother and father, who chose to send me to that school and to use their hard-earned money to give me the best start in life—which they unfortunately did not receive themselves—should be insulted in this way.

Hannah Bardell: I think that there is a basic reality here. In a tweet, the academic Taj Ali pointed out that

“Just 7% of Brits are privately educated...43% of the...most influential news editors, 44% of newspaper columnists...are privately educated. A two-tier education system creates a two-tier society.”

That is the point I am making. We have a Prime Minister who is completely divorced from reality. The current leadership race and its navel-gazing narcissism have given us a window into that elitism and privilege. Among the contenders is one of the richest men in the UK, who by his own admission knows literally no one who is working class. Those people left the Government only when they realised that their own reputations would be tainted. Whether it is the Windrush scandal or the Post Office Horizon crisis, there is a litany of chaos behind this Government.

I have no confidence in this Government because they have failed to build proper social housing, failed to fund a health service that was already on its knees before the pandemic, and failed to protect the most vulnerable in our society. Instead, they have cut the financial lifelines of the poorest and most vulnerable, and have sought to balance the books on their backs while vilifying them.

The SNP Government in Scotland are sick to the back teeth of cleaning up the mess of this Conservative Government, and using our precious resources, with one financial hand tied behind our back, to clean up that mess. Mitigating the bedroom tax and lifting the poorest and most marginalised out of poverty without the full basket of financial powers is hugely challenging, but we do it because we understand what it means to govern in everyone's interest.

This Tory Government have failed because they have failed to quell the river of dirty Russian money flowing through their financial system. I was on the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Bill Committee with my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) and I saw this Government turn their back on the opportunity to stem the corruption and flow of dirty money. While we are grateful for what they have done in Ukraine, it is an absolute disgrace that this Prime Minister, this Government and previous Prime Ministers did so little.

I have no faith in this Government because they have presided over a right-wing Brexit that has torn our social and economic fabric apart. We understand the notion of credibility. The sooner Scotland can get independence, the sooner Scotland can flourish and the rest of the UK can, I hope, have its own democratic enlightenment and be free from the chaos and corruption that this Westminster system of Government holds.

I have no confidence in this Government because I am sick and tired of hearing Conservative Members talking on television about how, because they had personal experience of those who lost loved ones during the pandemic, we somehow do not have the right to challenge the fact that their Prime Minister partied his way through it. The reality is—[*Interruption.*] Hon. Members might shake their heads, but I had to stand at the deathbed of one of my team, a dear friend, through a window in her hospice because I was not allowed to cuddle her, while their Prime Minister partied his way through it. And there he is, still sitting in power—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I call James Daly.

7.51 pm

James Daly (Bury North) (Con): There have been some serious contributions today, and one of them has been quite enlightening. I have often wondered what people see in the Scottish National party Government—a Government that have trashed the economy, trashed the education system, trashed the health system—

Hon. Members: No!

James Daly: They have bankrupted it, and they have one of the worst drug problems in the west. They are the absolute definition of incompetence—[*Interruption.*] Absolutely not! No more nonsense about the rubbish we have just heard. This is a motion of confidence, and to hear from a party with a record of utter, dismal failure that they intend to criticise this Government is truly laughable.

Can I turn to Greater Manchester—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I cannot hear.

James Daly: Let us turn to the record. We have covered the SNP's record, so let us see the record of the Labour party in Greater Manchester that my constituents are faced with. With that great political titan, the Mayor of Greater Manchester, what have we had? We have the Greater Manchester police, for which he is the police and crime commissioner, in special measures. We have had the iOPS computer system, which has cost about £800 million—completely wasted. We have mental health services, all under the control of Andy Burnham in Greater Manchester, in special measures. What a complete and utter disaster. The cherry on the cake was when he attempted to impose upon people in greater Manchester the world's biggest green air charging zone. Andy Burnham's big idea was to charge my constituents anywhere between £10 and £60 for having the temerity to go to work. That is what they are faced with.

The great record of the Labour-controlled council in Bury comes down to this. I can only go through the litany of failure. In the *Bury Times* today, we see that children's mental health services in Bury are on their knees because of our Labour-controlled council. The headline in the paper says that it will take 10 years for Labour-controlled Bury Council to get children's services back to even a “good” rating. This is under a Labour council. The record of the Opposition parties on how they have interacted with our constituents as governing bodies throughout this country is absolutely abysmal.

I wish the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) was still here, because she missed something out when we were talking about rape and serious sexual offending, which has an incredibly serious record. What she never touches on is the abysmal record of the Leader of the Opposition as Director of Public Prosecutions. That is something Labour Members quite rightly never talk about—[*Interruption.*] Absolutely, and they throw allegations out regarding this Government's record.

So, what do we have? My Government have spent £10 million on building a new science, technology, engineering and maths high-skill centre in Bury. They have saved Gigg Lane and given my constituents back their 130-year-old football club. They have invested £80 million in transport infrastructure and provided £20 million for a levelling up bid for Bury town centre. Mysteriously, the hon. Member for Bury South (Christian Wakeford) is not here. I know he would want to—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Has the hon. Gentleman notified the hon. Member for Bury South that he is going to mention him?

James Daly: I will withdraw that, Madam Deputy Speaker. All I will say is that within the Metropolitan Borough of Bury we have another levelling-up fund bid in for the people of Radcliffe, a new school coming for the people of Radcliffe and the SEND school providing support services for some of the most vulnerable people in my communities. This is a Government to be proud of and a record to be proud of.

7.55 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr, Madam Dirprwy Lefarydd.

The Prime Minister's bluster and banter and his stock-in-trade mockery ended today, and they were little more than a pointy finger rhetorical raspberry, not just to us but to everyone who ever made the mistake of holding him to his word and believing what he told them. He is a law-breaking Prime Minister who cannot be permitted to remain in office, even as a caretaker. His dishonesty and abuse of power have together only served to erode trust in politics and our institutions. The House will not be surprised to hear that my party does not have confidence in this Prime Minister or his Government.

To come back to the question of eroding trust, this is why I introduced a private Member's Bill that will make it an offence for politicians knowingly to lie. They will be given every opportunity to correct the record, but they will be held to account in law so that they use words—our stock in trade—genuinely and honestly to the best of their ability. I have also written to the Conservative leadership candidates inviting them to support the Bill, because they have made truth and honesty core tenets of their campaigns as they attempt to separate themselves from the outgoing Prime Minister, whom they all of course supported. The Bill seeks to ensure that those who deliberately lie are held to account, but also to send a signal that lying and dishonesty in a modern democracy are a blight that must be eradicated.

My party's lack of confidence goes beyond this Government, besmirched as they are by Westminster scandal. It is driven by the wider deep-rooted problems

of the Union. We distrust the Union and lack confidence in the Union. The UK is foundering in deep stagnation from years of Tory austerity and a hard Tory Brexit that is hobbling our economy. It is no wonder that Poland is set to become richer than Britain in 12 years' time on current growth rates. It will not be ordinary working families who feel the benefit of the tiny growth that is predicted. The TUC estimates that the UK will see the worst wage squeeze of all the G7 economies, with real average wages falling by £1,750 between 2022 and 2023.

In Wales, we seek the macroeconomic tools but continue to be denied the bare necessities to fix Westminster's chronic tolerance of geographical inequalities. When we look at the place of Wales within the UK, we can see that things are very bad. Since 1998, relative productivity in Wales has hovered between 80% and 85% of the UK level. Once London's disproportionate weight is accounted for, the figure is still only 90%. Wales has been given the tools to juggle poverty, not to condemn poverty to history. How can we have confidence in a Government and system that perpetuate such gross inequalities? The current UK Government talk of levelling up, but instead of presenting a comprehensive plan for redistributing wealth, they have forced councils to fight over dwindling pots of money.

Today, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has shown that this Government's levelling up agenda does not work for Wales. It says that their ideological insistence on excluding the Welsh Government from decision making has led to worse outcomes for Wales. Despite this, the Conservative leader in Wales recently called for no further powers to be devolved and said that consequential funding for HS2 should—wait for it—be controlled by the UK rather than the Welsh Government. This is a staggering insult to our democracy. In conclusion, we have no confidence in the current Government and we have no confidence in any Westminster Government.

7.59 pm

Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con): It will not surprise hon. Members that I have confidence in this Government.

I will talk first about some of the policies this Government have pursued. It would be very easy for me to talk about Brexit and how this Government managed to pass it through the dreadful impasse and political paralysis of the last Parliament. Opposition Members did everything they could to block Brexit, but this Government got it done.

It would be quite easy for me to talk about the great effort that led to jabs going into people's arms and our country opening up, releasing our freedoms once again. I could talk about the millions of people supported through the furlough scheme. It would be easy for me to pour scorn on the political pygmies on social media who say that, somehow, Britain's place in the world is diminished as a result of Brexit. We need only look at the streets of Kyiv to see that is just not the case.

But what this Government should be congratulated for is providing hope to the 14 million people who voted for the Conservatives, many for the first time, and to the many people who did not vote for us. Many of them were voting for the hope that this Government would break with an agenda that had been pursued for decades, probably starting with the Blair Government. It is a big-city, London agenda that is not for places like

[Paul Bristow]

Peterborough: a Britain attached to the EU, dependent on mass migration and cheap labour, in which we were happy to write off millions of young people without a job because we could easily import labour from elsewhere. It is very much a liberal agenda that was happy to pour scorn on and laugh at traditional values, national identity, strong communities and strong families.

We again saw scorn being poured on these people during the jubilee. The agenda is one of big business and big cities, but little people and little places like Peterborough were left behind with low-paid jobs, suppressed wages, a sky-high welfare bill, regional inequalities, the negative effects of mass migration—as well as the positives—and high rates of family breakdown and alcohol and drug abuse.

To many people, including many Opposition Members, these people do not matter. They are denounced as bigots, gammons, Karens and many other vulgar terms when they voice their objection to this agenda. That is what this Government are trying to address in creating a high-wage, high-skill economy, and in levelling up and valuing places like Peterborough.

In Peterborough we have built a new university, with students starting in September. We have £23 million for towns fund regeneration and investment. We have new police officers, more money for theatres and more money for our schools. I implore Members on both sides of the House to understand that, when they take their nose away from SW1 and away from their Twitter feed, they will find that real people still support the Prime Minister. [Interruption.] Okay, I will read out a quote. I do not have time to go through all of them:

“The current government have best dealt with the pandemic, given circumstances, and also delivered Brexit. It is the only government that can deliver today, tomorrow and future!”

These are the ordinary people of Peterborough. [Interruption.] Members should take their nose away from their Twitter account and realise that the Prime Minister is still very popular. He is a greater man than many of his critics, and it is a sad day to see him go. I still have confidence in this Government.

8.3 pm

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): This place is always interesting, but it has been particularly interesting to listen to all the Conservative Members standing up, time and again, to suggest they will support this motion. They do not even need to listen to us; they need only tune in to the next leadership debate to hear their own candidates talk about the litany of abysmal failures overseen by this Government over the past 12 years. We will not let the Conservative leadership candidates wipe the slate clean after 12 years of Conservative rule. They walked through the Lobby to vote for 15 tax rises, against hungry children getting free school meals and against the windfall tax on the multibillion-pound profits of oil companies, before they adopted Labour's policy and tried to give it a new name.

There is loads I could mention. People forget that all the leadership candidates supported the Prime Minister through partygate, the Owen Paterson crisis and the dodgy covid contracts—the list is longer than my arm. The failures of this Conservative Government led to record NHS waiting lists and record delays in A&E,

delays at the Passport Office, delays in our courts, delays in prosecuting rapists and murderers, delays in issuing driving licences and delays at our airports. There is record neglect in the cities of the north of England such as Bradford, where we have had years of austerity, years of underfunding and years of false promises, including on Northern Powerhouse Rail, none of which have come to fruition.

This Government have completely wrecked this country's industries—that is their record. We have a skills crisis in this country. There is a crisis with our criminal barristers that is leading to further delays in our courts, a crisis in our care sector, a crisis with HGV drivers, a crisis with train drivers, a crisis with airport workers, a crisis with school teachers and a crisis looming in the civil service. Do Conservative Members really want to stand by this record?

I do not know where to begin on the record of successive Conservative Governments on engagement with Muslim communities. When I saw the front page of the *Daily Mail* last night and heard about the so-called “dodgy judgment” of the Minister for Trade Policy, the right hon. Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt), in meeting a “controversial” Muslim group, I did not expect the meeting to be with a mainstream Muslim organisation that Members on both sides of the House meet on a regular basis.

The Muslim Council of Britain is a mainstream Muslim organisation backed by mainstream British Muslim mosques, organisations and institutions. Yesterday, No. 10's long-held secret boycott of a mainstream Muslim group was finally admitted on the front page of a tabloid newspaper. This Government's record is that the Prime Minister's comments led to a 375% increase in attacks on Muslim women. Previous Conservative Governments refused to form a working definition of Islamophobia, and then they refused to adopt the definition used by the all-party parliamentary group on British Muslims. They then promised to make a definition of their own, before appointing and then unappointing their own adviser. Almost a decade later, hate crime against Muslims is rising, and what do we have from this Government? Absolutely nothing but a mainstream Muslim organisation boycotted by No. 10.

I am sorry to tell this Conservative Government that the days are gone when they could prop up Muslim organisations with one or two members, funded and supported for the purposes of the Government's policy agenda. Those days are over. Mainstream British Muslims sit in Parliament and represent our nations in sport. We are the doctors and nurses in our hospitals, and we are the teachers who teach our children and future leaders. We are equally British and must equally be heard. The record of this Government is nothing to be celebrated, and those who vote for this confidence motion are equally responsible because they are endorsing the Government's actions.

8.7 pm

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): One might think that Her Majesty's Opposition had better things to do than waste valuable parliamentary time, and one might have thought they would respect parliamentary conventions in the preparation of a motion of confidence, but they failed in doing that, too. No matter, as this

Government have again shown them how it is done, hence this debate. Here we are, playing these silly games while we have a war on our hands and several issues to deal with at home and overseas. *[Interruption.]* We are having this debate because of parliamentary convention, and this is the way to do it.

Much has been said about leadership in recent days, weeks and months, but no leadership has been found emanating from the Opposition, just the usual stone throwing from a party that is so out of touch with the people of this country that it felt its motion—the one that needed to be corrected—was the best way to spend valuable time.

Let us talk about leadership. This Government responded to covid by leading the western hemisphere's response. Brexit, which Opposition Members all voted against, allowed us to fund and procure a vaccine, and to get it into people's arms faster than pretty much anywhere else on the planet, saving lives quicker than anywhere else on the planet. What did Labour do? It opposed procurement and then criticised every move, with Captain Hindsight at the helm.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Marco Longhi: No.

Sarah Owen: That's leadership.

Marco Longhi: Well, this is great leadership—just listen to this. To be fair, Labour did take a stance on one thing. Labour would have had us in lockdown throughout the whole of Christmas and beyond, destroying more jobs, destroying more businesses and harming lives. That is out there for everybody to see; everybody knows.

The Ukraine—

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): Ukraine, not “the Ukraine”.

Marco Longhi: Ukraine. I stand corrected. Absolutely. On Ukraine, this Prime Minister and our country are the ones revered most by the Ukrainian politicians and people, and hated most by Putin. That does not happen by chance; it requires leadership. So what have Labour Members to say about defence? They say, “Defund it.” That is what they have always wanted. *[Interruption.]* They have always wanted to defund it. If the Leader of the Opposition had been successful in electing the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), we all know that we would now be without a nuclear arsenal.

Those are the two huge issues confronted head-on by this Government, in addition to delivering the programme set out in the 2019 manifesto—one that is bringing real change in my constituency. So let us have this vote tonight and let us send a message out to the nation about what the Labour party is all about. I will not say “what the Labour party stands for”, because I do not think anybody really knows.

8.11 pm

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): The leadership of this self-obsessed and profoundly damaging Prime Minister is finally coming to its end, but this charade went on for far too long. He should have gone

over his mishandling over the pandemic. He should have gone over the lobbying scandal that he created. And he should have gone because he partied when people died and then, as we put it in this place, “misled” this House. Now he is going, but only because he has been forced out by his Ministers, because they have finally concluded that he will cost them more votes than he wins. So they do not deserve any credit. They knew who he was when they voted for him, they propped him up through every scandal and, together, they have stripped away our rights and made the people of this country poorer.

While the news focuses on the Tory party implosion, supermarkets are adding security tags to cheese, butter and baby formula; we have the highest inflation for 40 years; electricity is fast becoming a luxury good; and millions are no longer paid enough to put food on the table. This hunger, poverty and inequality is all a political choice, and without action people will die. People, particularly disabled people, have already died because of this Government and 12 years of brutal cuts. We need a Government who will tackle the cost of living crisis, but instead we have one who are barely functioning, while the squatter in No. 10 is throwing parties in Chequers.

If anyone had any hope that the next Tory leader would prioritise the cost of living crisis, the contest so far has completely dispelled that. Instead of setting out the bold measures they would take to help working-class people, the candidates to become Prime Minister are obsessed with attacking trans people and cutting corporation tax. So no, I do not have confidence in this Government to tackle the worst drop in living standards since 1956. I do not have confidence in this Government to prevent millions from being forced to choose between heating and eating this winter. And I do not have confidence in this Government, full stop. So on behalf of my constituents who lost loved ones to the pandemic due to this Government's actions, on behalf of the families I meet who are left with no choice but to turn to food banks, and on behalf of every person in this country who deserves better than a low-pay, no-safety-net safety created by 12 years of Conservative rule, I will be voting no confidence in this Government.

8.13 pm

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): I am proud to stand up on behalf of the people of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke and express confidence in this Conservative Government. Why is that? It is not just because the 73% who voted to leave the European Union finally had their wishes commanded, despite the Brexit-blockers on the Opposition Benches continually trying to find every way to dodge delivering the mandate those people gave. It is not just because of the fantastic furlough scheme, which meant that people kept their jobs during the biggest global pandemic in 100 years. And it is not just because we had the fastest vaccine roll-out. It is because of what we see if we look at the local story.

In Stoke-on-Trent, Kidsgrove and Talke, we have £56 million of levelling-up fund money, which is bringing masses of regeneration and unlocking hundreds of millions more in private sector investment. We are seeing heritage buildings such as Tunstall library and baths regenerated for future generations, adding to the Conservative-led

[Jonathan Gullis]

council's regeneration and revitalisation of Tunstall town hall, which the Labour party was all too happy to allow to sit and rot for 30 years. In addition, we have the £17.6 million Kidsgrove town deal, which is meaning that we are bringing up to 1,700 new jobs to Chatterley Valley West, reinvesting in our high streets in the town of Kidsgrove and making sure we reopen Kidsgrove sports centre, which was shut because the Labour party, which ran the council at the time, could not be bothered to send a single pound coin to save it. We are refurbishing and reopening it, and letting a local community group run it, because they are local people who champion that cause.

On top of that, we have brought in 500 new jobs through the Home Office coming to our great city; we have £29 million from the transforming cities fund; and we have £31.7 million from Bus Back Better, which will see bus fares cut by 33% with the new £3.50 a day flat fare, create new routes and make sure that people can get around and travel—one third of people in the city do not have access to a motor vehicle. We also have the money to look at opening the Stoke to Leek line.

The litany of success goes on and on and on. We have the £7.5 million for Middlehurst School to become a new special educational needs and disability school, there are the family hubs that we successfully got, and there will be fantastic investment going forward.

Let us also have a look at Labour's dismal, abysmal and unforgivable local record. Let us not forget that it was a Labour council that spent £60 million on white elephant projects like a new council office, rather than investing in Burslem indoor market, the Wedgwood Institute and the Queen's Theatre in the mother town of Burslem, which would have brought regeneration to that fantastic town of our city of Stoke-on-Trent.

Let us look at the fact that jobs were leaving the ceramics sector and going overseas to China, and the Labour party did absolutely nothing to prevent it. Let us have a look at the fact that Labour went on strike for more than 70 years, withdrawing their labour and failing to represent the people on Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke because they believe that they have some God-given right to have that seat and the people should get in line. They sneer, snarl and they arrogantly look down and talk down to the people. That is that attitude the Labour party has always had towards the working people of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke.

Labour Members believe that borders are racist and anyone who wants border control is a bigot, which is why, despite the fact that we on this side of the House support the Rwanda deal, those in the party opposite snarl at it. That is why when I introduced the Desecration of War Memorials Bill, the party opposite said, "Oh, it is statues you're trying to protect." No, it is war memorials to our glorious dead. It is about time the Labour party stood up for our flag and for our country.

I introduced a new law to increase the fines on rogue and absent landlords who allow our high streets and our heritage to rot. At the last minute, my Labour predecessor was standing with a placard pretending to care, despite having had four and a half years to do something about it. Within two years I changed the law and we are taking those rogue and absent landlords to court. It was the Labour party that was found to be

institutionally antisemitic and failed to defend my predecessor, despite the abuse she got. The Labour party—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I call Alex Cunningham.

8.17 pm

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): What a rant, Mr Deputy Speaker. We all know that the Prime Minister is unfit for office, but rather than remove him, Tory MPs will tonight be whipped to keep an incompetent, lawbreaker in power, a person who has a problem with the truth.

I do not have confidence in this Government for many reasons, but top of the list is the fact that the percentage of people living in poverty in the Tees Valley, and the percentage of children living in poverty there, has soared to more than 40% in the past 12 years. That is the highest level in the country. The Prime Minister, his former Chancellor and his rotten Government should be thoroughly ashamed. Too many children in the Tees Valley, and many more across the north-east, go to school hungry, and many do not know whether there will be much to eat when they get home at night. Who knows what many of them will do during the extended school holiday period?

Earlier this year, while being grilled by the Liaison Committee, the Prime Minister accepted that it is not possible to level up the country without reducing the number of children in poverty. When challenged on why there was not a single mention of child poverty in more than 300 pages of the levelling-up White Paper, he suggested that that was the result of a "purely formal accident". What the devil does that mean? Whether accidental or deliberate, this was a staggering and unforgivable oversight on the Government's part. Last week, I raised the issue of absolute poverty levels with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, but she said that she did not recognise the figures I had quoted. They were her own Department's statistics. Not only do they not care, but they do not even know their own facts.

Poverty is widely acknowledged to be the leading driver of health, educational and economic inequalities between children growing up in areas such as the north-east and their counterparts in the rest of the country. Research published by End Child Poverty alongside the North East Child Poverty Commission has found that two in five babies, children and young people across our region are growing up poor and having their life chances and opportunities limited as a result. That is as a result of a Conservative Government. This abject failure of children and young people in Tees Valley and the wider north-east will be one of the defining legacies of this Prime Minister, and of anyone who has supported this Government.

Why should any child or young person in the Tees Valley have confidence in the Government when the intolerably high rates of child poverty in our area have somehow been forgotten in the Prime Minister's flagship policy? Why should anyone have confidence in any of the candidates vying to be the next Prime Minister when not one of them has even acknowledged this fundamental issue, never mind set out any plan to try to tackle it? When one of them, the former Chancellor, showed up in Redcar on Friday in his designer shoes,

which cost several times more than most families have to spend on food and other essentials in a month, he had nothing to say about child poverty—nothing.

We have so much talent and potential across the Tees Valley, yet so much of it is wasted as poverty and ill health hold our young people and our population back. Those children and their families need decisive action and a comprehensive joined-up plan to tackle child poverty now, not vague promises of being levelled up in eight years' time. They need a Government who are willing to put tackling child poverty at the front and centre of their agenda, who are committed to supporting them to thrive and fulfil their potential, not a Government who forget that they even exist.

8.21 pm

Anna Firth (Southend West) (Con): On behalf of the city of Southend, I absolutely have confidence in Her Majesty's Government. My wonderful constituency of Southend West is undeniably healthier, wealthier and especially safer.

Labour Members seem to conveniently forget not only that the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn)—the person they would have put into Downing Street—would have plunged us into the dark days of the 1970s, at the mercy of the militant unions, but that he and eight other Labour Front Benchers would have voted to get rid of our independent nuclear deterrent, fundamentally undermining our national security. That is why the Conservatives won the election so resoundingly three years ago. The British people chose democracy, freedom, security and opportunity over socialism, antisemitism, losing our nuclear deterrent and returning to the European Union.

We have not squandered the 80-seat majority that the British people entrusted to us. Yes, the past three years have been difficult.

Sarah Owen: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Anna Firth: I will not, because of the time. We have had to deal with covid, a global energy crisis and Russia's illegal, barbaric invasion of Ukraine, yet we have never once lost sight of our core manifesto promise. It is this Government who got Brexit done—not finished, but done, none the less. It is because of Brexit that we were able to develop the world's first approved vaccine, followed by the fastest vaccine roll-out in Europe, as has been highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Gareth Bacon).

Hannah Bardell: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Anna Firth: No, because of the time. The speed and take-up of our vaccine programme allowed us to lift our restrictions quicker than any other country in Europe, restoring freedom to people and benefiting our economy. This has been possible only because of this Conservative Government and because of Brexit, which was totally opposed by the Labour party.

If the Labour party had been in charge, more people would have died while we waited for the EU's vaccines. We would have been in lockdown for longer, damaging not just our economy but people's mental health. Also, the NHS would not have been so well funded and would have been less able to cope with covid when it happened—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Come on. Stop the shouting, please. We do not need it. Let everybody make their contribution in silence, please.

