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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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House of Commons

Monday 12 December 2022

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr Speaker *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Defence Jobs

1. **Mr Gagan Mohindra** (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support defence jobs in the UK. [902707]

12. **Antony Higginbotham** (Burnley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support defence jobs in the UK. [902718]

The Minister for Defence Procurement (Alex Chalk): The most recent estimate shows that Ministry of Defence investment supports 219,000 jobs in industries across the United Kingdom. Continued high and focused investment in defence, along with the changes that we continue to make as part of our defence and security industrial strategy, will contribute to further economic growth and prosperity across the Union.

Mr Mohindra: I thank the Minister for that answer. Ahead of Armistice Day last month, I was contacted by Northwood military headquarters in my constituency to help organise a tour of this place for the submarine service. I thank Captain James Clark and Conservative Friends of the Armed Forces for their help in making that happen. Does the Minister agree that during this time of global turbulence we should do all we can to support and champion the members of our armed forces?

Alex Chalk: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I pay tribute to him for taking the time to visit the Northwood military headquarters. There are 1,600 active service personnel at Northwood HQ, and their work is crucial to protecting our people, territories, values and interests at home and overseas. He is right to pay tribute to them, and I join him in that.

Antony Higginbotham: Thanks to this Secretary of State for Defence, Lancashire is home to the newest part of the armed forces, the National Cyber Force. That brings huge opportunities to our county, not only through the thousands of armed forces personnel who will eventually be stationed there, but with the cyber-security companies that we hope will cluster around the site in the years ahead. To really seize the opportunity, however, we need to ensure that we give local people the skills they need to join the NCF or other cyber-security businesses. Will the Minister meet me to discuss what steps we can take to ensure that the MOD supports the growth of its cyber-cluster, centred on the NCF, and the links between the NCF and local education providers?

Alex Chalk: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and for the close interest he has taken in the establishment of the National Cyber Force in Samlesbury, which has cemented the north-west's position as a key UK cyber-cluster. He will be aware that last week we announced the trilateral international partnership between the UK, Japan and Italy to develop next-generation Tempest fighters, which will also benefit the north-west. He is absolutely right that, with regard to skills, we need to encourage the creation of local partnerships between Government, industry and universities. I am pleased to note that Lancaster University has announced a £19 million investment in data and cyber-security research, teaching and innovation. I would, of course, be delighted to meet him.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): The Defence Committee recently had before us representatives from Boeing, which has been awarded some £6 billion-worth of contracts in recent years. A representative confirmed that Boeing directly employs only 1,600 people in the UK. Does the Minister not agree that that is a pretty poor return on the investment and that it certainly would not be the case in the United States?

Alex Chalk: I met Boeing recently, and we are always keen to see investment in the UK. We are absolutely delighted that, because of the pipeline of investment that the Government have commissioned—from ships to cyber to space—we are investing in jobs and capability, and we are ensuring that we take expertise from wherever it is in the world, securing jobs in this country.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): We welcome the Government's commitment to job creation; the problem is that they are creating jobs abroad, including in Spain. The Defence Secretary has just picked a Spanish firm to build the Royal Navy's three new fleet support ships. At least 40% of that work will go abroad and the best that the Defence Secretary could tell the Scottish Affairs Committee the other day was that the contractor will

"fully assemble the final ship in a UK yard."

As a result of the Defence Secretary's decision, how many jobs will be created in Spain and not in the UK?

Alex Chalk: Respectfully, I completely reject the tenor of that question. We should be celebrating the fact that, as a result of the commitment that we are making to UK shipbuilding, there will be 2,000 jobs in the UK and there will be shipbuilding industries in Appledore and in Northern Ireland. That comes on top of the 1,700 jobs secured as a result of the Type 26, the 3,000 jobs as a result of cyber investment and further jobs in respect of the future combat air system. This Government are investing in defence, in shipbuilding, in land, in sea and in air. We will continue to do exactly that.

John Healey: Well, the Minister told me in answer to a parliamentary question that the

"number of jobs sustained in Spain…is a matter for the contractor".