Anna Firth: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is a fact that over the past 12 years of Conservative rule, NHS funding has been increased by 42% in real terms. We are now spending £177 billion on our health service. We will be spending an additional £22 billion per year by the end of this Conservative-led Parliament—the highest amount spent on the NHS by any Government ever. Let us not forget that every single one of those funding increases was opposed by the Labour party. Only recently, it voted against providing our NHS with an additional £36 billion of funding—money that is now being used to treat our most sick and vulnerable people.

The Conservative Government have also made us feel safer. Thanks to 12 years of Conservative Government, Britain as a whole, and Southend West in particular, is healthier, wealthier and especially safer.

8.25 pm

Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): To say that I have no confidence in this Government or Prime Minister must be the greatest understatement ever heard in this Chamber, particularly so when we consider his horrendous tenure. Confidence is not something that should be blindly given; like respect, it is something that must be earned.

How can we have confidence in or respect for a Government still headed by a Prime Minister who has shamed the office he holds? He has no respect us—Scotland's representatives in this place—and we have no confidence in him or his Government. How can we have confidence in a Government and Prime Minister who have consistently—allegedly—lied to or misled this House? He has no respect for us, and we have no confidence in him or his Government. Who can have confidence in a Prime Minister who has been charged and fined by the police for breaking the very rules that he implemented during the pandemic? He has no respect for us, and we have no confidence in him. How can we have confidence in a Prime Minister and Government who have not only presided over sleaze and scandal, but decided to cover for it and even promote to Government positions those at the very heart of them? We have no respect for or confidence in this Government.

Even those in the Prime Minister's own party now shudder at the thought of being associated with him, as we have seen in the Tory leadership race. Is that any wonder, given that this a Prime Minister who, despite all the scandal, the desecration of office and the criminality, is still clinging on? Even after all the back stabs and head shots by his so-called allies, he still will not go. He is now a zombie Prime Minister. And why? Not for the sake of continuity, stability or Ukraine, but so he can avoid having to find a new venue for a wedding reception. It is laughable, but it is not funny. We are being laughed at by the entire global community. We no longer have any confidence in or respect for this Government.

The people of Scotland had this Prime Minister's card marked from the outset, and, regardless of who comes after him, we also know that Scotland's interest will not be high on their agenda when they take up office in No.10. Albert Einstein was still alive the last

[Steven Bonnar]

time Scotland voted Tory, but we do not need to be a genius to work out where Scotland puts her confidence when she goes to the ballot box. It is not here in Westminster, and it is not in any Tory Government. The people place their confidence and trust in the Scottish Government and in the SNP—the party that has been re-elected consistently by the majority of people in Scotland since 2007, the party that is in administration of the majority of the local authorities across Scotland, and the party that has the greatest number of elected parliamentarians in Westminster and in Holyrood. Regardless of the voting franchise, regardless of the political office, the people of Scotland speak clearly. They place their confidence in Scotland's national party and in the party of Scottish independence.

Let us not kid ourselves: the next Prime Minister will not be any different from any of the others. In the eyes of most Scots, a Tory is a Tory. If it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck, it is a duck. The ducklings on the Tory Back Benches all quacked in agreement and, crucially, in defence of everything that the soon-to-be ex-Prime Minister did. When he played fast and loose with the truth, they supported him. When he broke the law, they quacked their support for him. And they will do the same again for the next one. Scotland has no confidence in them and we have no confidence in this Government.

On behalf of the good people—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I call Shaun Bailey.

8.29 pm

Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con): The past few hours has been—well—an experience, hasn't it really?

There are two elements to a confidence motion. The first is a lack of confidence in the Government, and the second is the alternative to that Government. I have lived under that alternative, because I live in Sandwell—Labour-controlled Sandwell, socialist Sandwell. Let us take a journey to what life would be like under the Labour party: special educational needs and disability contracts doled out to their mates; dodgy land deals; backhanders to their mates, because they feel like it; dodgy contracts for the council; and no scrutiny. [Interruption.] The hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) does her usual thing. She does not have anything to say, but she chunters from a sedentary position. She failed in Hastings before she went to Luton, because, let us face it, they did not like her there.

The truth of the matter is that I have seen that alternative and it terrifies me. What worries me even more is that Labour Members go along with it. They are all complicit in that corruption in Sandwell, because it is their party that sits there and does it. It is their party that denied the need for commissioners to go in. We now have commissioners controlling that council. It is those young people with special educational needs who are put at risk by them because they failed to do a proper procurement on those contracts. When Labour Members talk about standards in public life, I sit here and I laugh, because it reeks of double standards.

Geraint Davies: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member to accuse Opposition Members who have no connection to the

council that he is talking about? He is abusing his privilege to talk about corruption and then pointing at us and saying that it is our fault. It is completely out of order.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I would have brought Mr Bailey up. I am listening very carefully to what is being said. It would help if people did not chunter so that I can hear both sides clearly.

Shaun Bailey: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. As a point of clarity, my understanding is that they are all members of the Labour party. It is the Labour party that controlled that local authority. They are all comrades in arms together. Labour Members could have intervened at any point. They promised that they would get grip on this.

Sarah Owen: Will the hon. Member give way?

Shaun Bailey: No, I will not.

Labour promised that it would get a grip on this, and it did not. So when Labour Members sit there and talk about standards in public life, I tell them to come to Sandwell. Come to Sandwell. If Members want to see the horror that is the alternative, we can show them.

Jonathan Gullis: It will not shock my hon. Friend to hear Members of the Labour party shouting down the fine people of Sandwell and Tipton just as they shout down the people of Kidsgrove, Talke, Newchapel and Stoke-on-Trent North. That is why my hon. Friend will share with us why Labour is going backwards and Conservatives are gaining in his local council as well as in Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council—the No.1 target in the west midlands in May, which Labour lost.

Shaun Bailey: I am grateful to my hon. Friend because he is right: we are scalping Labour councillors all over the place. As one lady put it to me on the doorstep during the local elections, "I have been Labour all my life. I am Labour through and through, but I cannot vote for that shower." The truth of the matter is that, when we look at the alternative, it is horrific.

I also want to touch on what this Government have done. What we have is £22.5 million possibly coming into Tipton. We have seen £25 million for Birchley Island in Oldbury dealing with our congestion and transport issues. We have seen £50,000 for the horrendous route between Burnt Tree and Dudley Port, which will mean that, finally, we can start dealing with those horrendous congestion issues and those road safety issues, which is vital to keep people safe. I know from my constituents that they are sometimes spending 45 minutes on our roads, and that messes with their businesses and messes with their standard of life because of how long it is taking them to commute to work and the difficulty that it presents them. It is this Government who have put that money into Sandwell.

It is quite interesting, Mr Deputy Speaker, because I will quite often go to Ministers—my hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench—and say, "Look, we need money. We need investment. This is what we want." They then say to me, "Well, the problem is, Shaun, your local authority has not applied for it." Then I go to the local authority and say, "What plans do we have on the

shelf?" I am referring in particular to the levelling up fund. I then get told, "Oh, well, we don't have any." They cannot be bothered. That is the truth with them. They cannot be bothered. For 50 years my communities put their faith in the Labour party, and they were betrayed—it is as simple as that.

I always remember at the general election a man breaking down to me in Tividale in my constituency. He told me he had been Labour all his life, but he realised that the Labour party had lied to him and misled him for most of his life. He felt lied to. He broke down, and that really affected me. When someone feels that their life purpose and their belief system have been mis-sold to them, what do they do? *[Interruption.]* I am sure there are some quips; Labour Members may find it funny, because Labour has led Sandwell for 50 years. It is their arrogance and their thought process. When I look at the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), he is typical of the Labour privilege that we see. How he can sit there pretending to represent working people is beyond me.

As I round up my comments, the truth is this: my communities have confidence in the Government, because they have seen the difference after 50 years of Labour misrepresenting them. They have seen the investment that has come in, and they have seen the shambles that is the Labour party and the way it has mismanaged our local area. I have total confidence in this Government, and I would not want Labour.

8.35 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I have no confidence in this Government. The public have no confidence in this Government, and nor do Government Members, 59 of whom put in their own letters to say they had no confidence in this Government. They need to vote with us accordingly tonight.

All political careers end in failure; that is a truism. Unlike past demises, however, this one is based not on policy, but on probity. The degradation and debasement of standards should be about not left and right, but right and wrong. This Government have got all the big calls wrong: we have the highest inflation in 40 years and the biggest tax take in 70, while these leadership contenders who have spent years defending the indefensible now out-vie each other to disown the past 12 years.

The moral is that not every fairy tale has a happy ending. This was not just about ambush by cake; it was about a pattern of behaviour that resulted in the first ever lawbreaker Prime Minister. One misjudgment alone might have been ride-outable, but the cumulative effect of partygate, Paterson, the redecoration of the No. 10 flat, the promotion of an alleged drunken groper to a post that included reporting MPs' misconduct and the Prime Minister's saying he had had a memory lapse about that individual's previous history just proved to be one implausibility too far.

As we have seen today, the PM who as a child wanted to be world king has become King Canute, still defiant and partying to the end, characteristically skipping Cobra meetings—if not quite fiddling while Rome burns, then partying while the country roasts. It brings to mind those suitcases being wheeled down Whitehall on the eve of Prince Philip's funeral. Meanwhile, our fellow citizens face huge challenges: climate change-induced heatwave, looming strikes, inflation, cost of

living crisis, energy crisis, record NHS backlog, passports backlog, Home Office backlog, courts backlog—backlog Britain.

If we are trying to define exactly what Johnsonism is, we would have in there the idea that the rules do not apply to those at the top, self-advancement, Government by slogan and, as Dominic Cummings put it, a "shopping trolley" *modus operandi*. Remember the pro-EU and anti-EU columns, or the one-time fan of an amnesty for illegal immigrants who now wants to ship off asylum seekers to Rwanda? Multiple signs were already there: those costly London Mayoralty vanity projects, the Jennifer Arcuri improprieties, which are still unresolved, with new people appearing out of the woodwork making similar claims, and even indifference to groping and grabbing. It was all part of a pattern. I was in the now PM's presence in Acton in 2015—there is footage of it out there—and I was grabbed from behind by one of his aides for wanting to speak to him.

If we consider Imran Ahmad Khan, Neil Parish, Charlie Elphicke and Andrew Griffiths, it does not feel as though sexual misconduct is being stamped on, or out. When an entire Government are rotten to their core, all politicians become tainted and tarnished. It is time to call time on the lot. The first step is today's vote, but the country is crying out for change. There is a democratic deficit if those of us who are not among the small number of Tory party members have no say in our next PM. We need a general election as soon as possible, to have a say on the next, unelected Prime Minister who emerges from that process, and refresh all 650 of us.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. We have just over an hour before the wind-ups begin and I want to accommodate everybody, so we are going to a three-minute limit, with immediate effect.

8.39 pm

Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con): I have heard a lot of speeches today from the Opposition. Some have been reasonable and some have been bad, but I do take exception to the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) implying that Conservative Members are privately educated and that there is no working class on the Government Benches. I was brought up on a council estate. I went to a local high school. I had the opportunity to go to university but chose not to; that was my choice. What have the Conservatives done for a working-class kid in Dewsbury? They made me an MP. They made me the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Pakistan and promoted me to a PPS. So if Opposition Members could pass on some advice to the hon. Member for Livingston—

Shaun Bailey: Does my hon. Friend agree that the laugh we just heard from Opposition Members shows their utter contempt for working-class people such as him and me, both from council estates ourselves, who know it was the Conservative Government who gave us the opportunity to be here now?

Mark Eastwood: Absolutely; I totally agree. Opposition Members could do with carrying out their research on Conservative Members, especially the new intake—people like me and my hon. Friend. That is the message I want to pass on.

[Mark Eastwood]

I am here to make a more positive speech. I am pleased to support a Prime Minister and a Government who have delivered on people's priorities and stepped up to the plate to support our nation through an unprecedented pandemic. The Government introduced the coronavirus job retention scheme that saved so many jobs by supporting furloughed workers with 80% of their wages, the self-employment income support scheme that paid self-employed individuals up to 80% of their profits, bounce back loans, and the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme—all in support of business. With a business background, I am proud that the Government stepped up to the plate on that one. Further schemes such as Eat Out to Help Out and Kickstart sought to alleviate some of the most pronounced economic effects of the pandemic, supporting citizens and businesses throughout the past two years. As the pandemic progressed, the fantastic network of healthcare professionals and volunteers enabled this Government to deliver a world-class vaccine rollout, the fastest in Europe, to protect our nation's most vulnerable from the devastating impact of covid.

The Government's towns fund has helped to regenerate my town centre, where I grew up, with £24.8 million that means we will get back the world-class market that we had before. This was all done under this Government and Prime Minister. I am looking forward to seeing the town being transformed in future.

On education, the Government invested in Kirklees as an educational investment area, with £36 million for schools on provision for those with special educational needs and disabilities. That is amazing for my constituency. As someone who has experienced this personally, I am absolutely proud that we are supporting parents with children from different backgrounds with different issues and difficulties, because we need to level up and give everybody the same opportunity in life.

In summary, the Government have delivered and the Prime Minister has delivered. However, we are looking to replace the Prime Minister with a new leader. I will continue to support this Government and support the new leader as we carry out this crucial agenda.

8.43 pm

Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mark Eastwood) even though I am not quite sure what his argument really was.

Most people in this country—in fact, overwhelmingly people in this country; indeed, even in this Parliament—have no involvement in deciding who the next Prime Minister is. However, I will come back to that. It is an important issue whenever a Prime Minister is switched mid-term. At the moment, as many of my hon. Friends have said, we have a massive crisis in the national health service; we have problems with energy costs and how they will affect people's lives; and we have problems with inflation and how it affects people's ability to put food on the table. Those things are more important than ever, yet here we are, switching Governments with no prospect, as far as I can tell, of any realistic plan to address those problems.

I will share a quote from Janice Turner, who wrote in Saturday's *Times*:

"For the third time in six years, who leads us is being decided by the tiniest sliver of society."

She refers, of course, to the 150,000 Conservative party members. Margaret from Knowsley made a similar point. She said:

"It is like watching a criminal gang choose its leader. The rest of us have no say in the matter but have to live with the consequences daily in our lives. Except this is about our democracy and who is in charge of our country."

I think she put it very well.

I have not got time to talk about how we could handle this situation better, but I refer those who are genuinely interested to an article by the noble and learned Lord Sumption that was in *The Sunday Times* eight days ago. He set out why, without a written constitution in a parliamentary system, this problem must be resolved before we get into this position again, because it threatens to undermine the stability of our democracy.

8.47 pm

Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con): I still remember the look on people's faces when I first won my seat back in 2019—it was the look of hope for the future, because they had felt neglected for generations. To tell the truth, that is why I decided to stand for Parliament, represent the people of Blyth Valley and break the chains of Labour.

One of our first tasks as a Government was to deliver Brexit, which we did, and then to support the country through the pandemic, which we did with the massive vaccine roll-out, the furlough scheme and the support to businesses and individuals. Now we are supporting the people of Ukraine.

In Blyth Valley, people are starting to see the shoots of economic growth. The number of jobs set to come to the area is truly amazing, with Britishvolt, JDR Cable Systems, Merit, the Catapult, Tharsus, the offshore wind industry, the port of Blyth and Dräger, and we also have the towns fund and the future high streets fund. This is true levelling up with a Conservative Government, with an expectation of more than 10,000 jobs. Where once stood a coal-fired power station will stand a gigaplant. The 16th largest building in the world will make the batteries to power thousands of electric vehicles up and down the country.

Dr Luke Evans: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, because Britishvolt has its headquarters stationed at MIRA technology park. Is not such levelling up in the midlands and the north-east under this Government exactly why we should have confidence in this Government's agenda?

Ian Levy: I totally agree, and we are levelling up across the country. The gigaplant will be like a phoenix rising from the ashes of neglect. Even today we can see work being carried out on the Northumberland line, which will connect Ashington to Bedlington station, Bebside, Newsham and Seaton Delaval, and will then connect to the Metro system and into Newcastle Central station.

I have every confidence in this Government. I am under no illusions about the fact that Opposition Members will say, "Well, he would. He is the first Conservative Member of Parliament for Blyth Valley", but I know when I talk to people in the constituency that they feel

there is a definite change and they have hope once again. That is why I have confidence in Her Majesty's Government.

8.49 pm

Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): When the Prime Minister took office, he stood on the steps of Downing Street and promised to level up every part of Britain. He said he would close the opportunity gap and, in his words, unleash the power "of every corner" of the United Kingdom. In 2019, he came to Sheffield and made that same pledge. He continues to boast about levelling up as though it has been some gigantic success, but if we dig deep enough beneath the surface, we find that his legacy is one of broken promises, shattered communities and a failure to deliver. The public know that they cannot trust a word that the Government say. They have concluded that levelling up is just another empty slogan that will do nothing to help them in their everyday life.

The effects of 12 years of Conservative mismanagement are plain to see. Only if we remove the Conservative party from power altogether will we see these trends reversed, and today's vote is a chance to do that. To take just one example, our local authorities' budgets have been cut to the bone by the Prime Minister and his two Conservative predecessors. Sheffield City Council's central Government grant has been cut by more than £3 billion in real terms since 2010, which has put an enormous strain on its budgets. The impact has been stark. According to the End Child Poverty coalition, 45% of children in my constituency are in poverty. That really is a shameful statistic. One of the basics of levelling up needs to be ending child poverty once and for all, but in my region, child poverty rates continue to rise year on year. This is not levelling up; this is levelling down, and families across the country are paying the price.

The Conservative party is truly unfit to govern, as it has shown time and again. I am of course pleased to finally see the back of the Prime Minister, but it is clear that whoever takes over cannot be trusted to truly level up. Instead of focusing on the real issues facing people, leadership candidates are trying to stoke culture wars and divide communities. Today, the Met Office warns that unprecedented heatwaves pose a significant risk of death, but the leadership candidates are not prepared to step up to the serious threats posed by climate change. They instead want to water down net zero targets and roll back green initiatives. Perhaps that is not surprising, given that one candidate has seemingly accepted tens of thousands of pounds in donations from a notorious climate change denier. The Conservative party is out of touch, out of ideas and, I hope, soon to be out of power. A new leader will not change any of that.

8.52 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I would have preferred, as I think my constituents would, these many long hours of debate on confidence in the Government to have been spent discussing the safety of our children and the Online Safety Bill. This is a difficult moment for Labour Members, as they all stood to make the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), who is aware of roughly what I will say, the Prime Minister of our nation. How would he have fared with

his plan for a second referendum on the EU, which he did not even personally believe in? Would he have created the private sector-led vaccine taskforce? When Dame Kate Bingham was first appointed to it, there was no shortage of Opposition Members saying that it was a crony appointment. It was, in fact, a brilliant move, and she worked closely with our multinational pharmaceutical companies, which the right hon. Member for Islington North would happily have abolished, along with our intelligence agencies.

Sarah Owen: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Graham: There is no time, alas.

Would the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) today be defending his Prime Minister's record on standing up to Putin? We are talking about the man who gave Putin the benefit of the doubt when it came to the murder of a British citizen in Salisbury and the handling of Novichok, which could have killed hundreds, if not thousands. As I say, I understand that this is a difficult debate for Labour.

Nor did we hear any mention from the Scottish National party of the first ever dedicated, ringfenced funding pot for marine energy in the recent renewables auction, which provides £20 million a year for investment in Scottish companies such as Orbital Marine Power, MeyGen Ltd, and Nova Innovation. There was nothing from the SNP about the value of the Prime Minister's 33 trade envoys, who tirelessly promote Scottish products abroad. None of us has ever lost confidence in Scotland, or in the quality of Scottish products, but we think it is sad that the SNP does not see the value of the United Kingdom promoting Scottish exports all over the world.

On what this Government have achieved, let me highlight first their strong record on the Indo-Pacific pivot, which has led to better relationships across south-east Asia, to the great benefit of those nations and our own; and, secondly, what has been done with levelling up, pride and regeneration in small cities such as my own of Gloucester. There, the levelling-up fund, the station improvement fund and a whole number of improvements have done things that under Labour's tenure were never even dreamed of.

Let us be in no doubt. There are always things that a Government can do better. For example, I wish this Government were thinking closely and hard about insulation for some of our poorer families to help them through this winter's energy increase, and maybe that will come. However, I am in no doubt that this is a Government who are delivering, and I have full confidence in them.

8.55 pm

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): We are here today because we have seen a real decline in our standards in public life, and in particular in the Prime Minister. We have heard many Government Members talk about the positive things in their constituencies, and they clearly want those to continue, but we are here because the Prime Minister was put out of office by those on the Government Benches two weeks ago.

The Government had the opportunity to do things very differently, and I would argue that the rot set in in November last year, when there was an attempt to keep

[Wendy Chamberlain]

Owen Paterson from censure. I had the emergency debate on standards after that and, dare I say it, that was a much more collegiate and positive debate than this one, because I think there was recognition on all sides of the House that a stop needed to be put to the direction of travel. A constituent said that Mr Paterson's resignation was not the end, but must be the beginning of an uncompromising campaign to end the corruption in our politics. We are here, and we have been where we have been in the last couple of weeks, because that corruption has not been stopped.

If we look at partygate from a constituency perspective, other than trips to Barnard Castle, I have certainly had no higher volume of emails about anything from constituents, who told me some quite devastating stories. We know how that has gone; it has gone from "There were no parties" to "All rules were followed" to an admission that "There were parties, but we weren't quite sure what the rules were." The PM has indicated that he intends to remain as an MP if he remains sitting in this place. Therefore, I do hope that the Privileges Committee will continue with its investigation regardless of whether he is the Prime Minister. If the new Prime Minister, whoever they may be, fails to ensure this, we will know that there is no change to the approach to our standards in public life. Lord Evans believes there has been an erosion, and Lord Geidt clearly did so. Indeed, the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose) made it clear in his resignation statement that standards have fallen.

To go back to what the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) said, the fact that we have ended up here because of a lack of candour about office appointments means that this place is not safe. We cannot with all confidence say that it is safe. That shames and should shame us all, and we should all be committed collectively to doing something about it. By failing to face up to this corrosion and failing to identify the battery acid at the core of their party, the Government have lost people's confidence because they have lost confidence in their values, and our by-election victories over the last year demonstrate that.

8.58 pm

Sir Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I want to focus on one example of a specific problem with this Government that I think makes it impossible to have confidence in them. Between November last year and the end of March this year, the Prime Minister claimed 10 times at Prime Minister's questions that more people were in work than before the pandemic. That was untrue. The figures show that total employment is still 366,000 lower than just before the pandemic.

The Prime Minister made that untrue claim twice on 24 November 2021, three times on 5 January 2022, again the following week and then again the following week. He claimed it again on 2 February and on 23 February. On 24 February, the exasperated chair of the UK Statistics Authority wrote to the Prime Minister to point out that the claim was not true. The Prime Minister claimed it again on 27 March.

On 30 March, I asked the Prime Minister at the Liaison Committee whether he accepted that his tenfold statements had been wrong. He replied:

"I think I have repeatedly—and I think I took steps to correct the record earlier."

Well, he had not corrected the record, and he still has not. In his answer at the Liaison Committee it was clear that he understood what has actually happened since the pandemic, and that about half a million people—mainly older people—have given up on work, substantially reducing the number in work overall. However, four weeks after that discussion on 27 April, the Prime Minister said:

"Let me give them the figures: 500,000 more people in paid employment now than there were before the pandemic began".—[*Official Report*, 27 April 2022; Vol. 712, c. 754.]

That was even though he had made clear to me on 30 March that he knew that to be untrue.

At the Liaison Committee two weeks ago, the Chair of the Justice Committee asked:

"How important is the truth to you, Prime Minister?"

The Prime Minister replied, "Very important, Bob." But it clearly isn't important, and the record still has not been corrected for any of the 11 instances of the false claim that the Prime Minister knows he has made.

Other examples of a lack of truthfulness have been much more consequential. After negotiating customs checks between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Prime Minister went to the Democratic Unionist party conference and announced that there would be no such checks. That was obviously untrue, and the DUP has paid a very heavy political price for taking him at his word. Democracy does not work if Ministers routinely say things that they know to be untrue. Why did they not see through him before?

9.1 pm

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): I am delighted to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Sir Stephen Timms). Morality and probity in public life matters—it really does—and we need to establish that. I was proud to become a Member of Parliament, and I think we believed that and were right to believe it. During my lifetime there have been 10 Conservative Prime Ministers, the bulk of whom would have found the idea of lying to Parliament anathema. Yet I am afraid we have a Prime Minister who has broken that code, and that matters.

I have listened to Conservative Members extolling the virtues of the Prime Minister and the Government. There are things that I would agree with the Prime Minister about, such as Ukraine, on which this country now has a proud record. But across the world, we are now a laughing stock. This country, which was once the hallmark for probity, is now a hallmark for lawbreaking. We know there is potential lawbreaking in terms of the Northern Ireland protocol, because the Prime Minister has not got Brexit done. He has betrayed and made a fool of every Conservative Member of Parliament who stood up today, and in the past, and said, "We've got Brexit done." Brexit has not been done.

There was the attempt to keep Owen Paterson in office, and the overriding of Sir Alex Allan, the Prime Minister's ethics adviser, who declared that the Home Secretary had broken the ministerial code of conduct. Of course those things are important and matter, but it matters even more that nearly 40% of children in my

constituency are living in poverty. In some wards the figure is as high as one in two children. That matters, and the Government are failing abysmally to deal with such things. They should be ashamed. It matters that climate change—the biggest issue our nation faces—hardly got a mention by the Prime Minister or anybody else on the Government Benches. Climate change makes a difference to the futures of children in my constituency, and to children across the planet. The Government are failing on those issues on a day-to-day basis.

In the end, what is ironic about this debate is that we could almost believe that it was not Conservative MPs who decapitated the Prime Minister. They got rid of him—not us—but one would not think that was the case today, given the way they describe their loyalty to the now outgoing Prime Minister. Of course, Cabinet Ministers did not resign. Only recently, when they saw their own futures at stake, did they make a decision to get rid of a losing Prime Minister. Before that, despite all his incompetence and failures, they stuck with him.

9.4 pm

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): The very fact that we are having a debate on a motion tabled by the Government on the Government's confidence in themselves shows how out of touch with reality they really are. Just 10 days ago, many Government Members were writing open letters to the Prime Minister telling him that they had no confidence in him. Nothing has changed—we still have the same Prime Minister in Downing Street, leading this Government—so I do not know how on earth they are able in all good conscience to vote for this motion this evening. It is bizarre.

We all know that the Prime Minister is unfit for office. Government Members all know it too, but rather than remove him from the position immediately, they have left him in No. 10 at a time when the country needs honest and respected leadership—something that he seems unable to offer. Last week, the Government blocked Labour's vote of no confidence, and that was after the resignation of more than 50 members of the Prime Minister's Front-Bench team. In blocking that vote and creating today's spectacle, it is clear that the Prime Minister has only ever been interested in doing what is right for his own ego, rather than for the good of the country.

Many of the Prime Minister's former allies resigned from his Cabinet, but rather than remove him, they are indulging in fantasy economics in the leadership contest, distracting themselves from the chaos facing the country with party infighting, and attempting to disassociate themselves from their time in the Prime Minister's Cabinet of chaos. The Conservative leadership candidates are also trying to wipe the slate clean after 12 years of Conservative rule, but on their watch taxes are going up, food and energy bills are spiralling out of control, crime is rising, and many of the public services we rely on have simply stopped working.

The Prime Minister is squatting in No. 10, presiding over a zombie Government, while the country is gripped by a spiralling cost of living crisis and worsening backlogs caused by his Government's economic policies and political failures. In just the last few days, I have spoken to constituents who are living through the Government's cost of living crisis. A couple I met who are both in

full-time employment get to the middle of the month and have to rely on the local food pantry to support them in putting food on the table for them and their young child. That is utterly depressing and shameful. Another couple told me that they visit the local baths at least three times a week for a swim at a reduced rate, thanks to the Welsh Government. That is great news for their health and wellbeing, but they also use it as an opportunity to have a shower to save on water and heating costs at home. We should not be normalising this in the 21st century.

We should have a Prime Minister and a Government who focused on dealing with these issues and others that are causing great hardship across the country. Instead, we have more chaos, which is why I simply have no confidence in the Government. Since the Prime Minister announced his intention to resign on 7 July, the Government have dropped legislation and called off a number of Bill Committees on issues of the utmost importance, from protecting people online and fraud to national security and levelling up. That is a direct consequence of the chaos engulfing the Government at this moment.

The country does not need a fourth Conservative Prime Minister in six years. Britain needs a fresh start and a Labour Government, which is why we will vote against the Government's motion this evening.

9.7 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): I have no confidence in this Government. I know that a few people say, "Oh, the zombie Prime Minister made a few errors because he didn't know he was at the party, he didn't know it was a party, he didn't know if he was drinking at the time and he didn't know the law even though he wrote the law, so we should let him off—but he got the big issues right." I put it to the House that he did not get the big issues right.

Take covid: 200,000 people dead—the highest number in Europe. That is a complete disaster. People say, "We got the vaccine out." Well, we had the vaccine. The Prime Minister claims, "If we had been in the European Medicines Agency, we wouldn't have been able to roll it out." That is not true; we would have. He keeps repeating that untruth again and again.

Billions have been lost in procurement over this whole episode. How do we know? Well, Wales was given £1 billion to deliver test, track and trace, and it spent only £0.5 billion, because it delivered that service through public health and local authorities, instead of through people putting their hand in the till and taking the money, as happened when the local landlord of the former Health Secretary, the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock), got a contract. It is absolutely ridiculous!

What about the economy, which is supposed to be doing well? We just heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Sir Stephen Timms) that the Prime Minister consistently stands at the Dispatch Box and says, "There's half a million more people in jobs," or whatever he says that week, when he knows that those are only the payroll figures, which do not include the self-employed. If we asked the Official for National Statistics, we would learn that there are something like half a million fewer people in jobs. The Prime Minister

[Geraint Davies]

is intentionally, in my view, giving the wrong impression of the economy. We have the slowest recovery in the G7, the slowest projected growth and the highest inflation. It is a disaster. Then we are told, "He's got Brexit done," but 25% of the fruit is not being picked and we are not butchering the meat. Some 40,000 pigs have been culled, yet the price of ham is up by 27%. Is that a success?

What about trade? Trade is down 15%. What about those trade deals? If we had got the Japanese trade deal through the EU, we would have made £1 billion more in GDP. What about efficiency? Passports—you've got to wait 12 weeks. Driving licences? All the civil servants were pushed into Brexit management—botched Brexit—and now the Government are going to cut 90,000 civil servants. That is going to go well, isn't it, if you are in a queue?

Then there is the Northern Ireland protocol. We are pulling out of the single market, so business will fail, we will mess up the peace process and we will break international law. Talking of which, what about Rwanda? Israel did not want to send its refugees to Rwanda. Why? Because they were being tortured, raped and killed, yet we are. And, oh, the solution to that is to pull out of the European convention on human rights, which Churchill put together. Our fundamental values of democracy, freedom and human rights are being ripped up at a time when China is abusing democracy in Hong Kong and the human rights of the Uyghurs, and confronting Taiwan. Russia is moving in and we are abandoning the right to protest, playing into Putin's hands. Even the windfall tax is being given back to the oil producers.

The fact is that the Labour Government produced 40% growth in 10 years and doubled spending on health and education. We need another Labour Government to invest in growth for a better future.

9.10 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The motion is right in one respect. The debate we need to have was never just about one lawbreaking, Parliament-proroguing, office-abusing Prime Minister; it was always about this tawdry, toxic Government as a whole.

Every single MP on the Government Benches who stood by the current Prime Minister while he dissembled and denigrated his way through two and half years is implicated in his offences. Every one of them who stood by while the partying happened, while the attempts to cover up bullying in the Home Office happened and while the rules were being changed to protect their mates while sexual harassment was being brushed under the carpet, is complicit. Did those who finally resigned really only just realise that the Prime Minister was serially incapable of honesty, of integrity, of decency? Of course not. They have been a Government with no respect for standards in public life, no respect for the law and no respect for the British public.

Like all of us, I stand here to represent my constituents. Frankly, the Government do not have the right even to ask my constituents to have confidence in them. That they seek to do so tonight only underscores their abject failure to even begin to understand what integrity means. That is why we need not just a change of leader, but a change of Government and an immediate general election.

I do not have time to go through all the different reasons for not having confidence in the Government, but let me mention just two. Today's debate is happening while the country is in the grip of the kind of deadly weather event that so many of us have been warning about for so long and which will only get worse in the future. Yet the Government are planning to green-light new extraction of oil and gas reserves from the North sea knowing it will make no difference to consumer bills or energy security, but a world of difference to an already overheating planet. That approach is not just immoral but criminally negligent.

On democracy, it would be easy to dismiss the Government as simply the incompetents they are, but that would be wrong. The populist style of politics they have inflicted on this country is deeply dangerous. They risk a frightening descent into what the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black) bravely and correctly called out in May: fascism. As she said back then, fascism does not always arrive wearing jackboots. It can come knocking more subtly than that. Students of fascism have helpfully suggested some of its signs: disinformation, misogyny, disdain for intellectuals, social conformity, suppression of trade unions, threats to human rights, the creation of hate groups and abuse by them, the rise of militarisation and, of course, racism, which is at the heart of fascism. Do any of those sound familiar?

There is a pattern here if only we are prepared to see it. We like to tell ourselves that we live in a mature democracy, yet this populist Government have deliberately set out to weaken the very institutions that define a liberal democracy. They have set out to make it easier for them to cling to power, whether they enjoy the confidence of the electorate or not. So no, Mr Deputy Speaker, I do not have confidence in this Government. That the Prime Minister's political career has ended in failure and disgrace is thoroughly deserved. Anyone voting for the motion tonight deserves the same fate.

9.13 pm

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): Three minutes is not enough to sum up or express the misery, suffering and hardship caused to people in my constituency and across this country by this rotten Government. Of course I have no confidence in the Government, and of course my constituents have no confidence in the Government. They saw through the Prime Minister from the very start, and millions and millions more people are seeing through the Prime Minister. Just think of all the suffering that has been caused in the last 12 years of this Government to those who have had the bedroom tax inflicted on them and those who have been humiliated with the indignity of the appalling unfair fitness to work tests, where they are signed off as if they were fit to work when they are not. Think of the people deported from this country during the Windrush scandal. Think of all the people who died unnecessarily because of covid. The Government brag about their covid response, but I think it is some kind of sick joke. We were told once that 20,000 covid deaths would be a "good" outcome. There have now been more than 200,000 deaths. If we had had the same rate as Germany, Japan, Canada or Australia, tens of thousands of people would still be alive, but the truth is that to the Government, that does not seem to matter.

The Government have attacked hard-won civil liberties and hard-won democratic rights. There has been anti-trade union bile and more anti-trade union legislation, making it harder and harder for trade unions to take strike action legally. We have the Government's draconian attacks on the right to peaceful protest. They have also pushed forward a voter suppression strategy through the introduction of voter ID.

It is good riddance to this disgraceful, law-breaking Prime Minister, but the truth is that it is not one politician or one Prime Minister who has created the situation in our country where there are more food banks than branches of McDonald's. It is not one Prime Minister who has created the hostile environment for migrants and for those who people presume are migrants. It is the whole rotten system. The truth is that, over the past 12 years, we have seen what the reality of Conservative Government means to people in our country. The reason that Conservative Members decided to get rid of him is that they want to push forward with even more unpopular policies, pushing down living standards and letting the billionaires and the oil and gas giants off the hook. They merely want to find somebody who has the political capital to push forward that abhorrent policy, and that is why we need a general election.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): If people can trim a bit off their speeches, everyone will get equal time.

9.16 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): In Scotland, 2022 is the Year of Stories, so it is nice that Conservative Members have come in today with their contribution to fiction and rewriting history. The Prime Minister and his Government, the Ministers who support him, sit in a parallel universe of self-delusion. This is the kind of situation that happens in failed states with an autocrat in power and no written constitution.

It is impossible to have confidence in this Tory Government because they do not even have confidence in themselves. Resignations proved that they do not want the Prime Minister and it is ludicrous to pretend today that they ever did—although perhaps that is why Conservative Members were so rowdy earlier. Having seen some of the leadership candidates coming forward, they are feeling a bit of regret, guilt and remorse. The problem with those leadership candidates is that they were all loyal to the Prime Minister. They stood up to defend him and they now claim that somehow, magically, they had absolutely nothing to do with him and the failures of this woeful Tory Government.

The Government's failures are legion, whether we are talking about PPE contracts, the people excluded from support schemes, the failure to support businesses through the cost of living crisis, or the Home Office's ludicrous incompetence, as I know from all manner of constituents I see in my surgeries on a Friday. The Government are completely neglecting the COP26 legacy, just as we see the climate crisis on our doorstep here in Parliament.

There is also the denial of democracy. The Prime Minister said earlier that he stands up for freedom and democracy, but that could not be less true. My Glasgow

Central constituents look to this place and see nothing that Westminster can offer them. In Scotland, democracy did not stop on 18 September 2014. The right to self-determination is not a one-time thing. It is the right of the people to decide how they want to be governed, and the people of Scotland will have that right again.

9.19 pm

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): This is a Government in whom I can have absolutely no confidence. This morning, I attended a meeting with members of the Criminal Bar Association and listened to junior criminal barristers talking about the deplorable state of the criminal justice system. It is an extraordinary state of affairs that under this Government, barristers are on strike over pay and our legal system is crumbling. They do incredibly important work—the majority of it funded by legal aid—yet the median income of junior criminal barristers in their first three years is £12,200, which is below the minimum wage. As a result, we are seeing an exodus from the profession. Between March 2021 and March 2022, more than 1,000 trials were postponed at the last minute because no barristers were available to prosecute or defend the case. That has had serious consequences for victims, witnesses and defendants in what were already very stressful situations.

The Criminal Bar Association has been clear that without fee increases sufficient to stem flight from the profession and promote recruitment, the systemic failure that the criminal justice system is experiencing will become endemic, rendering the reduction and elimination of the unacceptably high backlog unachievable. I ask the Government to engage with the Criminal Bar Association as a matter of urgency. The Government are due to lay a statutory instrument within days that would increase fees, but it would apply only to new cases, leaving 58,000 cases stuck in the backlog that would not benefit from any increase.

Now for the Government's handling of the civil service and their pursuit of the small state. They plan to cut 91,000 jobs from the civil service within three years, which will damage the economy and the delivery of public services. In the north-west, it could mean the loss of more than 11,000 jobs; on Merseyside, more than 3,500 jobs; in Wirral, more than 400 jobs. As the Public and Commercial Services Union has highlighted:

"Making cuts will only make things worse, make waiting lists longer for those seeking passports and driving licences, make telephone queues longer for those with tax enquiries."

As we experience an unprecedented heatwave that represents a threat to life, the Prime Minister has skipped an emergency Cobra meeting and stayed in the luxury of Chequers for a party, yet again putting parties before his responsibilities—another in the long line of insults from this Prime Minister to the people of the United Kingdom. This Government are allowing crucial institutions to fall into chaos, are planning to slash funding from overstretched Departments and are propping up a discredited Prime Minister who is unfit for public office. I have absolutely no confidence in this Government.

9.21 pm

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): I have no confidence in the Prime Minister and this Government. My inbox is filled with emails from constituents telling me how

[Janet Daby]

the current Prime Minister and his Government are not fit to lead our country. Conservative Members seem to have amnesia; they seem to have forgotten that they recently had a vote of no confidence in the Prime Minister. They also recently had an exodus of Ministers resigning from the Prime Minister's Cabinet. They are now in the middle of a contest to choose the third leader that the Tory Government will have had in the four years that I have been in this place.

The Prime Minister is a significant risk to our country, as we have seen time and again. It was wrong that he put the former Deputy Chief Whip in such an important position of responsibility and authority when he knew that he had displayed sexually harmful behaviour towards others. Since the PM has been in office, he has gone from one scandal to the next, just like in a soap opera, but Parliament is not a soap opera, nor should it be reduced to one.

The Prime Minister is a safeguarding risk, but he is also a national security risk. His careless words as Foreign Secretary led to evidence being given against Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe that led to her spending five years incarcerated. Anoosheh Ashoori, my constituent, spent four years in prison in Iran. The Government should have repaid the debt to Iran a lot sooner, which could have brought them home even sooner. Then there was the private meeting that the Prime Minister had with the ex-KGB agent Alexander Lebedev in Italy. What was that about?

These are a few of the many incidents that have been inappropriate, dangerous, disgraceful and lawbreaking. The Prime Minister unlawfully prorogued Parliament. He did not lock down fast enough at the beginning of the pandemic, which could have saved lives. His former adviser even said that the Prime Minister resisted the autumn lockdown in 2020 because he thought only over-80s die of covid. How ridiculous and insulting is that?

Millions in taxpayers' money was lost as Ministers signed off deals for PPE that was not used. The Government's test and trace system failed to cut infection levels, despite being funded by £37 billion of taxpayers' money. The then Chancellor wrote off £11.8 billion in public funds. There was the U-turn on keeping overseas aid spending at 0.7%; the refurbishment of the Downing Street flat and the questions about who paid for the £840-a-roll wallpaper; the Tory Ministers being allowed to help a Tory donor to avoid paying a new tax on his housing development; the Owen Paterson scandal, where the Prime Minister tried to change the standards rules to save his friend; and, of course, partygate. It is clear that this Government are not up to the job of governing our country, and the only solution is a general election.

9.24 pm

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab): Today, MPs have the chance to rid ourselves of this zombie Government as they desperately try to survive, stumbling forward with no purpose and no thought for the people they trample over in their pursuit of self-preservation. Every day this Government are in power, they continue to make people suffer. Indeed, this weekend we saw that the Prime Minister was more committed to partying

and flying fighter jets than to attending Cobra meetings. Does he know how insulting it is that while my constituents have been worrying about putting food on the table, he has been partying and having joyrides?

Meanwhile, the Home Secretary will not even show up at the Home Affairs Committee to answer crucial questions. To my constituents who are worried about their passports, and those of them who work in Her Majesty's Passport Office, this hiding away does not show leadership; it shows a dysfunctional Government on their deathbed. With my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris), I had agreed to meet the Schools Minister to discuss new provisions on special educational needs. The next day, the Department had no Ministers at all. The people of this country have been abandoned and forgotten as the Conservative party fights among itself.

I am guessing that the reason we could not debate the Labour motion of no confidence is that the Prime Minister is scared. He is scared of his record being criticised, he is scared of his party telling people what they actually think of him, and he is scared of being subjected to any real scrutiny. The Conservatives campaigned on a promise to level up the north-east, but we now have the highest rate of child poverty anywhere in the UK. This is levelling down, and it is criminal.

The Government were shamed into U-turning on backing free school meals outside term time and on dumping sewage in rivers. In another U-turn, they finally brought in Labour's windfall tax policy to help people with the cost of living. The public are not fools, and they no longer have confidence in this shambolic Government. While the Tories have U-turned so much that their Front Benchers must be dizzy, the country has turned away from this toxic, corrupt Conservative party, and the frightful four who are jostling for power know it, as they have all ruled out an early election.

I say to Conservative Members, "Do the right thing for Britain, the right thing for your constituents, and the right thing for democracy. Free us from the chains of this zombie Government and this lame duck Prime Minister, and give the people of this country what they truly need—a fresh start and a Labour Government."

9.27 pm

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab): I am sure that many in the Chamber will have found last night's ITV programmes eye-catching. We sat through some of Britain's most surreal and melodramatic reality TV. I hope it will be noted in *Hansard* that I am not talking about last night's episode of "Love Island"; the sniping, the mud-slinging and the bickering from each of the Tory leadership candidates made the contestants in *Casa Amor* seem positively tame by comparison.

In all seriousness, last night's leadership debate only further undermined my confidence in this Conservative Government and their ability to deliver for the country. Front-Bench and Back-Bench Tory MPs alike offered no practical solutions to the biggest problem facing my constituents: the cost of living crisis. My constituents are concerned about their rising energy bills, the extortionate cost of petrol, the sky-high cost of the food shop, and record high inflation.

A recent survey that I conducted suggested that 95% of my constituents think the Government should do much more to help people to deal with the cost of living

crisis. Despite that, absolutely nothing that this Government, or any possible future Prime Minister, are saying has addressed the escalating crisis. The mud-slinging on display within the Conservative party is completely detached from reality. It seems that we are being led by a reality TV Government—a Government who are only interested in petty squabbles, manufactured disagreements and voting off the next contestant, when they should be entirely focused on introducing timely and effective measures that will ease the cost of living crisis, reduce child poverty, address skyrocketing ambulance and accident and emergency waiting times, and reduce crime and antisocial behaviour.

We desperately need a Government who are rooted in this reality, but, perhaps unsurprisingly, I do not believe we will ever get that from the Conservative party, which is why I have no confidence in this Government. In Parliament and across the country, confidence in the Government is rapidly draining away. After 12 long years of Tory mismanagement, Britain clearly needs a fresh start.

9.29 pm

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Lord Hague was right, David Cameron was right, and in June 2019 Max Hastings said:

“I was Boris Johnson’s boss: he is utterly unfit to be prime minister.”

Now we have a Prime Minister squatting in No. 10 or partying at Chequers. If he needs help with moving, Gary’s Removals or Cleavers in my constituency are available. He is a Prime Minister who 10 days ago scrambled around trying to keep his premiership from sinking, but he rearranged his deckchair Cabinet, desperate to not go down as the worst Prime Minister in history.

The Government still claim that they got the big calls right, but they are rewriting history. They sought to change the rules over Owen Paterson. They disposed of PPE without replacing it, ahead of what was to be the pandemic, then they blew £37 billion on the test and trace scheme and lost £4 billion to fraud. They bodged the Brexit deal, which has led to a 4% hit to the UK economy. They claimed that they were the lead nation in supporting Ukraine, but when Crimea was invaded in 2014 they refused to provide or sell weapons to that country, preferring instead to normalise relations with Russia. Now, with the economy in crisis, we have one in 15 suffering with covid, we have ambulance services and social care in crisis and we have the worst inflation in the G7 and the worst growth anywhere in the G20 except Russia.

Now we have the Conservative party leadership contest, which is seemingly a triennial navel-gazing event. The public will not forgive this. We had it in 2016, in 2019 and now in 2022. This is like the three-year itch. I hate to disabuse this Government of their belief that they are irresistible to the public, but after Wakefield, after Chesham and Amersham, after North Shropshire and after Tiverton and Honiton, the public have stated, loud and clear, that they feel misled by this Government, who have lost the public trust. Two weeks ago, a YouGov survey found that, irrespective of the new leader, 57% of the public wanted a general election; 27% said that they were against that and 17% did not know. I fear that Conservative Members are not listening to the public. They are out of touch. They should give way to public

opinion and give way to a general election. The public have no confidence in this Government, and I am on the side of the public as usual.

9.32 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Former Conservative Cabinet colleagues are publicly accusing each other of economic incompetence, of negligence in preventing fraud and even of being a Liberal Democrat, yet after defenestrating their party leader because they had no confidence in him, Conservative Members have decided to leave the man in place as Prime Minister of this Government. As a result, the public have no confidence in them. That is clear because the Government refuse to call a general election, as they have no confidence that they would win it.

The 6.6 million people waiting for treatment in the NHS have no confidence in this Government. The parents of the 350,000 children on that waiting list have no confidence in them. The 50,000 imaginary nurses currently housed in the 40 presumably non-existent hospitals have no confidence in them either. The taxpayers paying the highest level of tax for 70 years and facing the highest inflation in 40 years have no confidence that this Government have the ability to tackle the record £2 trillion of debt, the highest peacetime debt the UK has ever seen.

The victims of crime who have watched crime rise by 18% while prosecutions fall have no confidence in this Government. The people awaiting their passports because of the chaos in the Home Office have no confidence that they will be able to travel abroad for either business or a family holiday. The refugees who have a well-founded fear of persecution in Syria or Afghanistan have no confidence that they will not be deported to a country where they have no family and no connection. Women and girls have no confidence that this Government, with their inability to properly tackle sexual predation in their own ranks, will deal with the violence against them. Minority communities who experience racial profiling and have been outraged as police shared racist photos among themselves have no confidence that this Government will press for real reform.

The families and friends of the 72 who died in Grenfell Tower have no confidence that, five years on, this Government have acted to make others safe. The 2 million families depending on food banks to feed their children have no confidence that this Government understand what it means to see their children go to bed hungry. The 5.5 million public sector workers whose real-terms wages have stagnated and declined in the past 12 years have no confidence that they can continue to pay their rent, with 9% inflation eroding their pay still further. A blind eye has been turned to jobs for sexual favours, to ministerial bullying, to crony contracts and to wine time Fridays—although people did ask “WTF?”—yet this Prime Minister wants to stay on as caretaker. Ponder that word. Is there any word in the entire English language that describes this Prime Minister less than “caretaker”? He is a reckless narcissist, and nobody inside or outside this Chamber should have confidence in his Government.

9.35 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The winner of the current leadership contest will be the fourth Conservative Prime Minister since 2016. The Conservatives really

[Stephen Kinnock]

have turned government into a game of musical chairs, to the point where the world's oldest political party is not a credible or coherent organisation at all. It is a coalition of chaos led by a Prime Minister who embodies the vacuum of moral purpose at its heart.

They say that a fish rots from its head, but let us not forget that every single Conservative Member is complicit. They propped him up and defended the indefensible, so the entire fish is rotten. That is why it makes no difference who wins this leadership contest, and it is why a general election, and a fresh start with a Labour Government is the only viable option for our country.

We cannot in all good conscience allow this man, a man who put our national security at risk by holding clandestine meetings with a former KGB officer, to carry on squatting in Downing Street over the summer. This zombie Government are set to limp on in parallel with the frankly embarrassing leadership contest, which not even the candidates want to see played out in public. They are dodging scrutiny, and no wonder. They are offering hundreds of billions of pounds in unfunded tax cuts, but nothing for the millions of families who will face a choice between eating and heating this autumn. There is not a word on boosting productivity or driving the modern manufacturing renaissance that our country so desperately needs, and no mention whatsoever of the Conservative party's backlog Britain, with the Passport Office in meltdown, A&E queues off the scale, courts mired in delays and a broken asylum system costing the taxpayer £4.7 million a day.