We could have had 100% of the jobs in Britain. This is a dodgy decision, whichever way we view it. On 21 November, I received confirmation in a written answer that the prime contractor for this £1.6 billion contract will be a company that was registered only in May, with no trading history, with capital of just £10,000 and with two directors, both living in Spain. What guarantees can the Minister give the British taxpayer and the Royal Navy that this contract will not betray British jobs and UK industry?

Alex Chalk: What I genuinely do not understand is why the Opposition are not welcoming a deal that is bringing more than £70 million into Belfast, securing jobs in the shipbuilding industry in this country and ensuring, by the way, that the base of industrial support goes beyond the traditional Scottish yards to include yards in Belfast and, indeed, in Appledore. That is good news. As for the right hon. Gentleman's point about other countries playing a role, let us not forget that one of the great successful procurements is the F-35. That is an American plane—of course it is—but who produces 15% of the components? The United Kingdom does. That is exactly what happens in these sorts of contracts, and it gets value for money for taxpayers.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): All credit to Babcock—maybe the Minister will join me in congratulating it—for securing the Natural Environmental Research Council's £45 million fleet renewal programme. Of course, Babcock and BAE should be gearing up to do 100% of the fleet solid support ships in a distributed model across the UK, but they are not, because this Tory Government have awarded a £1.6 billion contract for three ships to Navantia in Spain. When Sir John Parker, in his national shipbuilding strategy—*[Interruption]*—maybe the Secretary of State could pipe down a second. When Sir John Parker stressed that the Ministry of Defence should embrace smart procurement, invest in yards and apprenticeships, and commission ships with an eye to export, did the Government realise that he was talking about yards in the UK, not in Spain?

Alex Chalk: I listened very carefully to that question but, with respect, we will not take lectures from an SNP Government who put a ship in the water in 2017—a ferry that has now failed to be developed. We are proud that we have got behind the Type 26, which is benefiting the Scottish economy, and indeed the British economy, with an additional 2,000 jobs as a result of the five vessels that we have continued to commission. This Government are investing in broad-based maritime capacity in this country, now and in the future, and developing our capability here in Britain.

Dave Doogan: We hear all the time about the strength of the Union for orders into Scottish yards, but Scotland, still stuck in this necrotic Union, loses out no matter what happens, when this Secretary of State awards work to Cádiz that should have gone to the UK—it's heads, the UK wins; tails, Scotland loses. I wish Appledore in Devon and Harland and Wolff in Belfast all the best, but without the requisite workforce or skills, they are simply the Union flag gift-wrapping that this Defence Secretary has given to the Spanish shipbuilding industry. I ask the Government and the increasingly ridiculously titled shipbuilding tsar: contrary to his own claims, when the bulk of this work is delivered in Spain, will this Secretary of State and his ministerial team resign?

Alex Chalk: It is very important that the House is not misled in any way. It is not the case that the bulk will be built in Spain. Quite the opposite: the majority will be built in the United Kingdom. All the assembly and all the integration will happen here in the United Kingdom. I hope the hon. Gentleman will celebrate the fact that the Type 26, built in Scotland, secures 1,700 jobs and includes the potential for exports. Govan, Rosyth, Scotstoun—all those yards are being nurtured and supported by the power and might of the UK Union. That means that Scotland's place is better in the Union, and the British Union is advantaged as well.

Africa: Tackling Violent Extremist Organisations

2. **Sir James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help tackle violent extremist organisations in Africa. [902708]

The Minister for Armed Forces (James Heappey): We are concerned by the growth of Daesh and the continued presence of al-Shabaab and Boko Haram across Africa. We are working closely with our partners across the continent, as well as with our international allies, to ensure that we counter the shared threats of violent extremism and terrorism. Obviously we are supportive of the missions led by the United Nations and the African Union, but we are also increasingly looking at how the UK can support regional solutions for regional problems, and how the UK works with friends such as Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria to support their leadership in the Sahel, the Lake Chad basin, the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia.

Sir James Duddridge: The Minister talks about recognised current terrorist organisations, but what assessment has he made of the Wagner Group in Africa, and would he recommend its proscription as a terrorist organisation?