Backlog Britain is not simply the result of the Government's failure to plan for the end of lockdown. The multiple system failures we now see are the result of 12 years of Tory incompetence and indifference. Growth, investment and productivity have stagnated since 2010, and our public services have been hollowed out, leaving our country profoundly lacking in the resilience we needed to weather the covid storm. The Government's failure to invest has impacted on our national finances, on workers' pay packets and on our public services, and it has left our private sector vulnerable to major shocks such as the pandemic, the war and the Prime Minister's botched Brexit deal.

We should be in no doubt that authoritarian states such as China and Russia have been waiting in the wings, ready to pounce and to exploit our overexposed and vulnerable assets and supply chains. Labour has a plan to make, buy and sell more in Britain. After 12 years of a stagnating Tory economy, low growth and broken promises, we need a fresh start, not just a change at the top.

9.38 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Mr Deputy Speaker, I hope you caught the Prime Minister's surreal bravura performance, which was rather clouded by the fact he did not realise that his own Government tabled the motion. There was not a cheep about being booted out by his own party, finally, after breaching his own rules on partying while my constituents could not hold their loved one's hand as they were dying. There was not a cheep about Marcus Rashford shaming this Government into feeding hungry, poor children during the school holidays.

As Conservative Members brag about this Government getting Brexit done, they forget that they were continually warned about what Brexit would mean for families in Scotland and the rest of the UK—£1,400 a year and a fall in GDP. Well, it has happened, folks. And the latest polling shows that more people think Britain was wrong to vote to leave the EU.

There was not a cheep about being prepared to flout international law after he changed his mind on signing the Northern Ireland protocol. There was not a cheep about illegally proroguing Parliament.

Scotland has a different Government and deals with people in an entirely different way. We respect people and we treat them with dignity and respect when they need help. Here, this Westminster Parliament is believed to be sovereign, whereas in Scotland we know that that is not true; in Scotland, the people are sovereign. They elected a Parliament last year with a majority for independence, but this Tory Government are absolutely determined to keep Scotland in the Union. Self-determination apparently does not apply in Scotland. Even the—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I want both Front Benchers to be heard with civility, please. I call Angela Rayner.

9.40 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Today's debate has been very revealing. We heard a speech from the Prime Minister as delusional as the Transport Secretary's leadership bid, but sadly not as brief. He claimed that the deep state was plotting against him. Even now, he cannot either take responsibility or face reality—inspired not by Churchill or even Thatcher, but, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) said, by Trump. The truth is that this Prime Minister is the danger to our democracy and to our national security every day he clings on. I note that he cannot even be bothered to meet the conventions of this House and be here for the wind-ups like other hon. Members. The only deep state relevant tonight is the one he has left the country in. He claimed the two pillars of government were a dynamic economy and strong public services. I don't think he has been watching the other debates—[*Interruption.*] Ah, hi! Better late than never, Mr Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister has finally arrived, but I do not think he has been watching the other debates. His Foreign Secretary said that the

“economic strategy that we have at the moment, simply isn't working”

and that ambulance waiting times were “appalling”. The Trade Policy Minister said that

“we are going to be one of the most uncompetitive nations”

and that

“public services are in a desperate state”.

And they are the ones who are still members of this Government.

The hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Kemi Badenoch) asked: “Why should the public trust us? We haven't exactly covered ourselves in glory”. I agree. His former Chancellor said that the next Prime Minister would have to

“restore trust, rebuild our economy and reunite our country”.

For all the bluster we heard from Conservative Members today, I think those damning words say it all. And how many of them said the Prime Minister was honest? How many would put him in their own shadow Cabinet? *[Interruption.]* You will be, don't worry; that was not a misspeak. How many would put him in their shadow Cabinet, as it is soon to be? It was one less than the number of fingers the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns) raised to the public when she was appointed.

That is the standard of the Government he now leads—not exactly a ministry of all the talents. Will the last person in Downing Street please turn out the lightweights? As my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) said, while our country is in crisis, our Government are in chaos. As a national emergency was declared, where was the Prime Minister when Cobra was called? He was preparing for another party—I hope it went well. You couldn't make it up! He was missing in action while Britain boils. My hon. Friends the Members for Wallasey (Dame Angela Eagle) and for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), among others, noted the tidal wave of sleaze and scandal that swamped the Prime Minister and the human impact of ministerial misconduct on its victims. But, as my hon. Friends the Members for West Ham (Ms Brown) and for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome) said, this Conservative Government have also been a catastrophe for our whole country. We have had 12 years of Tory failure: 12 years of low growth; 12 years of a stagnating economy; and 12 years of broken promises. And that is just another verdict from his own Foreign Secretary.

What of the crises facing us now? On the cost of living crisis, the Government have no answers. On climate change, they have no answers. On backlog Britain, they have no answers. They are not just asleep at the wheel; they are steering us straight into the eye of the storm. It is no wonder that so many hon. Members have drawn the conclusion that Britain needs a fresh start. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) summed up this Government's record on tackling Islamophobia.

I agree with one comment that was made from the Government Benches, and that is that the office of Prime Minister is greater than the person who holds it. As so many of my hon. Friends have noted, this Prime Minister is simply not fit to fill that office, but the Conservative party plans to indulge him for the next seven weeks. A caretaker known for no care, every day he is in Downing Street he does more damage. He should be long gone. I say to Members on both sides of the House: let us tell this Prime Minister to go, and to go now. Enough is enough.

9.45 pm

The Deputy Prime Minister (Dominic Raab): I rise to proudly defend the record of this Government under this Prime Minister, and to speak in favour of the motion before the House. The Government under this Prime Minister have steered the country through some of the most difficult challenges in living memory.

This Government under this Prime Minister got the big calls right on the vaccine roll-out—the fastest and most effective in Europe. We would not have been able

to do that if we had listened to the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), the Leader of the Opposition, because we would have been tied to the EU's approach, with all of its limitations. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members chunter from a sedentary position, but it is worth reflecting on how many lives and livelihoods it would have cost us if we had listened to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. Labour Members really ought to have a bit more contrition.

Next, the Prime Minister and this Government took the tough call to come out of lockdown. It was around this time last year and in the teeth of opposition from the right hon. and learned Gentleman, backed up by his colleagues. As a result, we emerged with the fastest growing economy in the G7 last year, with 12 million jobs saved by furlough and in a strong position to face down the economic headwinds that have followed. Again, Labour Members might show at least a bit of remorse for their spineless, vacuous fence-sitting. The right hon. and learned Gentleman shakes his head, but I thought that the leader of the Labour party would appreciate the opportunity to look back with the benefit of hindsight at some of the mistakes that he has made. That is what he does; that is what they do.

I listened very carefully to the right hon. and learned Gentleman and the list of criticisms that he levelled at the Government. At the end—he bored on for quite some time—he said:

“I know that there has been fearmongering that this motion might lead straight to a general election...that is complete nonsense”.

It must be the first time in history that the Leader of an Opposition has pushed for a vote of no confidence but has not come out and called for a general election. That is the Labour party under the right hon. and learned Gentleman: all critique, no cojones.

Now, as we face a global fight against inflation, caused by the aftershocks of covid and the war in Ukraine, we again face a series of tough calls. We have put in place, under this Government and under this Prime Minister, an unprecedented package of targeted support to help those struggling the most to make ends meet. But we have to control inflation, we have to rein it, and that includes the way we address public sector wage demands. The consequence of failing to curb inflation—the direct result of giving in to excessive public sector wage demands—would be to keep inflation higher for longer and to have a further increase in interest rates. That reckless abdication would hit the poorest the hardest, and it would strike not just the lowest incomes in our society but the mortgages of working and middle-class families across the country. Conservative Members are committed to that wage restraint, coupled with an extensive package of support for the poorest and most vulnerable to get inflation down as soon as possible, which is the only credible approach.

What has Labour been doing about it? Members on the Labour Front Bench ignored the leader of their party and defied the memorandum that he sent in June ordering them not to back the RMT union. They actively backed the most militant demands led by that union, whose irresponsible strike action caused widespread disruption to people's lives and livelihoods. It was not just the usual virtue-signalling tweets; many of those Members joined the RMT picket lines, backing the unions over the public. The right hon. and learned

[The Deputy Prime Minister]

Gentleman showed that he cannot control or lead his party, and he cannot stand up to the public in the face of strikes coming down the line.

Michael Fabricant: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. He may not agree with me, but I think that he is being a little unfair to the Leader of the Opposition. The pointless motion today, which he knows—[*Interruption.*] Oh, yes! The Leader of the Opposition demanded it, and the Leader of the Opposition is now getting it. The motion that he asked for and is getting today will unite the Conservative party more than anything else that he could possibly have done.

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. What is more, the behaviour of those on the Labour Benches will unite the country. We know why they have not stood up to the unions, including the RMT, since 2015. The Labour party HQ and the local Labour party branches have guzzled up some £68 million in donations from the unions. It is the same old story. The Labour party cannot stand up for the people of this country because it is so deeply buried in the pockets of the unions.

While Labour Members play their games and stand on the side of the unions rather than the public, we will get on with delivering for the British people: unemployment close to a 50-year low, a rise in the national insurance threshold—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I cannot hear what Mr Raab is saying.

Dominic Raab: The Opposition do not want to hear it. They never want to talk about the fact that unemployment is close to a 50-year-low, or about the rise in the national insurance threshold, which is the biggest personal tax cut in a decade to support hard-working people across the country; the record levels of doctors and nurses in our precious NHS, only because we have the economic strength to fund them; the fact that violent crime and theft are down since Labour was in office, and reoffending is down because of the action that we have taken; the extra money that we provided for more police officers, which Labour opposed—that is true—and the tougher sentencing powers for dangerous and violent sexual offenders that we passed only recently in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, which Labour opposed.

Jess Phillips: While the right hon. Gentleman is jogging through his ideas—let us call them that—will he comment on what I spoke about and say whether he thinks that the Conservative party, under this Prime Minister, has successfully handled cases of sexual harassment and violence within its own ranks?

Dominic Raab: We have zero tolerance, and the systems are in place. Let me tell the hon. Lady—she talks a lot about this—that the number of convictions for rape has risen by two thirds in the past year. When it comes to supporting the victims of crime—[*Interruption.*] I have listened to her, but she never talks about this: we have quadrupled the investment in support services for victims since the last year of the last Labour Government. If she really felt so strongly about these issues, why did she not vote for the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts

Act? The truth is that only the Conservatives are willing to take the concerted action to stand up for victims, to stand up for the public and to keep our streets safe.

When it comes to our international security, which the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) raised, it is this Prime Minister and this Government who showed the international leadership to fund, to supply, to train and to support the military capabilities of the Ukrainian forces, to sanction the Russian oligarchs and the businesses that finance President Putin's war machine, to provide the humanitarian aid that the Ukrainian people need and to welcome those fleeing from Russian forces. What about the Labour party?

The right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras and the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne wanted the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) to lead us. [*Interruption.*] Well, he spoke earlier, but he is not in his place now. The whole House knows what that would have meant: out of NATO, with Trident dismantled. They would have left our No. 1 alliance and given up our ultimate national security insurance policy at precisely the wrong time.

Sally-Ann Hart: Will my right hon. Friend just clarify whether it is £68 million that the Labour party has guzzled since 2015, and whether that includes the £500,000 that a Chinese spy gave to a member of the Labour party to pay for their son to be an employee?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point, which I believe is now a matter of public record. The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne backed a leader who the former head of MI6 said—I will quote, so we have this accurately for the record—denigrated his own country and

“embraced the interests of its enemies and opponents”.

That is who Labour supported. The Opposition have no business talking about national security.

I am proud of the record of this Government under this Prime Minister. Labour Members want to talk about trust, but they cannot be trusted on jobs, they cannot be trusted to keep our streets safe and they cannot be trusted with our national security. I commend this motion to the House.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 349, Noes 238.

Division No. 45]

[9.57]

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan (*Proxy vote cast by Scott Mann*)

Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack

Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Sir Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, rh Conor
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, rh Michelle
Dorries, rh Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Kate
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkynds, Andrea
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth

Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kearns, Alicia
Keegan, Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lockhart, Carla
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Macleane, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morrissey, Joy
Morton, Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Patel, rh Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, Chris
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Pritchard, rh Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, rh Dominic
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Roberts, Rob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, rh Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Simmonds, David
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, rh Rishi
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tracey, Craig
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Trott, Laura
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Vara, rh Shailesh

Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Wallis, Dr Jamie
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Webb, Suzanne
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John

Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Chris Heaton-Harris and
Michael Tomlinson

NOES

Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Bonnar, Steven
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Davies-Jones, Alex
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha

Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doogan, Dave
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Fellows, Marion
Fletcher, Colleen
Flynn, Stephen
Foord, Richard
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Furniss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Green, Kate
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Dame Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan

Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Pat McFadden*)
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Linden, David
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McLaughlin, Anne
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owen, Sarah

Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Powell, Lucy
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
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
Starmar, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Wakeford, Christian
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad

Tellers for the Noes:
Taiwo Owatemi and
Mary Glindon

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has confidence in Her Majesty's Government.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

AGRICULTURE

That the draft Common Agricultural Policy (Cross-Compliance Exemptions and Transitional Regulation) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 7 June, be approved.—(*David Morris.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

UNITED KINGDOM INTERNAL MARKET

That the draft United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 (Exclusions from Market Access Principles: Single-Use Plastics) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 9 June, be approved.—(*David Morris.*)

Question agreed to.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION

[*Relevant documents: Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, Appointment and re-appointment of Electoral Commissioners, Second Report 2022, HC 353*]
Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6) and Order, 6 July),

That an humble address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that Her Majesty will re-appoint Lord Gilbert of Panteg as an Electoral Commissioner with effect from 1 November 2022 for the period ending 31 October 2026; appoint Roseanna Cunningham as an Electoral Commissioner with effect from 1 October 2022 for the period ending 30 September 2026; and appoint Chris Ruane as an Electoral Commissioner with effect from 1 November 2022 for the period ending 31 October 2026.—(*Mr Bone.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Doncaster Sheffield airport

10.10 pm

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): I submit this petition on behalf of the good people of Don Valley, and the 56,000 people who have supported an online petition to save Doncaster Sheffield airport from closure. It is an award winner that is central to Doncaster's future. It has superb facilities, its location could not be better, and it is one of the most environmentally friendly airports at which to land an aircraft; it has a unique approach. The petitioners

"request that the House of Commons urge the Government to take all necessary steps"

to keep our airport open, and to safeguard its future for Doncaster and its people.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[*The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,*

Declares that Doncaster-Sheffield Airport is incredibly important to the economy and wellbeing of the City of Doncaster, and should not be closed down; further that the owners, Peel Holdings, have indicated their intention to close the airport on the basis that they say it is not commercially viable; notes that the airport provides employment for some 800 people and brings in valuable trade and business to Doncaster; and further that it would be a real setback to the levelling up of our City for the airport to be closed.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to take all necessary steps to keep Doncaster-Sheffield airport open and safeguard the employment of all those who work in or around the airport.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002757]

St George's University Hospitals Trust: Cardiac Surgery Mortality Review

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(David Morris.)

10.11 pm

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): I thank Mr Speaker for granting this Adjournment debate. I first want to explain why I have brought it forward. St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is not in my constituency, but Professor Marjan Jahangiri, professor of cardiac surgery at St George's Hospital, is my constituent, hence my involvement today. I am delighted that my constituent is in the Gallery. I reassure you in advance, Mr Deputy Speaker, that while I may refer to coroners' inquests, I will refer only to those that have concluded; there are several pending, but I will not refer to them, so my remarks will not be on matters sub judice.

I have secured this debate because I believe my constituent may have suffered a serious miscarriage of justice. There are also major public policy issues, if my conclusion is right that the independent mortality review of cardiac surgery at St George's is deeply flawed. Let me say by way of background that my constituent is a pre-eminent cardiac surgeon and was the first female professor of cardiac surgery appointed in the UK and Europe.

Let me attempt to summarise a very complex situation. The results of cardiac surgery in the UK are reviewed on a three-yearly cycle. St George's Hospital went into alert for the periods of 2013 to 2016 and 2014 to 2017, due to excess mortality of 11 to 12 patients. I should state that my constituent's results have never been subject to an alert or an alarm. There were 202 deaths from approximately 5,200 operations at the unit between 2013 and 2018. NHS Improvement commissioned an independent mortality review of the cardiac surgery unit, which is known as the Lewis review.

The Lewis review panel studied the cases and wrote a one-page report on each patient—a structured judgment review. These were based solely on a review of hospital records. Each case received a score of 1 to 6 for problems in care contributing to death. No medical professional was interviewed, and no risk-adjusted mortality was analysed. This methodology is, I understand, very non-standard and runs counter to the methodology of the National Institute for Cardiovascular Outcomes Research. My constituent highlighted, before publication of the Lewis report, factual errors in the structured judgment reviews, but these letters were ignored.

The review, when it was published, concluded that 67 out of the 202 deaths were avoidable. The figure of 67 is vastly different from the original alert of 11 to 12. As a result of the review, all consultant cardiac surgeons at the unit, including my constituent, were referred to the General Medical Council by NHSI and St George's. The General Medical Council found “no case to answer”, with no failings in care, and the case was closed.

The 67 cases were referred to Her Majesty's senior coroner for inner west London, Professor Fiona Wilcox. The coroner has rejected the findings of the Lewis review in all 13 of my constituent's cases, and no failings in care have been identified. In total, the coroner has rejected the findings in almost 40 cases, and in only one has she concluded that there have been failings in care—a case in which she had already opened an inquest.

I want to give the House a flavour of some of the comments that the coroner has made. I will just choose a few quotations from an inquest on 14 July 2021, which was one of my constituent's inquests. One quote is:

“I can find no failings of care. I find no criticism of the care delivered by the clinical team. The failings identified in the review have, once again, not been found after consideration of the evidence.”

Another quote from that inquest is:

“I cannot find failings that contributed to the death. On the contrary, I find that the care given by the staff of St George's was excellent and beyond criticism.”

And another quote from that inquest is:

“There has been enormous damage and suffering as a result of the NHSI Review to the families and St George's staff, sufferings to relatives who fear that their loved ones died because of lack of care or failures in care, and extraordinary amount of work for this Court.”

On 9 May 2022, the coroner issued a regulation 28 report under the Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013, in which she described the failings of the NHSI Lewis review and stated that its implementation has caused deaths and harm. I want to quote just a few quotations from that regulation 28 review. It said that

“when the operative mortality statistics of each of the surgeons is examined across the range of theatres where they work, no surgeon had then or has now an operative mortality rate higher than expected.”

Separately, it said:

“The whole reputation of the cardiac surgery department and the hospital has been damaged with no evidence that this court has so far seen of deficiencies in care.”

Specifically, it was said as a matter of concern that

“the SJR process as deployed in SGH is not fit for purpose, further undermining the public confidence in the NHS, which the public may perceive as the NHS being unable to appropriately audit its own work.”

My constituent finds herself in a position where a review states that her unit caused 67 avoidable deaths, yet she has been exonerated by the coroners' inquests and the General Medical Council.

This has wide-ranging implications. Not only is my constituent's medical reputation severely affected, but there are many other consequences. The families of those who died are left confused and troubled as to why their family members died, and it erodes public confidence. As noted in the regulation 28 report, which I mentioned briefly, the restrictions imposed on the unit are limiting its ability to carry out necessary surgeries. The coroner also said that the trust's cardiac research and training programme had to be disbanded as a result of the review, and surgeons and nurses are losing vital skills. Finally, significant public funds are being spent on the court's time and legal settlements.

This troubling situation raises significant public policy issues. The situation has been raised in the other place. Lord Kamall said that

“it is also important to recognise the differences between the coroners' inquests and the work of the independent mortality review, which was not undertaken to determine the cause of death in individual cases or attribute blame”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 May 2022; Vol. 822, c. 451.]

and that it was all about processes, procedures and culture. I would argue, however, that that is not the case.

The Lewis review is specifically called a mortality review, and the terms of reference for the review refer nowhere to a review of processes, procedures or culture.

Instead they are focused squarely on whether there are “problems in care that may have or definitely contributed to the death of a patient.”

Furthermore, the terms of reference explicitly confirm that the review was to consider the same issues as the coroner. I therefore ask the following of my hon. Friend the Minister, although I appreciate that he may want to reflect on this: given the rulings of the coroner and the General Medical Council, I ask that the findings of the NHSI/Lewis review be dropped. This was clearly a review into individual deaths rather than a review of culture, and the findings have been discredited by the coroner. I believe it is firmly in the public interest to drop the conclusions of this review. I further ask that that be done quickly, as it is taking a significant toll on all those involved. I would be most grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister gave this issue his full and due consideration.

10.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (James Morris): It is a pleasure to be here in my new role as Parliamentary Under-Secretary responsible for primary care and patient safety, and I start by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan) and congratulating her on securing this important debate on cardiac services at St George's Hospital. Before responding to the specific issues that she raised, I wish to extend my sympathies to the bereaved families she mentioned who have been affected by these issues.

It might be useful if I begin by setting out some of the background and history of cardiac services at St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. It is important to consider the mortality review in the context of the growing concerns that there were about the culture that existed across cardiac services at St George's, and the impact that context may have had on the safety and quality of services and questions over mortality rates. Indeed, a number of reviews of cardiac services at St George's and a Care Quality Commission inspection were critical of services, and concerns were raised by a large group of cardiologists from the hospital. Following two mortality alerts from the National Institute for Cardiovascular Outcomes Research, NHS Improvement commissioned an independent external mortality review, which my hon. Friend mentioned. The purpose of the mortality review was to verify that the trust had identified and addressed the concerns raised through both NICOR alerts, and to inform the trust's discussions with the coroner regarding the deaths.

It goes without saying that the review's aims and methodology differed significantly from those of an inquest. The independent panel for the review was composed of consultant cardiac surgeons, cardiologists and consultant cardiac anaesthetists drawn from across the country. It was chaired by Mr Mike Lewis, and published its report in March 2020. The panel found shortcomings in 102 of the 202 deaths it examined. In particular, it found that problems in care probably, most likely or definitely contributed to the deaths of 67 heart

surgery patients. As my hon. Friend mentioned, the structured judgment reviews are a standard way of assessing deaths. There is always learning following such a level of scrutiny of a service, including for the regulators. However, I would argue that it would not have been acceptable for NHSI to have ignored the professional and public concerns that gave rise to the mortality review in the first place. The trust and NHS Improvement jointly referred 67 heart surgery patients identified by the review to the coroner. The coroner decided to hold inquests into those cases, which are ongoing. NHS England received a prevention of future deaths report, dated 9 May 2022, to which my hon. Friend referred.

My hon. Friend has raised serious concerns about the findings of the coroner in relation to the mortality review of cardiac services at St George's, the subsequent impact on the services available to people in south-west London, and the impact of regulatory action on the professionals involved. I have set out the background to the mortality review and what it found. Since the independent mortality review, St George's has taken comprehensive action to improve the quality, leadership and culture in the cardiac unit. Importantly, mortality has returned to normal levels, patient care outcomes have improved, and the Care Quality Commission has found that services are safe. The review greatly assisted the trust by making recommendations that helped to improve the service and deliver better outcomes for patients.

NHS England London region is continuing to work with the trust to improve the services and leadership of the cardiac unit. The restrictions that were placed on the cardiac surgery unit's practice before the mortality review have now been removed, and the unit's outcomes are now in line with those of other trusts. Enhanced oversight of the unit continues, with a package of support measures in place to ensure that improvements are made.

As my hon. Friend said, on 7 May 2022, the GMC found that the two doctors excluded by the trust had “no case to answer”. It is important to emphasise that the referral of those doctors was not as a result of the mortality review, which considered issues of safety and did not criticise any individual. It would be inappropriate for me to comment on individual cases in relation to that matter because of ongoing legal issues. Finally, NHS England is committed to reviewing the coroner's prevention of future deaths report of 9 May and will respond in due course.

NHS hospitals are working hard to provide the very best care for their patients and families, and they should always seek to learn and take action when they have concerns. The Government are absolutely committed to improving the standard of investigations into serious patient safety incidents in the NHS to create a culture of learning from mistakes and to improve patient safety.

Question put and agreed to.

10.30 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 18 July 2022

[SIR MARK HENDRICK *in the Chair*]

BTEC Qualifications

[*Relevant document: e-petition 570179, Don't scrap funding for BTEC Performing Arts*]

4.30 pm

Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair): Before we start, I want to say something about the exceptional heat. While the heat remains at this level, I am content for Members not to wear jackets or ties in Westminster Hall. Mr Speaker has announced similar arrangements for the main Chamber. When the House returns in the autumn, Mr Speaker and the Deputy Speakers will expect Members to revert to wearing jackets and will also strongly encourage male members to wear ties when speaking in the main Chamber and in Westminster Hall.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 592642, relating to BTEC qualifications.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Sir Mark. The petition, entitled “Protect student choice: do not withdraw funding for BTEC qualifications”, aims to reverse the plan to withdraw funding for most applied general qualifications, such as BTECs, and guarantee that they will continue to play a major role in the qualifications landscape.

The petition is about choice, and not forcing students to choose between studying only A-levels or T-Levels from the age of 16. I begin by acknowledging and congratulating the #ProtectStudentChoice coalition, an unprecedented gathering of 30 organisations from various sectors, including the Association of School and College Leaders, national teachers’ unions and the National Union of Students, for its brilliant campaigning against the defunding of BTECs.

The strong level of support—including the petition, which gathered over 108,329 signatures, leading to today’s debate—is credit to the brilliant work done by the coalition and, in particular, by the petition’s creators, Noni and James at the Sixth Form Colleges Association. The fact that the Government have had to make changes to their plans—although those changes still do not go far enough—shows the power of the work of the coalition and the value of the petition. I also want to say a special thanks to St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College and South Thames College in my Battersea constituency—two brilliant institutions providing BTECs for young people in Battersea and neighbouring constituencies.

Many of us are here because we are passionate about ensuring that the education system provides young people with the skills employers need. As we come out of the pandemic, we need students to finish education well equipped to progress to further training or to get skilled jobs, allowing businesses to recover and young people to flourish. That is why I am extremely concerned about the Government’s proposal to remove funding for the

vast majority of BTECs. That will remove choice for many young people and may lead to some missing the opportunity to go to university.

Several hon. Members rose—

Marsha De Cordova: I have too much choice. That is what we want our students to have, right? I give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer).

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): It is pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Sir Mark. I congratulate my hon. Friend, who is a dear friend of mine, on securing the debate. BTECs have been a lifeline for so many of my constituents across St Helens and Knowsley. They have a positive impact on social mobility and have helped so many young people get on in life. Does my hon. Friend agree that BTECs offer the right balance of academic and vocational learning, and that funding for them must be maintained?

Marsha De Cordova: I congratulate my hon. Friend on making that point; she has clearly read my speech, because I am going to come on to that. She is absolutely spot on. That is why I was proud to join over 100 parliamentarians calling on the Government to reconsider their plan.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): My hon. Friend is right: one thing that we want to promote, of course, is choice. I agree that scrapping BTECs will hinder social mobility, and hinder progress into skilled labour markets and higher education. As Paul Britton, the principal of Wyke Sixth Form College, pointed out—I am a bit biased as I went there myself as a student—scrapping BTECs will also have an impact on the local economy. Not only is it bad for social mobility, but it is bad for choice and for the local economy. I support BTECs so much that even my daughter is going to do one next year.

Marsha De Cordova: Fantastic—I could not say it better myself. My hon. Friend makes a fantastic contribution and she is absolutely right: it is not just about social mobility; it is about the local economy too.

The introduction of T-levels does have value in terms of technical education; however, there is no rationale for why BTEC qualifications must make way for them. It makes sense to have A-levels, T-levels and BTECs in all future qualification landscapes. It is clear that the Government are forcing through these changes so they can drive up T-level take-up. The Sixth Form Colleges Association has described T-levels as a

“minority, untested product that the Government is pushing as a mass product.”

It is still too early to analyse the effectiveness of T-levels. The Government should not be pulling away from BTECs without evidence about the success of T-levels. That is grossly unfair to young people, removing their choice and opportunity.

The notion that we can divide people into “academic” or “technical” is wrong. BTECs provide a different type of educational experience—one that combines the development of skills with academic learning. I believe

[Marsha De Cordova]

that the Minister studied a BTEC and said that it had a transformative impact on her life. Perhaps she agrees with me that, after last week, we need a new BTEC course on public anger management.

Leaders from various education institutions have said that, for some students, BTECs will continue to be a more effective route to higher education or skilled employment than studying A-levels or T-levels.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I am fortunate to have Peter Symonds College in my constituency. It is one of the biggest in England and it educates about 4,500 young people. Many of its students progress to higher education or to skilled employment after studying an applied general qualification such as a BTEC. Does the hon. Lady agree that if the Government are to proceed with this policy and remove BTECs, we need to hear from the new Minister—I welcome her to her place—what viable pathway they envisage for those young people who will then want to move on to higher education or skilled employment through colleges such as Peter Symonds, which serves my constituents and those of many of the MPs around me in Hampshire?

Marsha De Cordova: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution. It is important that we retain the three routes that are currently available.

In particular, BTECs provide a good route to get young people into university. The Nuffield Foundation found that around a quarter of students who go to university have BTEC qualifications. A significant number of those students complete their studies successfully, with 60% graduating with at least an upper second-class degree. The Government must listen to students. It is clear from the data that students value these qualifications. An estimate suggests that around 34% of the 921,046 16 to 18-year-olds studying a level 3 qualification in England are pursuing at least one BTEC.

On the benefits of BTECs, I will share some students' experiences. First, BTECs allow students to specialise and learn a wider range of skills. Isabella, who is studying for a BTEC in IT at St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College, said:

"If I was to do A level computer science, I would have to pick two other subjects that weren't related to my chosen career path...I would like to do something in artificial intelligence or computer science or web developing and I realised that me doing BTEC IT really benefits me as I study a lot of" those areas.

Secondly, BTECs are more accessible than alternatives such as T-levels. Summer, a level 3 aviation operations student at Newcastle College, said:

"Many people won't meet the qualifications" to go on to T-levels, and "everyone deserves an education no matter what grades they get."

Thirdly, BTECs also lead to beneficial health outcomes, including for mental health. Sylvia, who is studying art, design and communications at St Francis Xavier College, said:

"I don't need to worry about exams or any tests, I'm just in the moment—I design buildings and I build them." Not everybody is cut out to do exams.

The reality is that the plan for T-levels and A-levels to become the qualifications of choice for most young people will leave many students—including those with special educational needs or disabilities and those from a black, Asian or ethnic minority background—without a viable pathway after their GCSEs. The Department for Education's own impact assessment concluded that such students had the most to lose from these changes. Defunding BTECs risks reversing the progress made by higher education institutions, especially in London, on access and participation in recent years. BTECs are engines of social mobility, as my hon. Friends have highlighted. Research from the Social Market Foundation found that 44% of white working-class students who enter university studied at least one BTEC, and that 37% of black students enter with only BTEC qualifications.

The Government have now said that they plan to delay the defunding until 2024-25 rather than 2023-24, and that their plans will apply to only a "small proportion" of the total level 3 BTECs and other applied general-style qualifications. On the first point, delaying a bad idea does not stop it being a bad idea. On the second, removing a small proportion of qualifications for which a high proportion of students are enrolled will still have a devastating impact. For example, around 80% of applied general enrolments in the sixth form college sector are in just 20 subject areas.

It is time for the Government to listen, and they need to consider reversing their plans. Does the Minister think that the new Prime Minister will change the Conservative party's disastrous policy on this issue? Will she guarantee that funding will not be removed for any BTEC qualifications unless an impartial, evidence-based assessment has concluded that they are not valued by students, universities and employers? Will she ensure that students and practitioners can contribute to the process of identifying qualifications that are deemed to overlap with T-levels? Can she assure us that some of the most popular BTECs—in subjects such as health, business, IT and applied sciences—will not be scrapped through the reapproval process simply to help drive up the numbers of students taking T-levels?

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Before my hon. Friend comes to the end of her speech, may I say to her that it is not just in London that BTECs have proved so useful? It is also the case in the west midlands conurbation, which has a very diverse population and a sizeable skills gap. That is why the Government should look at offering BTECs alongside T-levels. T-levels have a huge role to play, and employer demand is there, but employers also recognise the upgrading of young people's skills and abilities through undertaking BTECs. It is not just on the educational side, but on what the Government always say they are looking at—the outputs, which employers value as well.

Marsha De Cordova: My right hon. Friend is absolutely spot on.

In conclusion, the Government argue that changes are needed and that their plans are about streamlining and improving the quality of post-16 qualifications, but I and others firmly disagree with that assessment. We do not believe that the reforms will achieve their desired outcomes. The Government need to listen not just to me but to students, practitioners and employers, who all see the value of retaining BTEC qualifications.

4.45 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): It is a pleasure to be here now that I am back on the Back Benches, as one of the 56 who were driven to resign. This is the first debate that I have spoken in since then, which demonstrates how important I feel it is. There are a number of reasons for that.

BTEC qualifications are important nationally and for my constituency, which has several excellent further education colleges that I will mention. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova), who opened the debate. There were 669 signatories to the petition in my constituency—the eighth highest by number of constituents. Normally, when so many people sign a petition, it demonstrates that lots of others support the subject. That is why I am here.

To cut to the chase, I understand the need to equip students between 16 and 18, or indeed those studying in later life, with the best skills and tools to get into jobs and to work with the businesses that need them. That is really important for growing our economy. In that respect, I supported the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022.

I have real concerns, however, about the proposal to axe BTEC qualifications, which, in a large proportion of cases, function perfectly well. I completely understand that it would be worth looking at the multifarious range of courses, because clearly some are repetitive and some do not quite align with the jobs and skills we need, but a great many of them certainly do. I do not believe that they should just be removed so that people are left with only T-levels and A-levels. I perfectly understand their place as well, but it seems like throwing the baby out with the bathwater to get rid of something that is already performing well.

Emma Hardy: The hon. Member is making an excellent speech. I hope that the Minister will recognise that T-levels are not universally available throughout the country, because of the work placement requirement that comes with them. Getting rid of BTECs and replacing them with T-levels actually limits choice for people, because the availability of T-levels is variable and depends on the jobs in the local economy.

Rebecca Pow: That is a really good point. It was not raised by people in my area—it may not be the case there—but the case certainly has been made that T-levels are basically the equivalent of three A-levels rolled together, and not every student is quite ready to do that. Students also have to get the same qualifications at GCSE to do a T-level, so already, one might be alienating a certain number of students who might find the BTEC really good and go on to do some of these other things. There are many things that I urge the Minister—I welcome her to her place—to look at and listen to, now that we have this reprieve.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): The hon. Lady has hit on an important point. If the Government are saying that T-levels have greater rigour than BTECs, and if, by definition, T-levels will not be appropriate for many students who currently do BTECs, the Government have to tell us what their plan is for those students. If the plan is not a level 3 qualification, what is it?

Rebecca Pow: I am not always the first person to agree with the Opposition, but I think we have a lot of synergy here. What is most important is putting students first and coming up with what we can do for them—and then, in fairness, what they can do to help the country and the economy because they are well trained and they have the right skills.

We have a reprieve, but I believe that it is only a delay at the moment. I urge the Minister to use that delay to listen to all these comments and work out what sort of system might keep all three qualifications in the right shape or form.

Steve Brine: Further to my earlier intervention on the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova), if the Government wish to proceed with this, they have the right to do so—if they can convince the House that it is the right thing to do. However, young people have had enough anxiety over the last few years, and they are making decisions now. They do not have time for delay and navel gazing. We need a steer sooner rather than later; otherwise, it just adds to their anxiety.

Rebecca Pow: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. I think that we all recognise that our students have come through a very difficult time. Indeed, the colleges, in planning, also need some clear steers. His point is well made.

I want to speak very specifically about my own sixth-form college, Richard Huish College, which has been rated outstanding by Ofsted for the third consecutive year, and has an outstanding record over 20 years. Nearly 800 students every year do applied general qualifications—that is, BTECs—and a significant number go on to very high-quality education and a whole range of other courses. BTECs are definitely a useful stepping-stone. I have spoken to those students, and many of the points that I am about to raise have come from those discussions. I will highlight some of the examples. One student did two A-levels, psychology and sociology, and then a BTEC in music production. She has gone on to Magdalen College, Oxford, to do human sciences.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): That is a really important point. BTECs can enable students to go to university at Oxford and Cambridge, but Oxford and Cambridge will not recognise the T-level subjects.

Rebecca Pow: That is another well-made point. All those things must go into the mix in making sure that we get this right for our young people.

Another example is a student who studied the BTEC extended diploma in public services and went on to do paramedic science at the University of Plymouth. Another did the business BTEC and went on to do a higher-level apprenticeship with the accountants Ernst and Young. Another did the extended diploma in public services and went on to join Avon and Somerset police. Another did health and social care, and went on to an adult nursing degree at Cardiff University. A further student did a health and social care diploma and went on to a teaching course at the University of Plymouth—and so on and so forth. That demonstrates the breadth of the qualification.

There is also a strong link, particularly in my constituency, between students doing a health-related BTEC and then going into nursing, which is critical. We have another

[Rebecca Pow]

very good FE college, University Centre Somerset. In fairness, it does T-levels and BTECs, and that is all going well, but it takes a lot of students on to its nursing courses. We need those people in Somerset, and probably all over the country. We particularly need them in Somerset because we have a wonderful new hospital. As the MP, I was responsible for helping to get the upgrade and the new theatres, and we are working on that. There is a massive call for more nurses, and we want those nurses to stay in my lovely constituency. If we can train them there, and they can get a great, well-paid job, we will not haemorrhage them to elsewhere in the country. We need them to stay in Somerset, particularly because we have an ageing population. I would like my young people to stay in my wonderful constituency.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): The hon. Lady is making an important point about the link-up and the circular needs in our local communities. For example, students can do a biomedical science BTEC at Luton Sixth Form College, they can go to the University of Bedfordshire in Luton and then they can work at Luton and Dunstable University Hospital. Would she agree that it is important that that practical link-up is maintained?

Rebecca Pow: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. That is exactly the point that I was trying to make. We are demonstrating that that is what is happening in Somerset. I certainly want that to continue, and in fact to grow, and for us to nurture all those people to live and work in this wonderful environment. It is a beautiful environment in which to work anyway, so if we can give them a good job and good training, I am sure that they will be tempted to stay. That is particularly important. A significant number of people go into teaching from these courses, which is also important. There are a lot of concerns that moving from this binary system of T-levels and A-levels, and that it will mean our BTECs become defunded, so can the Minister assure me that that will not be the case? As I said, it will be much more appropriate for many young people to start with the BTEC.

On the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), we want our students to have a viable pathway, and that point about the uncertainty was such a good one because they will already be thinking, “BTECs are the way for me”—having that confidence because it is not three A-levels rolled into one—but suddenly they are getting a bit uncertain about what we are doing for them.

The point that the hon. Member for Battersea and others made so ably about disadvantaged backgrounds is significant, because the data shows that a high proportion of people from disadvantaged backgrounds start with a BTEC and loads of them go on to university. The universities know that, and we are trying to level up and include everybody. That is something that needs to be taken into account.

I will make one further point, which is particularly relevant to Somerset. We have a high proportion of small and medium-sized enterprises in our county, and they simply cannot provide the 45 days of work experience required for a T-level. I understand why that is important and why T-levels are designed to include it, but these are not huge companies; they are small SMEs, and a lot of them find it difficult to give somebody even a week's

work experience. That needs a lot of attention, because otherwise even the T-levels will struggle in Somerset. What we do not want is to be left with a whole load of brilliant young students for whom A-levels are not appropriate and a T-level is not appropriate, and who are just not getting the opportunities that they need.

To conclude, my plea is to look at this really carefully and listen to what everybody is saying, because we are all saying it with the best intentions. We want to support the Government and their skills and opportunities agenda, because that is absolutely the right way to go. It is really good to be looking at all of this, but could we potentially have an evidence-based assessment of the whole situation so that we are doing the right thing for our young people?

4.57 pm

Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Mark. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) for leading the debate and speaking with characteristic eloquence about what the Government's plans to defund applied general qualifications will mean for young people living in her constituency.

Like my hon. Friend, I have been deeply moved by the many messages I have received in recent weeks from students studying at Wirral Metropolitan College, urging me to speak in this debate and to stand up and defend the principle of student choice. Many of those young people live in some of the most deprived communities in the country, and they understand all too well what the Government do not: that guaranteeing young people access to a wide range of educational opportunities is essential if they are to realise their full potential. That message has been underscored by many of my older constituents who now work in sectors as diverse as academia, administration and aerospace, for whom BTECs were a vital stepping stone towards university or training in industry.

Much of today's discussion will understandably focus on pathways to work or further study, but we must never forget that education is all about broadening one's horizons in other senses. Although much of what a person studies at age 17 and 18 has little bearing on their day-to-day work, it nevertheless plays an important role in shaping more well-rounded, thoughtful and inquisitive adults. Since the Conservatives came into office 12 long years ago, education policy has been treated as a plaything for policymakers, who have little grounding in the sector and are more interested in ideology than in outcomes. Rhetoric has trumped hard-earned experience and successive Education Secretaries have been free to make far-reaching reforms, despite the protestations of education experts, practitioners and young people themselves.

The result is that today levels of social mobility are in freefall, while the UK continues to lag far behind our European neighbours when it comes to investment in technical training and education. Now Ministers want to do away with a system of qualifications that is widely respected, recognised and understood, replacing it with T-levels, which are entirely untried and untested.

For many people working in further education, these plans will undoubtedly revive memories of the ill-fated vocational diplomas and A-levels. However, whereas

those served only to distract the Government from attending to the more profound questions concerning education provision, I fear that these new proposals will have the far graver consequence of entrenching long-standing educational inequalities for years to come. Indeed, the University and College Union has warned that by limiting student choice to a traditional academic education or a narrower vocational pathway, we risk giving rise to an overlooked middle of learners who are unable to access either.

For far too long, the Government's approach towards education policy has been warped by a grotesque desire to preserve a privileged education for the elite few, and by the belief that university is somehow innately superior to a vocational education. The consequence is that vocational education is today poorly understood, even by Ministers who seek to reform it.

Ministers have fundamentally failed to grasp the fact that not everyone studying a vocational subject wishes to enter an occupational role, and nor should they be expected to commit to such a significant decision at such a young age. The education unions are quite right to fear that the Government's plans for T-levels risk forcing some students, who would otherwise study BTECs, into lower levels of learning or out of education entirely.

Our country faces some extraordinary challenges in the coming years. The landscape of work is set to be fundamentally transformed by the growing pace of automation, while the existential threat posed by the climate crisis demands that we invest in an unprecedented level to lay the foundations for a high-skilled and green economy. These changes all have enormous implications for the future of education provision and, in particular, vocational education. We are in desperate need of a rethink of our priorities and a clean break with the idea that a vocational education is somehow second rate.

However, instead of showing the vision, ambition and commitment to fundamental change that the times call for, Ministers are instead focusing on repackaging technical qualifications and restricting student choice. In the short term, it is young working-class people in my constituency who will suffer, but soon enough our whole country will be forced to pay the price.

5.2 pm

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Sir Mark. I, too, thank the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) and the Petitions Committee for scheduling the debate. The petition has attracted many signatures from my Meon Valley constituency and elsewhere in Hampshire, where we are fortunate to have some really strong colleges serving our students. Although I do not have a sixth-form college in my constituency, some of my constituents attend colleges in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) and other nearby colleges. In the lead-up to the debate, I have been contacted directly by student constituents who have concerns, and I am pleased to speak on their behalf too.

In the post-covid landscape, we must help students to catch up, as well as ensuring that education meets the changing needs of employers and the future life of

young people. One thing that I know employers look for is certainty. There has been an endless debate about the value of qualifications and about how well qualifications relate to what employers need, which is why I wrote a paper on assessment nearly two years ago and why there have been five commissions since on the subject, which I will come to later. Indeed, tomorrow we will be setting up an all-party parliamentary group on assessment—I say that in case anybody here is interested in joining.

With BTEC, we have a proven qualification in many subjects that provides value for everyone—students and employers. Qualifications such as BTEC are taken close to the point at which many students are likely to enter work. They are relatively more important than A-levels to young people who are not going to university, as they prepare students well for work immediately, whereas university students have another three or four years before facing career-level employers for the first time after graduating.

I am pleased that most universities recognise BTECs as part of the mix of qualifications for entry to university. I did not know about T-levels, but I have looked them up and the hon. Member for Battersea is absolutely right that Cambridge and Oxford do not accept them at this stage, but I hope that might change.

I welcome the intentions towards employability skills that the Government showed in bringing in T-levels. However, where BTEC qualifications best fit the needs of students and employers, they should be retained. Let us take nursing and healthcare, for instance. All the medical bodies have said that they are concerned about the impact of scrapping BTEC courses on their ability to recruit in future. Students who take BTECs can become support workers, and many go on to qualify as nurses, midwives and radiographers. NHS employers estimate that about one fifth of those studying for a nursing degree started with a health and social care BTEC. At the same time, NHS bodies have doubts about the viability of replacement T-levels because, as we have heard, they require a 45-day work placement, which many employers struggle to offer. That is a problem for people who want to go into medicine too; finding work experience is very difficult. Ending BTECs without having a suitable replacement will make it hard to recruit into those professions and others, including apprenticeships, so we must ensure that every route into those jobs is kept open.

We should also look at the social impact of the proposed changes. The equalities impact assessment, which formed part of the Government's response to the consultation, states that removing BTECs will mean that some students do not attain a qualification at level 3. There is simply a commitment to mitigate that with a higher-quality level 2, and mitigations are outlined to support continued progression to level 3, but it is not clear what they will be. The EIA highlights concerns about the uncertainty of the future approval criteria.

Hon. Members will agree that to expect students to start on a path when neither they nor the Government know where it will lead is unacceptable, as my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) articulated well. The EIA is clear that students from minority and more deprived backgrounds will be disproportionately affected by this change. It is not good enough to say that we will make a better level 2 for them. That is not how we advance social mobility.

[Mrs Flick Drummond]

This experience should teach us that the structure of senior education assessment is becoming more confused, not less. We have A-levels for the academic strand, which is completely separate from vocational strands. T-levels do not provide learning in some subjects in the way that BTECs do. We are proposing to end BTECs in general while retaining some specialist qualification. As I mentioned in the paper that I wrote, it is time to look again at how we structure education between the ages of 14 and 18 so that young people can work towards a range of qualifications that complement each other—education and vocational, with the ability to do different strand at the same time.

We should end the situation in which young people take GCSEs, which are only a milestone in their education, before moving into a confused offer of A-levels, T-levels and whatever other limited qualifications remain after this review. We need a vocational path alongside T-levels. All the commissions that have published on this subject agree that our assessment system is no longer fit for purpose.

University technical colleges are one of the best innovations in education in decades. Many of my constituents go to one in Portsmouth, and I would love to have more surrounding my constituency, because the demand for UTC places in Hampshire outstrips supply. That is the right kind of environment for young people to take in a mixture of subjects and qualifications. By starting at 14, they avoid a jolt in students' education at 16. Students do GCSEs, but it is a secondary thing; it is something they have to get through, rather than linking to what they want to do.

Steve Brine: As usual, my hon. Friend is making a very thoughtful speech. In Hampshire, we have a tertiary system: we have big sixth-form colleges and very few sixth forms attached to state secondary schools. UTCs are an important element of choice that maintains the system that has worked well and served our county and constituents for many years.

Mrs Drummond: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That should not stop a curriculum that starts at 14 and continues to 18. It just means that it continues in a different building, perhaps with a different uniform. It is a way of progressing, and it is very easy to do. It should not be a barrier to changing to a different sort of curriculum. It also means that people would have a much more coherent education. They would then be able to go into the workplace, further training or higher education, properly equipped with a wide range of experience. It is a bit like an English baccalaureate, although I do not think we should call it a baccalaureate—I have spoken about that many times and will not speak about it now.

Employers, teachers and students in my constituency all tell me that we should have a meaningful reform of senior education, and I agree. The present situation with BTEC, as this petition emphasises, is one that we must avoid letting happen again.

5.9 pm

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Mark. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De

Cordova) on leading the debate with an excellent speech, and the #ProtectStudentChoice coalition on their excellent campaigning on the issue. I am a proud former student, and now governor, of Luton Sixth Form College—the UK's first sixth-form college—which now educates over 3,000 students. I am also pleased to be co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on sixth form education, so I would like to extend my thanks to the Sixth Form Colleges Association in particular for all their hard work in the area.

Every student deserves a first-class education, and I know that giving students choice to shape their learning, assessment and career path is critical to their successfully achieving their future aspirations. However, the Government's proposals seem to fly in the face of that. #ProtectStudentChoice estimates that at least 34% of the 16 to 18-year-olds studying a level 3 qualification in England are pursuing at least one applied general qualification—that is more than 300,000 students. Many young people would be better served studying an applied general qualification, such as a BTEC, rather than an A-level or T-level-only study programme. It should not be one route over another. The three-route model would work well. That is why the over 108,000 people who signed the petition and I are steadfast in our opposition to the Government's plan to defund BTECs.

Working class people in my town should not be held back by that short-sighted narrowing of opportunities. BTECs have transformed the life chances of thousands of young people in Luton and made a significant contribution to our local economy—there are numerous examples of young people in Luton pursuing their aspirations through BTECs, whether that be work, further qualifications or university—and that is backed up by research. I have made the point many times before that disadvantaged young people are among those with the most to lose from the Government's plans. That is evidenced by the Department for Education's own equality impact assessment, which states

“those from SEND backgrounds, Asian ethnic groups, disadvantaged backgrounds, and males”

are “disproportionately likely to be affected.”

BTECs are a route to university for many of those young people. The Social Market Foundation found that 44% of white working-class students that enter university studied at least one BTEC, and that 37% of black students enter with only BTEC qualifications. The Nuffield Foundation found that a quarter of students now enter university with BTEC qualifications, and are more likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds. The vast majority of BTEC students complete their studies successfully, with 60% graduating with at least a 2:1.