James Heappey: Wagner's presence in Africa is obviously deeply unhelpful, and it is cynical and opportunistic. It has no interest in the countries in which it operates; it is simply there to extract the maximum value for Russia, and potentially to cause as much chaos as it can for those of us who are trying to help on the continent. However, the Government do not routinely comment on whether an organisation is being considered for proscription.

Defence Sector: Support for UK Companies

3. **John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support UK companies in the defence sector. [902709]

4. **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support UK companies in the defence sector. [902710]

The Minister for Defence Procurement (Alex Chalk): The defence and security industrial strategy is helping to retain onshore critical industries for our national security and our future. The Ministry of Defence supports the development of a more productive and competitive UK defence sector. With a significant footprint across the UK and the procurement pipeline, the MOD is well placed to contribute to economic growth and levelling up.

John Spellar: May I take the Minister back to the subject of the fleet solid support ships? I realise that he is new to the job, but he has been ducking and diving during earlier exchanges. The prime contractor, as Ministers have admitted, is Navantia. What guarantees have they obtained that the boats will be built in the United Kingdom—especially the first in class—and in respect of the numbers of apprenticeships that would ensure capacity for the future?

Alex Chalk: As is always the case, the precise details of the contract will be set out in due course, but these facts are absolutely clear: the award is of £1.6 billion to deliver three vessels, and this will be a British ship built to a British design in a British dockyard, mostly with British steel. I hoped that the right hon. Gentleman would support this development, because it strengthens British shipbuilding—and, by the way, it also means £70 million for a British dockyard, which he should certainly support.

Mr Sharma: I welcome recent developments in the Tempest programme. Having our own combat air industrial capabilities is incredibly important, and ensures that we are not dependent on the Americans, but what is the MOD doing to ensure that all the enablers for modern combat are built here and bring real industrial value to the UK?

Alex Chalk: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising such an important point. He is absolutely right; this provides a capability that will ensure that we stay one step ahead of our adversaries, and it will be a collaboration. If ever there was a symbol of global Britain, this is it: us working with the Japanese and the Italians to produce something that is cutting-edge. If I may say so, that is a message that I hope his colleagues will understand as well. It is by working with other countries to share and develop expertise that we can make all the free world that bit freer and safer.

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con): I welcome Friday's announcement about the UK, Italy and Japan working closely together on the next generation of combat aircraft. This, of course, sits alongside the partnership of the UK, the United States and Australia—AUKUS—and shows that such partnerships are important not only for our national security and the security of the Indo-Pacific, but for UK companies and UK jobs. Does my hon. and learned Friend agree?

Alex Chalk: My hon. Friend makes the point brilliantly. This is about investing in capability to ensure that expertise remains in the UK, and that we learn and collaborate in developing the next generation of expertise, but there is also the potential to export. Previous examples of our successful collaboration include Typhoon, with more than 600 units sold overseas. If we get this right—and there is every reason to think we will—there will be such opportunities in the future as well.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does the Minister agree that, contrary to the Opposition's claim, supporting UK companies in the defence sector not only makes good economic sense, but is critical to ensuring that the sector is aligned with the Department's national security objectives?

Alex Chalk: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. So many of these collaborations lead to direct investment into British shipyards—for example, the over £70 million that we were just talking about. But what does this mean in pounds, shillings and pence? It means that those defence jobs are paid, on average, 15% higher than the average wage, and that is just one reason why we need to keep them in the UK.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Contrary to the drivel we have just been listening to, there are absolutely no guarantees about British jobs and British apprenticeships in British yards. At what point are Ministers going to stop talking about it and actually use procurement to deliver and secure the future of British yards?

Alex Chalk: With great respect, that is completely wrong and risks being misleading. What has been made crystal clear is that these ships will be built, integrated and assembled in the United Kingdom. Appledore will get work; Harland and Wolff will get work—there will be investment and jobs in those shipyards. That is good news and surely something we should be welcoming.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): Ascent Flight Training at RAF Valley on Ynys Môn has been awarded a £175 million contract to expand pilot training, with four new Texan T6 aircraft, a new simulator, 11 additional flying instructors and nine new engineering roles. From 2024, RAF Valley will be responsible for training 53 student pilots, up from 36. Will the Minister pay tribute to Ascent Flight Training, to the whole force and to all those who support RAF Valley for playing their part in keeping us safe?