I was contacted by a constituent ahead of the debate to share their experiences studying BTECs. They said that:

“Dyslexia greatly affects my short-term memory, making exam-based qualifications which rely on memory recall, such as A-levels, almost completely out of reach for myself and others with dyslexia.”

Instead, they

“pursued a BTEC in mechanical engineering, which allowed for me to be assessed on coursework and practical applications across the span of two years. If it was not for my BTEC qualification and the support I received throughout that process, I would not be able to pursue a BEng at university today.”

They summed the point up better than I could, saying that:

“BTECs are a vital lifeline to all neurodivergent and underprivileged children in the UK, for whom A-levels may not be a viable option. Students with dyslexia, ADHD and ASD face larger barriers to mainstream forms of education than most, and by cutting funding for BTECs, it will ultimately deter these students from achieving their potential and integrating them into industry workforces.”

Mr Perkins: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. This Government have had an obsession with exams over the course of the last 12 years, as though they are the only way of demonstrating what a student knows. Does the fact that so many students get a second chance through BTECs, and go on to be successful at university and get degrees, not prove that the focus on exams, and on dismissing the achievements of those students who have qualifications largely based on coursework, is entirely wrongheaded?

Rachel Hopkins: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I will go on to talk about choices and how people can progress and make different choices about their careers and future, and what they want to do, but that is exactly it. Narrowing those options will make things much more difficult.

I would be interested to hear from the Minister what assessment has been made of how to support neurodivergent students who will be impacted by the proposals to defund BTECs. Altaf Hussain, principal of Luton Sixth Form College, based in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen), has made this point to me:

“By allowing that flexibility for A Levels and forcing the T Level route for students with lower prior attainment the government is creating a divided society that is penalising the most vulnerable in our society. The point is that many young people do not want to, or even should not have to, decide their future path at 16. Interests, aspirations and capabilities all change”.

To re-emphasise the point, it is not about favouring one route over others, but empowering young people to shape their own learning. T-levels could be a welcome development, but they should sit alongside BTECs, rather than replace them.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the need to keep options open for young people. Deciding our whole future at the age of 16 would have been unrealistic for most of us, and it flies in the face of what most educational systems around western Europe are doing. Does my hon. Friend also agree that employers want young people with a rounded range of skills and qualifications—vocational, academic and practical—and that the obsession with people going down an academic or a vocational route is completely at odds with what happens in most workplaces?

Rachel Hopkins: I thank my hon. Friend for her—as ever—very thoughtful contribution, and I thoroughly agree with her. As Ministers know, T-levels will not fill the gap, because this is not just about the qualification and the specific workplace at the end of the process, but about tailoring learning and types of assessment to suit people’s development.

I understand that the Government’s justification for defunding some BTEC qualifications is that they overlap with one of the new T-level qualifications, or that they

have not been reapproved as they do not meet new quality and necessity criteria. The #ProtectStudentChoice campaign has raised concerns about the overlap process: it is not transparent, and some unusual decisions have been made regarding qualifications. For example, one awarding organisation’s diploma in health and social care featured on the list, but diplomas from other awarding organisations did not. Engineering BTECs were included, despite most engineering T-levels featuring in waves 3 and 4. Some clarity on that point would be very welcome.

Fundamentally, there is no student, provider or employer input into the overlap process. The reapproval process is expected to make its first announcement in September, so I urge the Minister to ensure the same failures are not replicated. As all BTEC qualifications must go through that process, it must be transparent, and decision making must not be the sole preserve of Whitehall and external consultants. As a bare minimum, the public—especially hard-working students—expect the Government to be open and clear about their plans. Not doing so severely damages trust in the Government to do the right thing and the credibility of the policy, so the Government must go further than simply delaying the defunding of BTECs by 12 months and making vague commitments to remove only a small proportion of them. They should rethink their plan and guarantee that funding will not be removed unless an impartial, evidence-based assessment has concluded that a qualification is not valued by students, universities or employers. Reckless policymaking that could be disastrous for social mobility and the economy must not take place without hard supporting evidence.

5.18 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Sir Mark. I congratulate the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) on opening this excellent debate.

Here we have another broken promise from the Conservative Government. For months, we Liberal Democrats have warned that the Government were planning to scrap BTECs, and our concerns were heightened during the passage of the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022. We were given assurance after assurance, but here we are. It is interesting to see that as soon as some Conservative Members are free of the shackles of Government, they stand up and support BTECs—I wish there were more.

Rebecca Pow: Obviously I am speaking up for BTECs, but I also think the Government are going in absolutely the right direction in terms of skills and opportunities, recognising that they need to be aligned with business needs. I am sure the hon. Lady would agree with that.

Wera Hobhouse: I absolutely agree, but the Government are going to scrap BTECs, and the hon. Lady is opposing that. That is the only point I was making.

In July, the Department for Education introduced a twin-track system, for A-levels and T-levels, for young people at the age of 16, and the result is that funding for most BTEC qualifications will go. One hundred MPs and peers—including me—wrote to the Department for Education in support of the #ProtectStudentChoice campaign, a coalition of 21 organisations that represent

[Wera Hobhouse]

students and staff in schools, colleges and universities, whose aim is to save BTECs. I thank the more than 100,000 petitioners, many of them from Bath College and Bath Spa University. We will continue to resist the move to defund BTECs.

It is the creative subjects in particular that will suffer. The Government intend to scrap those BTECs that they deem to overlap with A-levels and T-levels, but the process of assessing what is an overlap is not at all transparent. Who were the six assessors commissioned by the DFE to review the 2,000 or so qualifications? What were their backgrounds and experience? Where is the written evidence of their conclusions in order to defund 160 qualifications? Ofqual has quality-assured the qualifications for many years, and Ofsted, which oversees the quality of education, has at no point suggested that the qualifications lead to poor outcomes, so why will they go?

BTECs are invaluable in order to provide very different types of educational experiences. We have already heard a lot about that. They are popular with students and respected by employers and they provide a well-established route to higher education. They work, so what other than a narrow-minded ideological view has led the Government to scrap most of them and create less choice, especially for those learners who come from disadvantaged backgrounds? We Liberal Democrats acknowledge that from time to time, the range of qualifications needs to be reviewed, but not by closing viable educational pathways, especially for those students from poorer or minority backgrounds. Research from the Social Market Foundation found that 44% of white working-class students entered university with at least one BTEC, and so did 37% of black students.

Removing BTECs as an option risks students failing courses or picking courses that they are not engaged with. Students today need more, not less, support. They need more, not less, choice. They need choices and a Government who understand that by providing diverse pathways to qualifications, we will all end up with a much better, wider and diverse workforce. I hope the Government will think again.

5.23 pm

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Mark. I start by congratulating the 13,437 people who signed the petition entitled “Don’t scrap funding for BTEC Performing Arts”—I will come back to that in my speech. I also congratulate and place on the record my thanks to the more than 108,000 people who signed the #ProtectStudentChoice petition. Like other hon. Members in the debate, I want to refer on the record to the excellent work that my local college, Lewisham College, does in developing our young people and others so that they can go on and be successful in BTECs and continue their education further.

The securing of a Westminster Hall debate clearly shows the strength of feeling about the plans to defund BTECs. I am really glad to see people from all different political parties contributing to the debate and showing the strength of feeling on this issue. I am sure that they are all aware that young people in England can currently choose between three types of level 3 qualifications at

the age of 16: academic qualifications such as A-levels; technical qualifications that lead to a specific occupation; and applied general qualifications, such as BTECs, which combine the development of practical skills with academic learning.

That all changed in July 2021 when the Department for Education confirmed plans to replace the three-route model with a two-route model, of A-levels and T-levels. As a result, funding for the majority of BTEC qualifications will be removed. It is disappointing that the Government reached that decision after the Wolf review said that BTECs are

“valuable in the labour market, and a familiar and acknowledged route into higher education”.

Although the Government insist that it is not a cut, it is.

Mr Perkins: My hon. Friend refers to the Government’s decision a year ago in July 2021, but that is also four Education Secretaries ago. Does she agree that we have Education Secretaries who pop into the job for a few months without any prior knowledge of the work, make massive decisions and disappear to do a different job, leaving those lifelong educationalists to pick up the pieces from the appalling work that they have done?

Vicky Foxcroft: My hon. Friend makes a powerful and important point. These are people’s lives, future and opportunities to get on in life. Quite often, they are lifelines. I speak from experience. After failing my GCSEs, as a working-class 16-year-old with a difficult background, it was a BTEC in performing arts—I am doing a bit of performing now—that got me back into education and, ultimately, to university. It made me excited about education again. A BTEC was my second chance.

Kate Green: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government’s ambition for a lifelong loan entitlement, so that adults can return to learning and achieve level 4 and beyond qualifications, will be compromised if it does not give people the widest possible range of opportunities to get the level 3 qualifications that will enable them to take advantage of that subsequent opportunity?

Vicky Foxcroft: My hon. Friend makes a good and important point about everybody having access to the education at the points and times in life that they need it. This Government’s decision to hastily remove BTEC funding quite simply makes a mockery of their claims to be levelling up in education. That is made worse on examining impact assessments of the decision, which highlight that 27% of BTEC students are deemed the most disadvantaged.

I am wholeheartedly opposed to the changes. Scrapping BTEC funding is simply the wrong call for several reasons, but one of the main reasons has to do with my life story of a young kid who many thought was never going to go on to achieve anything. I went to Accrington and Rossendale College and studied my BTEC in performing arts. That led me to believe that I could go on to university. That led me to believe that I could stand here one day as an MP. They offer life-changing opportunities for people.

Wera Hobhouse: It is fascinating to hear the hon. Lady’s story. Given her experience, does she agree that it is important that we provide education that engages young people who otherwise find academic subjects

very difficult to engage with at first? They need to be moved towards an educational route that engages and enthuses them.

Vicky Foxcroft: I absolutely agree. Studying performing arts taught me that I loved history and geography and taught me about team working. There are so many other skills that are important in life.

BTECs are engines of social mobility. Research from the Social Market Foundation found that 44% of white working-class students who enter university studied at least one BTEC, and 37% of black students enter with only BTEC qualifications. It has already been said that research from the Nuffield Foundation found that a quarter of students now enter university with BTEC qualifications, and are likelier to be from disadvantaged backgrounds. The vast majority of BTEC students complete their studies successfully, with 60% graduating with at least a 2:1. I must confess I only got a 2:2. My question is simple: why do Ministers want to take this second chance away from young people and others up and down the country, when it is evidence based?

To end, I state once again how strongly I oppose the defunding of BTECs. We all know that the scrapping of BTECs will be disastrous for social mobility and for the economy. The Government should rethink their plans to scrap those valuable qualifications and guarantee that funding will not be removed from any BTEC unless an impartial, evidence-based assessment has concluded that students, universities or employers do not value it; we know that at the moment they do.

Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair): I call Fleur Anderson.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Mark—

Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair): Order. I am sorry, I called Fleur Anderson.

Munira Wilson: I am sorry, Sir Mark, I thought you said Munira Wilson. I misheard you; my apologies. I will sit down.

5.30 pm

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Mark.

I, too, thank my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova), for leading this hugely important debate. I also thank all the 108,000 people who signed the petition and the #ProtectStudentChoice coalition for their unprecedented campaign, bringing together teachers, learners, parents and businesses from across the country to ask the Government to think again on the issue.

I welcome the new Minister to her place. She has on a plate the chance to change the opportunities of thousands of young people across the country by looking again at this policy. I hope that she is listening carefully and will take this action as her homework over the summer, but urgently, because once defunded, the BTECs will be hard to put back into place. It would be much better to stop, rethink and not defund the BTECs.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am conscious that our education system in Northern Ireland is different from the one here, so the debate is slightly different for

us. Every time there is a major educational change, one to two years' worth of children always pay the price for those changes to teaching and marking. Children cannot afford to be the losers, so does the hon. Lady share my concerns that the Minister and the Government must be cognisant of making any changes or deciding to go in a different direction?

Fleur Anderson: The hon. Member makes a good point: the changes will be detrimental. That is what teachers are telling us all—the MPs present today and many others. They have said that through the petition and they have told us. That is why I am in this Chamber—because the heads of my local institutions have told me of the detrimental damage if the change goes ahead.

I speak on behalf of colleges and sixth forms in Wandsworth, which are deeply concerned about the impact, especially on disadvantaged young people. The outcome will be perverse, the exact opposite of what the introduction of T-levels is supposed to do. No one present objects to T-levels; we object to taking away the three-track system.

One college, South Thames College, has already been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea. The South Thames Colleges Group has 21,000 students across south London. I have talked to those at the group, and they have a large number of students who are taking business BTEC, but would not move to the T-level because, first, they cannot work part-time—a T-level is full-time. Many people have to work part-time to make ends meet for their family, and they will not be able to do so. Their families will say, "Sorry, you cannot carry on in education. We need you to work," so they will have to drop being able to go to South Thames. I met several of those students, who say, "I have been able to come here to do a business BTEC and my siblings want to come, but my family says they probably won't be able to if moving to a T-level, which is full-time."

Secondly, the college will find it hard to find enough business placements in our area. As has been mentioned by other Members, there is a high number of SMEs—small businesses—in Wandsworth that will not be able to take on the business placements, especially as so many are struggling at the moment. Just this morning I met the head of the Wandsworth chamber of commerce, who said it will be very hard for businesses to be able to support T-levels. They really want to see more students doing business BTECs and other business qualifications, but the Government's change will have the opposite effect and will be damaging to our local economy.

The third reason why students will find it difficult to stay in education is that there are barriers to higher-level entry for T-levels. T-levels are supposed to replace BTECs as the step into post-16 education, but BTECs do something that T-levels do not. Finally, those who have to stay on and do their GCSE maths, English and catch-up will have to spend a year doing that and then start the T-level, which puts them a year behind their peers. Their peers will be going ahead with their qualifications, and they will feel that they are behind. It will not be attractive to take up a T-level, having had to spend a whole year catching up with GCSEs. If they could do the BTEC alongside catching up with GCSEs, it would be far more attractive and would keep young people in education.

[Fleur Anderson]

South Thames College notes that the Department for Education's impact assessment for its consultation acknowledges that students from more disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be taking the qualifications that the Department is planning to remove, and that it will need mitigation action to avoid causing them detriment. St Cecilia's Church of England School in Southfields shares exactly the same concerns as those of South Thames College. It offers BTECs in business, travel and tourism, music tech and applied science. I have introduced South Thames College teachers to previous Ministers so that they could talk about their concerns, and I invite the Minister to meet those teachers in order to talk to the people who know what effect the change will have.

At St Cecilia's, BTEC business attracts more pupils than other subject—about 25 a year. It is a popular subject at GCSE, and many then want to progress from the level 2 course to the level 3 course. It is the most valued and popular BTEC, accounting for about 25% of the school's BTEC students, who cannot just switch from BTEC business to T-level business. The cuts would mean that a significant number of pupils in year 11 would not be able to progress to the sixth form. Worryingly, I am hearing that schools are saying they will not be able to offer anything except A-levels if we move to the proposed system. That is not what Ministers want to be the outcome of introducing T-levels, but it will be if there is no stop, reset and rethink.

Most sixth forms the size of St Cecilia's will struggle to offer T-levels. They lack the space, the resource and the ability to merge the qualifications into a timetable in which other BTECs and A-levels are offered. St Cecilia's says that it will not have the staff capacity to organise all the business placements that are needed, which would be another barrier. The school would be competing with other sixth forms and colleges in an already packed market in Wandsworth. If that is true in south London, how much more will it be true around the country? How much more will rural areas be affected? I just do not see how the needs of the new business T-level can be met. The head of St Cecilia's says:

"Many pupils in Year 11 at St Cecilia's opt to take a blended courses of BTEC alongside A levels, and so not being able to offer Business would reduce the rich diversity in our current Sixth Form too."

If schools cannot offer T-levels for those reasons, they may switch to A-level business, but that would be a barrier to entry for pupils who prefer or need to study in a different way, for many reasons. St Cecilia's leadership believes that defunding BTECs would go against the Government's clear principle of placing curriculum development at the heart of school improvement. It is not trusting our student leaders, heads of education and teachers to make the best decisions, and it goes back to pupil choice as well. School leaders should be given the freedom to decide which courses are best suited to their cohorts, because they know them very well. That means a choice between BTECs, T-levels, A-levels and apprenticeships.

I would like to know what the Department is doing to address the concerns of institutions such as South Thames College and St Cecilia's. Will the Minister come and meet them? I particularly want to know what mitigations are being proposed to help disadvantaged

young people who will be affected by the change. Has there been an evidence-based assessment? The Minister should look at the evidence base for making this huge decision. Will she commit to permitting a wider range of part-time work options to count as an industry placement? Will she relax restrictions on the number of placements that can make up the industry placement total?

Those are all important questions, but the most important question is whether she or her replacement will look again at this ill-thought-out and reckless policy. I implore her to rethink and not to defund BTECs. Colleges, sixth forms and students oppose it, and the losers will be the most disadvantaged.

In one fell swoop, this change will disproportionately cut educational opportunities for black and Asian students, for students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, for students with learning disabilities, and for students with mental health challenges. It is not too late to look again at the policy and stop it. By doing that, the Minister will improve the educational opportunities of young people across the country.

5.40 pm

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Mark, particularly as you are a fellow north-west MP. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) on bringing an important issue to the Chamber. I hope that the Minister will give us a reasonable response.

I place on record my gratitude to all teaching staff and support staff in my constituency and across the country and the world. The last two and a half years have been challenging for all of us, but teaching staff, support staff and people who work in the catering teams—everyone—have gone above and beyond. All hon. Members present will agree that we are very grateful to them for their significant contribution.

I have received correspondence from Aquinas College and Stockport College in my constituency. My constituency was one of the top 10 constituencies where the petition was signed, because some 639 constituents signed it. Nationally, 108,349 people signed it, which is a serious number. I often attend debates in Westminster Hall with just two or three hon. Members, but there are several MPs here from pretty much all the political parties, which reflects the subject's importance.

Aquinas College in my constituency educates more than 2,200 young people every year, and its principal Danny Pearson has written to me on the matter. Stockport College is part of the Trafford College Group and educates more than 5,500 young people across several boroughs. My hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), who is a good friend and who made an intervention earlier, and I work closely with the Trafford College Group to ensure that those young people, and some older people such as me, have the opportunities that they need, that our economy needs and that Greater Manchester needs.

James Scott, the principal of Trafford College Group, wrote to me. I found his contribution quite serious and that is one reason I am here. Mr Pearson and Mr Scott both expressed serious concerns about the Government's plans to remove funding for these qualifications. Lots of constituents have also contacted me in the last few days regarding this debate, so it is a serious issue.

The Government talk a lot about levelling up, but actions speak louder than words. We need to invest in our young people and our education system to make sure that people are given the opportunity for education, further education and skilled employment. We do not want a race to the bottom and zero-hours contracts; we want skilled, well-paid jobs that people can rely on so that they can have dignity and survive in this brutal cost of living crisis.

I will not repeat at length the comments of several hon. Members, but BTECs have made a significant contribution to the local economy and social mobility in the UK. Defunding them will leave many young people without a viable pathway, which will in turn have an impact on their progress to skilled employment or higher education.

Several hon. Members have made the point about the disproportionate impact that the cuts will have on disadvantaged young people. That point is covered in the Department for Education's equality impact assessment, which the Government should not ignore—although I am not hopeful that the Government would not ignore their own equality impact assessment. I would welcome some comments from the Minister on that point.

I am a proud Labour MP and trade unionist. The National Education Union, the University and College Union, Unison and NASWUT all support the campaign, and as I and several hon. Members have said, almost 110,000 people signed the petition, so it is a serious campaign. I could repeat the points that have already been made by colleagues, but although the debate can last up to three hours—you look concerned, Sir Mark, but do not worry—I will not.

Social mobility is important, and we need investment. The cuts have not been properly thought out and will have a serious impact on Greater Manchester and the north-west. I hope that the Minister will take our comments on board and that her response will be useful to our constituents. Thank you for calling me to speak, Sir Mark.

Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair): Thank you. I taught for four years at a college in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, so I concur with a good amount of what he said. I call Munira Wilson.

5.46 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): Thank you, Sir Mark; it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. Please forgive me for mishearing you earlier, and I apologise to the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson), who made an excellent speech—probably far better than what I am about to say. I thank the Petitions Committee for proposing this debate, and the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) for opening it so ably.

Vocational and technical qualifications and training have for too long been incorrectly treated as inferior to academic qualifications. Right across our society—I include myself in this and hope that my own mindset is shifting now—we share an ingrained cultural bias in favour of academic achievement. Vocational skills, however, are more important than ever, as our country faces immense skills shortages across so many different sectors.

Although the Government's new-found focus on vocational and technical training is welcome, the Liberal Democrats are opposed to the defunding—that essentially

means scrapping—of the majority of BTECs. As many hon. Members have said, that will hurt the most disadvantaged students, and it narrows choice instead of widening opportunities for all. In so doing, we are kickstarting a damaging defunding process from 2024, before the T-level concept has even been properly proven and the new qualifications bedded in.

BTECs are immensely popular: more than a quarter of a million students take BTEC qualifications in any given year. They are disproportionately taken up by students from poorer backgrounds, ethnic minorities, and those with special educational needs and disabilities, as the DFE's own impact assessment has confirmed. The hon. Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) have already cited the large percentage of white working-class and black students who, having taken BTECs, make it to university and achieve a 2:1, so perhaps I can instead quote Lord Baker, a former Conservative Education Secretary. During the passage of the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, he described the plan to defund BTECs as “absolutely disgusting” because it would deny

“black, Asian, ethnic minority, disadvantaged and disabled students...hope and aspiration.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 October 2021; Vol. 814, c. 1789.]

The hon. Member for Battersea started her argument on the issue of choice—that is the crux of the matter, and there is cross-party agreement on it. Although there is always value in rationalising qualifications from time to time, forcing students to choose between A-levels and T-levels will narrow their choices at a time when we need them to have a range of ways to gain the transferable skills they need for their future careers. Some BTECs will remain—those that are equivalent to a single A-level, or a small number equivalent to two A-levels—but the majority will disappear.

I want to give an example from Esher Sixth Form College, which is not in my constituency but serves a number of my constituents. Students can study BTECs in subjects such as applied science, business or digital film and video production, in combination with complementary A-levels in subjects such as chemistry, computer science or graphic communication. However, BTECs also allow students to choose an unrelated A-level, enabling them to follow a passion.

The speech by the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) was brilliant, inspiring and powerful because it was based on her personal story, and she talked about the passion that brought her back to education. A lot of students choose to mix and match, so that they can round out their expertise and experiences in foreign languages, maths or politics, which are subjects that benefit the economy and our young people. At a time when employers are crying out for our young people to enter the workforce with far broader skills and experience, surely we should be broadening the choice and allowing that mix-and-match approach rather than the Government trying to force everyone into those two straitjackets.

Scrapping BTECs will leave many students without a viable pathway at the age of 16. For some students who begin A-levels but do not enjoy them and struggle to cope, BTECs offer a vocational lifeline to supplement their academic qualifications. One constituent of mine, Lucas, started out studying three A-levels but switched

[Munira Wilson]

to a BTEC in music in his first year in the sixth form. He went from contemplating leaving without any qualifications to achieving the highest grade in the county in his BTEC. He is now working as a teaching assistant supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities, and he is concerned about what scrapping BTECs and removing choice will mean for his pupils in the future.

In response to the petition, which is signed by 331 of my constituents from Twickenham, the Government argued that reform is necessary. As I have already said, I and my party fully agree that we must do much more to achieve parity between vocational and academic qualifications, but scrapping BTECs is not the answer. They have recently undergone a rigorous process of reform, they are popular with students, respected by employers and provide a well-established route to higher education or employment. The Government's answer in terms of T-levels is welcome. Technical qualifications giving 16 to 19-year-olds a mixture of classroom and on-the-job experience, including a work placement, are really welcome but, as a number of hon. Members have touched on, there are problems, which I want to go into in more detail.

The Association of Colleges is concerned that the transition is being rushed, and I wholeheartedly agree with that. If there is to be this transition, it should take place over 10 years, ensuring that no qualifications are defunded without a full alternative being in place. On that point, I was talking to the principal of Richmond upon Thames College, in my constituency, just this morning. About one in 10 of his current students is studying a course that is due to be defunded and because the college is only part way towards introducing T-levels, for a number of reasons, there is no alternative. Future students would have no alternative if those courses were defunded from 2024 onwards.

It is premature to start to defund BTECs before T-levels are fully bedded in and understood. Indeed, during the passage of the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, another Conservative former Education Minister, Lord Willetts, said that T-levels

"should succeed on their merits, not because viable alternatives are removed by government".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 October 2021; Vol. 814, c. 1793.]

That chimes with a lot of what we have heard today, and that point was made by a Conservative former Education Minister.

Ministers claim that students are confused by the current range of qualifications, but there is little evidence to support that. There are 39 subjects available across the entire sixth form college sector, with only nine available at Esher Sixth Form College, which I mentioned earlier. Ministers may be confused by that choice, but students certainly are not. Every year, about a third of Esher's cohort studies at least one BTEC. The flexibility for students to be able to pull together their own study programme is essential as they try to work out what the right choices are for them for the future.

The T-levels that are being introduced are 25% practical and 75% academic, which, as some people have already alluded to, puts them out of reach of many students who might achieve lower grades in their GCSEs. They are often the people who really flourish on the BTEC

pathway. The Association of Colleges has warned that T-levels will exclude the most disadvantaged students, particularly those who do not obtain a level 4 in maths and English GCSE. T-levels are rigorous and large qualifications, so, although the Government do not require maths and English for T-level entry, many colleges require it.

As hon. Members have alluded to, there is a real challenge with the industry placement that comes with T-levels. Trying to achieve 45 days is incredibly difficult. The Policy Exchange, a Conservative think-tank, says that only 8% of employers are currently offering a placement for the duration required for T-levels, and it is harder to find placements in some sectors than others. For instance, the digital industries often have teams working remotely, and we know that there is also a challenge between rural and suburban and urban areas.

The principal of Richmond upon Thames College told me this morning how difficult it is for him to get employers to engage with and provide work placements for vocational qualifications. That is in Greater London, in Twickenham, where there is a plethora of employers on the doorstep. Sadly, he is leaving Richmond upon Thames College later this year to go and head up Petroc, a college in Devon—I happened to visit Petroc with the new Member, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord), during the by-election. One of the challenges facing the principal of Richmond upon Thames College as he goes to Petroc is that in a rural area—the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) already made this point—it is even harder to find employers to engage with T-levels, so he has his work cut out, but I wish him all the best.

We really need to see where those completing T-level courses go next. The Association of School and College Leaders has stated:

"We are...watching the number of T level students who end up in university with real interest. If T level students are going to end up in university in large numbers, and not in further technical training, then it brings into question why BTECs are being defunded. After all,"

that is

"the government's main argument for scrapping BTECs in order to introduce T levels...The government can't have it both ways."

I completely agree with that point.

My final point is on defunding and process. There has been a real lack of transparency about which BTECs are being chosen first to be defunded. When questions have been asked about improving transparency, very little has been forthcoming. I see that as part of a wider trend. We were talking about BTECs today, but in terms of wider applied general qualifications, RSL Awards is based in my constituency, an awarding body for contemporary music and arts qualifications—it does the Rockschoool qualification grading. Some of its qualifications got delisted for reasons it fails to understand. It tried to appeal, but has been unsuccessful—it has been told "case closed".

RSL told me that—as with the BTEC point—more than a quarter of its students on some of its music qualification courses are from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. In classical music courses we just do not get that diversity; it tends to be much more white and middle class. Having a breadth of qualifications means that young people from a range of backgrounds are able to engage and secure qualifications. If the

Government are going to continue down this route, we should at least have a bit more transparency about what is being defunded and when.

To conclude, we have heard clearly from all sides that it is very difficult to understand why the Government want to scrap what is a very popular qualification with both students and employers. They are trying to shoehorn young people into T-levels or A-levels at a time when they need more support than ever to realise and rebuild their futures. It is such a retrograde step and will damage the prospects of the most disadvantaged students. If the Government are serious about levelling up—they tell us they are, although we have not heard much about it from any of the Conservative leadership candidates yet—and truly mean it when they say they want to champion vocational training, I hope the new Minister, whom I welcome to her place, listens to the thousands of people who signed this petition, college leaders, teachers and experts in this field up and down the country, as well as many former education Ministers and Secretaries of State, some of whom I have quoted. They really must think again.

6 pm

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Mark. I thank all those who pushed for today's debate—particularly the Sixth Form Colleges Association and the Association of Colleges, which have been particularly vocal in standing up to the anti-BTEC orthodoxy that threatens to take hold in ministerial offices at the Department for Education.

This has been a really excellent debate with valuable contributions from both sides of the House. I will reflect on a few of them before I get into my remarks. My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) presented the subject excellently and set up the debate. She said that a quarter of students who end up going to university do so through a BTEC. That is an important statistic, and Social Market Foundation research, which my hon. Friend and many other hon. Members raised, shows that 44% of white working-class students who attend university studied a BTEC. That point was repeated by the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), my hon. Friends the Members for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) and for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley), and the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson). It was one of the major themes of the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) reflected on the fact that her daughter had done a BTEC. My son also went through the BTEC route and ended up going to university. I think it is safe to say that, without BTECs, he would not have got that university education.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford spoke passionately and movingly about the difference that a BTEC made to her life and her life chances. My right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar) spoke about the importance that these qualifications have, alongside T-levels, to employers in the west midlands.

The hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) spoke about the important role that BTEC played in addressing the shortage of nurses in her community, and the need for those people to stay locally. Controversially, she spoke about the value of evidence-based assessment.

I warn her that she needs to stop that kind of talk if she wants to get back into this Government, but a lot of us appreciated that point, which was well made.

The hon. Member for Meon Valley (Mrs Drummond) spoke about the equalities impact assessment and made the incredibly important point that, if these qualifications disappear, many students simply will not have the routes that are currently available to them. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) spoke about neurodivergent students, and it is important that their needs are reflected. There is not a single one of us who is not regularly contacted at our constituency surgeries by the parents of neurodivergent students who are absolutely at their wits' end. These courses enable such students to access the life opportunities that others take for granted, and they say that they really help them and matter to them, so we should take that incredibly seriously.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green)—I know from her time as the shadow Education Secretary that she is incredibly passionate about vocational students—said that the Government should end their obsession with saying that all students are either academic or vocational, and that they should recognise that some students want an approach that gives them a broad choice. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford paid tribute to her local college and said that this decision makes a mockery of levelling up. That is a really important point. It was obvious to anyone who watched the Conservative party leadership hustings last night that levelling up seems to have disappeared entirely from the lexicon of the potential Conservative leaders. It may be that they have decided to distance themselves from the mockery that my hon. Friend highlights. Many of us appreciated her contribution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) said that, once they are lost, these qualifications cannot be easily replaced, and she reflected on the fact that many of her local institutions had contacted her with their concern about the approach that the Government are taking. Of course, that should not surprise us, because when the Government conducted their own consultation back in September, they found that 86% of respondents disagreed with the approach that they were proposing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Navendu Mishra) said that his constituency was one of the top 10 constituencies in the country in terms of the number of people from it who signed the petition. I know that all of us have had large numbers of constituents contacting us about this issue, but it seems like many of us have a lot to do if we are to catch up with Stockport in terms of the level of interest in this issue.

The hon. Member for Twickenham reflected on the comments of Lord Baker in another place, who described the situation as absolutely disgusting. Lord Baker also described this move as

“an act of educational vandalism.”

That should be reflected upon.

It is important to recognise that the broad coalition that is spearheaded by the #ProtectStudentChoice coalition and backed up by organisations such as the Sixth Form Colleges Association, Youth Employment UK, MillionPlus, the Apprenticeship Network and an array of employers and trade unions has forced the Government to change their position. It is important that we all make the point

[Mr Toby Perkins]

that the Government could look again at what they propose, but it is also important to recognise that there has been a significant U-turn from where the Government were back in September last year. The Labour party and I are pleased to have played our part in that campaign, urging Ministers to rethink their decision to axe these courses.

It is also worth recalling the history of the Government's shambolic and damaging approach to this question that we are considering today. It started with Ministers besmirching the reputation of BTECs. The Skills Minister at the time, the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), who was the one before the one before the Minister here today—well, it was 10 months ago, of course—described BTECs as poor-quality qualifications, when announcing that they would be scrapped to make way for T-levels.

In September 2021 the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), who was the brand-new Education Secretary at the time—he was the one before the one before this week's one, who is the fourth Education Secretary we have had in the space of a year. It is said that a year in the life of a human being is like seven years in the life of an Education Secretary. That appears to be the case. We get this dazzling array of new Education Secretaries, so I can only imagine how busy the person responsible for the board at the Department of Education must be, as they constantly have to change the name and the picture up in reception that shows the Education Secretary.

Returning to the point that I was making, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon, told us when he was Education Secretary that the Government would conduct a review. Many of us believe that the Government ought to have conducted the review before they sent out the message to students and lecturers that the qualification they were working towards was poor quality. Then the Government announced that they would defund 150 level 3 qualifications, which, in truth, is less than 10% of all of the level 3 qualifications out there.

We are pleased that the Government have performed something of a U-turn on this issue. In the final analysis, however, if they continue with their current policy, they will have scrapped less than 10% of all the level 3 qualifications currently on offer but, within that, they will have scrapped several courses that both employers and educationalists have real concern about. For example, the health and social care BTEC offers students a strong general introduction to the career opportunities available in the healthcare sector, and over 13,000 new students enrolled to study for it last year. It is important to reflect that if BTECs are scrapped, as the Government currently suggest they will be, a huge number of students will not have the breadth of options available to them. There are a number of important questions for the Minister to respond to. Many colleges are deeply concerned that the amount of work experience required to replace even the limited number of BTECs being replaced cannot be found. The Government have already downgraded the work experience requirement in the early years of the T-level qualification. If it becomes apparent that providers in many areas are unable to find the amount of work experience required to deliver the number of T-levels, the Government will have a choice.

Will the Government reduce the work experience demand further? Will they allow BTECs that do not have the work experience element to continue? Or will they accept that many students will be shut out of accessing a career for which there is a widespread skills shortage. Which one is it?

Secondly, if the Government's view is that T-levels are more rigorous than BTECs, and they are scrapping BTECs, what is the plan for those students who previously would have been able to study a BTEC and will now not have a level 3 qualification at the age of 16 or 17? What assessment have the Government made of which students are likely to miss out, as has been reflected by so many contributors to the debate? Is it not the truth that it will mean more students from deprived communities, more white working-class boys and girls, more BAME students, and more students from rural and small-town communities will likely not have a level 3 qualification in place? If so, what plans are in place for those students?

Early feedback shows that T-levels require considerably more time studying and working. Many students, particularly those from deprived communities, are expected by their families to work alongside their studies. T-levels make that much more difficult, and that is being cited as a barrier to poorer students accessing them. What assessment has the Minister made of how that barrier could be addressed? Does it strengthen the case, in her view, for some sort of student subsidy, along the lines of the education maintenance allowance, to enable T-level students to afford to take up this opportunity? Does she accept that it was a huge mistake for the Government to denigrate a qualification that students were in the process of studying for before having completed their review? Given that so few courses are being replaced, will she apologise on behalf of the Government to the students, their lecturers and the employers, whose achievements the Government have belittled?

Finally, I have met many students studying T-levels. Although it varies from coast to coast, many clearly see them as a route to university. T-levels were initially envisaged as a route towards work. Does the Government accept that for many students that will not be the path they pursue? On that basis, is it still sensible for T-levels to be so narrowly focused on a single discipline? Should the Government not recognise that a broader qualification would allow students to learn which is the correct path for them from a position of knowledge?

The Labour party welcomed the introduction of T-levels. We want them to be a success and we hope that a future Labour Government will address the current flaws within them. I urge the Government, even at this late stage, to think again about the decision. We know that they will come back in September. There are a number of popular courses where educationalists and students tell us it would be deeply damaging if they were abolished. We want to ensure that our system of post-16 vocational and technical education is fit for purpose. Every MP in this debate, alongside the organisations championing the #ProtectStudentChoice campaign, want this too. Let the Government pause and put this decision on hold, and ensure that we have an evidence-based approach to its replacement. Let us not lose the qualifications that have real value to both employers and students.

Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair): Just before I call the Minister, I declare an interest. I left school at 16 and eventually got to higher education through vocational

qualifications. I have the privilege of sitting here today because of that. The Minister has been extremely patient, listening for nearly two hours to the contributions. I am quite sympathetic to the position she is in, but I am sure that she will handle it well.

6.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Andrea Jenkyns): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Mark. I thank the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) for opening this important debate, and every hon. Member who has taken part. A number of important questions have been raised, and I hope to cover many of them in my speech, so do bear with me—I have tons of notes here.

I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss my Department's plans for the reform of level 3 qualifications, including how BTECs will fit into the future landscape alongside A-levels and T-levels. The introduction of T-levels is critical to driving up productivity and supporting social mobility. Based on the same standards as apprenticeships, T-levels have been co-designed with employers and draw on the very best examples of international practice. They will raise the quality and prestige of the technical offer in this country, ensuring that young people develop knowledge and skills that hold genuine labour market currency. It is this model that makes T-levels special, and it is the reason why we want them to be the qualifications of choice for 16 to 19-year-olds, alongside A-levels.

We have put significant investment into T-levels, as well as support for the sector, to help providers and employers prepare for them. We are confident that they will be a success and we will continue to carefully assess the progress of our reforms to ensure that no student or employer is left without access to the technical qualifications they need. There are now 10 T-levels available at over 100 providers across the country. By 2023, all T-levels will be available, and around 400 providers have signed up to deliver them.

We are introducing T-levels gradually to ensure quality from the start. Our confidence in their success is reinforced by the significant levels of investment and support that we have in place. We have made £400 million in capital funding available to support delivery since 2020, ensuring that young people can learn in world-class facilities and with industry-standard equipment. We have also put in place substantial support for schools, colleges and employers to help them deliver high-quality industry placements—I will cover this later, because I know that a few people were concerned about the placements—for all T-levels on a national scale.

We have supported providers in building capacity and networks with employers through the capacity and delivery fund, including through investing over £200 million since 2018-19. We want T-levels to deliver great outcomes for learners—I am sure that everybody in this room wants that—so we are committed to ensuring that teachers and leaders have the support they need to deliver them well.

In the two years to March 2020, we invested up to £20 million to help providers prepare for the delivery of T-levels, and to help teachers and leaders prepare for change. That included £8 million for the new T-level professional development offer, led by the Education and Training Foundation. We invested a further £15 million

in 2020-21 and we have committed over £15 million in 2021-22 to continue this offer. Since its launch in 2019, almost 8,500 individuals and FE providers have benefited from T-level professional development programmes to help update their knowledge and skills, for first teaching T-levels in September 2020 and beyond. We will continue to publish regular updates and evidence as part of our annual T-level action plans, which can be found on the Government website.

On Thursday I met Leeds City College students and tutors—it was my first visit in this post. There was great enthusiasm for T-levels and for our apprenticeship programme. It was wonderful to see that the majority of the students I spoke to have already secured permanent employment in the sector that they studied in, which is an important move forward. We read about students securing permanent job roles at the companies that they did their T-level placements with, and other students securing apprenticeships. Employers congratulated existing students and looked forward to the next generation of T-level students starting their placements.

However, these essential reforms will have their full benefit only if we simultaneously address the complexities and variable quality of the broader qualifications system. Therefore, to support the introduction of T-levels, we are reviewing the qualification that sits alongside A-levels and T-levels to ensure that every funded qualification has a clear purpose, is high quality and will lead to good outcomes for students.

Successive reviews, including the Wolf and Sainsbury reviews, which have been touched on today, have found that the current qualifications system is overly complex and does not serve students or employers well. Through our reforms, we want every student to have confidence that every qualification on offer is high quality, to be able to easily understand what skills and knowledge that qualification will provide and, importantly, where that qualification will take them.

Our reforms are being made in three stages. First, we will remove the funding approval for qualifications with low or no enrolments. Secondly, we will remove the funding approval for qualifications that overlap with T-levels. Finally, we will reform the remaining qualifications—I will go into further detail on that in a moment. As part of securing early progress in the review, we confirmed that we would remove funding approval from qualifications that have had fewer than 100 publicly funded enrolments in a three-year period. Through this “low and no” process, we have confirmed that around 5,500 qualifications at level 3 have low or no enrolments, and will therefore have funding removed by August 2022.

The next phase of our reforms is to remove funding approval for qualifications that overlap with T-levels for 16 to 19-year-olds, which will reduce the complexities for learners and employers. By “overlap”, we mean that the qualification is technical, that the outcome achieved by the young person is similar to that set out in a standard covered by a T-level, and that it aims to take a student to employment in the same occupational area. Just as T-levels are being introduced in phases, we are also taking a phased approach to removing funding approval from technical qualifications that overlap with T-levels. This provision lists qualifications overlapping with wave 1 and wave 2 T-levels, and includes only 160 qualifications of over 2,000 qualifications available

[Andrea Jenkyns]

at the time. We will publish the final list of qualifications that will have public funding withdrawn in September 2022.

We have listened carefully to concerns about the reform timetable and have built in an extra year so that public funding approval is not withdrawn from overlapping qualifications until 2024, to help ensure that providers are ready. That means qualifications that overlap with T-levels will not have funding approval removed until the relevant T-level has been available to all providers for at least a year. It is important that there are no gaps in provision, and that we retain the qualifications needed to support progression into occupations that are not covered by T-levels.

Our final reform—our policy statement on level 3 qualifications—was published in July last year. It set out the Government's decision on the types of academic and technical qualifications that will be necessary alongside A-levels and T-levels at level 3. On the academic side, we are absolutely clear that students will be able to take applied general style qualifications, including BTECs, alongside A-levels as part of a mixed programme where they meet our new quality and necessity criteria. That could include areas with a practical or occupational focus, such as health and social care—that has been mentioned—or STEM subjects, such as engineering, applied science and IT.

We will also fund large academic qualifications that would typically make up a student's full programme of study areas where there are no A-levels and no equivalent T-level. It can also include areas that are less served by A-levels, such as performing arts, creative arts or sports science, where they give access to HE courses with high levels of practical content.

I want to ask the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) if we are the same person? We have a similar background: I too am a working-class girl who studied a BTEC national—although mine was in business and finance—and I also have a background in performing arts. It is evident that the Labour party is not the only broad church; the party of government is too. As a mature student I went on to study economics at the Open University, and international relations at the University of Lincoln while I was a parliamentary candidate—I know what it is like for someone to juggle things and try to pay their way at the same time.

Kate Green: I listened carefully to the Minister as she described the new landscape and how she sees it fitting together. She said a few moments ago that there was confusion about the range of qualifications that had been on offer. Listening to her just now, I have to say that I am still pretty confused about the landscape that we are moving into. What do the Government plan to do to communicate really clearly, to students, institutions and employers, how the new landscape will work?

Andrea Jenkyns: If the hon. Lady bears with me, I will come to that point; it was touched on earlier and I will answer it with regard to the pathways.

On a more technical route, we will fund two groups of technical qualifications alongside T-levels for 16 to 19-year-olds. The first will be qualifications in areas where there is not a T-level. The second will be specialist

qualifications that develop more specialist skills and knowledge that could be acquired through a T-level alone, helping to protect the skills supply in more specialist industries and adding value to the T-level offer. Adults will be able to study a broader range of technical qualifications than 16 to 19-year-olds, which takes into account prior learning and experience. That includes technical qualifications that allow entry into occupations that are already served by T-levels.

I hope that has made it clear that we are not creating a binary system. Our aim is to ensure that students can choose from a variety of high-quality options, which I will go into. That is why it is important that we reform the system, to ensure that all qualifications approved for funding alongside A-levels and T-levels are high quality, have a clear purpose and deliver great outcomes, which is the most important thing.

As the post-16 qualification review continues, a new funding approval process will confirm that all qualifications that we continue to fund alongside A-levels and T-levels are both necessary and high quality. Both Ofqual and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education will have a role in approving those qualifications, and they are currently consulting on their approaches at level 3.

We are unashamed about raising the quality of technical education in this country. Students will benefit from the reforms because they will take qualifications that are high quality and meet the needs of employers, putting them in a strong position to progress to further study or skilled employment. Where students need more support to achieve a level 3 qualification in the future, we are working with providers to provide high-quality routes to further study. We have introduced a T-level transition programme to support learners in progressing to T-levels. We are also piloting an academic progression programme to test whether there is a gap in provision, which supports students to progress to and achieve high-quality level 3 academic qualifications in future.

We are determined to act so that all young people can learn about the exciting, high-quality opportunities that technical education and apprenticeships can offer. Through the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, we have strengthened the law so that all pupils have the opportunity for six encounters with providers of technical education qualifications and apprenticeships as they progress through school in years 8 to 13. For the first time, we are introducing parameters around the duration and content of those encounters, so that we can ensure that they are of high quality. The new requirements will strengthen the original provider access legislation—the Baker clause.

We will continue to gather evidence to ensure that our reforms across both technical and academic qualifications are working as intended. In particular, the unit for future skills, as announced in the levelling-up White Paper, will ensure that across Government we are collecting and making available the best possible information to show whether courses are delivering the outcome that we want. That will help give students the best possible opportunity to get high-skilled jobs in local areas.

Employers will benefit from our reforms, which place them at the heart of the system and will ensure that technical qualifications are genuinely grounded in the needs of the workplace. The Construction Industry Training Board has said that the reforms to technical education are a great opportunity to put things right that industry

should seize. We will also strengthen and clarify progression routes for academic qualifications, to ensure that every funded qualification has a clear purpose—that is vital—is of high quality and could lead to good outcomes.

I will now touch on some of the questions that were raised across the Chamber.

Fleur Anderson: The educational plans that the Minister has described are exactly the plans that the petitioners are concerned about. Has the debate given her pause for thought about going ahead with the reforms and then assessing the outcomes—as she has just described—rather than waiting and looking again at the reforms before they are cut, because then it will be too late? We will simply not know how many people are not doing the courses, rather than assessing the people who are doing the courses and their educational outcomes. Has the debate given her pause for thought about the plans that she has just outlined?

Andrea Jenkyns: I thank the hon. Lady for that question. We are consulting vigorously, and I was actually going to bring in her points here. She mentioned colleges in her area. I happily meet colleges, and that goes for colleges represented across the Chamber. My ears are open to this, because it is something I am passionate about. Social mobility is a big thing for me. Coming from a regular background, I want to ensure that every child has a great start in life, so my door is open.

I was asked about creating a barrier for disadvantaged and BAME students. We are not withdrawing funding approval from all BTECs and other applied general qualifications. We will continue to fund BTECs and applied general-type qualifications as part of a mixed programme where there is need and where they meet new criteria for quality and necessity. Students who take qualifications that are more likely to be replaced have the most to gain from the changes, because in future they will take qualifications that are of a higher quality, putting them in a stronger position to progress to further skills or skilled employment. The most important outcome is that they have a decent start in life and good-quality jobs.

Mr Perkins: The Minister's point somewhat misses the tenor of the debate so far. She is hearing that a lot of students from more deprived communities will not even get on to a course because of its make-up or because it will be full time, meaning that they will be unable to afford to do the course. Simply saying that they might have better opportunities when they complete a course does not take into account the fact that lots of them will not even get on to a course in the first place. I hope the Minister will look into that when she does her review.

Andrea Jenkyns: As I said, I am a woman who juggles and I know what it is like to have to pay my own way. Coming from a family who were not affluent, I had to work to pay my way at the same time as I did my BTEC.

Mr Perkins: The Minister would not have been able to do that if it had been a T-level. She would not have had the time.

Andrea Jenkyns: Not necessarily, but I will take the hon. Gentleman's point on board.

T-levels will equip more young people with the skills, knowledge and experience to access skilled employment or further technical study, including higher education in related technical areas. We want as many young people as possible to benefit, which is why we have focused on supporting access. That includes introducing a T-levels transition programme and flexibilities for SEND students, and removing the English and maths exit requirements.

I was asked about students who have dyslexia and their frustration about taking exams. That is already covered in the Equality Act 2010; it must be considered whether a student will need reasonable adjustments, which can include being given 25% extra time when sitting exams.

There was a question about Oxbridge not accepting T-levels. Oxford's admissions office says that BTECs are unlikely to be suitable for its courses unless taken alongside A-levels.

Vicky Foxcroft: I was looking at Oxford's website today. It says that the university will be accepting BTECs and will not be accepting T-level subjects. I want to make sure that the Minister is absolutely accurate in what she is saying.

Andrea Jenkyns: If the hon. Lady had let me finish rather than jumping in, she would have heard the full context. First, Oxford's admissions office says that BTECs are unlikely to be suitable for the university's courses unless taken with side A-levels, as it says on the website. Secondly, we are continuing to engage with Oxford and Cambridge on accepting T-levels, so watch this space.

There were some questions about different pathways and what sorts of qualifications young people will be able to take, other than T-levels and A-levels. On the academic route, students are able to take qualifications similar to the current applied generals in mixed-study programmes with A-levels where they complement the skills and knowledge in A-levels, and where they enhance students' opportunities for progression to further study in related fields of HE. That could include areas with a practical or occupational focus, such as health and social care, STEM and subjects such as engineering, applied science and IT.

We will also fund large academic qualifications that would typically make up a student's full programme of study in areas where there are no A-levels and no equivalent T-levels. That could include areas that are less well served by A-levels, such as performing arts, creative arts and sports science, for access to HE courses with higher levels of practical content. We will also continue to fund the international baccalaureate diploma and access to the HE diploma for adults.

Wera Hobhouse: I have spoken at length, and for a long time, to Bath Spa University, which teaches a lot of creative subjects. What reassurance can the Minister give my university, Bath Spa, about the creative BTECs that are going to be scrapped?

Andrea Jenkyns: As I have already said, where a course is not covered by a T-level or A-level—I mentioned performing arts, creative arts and sports science—the option is available.

We will fund two groups of technical qualifications alongside T-levels for 16 to 19-year-olds. The first will be qualifications in areas where there is no T-level. The

[*Andrea Jenkyns*]

second will be specialist qualifications that develop more specialist skills and knowledge than can be acquired through T-levels alone, helping to protect the skills supply in more specialist industries, and adding value to the T-level.