Alex Chalk: My hon. Friend is such a champion of defence on Ynys Môn, and yes, I absolutely pay tribute to them. It is only through their fantastic work that we can come together as a nation, develop the capabilities that we need and keep us and the next generation safe.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): The National Audit Office has found the defence equipment plan to be already outdated on its publication and based on optimistic assumptions. With inflation out of control and with foreign currency fluctuations, does the Minister expect defence companies to bear the brunt of this turmoil, and if so, will this ultimately lead to the loss of British jobs?

Alex Chalk: No, I do not. I am new to this Department, as the hon. Member indicates, but one of the things I am really pleased about is to see the ambition that exists

within this Government to develop the capabilities we need. I was also pleased to see that, notwithstanding the difficult circumstances that we and the whole world are in because of inflation, this Government are committed to ensuring that those capabilities remain, that those critical developments—Type 26, Type 31, the future combat air system, Poseidon and so much other equipment—remain in the pipeline, and that we do what we properly should to lead the world in supporting our friends in Ukraine.

Support for NATO Allies

5. **Dan Carden** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to support NATO allies following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. [902711]

The Minister for Armed Forces (James Heappey): This year has been extraordinarily busy, as the alliance has moved to respond to Russia's aggression in Ukraine. The Royal Navy has been deployed in the Black sea, the Baltic sea, the eastern Mediterranean and the north Atlantic; the Army has been deployed in Bulgaria, Poland, Lithuania and Estonia; and the Royal Air Force has been deployed in Lithuania and Romania, as well as in patrols over the Black sea, the Baltic sea and the High North. We have also been engaging with the armed forces of both Finland and Sweden in anticipation of their accession to NATO.

Dan Carden: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer. I have had the privilege of travelling to Poland and Finland in recent months to see how we are working with those allies. The UK must support Ukraine for the long term, and it must move beyond ad hoc donations of weapons and lay out a long-term strategy for military, economic, humanitarian and diplomatic support throughout 2023 and beyond. In the summer, the Defence Secretary promised that the UK and its allies would begin to establish a plan of action to support Ukraine into 2023. Can the Minister tell us where that is? The Defence Secretary also endorsed updating the integrated review in response to Ukraine during the summer. Where is that plan?

James Heappey: The hon. Gentleman is right, to a point. There is a need to gift in kind or to find international donations that meet an immediate need because an opportunity has arisen in the conflict, but he is right to suggest that there is also a sort of "business as usual" drumbeat that we must, as an international group of supporters, seek to deliver on. The problem is—I apologise to the House that this is the case—that Putin would like to see that plan as much as he would, and for that reason I can assure him that there is a good supply of ammunition and matériel going into Ukraine over the course of the next 12 months, but from where, when and what, I will not be able to share.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Select Committee on Defence.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): The UK has led by example with its military assistance to Ukraine, but may I invite the UK to step forward again? Until now, the west has publicly stated that it is for Ukraine to determine on what terms Russia is defeated. It is their country and, of course, Ukraine's objectives are fundamental, but this approach effectively outsources our Russia foreign policy and ignores the wider long-term threat Moscow now poses to all of Europe. Do we accept that this is no isolated invasion? Russia is returning to type by expanding its influence across Europe, by weaponising oil, gas and grain, and by increasingly drawing Iran and Belarus into the fight. This is a European war and it is in our economic and security interests to put out this fire. Our Russia foreign policy should reflect that.

James Heappey: I agree, but I do not think the response to Ukraine is the totality of the UK's foreign policy on Russia. Russia is a challenge not only across the European continent but beyond. My right hon. Friend is right that Russia is using grain as a weapon and as leverage across the global south, so the UK must seek to address Russia's malign activity globally while continuing to do everything we are doing to ensure that the war in Ukraine ends on terms acceptable to President Zelensky.

Cost of Living: Armed Forces Personnel

6. **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): What recent assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the rise in the cost of living on armed forces personnel. [902712]

The Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families (Dr Andrew Murrison): The Ministry of Defence has introduced a series of measures to support our people to cope with the cost of living, including: implementing the independent Armed Forces Pay Review Body's 2022 pay award recommendations in full; capping subsidised accommodation charges at 1%; freezing food charges; and increasing travel allowances by 7%. More than 32,000 service personnel have received a £150 contribution in lieu of the council tax rebate, families can save around £3,400 per child per year through our wraparound childcare, and our people in service family accommodation are receiving a £400 non-repayable discount to help with energy costs.

Carol Monaghan: I thank the Minister for his response, but nearly 3,000 personnel are already claiming universal credit, and food and heating costs are soaring for everyone. In addition to what he has already said, what discussions is he having with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that all personnel who are entitled to claim universal credit are doing so? What discussions is he having with the Treasury to ensure that personnel are further supported where required?

Dr Murrison: The hon. Lady will know that universal credit is an in-work benefit and is dependent on income, family size, type of accommodation and a raft of other issues. She will probably be interested to know about the further investment we are putting into family accommodation, which will help with many of the problems that have been reported to me in relation to heating and the cost of energy, especially through insulation. I suspect her constituents will probably be most appreciative of that.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): The cost of living crisis is no doubt affecting all those in the armed forces, and so, too, will the call on them to help out during all these strikes. Will the Government reward those who so generously give of their time? I know they are assigned to work over Christmas and new year, but are there any signs of some sort of reward or thank you to those who, yet again, have been called on to fill a hole?

Dr Murrison: My hon. Friend takes a close interest in the armed forces, and I think I can assure him that conversations on this subject are happening across Whitehall.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The Army's most senior soldier says personnel are turning to food banks and second jobs this Christmas, just to make ends meet. Six months ago, I raised the alarm that some troops are having to take second jobs at McDonald's because of the cost of living crisis. I know the Minister says he is supporting our armed forces during the cost of living crisis, but why is the Ministry of Defence still not collecting data on the number of service personnel using food vouchers and food banks or taking second jobs?

Dr Murrison: I visited the food bank in my own constituency and discussed the reasons that people use them, which are often complicated. The hon. Gentleman will know that we have accepted the Armed Forces Pay Review Body's recommendation in full, in recognition of the work that men and women of our armed forces do. He will be aware of the very real big incentives to remain within the armed forces, including a generous non-contributory pension, subsidised accommodation and all the rest of it. He will also be aware of the Haythornthwaite review, which I hope will report soon on what more we can do to incentivise people not only to join but to stay.

Cost of Living: Veterans

8. **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Ind): What steps (a) Veterans UK and (b) the Veterans Welfare Service have taken to help support veterans during the cost of living crisis. [902714]

13. **Christian Wakeford** (Bury South) (Lab): What steps (a) Veterans UK and (b) the Veterans Welfare Service have taken to help support veterans during the cost of living crisis. [902719]

14. **Rebecca Long Bailey** (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): What steps (a) Veterans UK and (b) the Veterans Welfare Service have taken to help support veterans during the cost of living crisis. [902720]

The Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families (Dr Andrew Murrison): As of 30 November 2022, Veterans UK has paid a total of 5,323 disability cost of living payments of £150 to veterans who are in receipt of a qualifying Ministry of Defence disability benefit. Over the past six months, the Veterans Welfare Service has assisted a total of 6,363 veterans with claims. The Veterans UK helpline has answered a total of 29,922 calls. To be clear, veterans—as civilians—are entitled to the same cost of living support offered by national, local and devolved Governments wherever they reside, in common with the general public.

Dr Huq: The Royal British Legion has issued 20% more basic support grants in the last year. Help for Heroes reports that requests for help are up by 28%, confirmed by what Ealing Ex-Servicemen's Club tells me, which also covers mental health issues. Why is the MOD not allocating specific funding for veterans' cost of living and associated issues this year? When will it match Labour's promise to increase veterans' mental health support by £55 million, to protect those who protected us?

Dr Murrison: I am pleased that the hon. Lady raises mental health, which is a passion of mine, particularly in relation to the armed forces. I hope she will welcome the ongoing work of Op Courage to help our veterans who run into difficulties. It is only reasonable to point out that most of our service community are very well both in mind and in body. However, Op Courage was designed to look after those who are not. I hope she will welcome the extra £2.7 million to expand Op Courage services to better help those to whom we owe so much.