Adults will be able to study a broader range of technical qualifications than 16 to 19-year-olds, which takes account of prior learning experience. Those include technical qualifications that allow entry into occupations that are already served by T-levels, such as data technician or senior production chef.

On the pathway, we have made it clear that students will be able to take BTECs and applied general qualifications alongside A-levels as part of a mixed programme. Our impact assessment recognises that students who take qualifications that are more likely to be defunded have the most to gain from these changes.

There were questions about overlap, and about students who have already signed up for courses. All qualifications on the final overlap will be funded until the current students have completed their studies.

There was also a question about work placements, which is a valid one. We have put in place substantial support for schools, colleges and employers to help them deliver high-quality industry placements for all T-levels on a national scale. We are engaging directly with employers through the Department's employer engagement team to develop a pipeline of industry placements, and we are providing an extensive programme of focused support to help ensure employers and providers are able to deliver placements.

We have a national campaign in place to raise the profile of T-levels to an employer audience, and we have established a network of T-level employer ambassadors to engage with others in their industries on T-levels and placements. We have also implemented different delivery models to ensure placements can be delivered by employers across all industries and all locations.

Marsha De Cordova: It is right that the Minister is doing all that engagement with employers and so forth, but what about the students who will not be able to take up work placements, given their other commitments? This is one of the advantages of studying a BTEC. That 45-day commitment might not be possible, particularly for mature students—possibly like the Minister herself.

Andrea Jenkyns: If anything, we could flip that on its head, because this is a unique selling point. In these work placements, students will gain the soft skills needed in employment, and valuable experience to build up their CVs, which can help secure them future employment.

We have invested over £200 million since 2018-19 through the capacity and delivery fund to support providers in building capacity and networks with employers. We will continue to monitor the delivery of placements and work closely with providers and employers to identify what support they will need to deliver high-quality placements.

Mr Perkins: I am grateful to the Minister for laying out what the Government are doing, but there are not enough work placements for the small number of people doing T-levels at this stage—that is why the Government have downgraded them—much less for the

sort of expansion she is talking about. We hear what the Government are doing about it, but the question I asked her is: in the event that they cannot get enough work placements, what are the Government going to do?

Andrea Jenkyns: I thank the shadow Minister for his question. I am more confident than he is that we will get these placements.

Mr Perkins: You haven't got them now.

Andrea Jenkyns: No, but I have seen at first hand what the Department is doing with employer engagement, so watch this space. The shadow Minister can come back to me if it is to the contrary, but we are finding—the evidence is showing—that more and more employers are signing up for this.

On the question about our new Prime Minister, the reforms were mentioned in our manifesto. It said:

“Our reforms and investment in education and skills mean more children are leaving school better equipped for working life and there are more high quality apprenticeships.”

On the evidence base, the impact assessment was published alongside the level 3 Government consultation response in July last year, as I have already mentioned, and it is on the Government website. However, the case for change, providing evidence of the need for reform and for T-levels, was published in July 2016, and the document about streamlining qualifications at level 3 was published in March 2019.

We have an opportunity to put things right that industry can seize on. We can also strengthen and clarify progression routes for academic qualifications, as I have already said. I would like to thank all colleagues, from across the House—

Navendu Mishra: On the Minister's point about putting things right, I wonder whether she will comment on this Government scrapping education maintenance allowance in 2010, I believe. They have not replaced it. That fits in with the theme of defunding education. Will the Minister comment? The data pointed out that because that £30 allocation was scrapped, fewer young people went into further education.

Andrea Jenkyns: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I think he will also find that more people from disadvantaged backgrounds are going into education than ever before.

Munira Wilson: I had a problem with mishearing before and I may have misheard again, but I do not think I have heard the Minister mention the word “choice” once. The central argument made by all sides in this debate is about the reduction of choice. We have heard for many years from Conservative Ministers and different Conservative Governments that choice is fundamental to their philosophy, yet here they seem to be reducing choice, and that will come at the cost of the most disadvantaged. Yes, a few BTECs will remain, but the vast majority of pupils will be forced into A-levels or T-levels or just to go straight into the workplace with very few qualifications. Please will the Minister address that point—how the Government are decimating choice by defunding BTECs in this way?

Andrea Jenkyns: I completely disagree. To me, the most important thing is outcome. There is choice there. We have said that if people—*[Interruption.]* Let me finish, thank you. There is choice. Look at apprenticeships. To me, the most important thing is the outcome, as I have said. If people can have better quality and higher paying jobs, that is a better start in life than taking courses that do not have the same outcomes.

I am going to conclude. I thank all colleagues, from across the House, for their contributions today. It has been a real pleasure to discuss the importance of developing our skills system. Transforming post-16 education and skills is at the heart of our plan to build back better and level up the country. We are ensuring that students everywhere have access to the qualifications that will give them the skills to succeed. T-levels are a critical step in the quality of the technical offer. They have been co-designed with more than 250 leading employers and are based on the best international examples of technical education. But these reforms will have their full benefit only if we streamline and address the complexities and variable quality of the broader level 3 qualification.

As a former BTEC student myself, I understand the benefits of technical education. *[Interruption.]* I will continue. I want to reassure everyone across the House that we are not withdrawing funding for all BTECs. Students will be able to take BTECs and applied general qualifications alongside A-levels, as part of a mixed programme, where those qualifications meet the new quality and other criteria. We want every student to have confidence that every qualification on offer is high quality—that, rather than choice, is so important: high quality, which will lead them into jobs—and to understand what skills and knowledge—*[Interruption.]*

Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair): Order. Let the Minister speak.

Andrea Jenkyns: Thank you, Sir Mark. We want students to understand what skills and knowledge a qualification will provide them and where it will take them, and our reforms will deliver that.

6.44 pm

Marsha De Cordova: I thank every Member who spoke. We heard incredible speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley), for Luton

South (Rachel Hopkins), for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft), for Putney (Fleur Anderson) and for Stockport (Navendu Mishra), and the hon. Members for Meon Valley (Mrs Drummond), for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) and for Twickenham (Munira Wilson), and many other Members made powerful interventions.

The petition, which was signed by more than 100,000 people, is about preserving and protecting student choice, and unfortunately I do not believe the Minister addressed that in her response. The proposal will cut funding and reduce choice for the young people we say—well, many of us say—we want to ensure have choice and opportunity.

We heard about the transformative impact that BTECs can have on lives and vocational training—including for you, Sir Mark, among many others. Nobody is saying that T-levels are not the way to go, but students need options and choices, and the Minister did not acknowledge that.

I hope the Minister recognises the strength of feeling across the House. This is not party political: Members from all parties spoke about the difficulties that students from disadvantaged backgrounds—particularly those with special educational needs or a disability, and those from ethnic minority backgrounds—will face. I do not believe the Minister fully addressed how the new qualifications will support disabled students. If she did cover that, I ask that she writes to update me, but I do not believe that those points were addressed.

We have to keep pressing the Government on this issue. I hope that there will be transparency, and that they will involve campaign leaders and organisations, trade unions and student bodies in their review of the new T-levels. At the end of the day, although the Minister studied BTECs herself, I am just not sure she fully gets it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 592642, relating to BTEC qualifications.

6.47 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 18 July 2022

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

AI: Pro-Innovation Approach to Regulation

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Ms Nadine Dorries): The Government are today publishing a paper setting out their emerging pro-innovation approach to regulating artificial intelligence. The UK can provide clarity and confidence to our AI ecosystem as well as ensuring the public and consumers are protected.

At the heart of our approach is a steadfast commitment to ensuring the UK is a place where AI companies can innovate, grow, and flourish. In areas from transport to healthcare, our AI ecosystem is driving forward new research, scientific breakthroughs, and growth across the nation. This policy paper seeks to shape the transformational effects of this critical technology: to unleash growth and innovation while safeguarding our fundamental values and keeping people safe.

The success of our AI sector is in no small part due to the UK's reputation for high-quality regulation and the rule of law. However, as AI continues to develop, a transparent, clear, and coherent regulatory regime must develop with it. Government believe that a pro-innovation approach is needed to create clarity for businesses and investors, while also taking proportionate steps to address existing risks posed by AI and standing prepared to identify and mitigate new risks as they emerge.

This policy paper sets out the building blocks of a regulatory framework that is coherent but flexible and can apply to AI's vast range of uses across different industries. It will support our regulators in addressing new challenges in a way that is proportionate, supports innovation and drives growth. This pro-innovation, pro-growth ethos will continue to inform policy development as we develop and refine the approach set out in this paper.

It is essential that we get this approach right, and I look forward to hearing views from the House on our proposals. We will also be seeking the views of AI experts across business, civil society, academia and beyond, as we work towards the publication of a full AI governance White Paper later in the year.

A copy of the paper will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS212]

Loot Boxes in Video Games

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Ms Nadine Dorries): The Government response to the call for evidence on loot boxes in video games has been published on www.gov.uk.

The Government are committed to ensuring that the UK is one of the safest places to be online, and this includes video games. We want all players, especially children and vulnerable people, to have the tools and information they need to enjoy games safely.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) launched a call for evidence on loot boxes in video games in September 2020, in light of concerns about the potential for loot boxes to cause harm.

The call for evidence received over 32,000 responses to a player survey, and 50 submissions from organisations and individuals. We are thankful to the organisations and individuals, including players and parents, who responded to the call for evidence. In addition, the Government commissioned an independent rapid evidence assessment of academic literature on loot boxes, which was conducted by InGAME in 2021.

The Government response sets out findings from the call for evidence. The call for evidence identified a range of potential harms associated with the purchase of loot boxes, though a causal relationship is yet to be evidenced. This includes harms which have been associated with gambling, but also a range of other potential mental health, financial and problem gaming related harms. The evidence suggests that the risks of harm are likely to be higher for children.

In response to the findings from the call for evidence, the Government want to see improved protections for children and adults with regards to loot boxes, and better longer term research into the impacts of video games. The Government's view is that:

purchases of loot boxes should be unavailable to all children and young people unless and until they are enabled by a parent or guardian;

all players, including children, young people and adults, should have access to and be aware of spending controls and transparent information to support safe and responsible gaming; and

better evidence and research, enabled by improved access to data, should be developed on the positive and negative impacts of video games to inform future policy making on loot boxes and video games more broadly.

DCMS will convene a technical working group to pursue enhanced industry-led solutions to mitigate the risk of harms for children and young people and adults from loot boxes in video games. In addition, we will work with academics and other partners to launch a video games research framework.

The Government response have been developed alongside our review of the Gambling Act. We will continue to keep the position set out in the Government response under review, considering any new and emerging evidence on loot boxes and harms, progress made in strengthening industry-led protections, and any specific proposals on how statutory protections could be enhanced. We will not hesitate to consider legislative options if we deem this necessary to protect children and adults.

I will be placing a copy of the Government response to the call for evidence in the Libraries of both Houses, and this response has been published on www.gov.uk. The rapid evidence assessment of academic literature on loot boxes, conducted by InGAME, has also been published on www.gov.uk.

[HCWS211]

Data Protection and Digital Information

The Minister of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Warman): Today, the Government are introducing the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill in the House of Commons. The Bill is being introduced

after the Government published their response to the “Data: A New Direction” consultation on 17 June 2022.

We now have the opportunity to seize the benefits of Brexit and transform the UK’s independent data laws. We have designed these new updates to our data protection framework so it works in our interests, protects our citizens, and unburdens our businesses.

Through this Bill we will realise the opportunities of responsible data use while maintaining the UK’s high data protection standards. The EU does not require countries to have the same rules to grant adequacy, so it is our belief that these reforms are compatible with maintaining a free flow of personal data from the European economic area.

Our Bill will improve people’s lives in many different ways. Firstly, we are increasing fines for nuisance calls and texts that break the rules. Telecoms network providers will also be required to notify the ICO when they have reasonable grounds for believing that unsolicited direct marketing is occurring on their networks.

Reforms to the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations will also remove the need for cookie banner pop ups for low risk activities, such as audience measurement, so it’s easier for businesses to use information to improve their services. The Bill will also pave the way for the removal of irritating banners for other types of cookies when browser-based or similar solutions are sufficiently developed.

The Bill will bring some everyday physical processes into the 21st century. It will be easier and more secure to use digital identities, which give people more choice and greater security when they want to prove things about themselves online or via apps instead of with physical documents. We will improve Government data sharing to improve public services for businesses, and the Bill will also update the way births and deaths are registered by clerks, moving from a paper-based system to an electronic register used by officials.

Our reforms to data protection laws will mean that UK scientists are no longer needlessly impeded by overcautious, unclear rules on how they can use people’s personal data. We will simplify the legal requirements around research, which will provide scientists the clarity and confidence they need to get on with life enhancing and life-saving research.

We are reducing the burdens on businesses that have held the UK back from the benefits of greater personal data use before now. By focusing on outcomes not box-ticking, we will unburden businesses from prescriptive requirements and empower them to protect personal data in the most proportionate and appropriate way. Our changes could create around £1 billion in business savings over 10 years.

The Bill will sustain and scale the UK’s approach to supporting international data flows by capitalising on its independent status to strike partnerships with some of the world’s fastest growing economies. Reforms will ensure that the mechanisms to transfer personal data internationally are secure and flexible to help British businesses grow.

The structure and objectives of the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) will be modernised so that it remains an internationally renowned regulator, including increased investigatory powers to help it keep

pace with changing practices. New strategic objectives will have an emphasis on economic growth and innovation, while ensuring the ICO continues to produce high-quality codes of practice, and has the flexibility to allocate its resources appropriately. The ICO will remain operationally independent while enabling the public and parliament to more effectively hold it to account through key performance indicators.

Reforms will also confirm that elected representatives may process general personal data where necessary for the purposes of democratic engagement activities. The intent is to allow MPs, councillors and political parties to undertake the democratic engagement activities they have done for decades—such as opinion surveys of local residents, and targeted letters to constituents—without the unnecessary complexity and confusion of the EU’s general data protection regulation. This builds on measures in the Data Protection Act 2018 which received broad cross-party support at the time.

The Bill will improve the efficiency of data protection for law enforcement and national security partners—encouraging better use of personal data where appropriate to help protect the public. Our proposed reforms create greater consistency between general, law enforcement and national security data processing. They will provide agencies with clarity on their obligations, boosting the confidence of the public on how their data is being used. These changes are vitally important for the work of our law enforcement and national security agencies who process personal data in the public interest, to prevent crime and safeguard national security.

New information standards for IT products and services supplied to the health and adult social care sector will ensure these are interoperable to make it easier for staff to access the information they need to help their patients.

The powers included in the Bill allow Government Departments to establish sector-based smart data schemes with supporting regulation, to ensure consumer and business protection. This is the secure and consented sharing of customer data with authorised third-party providers. These approved providers then use this data to deliver innovative services for the consumer or business, such as automatic bank account switching. This saves time, money and effort for customers who can more easily find and choose better-suited deals.

[HCWS210]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Vaccination Update

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maggie Throup): The covid-19 vaccination programme continues to protect the nation against the virus. As of 13 July 2022, over 149 million doses have been administered in the UK, including over 53.6 million first doses, over 50.2 million second doses and over 40 million third primary or booster doses in the UK. This represents uptake of 93.3% for the first dose, 87.4% for the second dose and 69.6% for the third primary and booster doses in the UK. During the spring campaign, data to 10 July shows that over 4 million over-75s received a further dose in England. Up to 10 July, over

85% of those eligible by the end of May had received a spring booster, ensuring that the most vulnerable in our society have recent protection.

On 15 July, Her Majesty's Government accepted advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation regarding the covid-19 vaccination campaign for autumn 2022. The JCVI's advice is that a covid-19 booster vaccine should be offered to:

Residents in a care home for older adults and staff working in care homes for older adults.

Frontline health and social care workers.

All adults aged 50 years and over.

Persons aged 5 to 49 years in a clinical risk group including pregnant women, as set out in the UK Health Security Agency's Green Book Chapter 14a—Tables 3 and 4.

Persons aged 5 to 49 years who are household contacts of people with immunosuppression.

Persons aged 16 to 49 years who are carers, as set out in the UKHSA's Green Book Chapter 14a—Table 3.

The final eligible groups are broader than those announced in the JCVI's interim advice in May. The committee considered the recent epidemiology of the BA.4 and BA.5 waves, as well as the benefits of aligning the covid-19 programme with the flu vaccine rollout, concluding that expanding the offer would provide necessary protection to those at higher risk of severe illness and keep greater numbers of people out of hospital.

All eligible groups are encouraged to take up the vaccine when the time comes, even if they have had a spring booster, to give themselves the best possible protection against severe outcomes of covid-19 this winter.

In addition, the Department of Health and Social Care will once again be offering the free flu vaccine to additional groups. These groups will only be eligible once the most vulnerable, including previously announced pre-school and primary school children, those aged 65 years and over and those in clinical risk groups, have been offered the jab.

The additional groups set to be offered the free flu vaccine in England will be:

All adults aged 50 to 64 years.

Secondary school children in years 7, 8 and 9, who will be offered the vaccine in order of school year—starting with the youngest first.

The National Health Service will announce in due course when and how eligible groups will be able to book an appointment for their covid-19 autumn booster, and when people aged 50 to 64 years old who are not in a clinical risk group will be able to get their free flu jab.

[HCWS215]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Clandestine Entrant Civil Penalty Scheme: Public Consultation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Simon Baynes): The Government are today launching a consultation on reforming the clandestine entrant civil penalty scheme—part of the ambitious work to tackle illegal migration we are delivering through our new plan for immigration.

Illegal migration is facilitated by serious organised criminals exploiting people and profiting from human misery. The same criminal gangs and networks are also responsible for other illicit activity ranging from drug and firearms trafficking to modern slavery and serious violent crimes. A significant number of people, who arrive in the UK through concealment in vehicles by tourist and freight transport routes, have had their entry illegally facilitated by organised criminal gangs. Despite extensive work with overseas partners to strengthen our shared borders and enhance our strategic partnerships, this method of entry continues and endangers the lives of those involved. In many cases, this is a result of criminal gangs and opportunistic migrants taking advantage of unsecured or poorly secured vehicles to smuggle people or enter the UK illegally.

For these reasons, the UK operates a scheme to tackle illegal migration called the clandestine entrant civil penalty scheme. The scheme means that when clandestine entrants are found concealed in a vehicle, a penalty of up to £2,000 per entrant can be imposed on any responsible person connected to the vehicle in question, up to a maximum aggregate of £4,000 in total per clandestine entrant. A responsible person is defined as the owner, hirer or driver of the vehicle. The scheme applies to all vehicles, commercial and private, as well as anything that is designed to be towed or carried by a vehicle—such as trailers, caravans, containers etc. In circumstances where the driver is employed by the vehicle owner or hirer, such as an HGV, the employer is also liable for the driver's penalty. The penalty level has not been changed for nearly 20 years.

During the financial year 2020-2021, there were 3,145 incidents where clandestine entrants were detected concealed in vehicles, despite the covid-19 pandemic causing a lower volume of traffic. This rose to 3,838 incidents during the financial year 2021-2022. The Government are therefore concerned that the scheme is not having enough of an effect, as drivers are not taking the steps required to secure vehicles, and clandestine entrants are continuing to use these routes to enter the UK.

It is for this reason that the Government committed to review and overhaul the scheme as part of its new plan for immigration. A public consultation on the new plan for immigration was held from 24 March to 6 May 2021. The Government then introduced changes to the scheme through the new Nationality and Borders Act 2022.

The changes under the 2022 Act include narrowing the statutory defences available to those who have carried a clandestine entrant. This means that where a clandestine entrant has been carried, it will no longer be a statutory defence to say that an effective system for preventing the carriage of clandestine entrants was in operation, and that person may still be issued with a penalty. However, if the person has complied with regulations to be issued by the Secretary of State, which will require them to take actions to secure their transporter, report unauthorised access and keep records to show they took these steps, this could mean the level of the penalty is reduced.

The 2022 Act also introduces a new civil penalty for failing to adequately secure a goods vehicle, regardless of whether a clandestine entrant has been found. The Secretary of State will also make regulations which set out what is meant by a goods vehicle being adequately

secure and the required vehicle security standards that will determine whether liability arises under this new offence. These may include vehicle checks, reporting unauthorised access and retaining records to demonstrate steps taken.

Before any of these regulations can be made under the 2022 Act, the Secretary of State has a statutory duty to consult with such persons as she considers appropriate. The Government have also agreed to consult on the level of penalty for the new offence of failing to adequately secure a goods vehicle, with a view to bringing into operation a new level of penalty: code of practice.

The Secretary of State is now discharging these obligations through this consultation, which is designed to seek the views of all interested parties on these issues and others connected with the scheme. The consultation will run for eight weeks and will close on 12 September 2022.

Alongside the consultation, the Home Office will be running a series of engagement events to explore these issues in more detail. If you would like to join an engagement event, please email:

ClandestineEntrantCivilPenaltyConsultation@homeoffice.gov.uk.

The closing date to express an interest in joining an engagement date is 19 August 2022.

We welcome your views and look forward to hearing from you.

A copy of the consultation will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and also made available on www.gov.uk.

[HCWS213]

Swift, Certain, Tough: New Consequences for Drug Possession

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): Today, I am pleased to announce the publication of a White Paper, “Swift, Certain, Tough: new consequences for drug possession” and accompanying public consultation, which has been laid before the House (CP 723). It has also been published on gov.uk.

As set out in the 10-year drug strategy, published in December 2021, we are committed to exploring options for tackling so-called recreational drug use. This White Paper does just that and proposes new sanctions to deter people from illicit drug use and change attitudes. Fundamental to this new regime is that drug users face greater consequences than they do today. And while we want consequences to be tough, we also want them to be fair, meaningful, and appropriate.

The White Paper sets out a combination of proposals for legislation, as well as broader areas for reform on which we invite consideration. We propose a new escalatory three tier framework for drug possession offences which will apply to all drug users, except where users have a drug dependence where treatment is the most relevant intervention.

Three tiers

Where appropriate, those caught for a first-time drug possession offence will be placed in tier 1 and issued with a fixed penalty notice. This requires them to either attend a drugs awareness course (paid for by the individual), or, if they do not attend the course, to pay a financial penalty.

For those who do not change their behaviour and are caught for a second time they will progress to tier 2. In this tier, the offender would be offered a caution which would include, where proportionate, a period of mandatory drug testing alongside attendance at a further stage drugs awareness course.

Should an individual be caught for a third time, they move to tier 3 and we expect them to be charged with the relevant offence. To ensure the courts have the right powers to change behaviours of drug offenders, we propose introducing a new civil court order to enable a range of conditions to be imposed, including: (i) exclusion order; (ii) drug tagging; (iii) passport confiscation; or (iv) driving licence disqualification.

Progression through the tiers should always be linear. We would not expect an individual to start with a tier 2 or tier 3 intervention or indeed “jump” from tier 1 to tier 3. The escalatory framework gives individuals the opportunity to understand the harms of illicit drugs better and to reflect on their behaviour and the harm they are doing to themselves and to wider society. Should they nevertheless continue to offend, consequences will escalate.

Drug testing on arrest

Given our focus is on reducing drug demand, we must take any opportunity to reach individuals and provide the right interventions. Therefore, this White Paper also proposes some important changes to drug testing on arrest powers to ensure the police can drug test more individuals than today. Drug testing on arrest is not about further criminalising drug users, but about identifying those who use drugs where their drug use may be a causal factor in their criminal behaviour and intervening to help them to change their behaviour. To achieve this we are therefore proposing to:

1. Expand the types of drugs that can be tested for to include a wider range of class A drugs;
2. Expand the types of drugs that can be tested for to include drugs in other classifications where relevant, and in particular cannabis as the most widely used illicit drug;
3. Expand the number of “trigger offences” that can lead to drug testing on arrest.

The proposed legislative changes will apply to both drug testing on arrest and to drug testing on charge.

Consultation

Given many of the changes will require primary legislation, we believe the right approach is to publish a consultative White Paper. We will therefore open a formal consultation period on the document today for a period of 12 weeks. I would encourage parliamentary colleagues to review the document and the consultation, and to make relevant organisations in their areas aware. Consultation responses will be thoroughly analysed and taken into consideration before finalising any policy.

This White Paper represents a significant step in reducing overall drug use towards a historic 30-year low and shows we do not shy away from proposing new interventions to do this. Ultimately these sanctions are aiming to change behaviour and reduce demand for drugs. We want people to lead healthier lifestyles and we want them to stop putting money into the pockets of dangerous drug gangs who fuel violence in our communities.

We are utterly steadfast in our determination to grip this problem and, ultimately, turn the tide on illegal drugs.

[HCWS214]

Ministerial Correction

Monday 18 July 2022

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Strategy for International Development

The following is an extract from the estimates day debate on 6 July 2022.

Vicky Ford: On covid, I remind the Select Committee Chair that we were at the forefront of the international response to covid-19. We pledged up to £1.2 billion to address the impacts of the pandemic.

[Official Report, 6 July 2022, Vol. 717, c. 970.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford).

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion).

The correct information should have been:

Vicky Ford: On covid, I remind the Select Committee Chair that we were at the forefront of the international response to covid-19. We pledged up to **£2.1 billion** to address the impacts of the pandemic.

ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 18 July 2022

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