Christian Wakeford: Some 90% of veterans who try to claim the personal independence payment for post-traumatic stress disorder are rejected, according to armed forces charities. It can make up to 50% of their income, and the rejections have left veterans attempting suicide, facing homelessness or becoming reliant on food banks. Why is it always veterans who are left until last and have to rely on charity for assistance?

Dr Murrison: I hope the hon. Gentleman was listening to and approved of my earlier answers on the support that Government are giving to our armed forces community. I hope he will take note, because it is important to understand the facts around suicide and mental health in the armed forces community. If he is not familiar with the recent Manchester University study on suicide, he may be interested to read it. I will be more than happy to send him a copy or arrange a briefing.

Rebecca Long Bailey: Veterans charities are reporting huge increases in demand for basic support grants. Indeed, a recent survey by Help for Heroes found that 82% of respondents were worried about the cost of living, with one in eight having to use a food bank in the past 12 months. The Royal British Legion reports that 14% of veterans aged 65 or over have turned off their heating to save money even when it is too cold. Can the Minister assure me that he is providing support to those services delivered by veterans charities to ensure that veterans and their families across the country can access cost of living support?

Dr Murrison: The hon. Lady takes a very close interest in these matters, for which I am grateful. Of course the MOD works closely with service charities, with whom we have an almost constant dialogue in terms of their caseload to ensure that we do the best we can for our veterans. It is worth bearing in mind that veterans are civilians and are entitled to the same Government initiatives to ease their position in the current crisis as any other member of general public, as I said in my earlier remarks.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): Veterans and their families have made immense sacrifices for our country's safety, but, in the run-up to Christmas, we have veterans hit by increased mortgage costs and rising bills, tens of thousands of veterans claiming universal credit and many reliant on charitable grants just to get by. It is not good enough. How can the Minister expect us to believe that his Government will make the UK the best place in the world in which to be a veteran when they are leaving many veterans and their families to struggle this Christmas?

Dr Murrison: I detect a theme in the line of questioning. I have to draw the hon. Lady's attention to the remarks that I made earlier and to the package of assistance that the Government have provided for all citizens. The focus of defence, of course, in accordance with the military covenant, must be to ease the condition of people who have suffered specifically as a result of their service in the armed forces, which, although most members of our armed forces community are robust mentally and physically, means that particular attention must be paid to those who may have been damaged in some way physically or mentally by virtue of their service. That is what we are resolved to do, and hence, in particular, our support for Op Courage.

Ukraine: Defence Support

9. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): How many (a) armoured vehicles, (b) anti-tank weapons and (c) multiple-launch rocket systems his Department has donated to Ukraine for use against Russian forces in that country. [902715]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): The UK is the second largest donor in military aid to Ukraine. We have gifted almost 200 armoured vehicles and more than 10,000 anti-tank missiles to Ukraine. We have also delivered a number of multiple launch rocket systems to counter Putin's brutal use of long-range artillery, but, for reasons of operational security, I am unable to give a precise quantity.

Mr Hollobone: His Majesty's Government have led Europe in arming Ukraine against Russian aggression. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the equipment and personnel losses incurred by the Russian armed forces as a result of the deployment of British weaponry in theatre?

Mr Wallace: Although we do not specifically collect data on UK use of weapons, we can say that we estimate that more than 100,000 Russians are either dead, injured or have deserted. Russia has also lost 4,500 armoured vehicles, 63 fixed-wing aircraft, 70 helicopters, 150 unmanned aerial vehicles, 12 naval vessels and more than 600 artillery systems, and failed to capture a single one of its major objectives from day one. President Putin's three-day war, or special operation, turns out to have been a disaster for him and his army.

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): Ukrainians have been buying Mitsubishi L200 pick-up trucks from west country farmers to adapt them for use as impromptu fighting vehicles. As the first Boxer armoured vehicles arrive with the British Army in the coming months, what consideration are the Government giving to passing some of the retiring Warrior infantry fighting vehicles to Ukraine?

Mr Wallace: First and foremost, the type of weaponry and vehicles that the Ukrainians are buying off the shelf like that is not necessarily because of a lack of need elsewhere, but because of the speed and innovation that they require. When we transfer something like a Warrior armoured personnel carrier, it is tracked, it is—if my memory serves me right—28 tonnes, and it comes with a huge long logistical supply chain. We are very interested in making sure that we keep them supplied with equipment that they can use almost immediately rather than having to deal with the huge logistical tail that will come with it. We focus on giving them what we can. We have obviously supported the renovation of armoured vehicles and we will continue to do so.

Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): The House will know that supplies of British, American and other western equipment have been vital in helping our Ukrainian friends to protect themselves against the continuing and merciless Russian attacks, and I thank my right hon. Friend and the Government for all that they have done and continue to do. Does he agree that we and our allies must help our Ukrainian friends not just to take out the drones and missiles, which means supplying them with anti-aircraft systems and fixed-wing aircraft to help shoot them down, but to take out the launch sites of those missiles and drones by supplying the Ukrainians with the use of longer-range missile systems, such as army tactical missile systems? That is the way, truly, to protect our Ukrainian friends and to bring the war to an end as soon as possible.

Mr Wallace: Without my right hon. Friend's support of me and Ukraine, none of this would have been possible. I place on record my great appreciation of his support through that process. He is right that the Russians are taking advantage of the short-range capability of the Ukrainian armed forces by using Iranian kamikaze drones and, against all the rules of law, including the Geneva conventions, by the mass targeting of critical civilian infrastructure. That is not only a war crime, but a war crime that we must see does not go unpunished. I constantly review the weapons systems we could provide; I hear his call for ATACMS from the United States, but we too have in our armoury potential weapon systems that are longer range and, should the Russians continue to target civilian areas and break those Geneva conventions, I will be open-minded about what we do next.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): At a recent event in Monkstown Boxing Club in my constituency, which was arranged to show support for Ukrainians located in the greater Belfast area, there was huge support and thanks for the work our Government have done to help Ukrainians to defend themselves against Russians. The question is this: we are supplying equipment, but there is talk now that we are only supplying very limited ammunition for that equipment. Is the Secretary of State convinced, first, that we are supplying what is needed and, secondly, that we have the capacity to supply what is needed in the future?

Mr Wallace: We are providing ammunition, although some of it is in the form not necessarily of mass shells, but of more sophisticated weapons systems such as Brimstone missiles or Saab Thales next generation light anti-tank weapons, made in Belfast. We continue to supply those and indeed resupply ourselves. For the areas where we do not have something, we have set up an international fund with the Danish, which has so far raised €600 million, and we will be announcing the first block of purchases from the international community or from production lines to make sure we help Ukraine to get through 2023.

Women in the Armed Forces

10. **Cherilyn Mackrory** (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): What recent assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of progress towards creating a more inclusive environment for women in the armed forces. [902716]

The Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families (Dr Andrew Murrison): This is an important question and I thank my hon. Friend for it. Defence continues to improve the experiences of Defence women by introducing flexible service, working to improve health, instigating zero-tolerance policies on unacceptable sexual behaviours, launching the Defence Serious Crime Unit on 5 December and creating an independent bullying and harassment helpline. Defence Ministers and officials meet the servicewomen's networks regularly. We have made progress, but we know that we must do more and continue to press ahead to make the armed forces the best place to work for women.

Cherilyn Mackrory: Next year, Falmouth in my constituency will host national Armed Forces Day. Following the success of last year's G7, we hope that it will be yet another momentous occasion for Cornwall and that one of its lasting legacies will be that women and girls across Cornwall will be inspired to join the armed forces. I thank the Minister for his answer, but can he tell me to what extent the focus on inclusivity is resulting in better retention of women in the armed forces?

Dr Murrison: I agree with my hon. Friend and look forward to Armed Forces Day in Falmouth. Women are, of course, an integral part of our armed forces and Defence remains committed to improving their lived experience. In a competitive age, our advantage derives from the talent and skills of our people. We really must attract, recruit and retain people from the broadest base possible. Not only is that the right thing to do, but it is mission-critical to our operational effectiveness. We are committed to making the changes required to create a more inclusive environment for all women to pursue long and successful careers—including my two serving daughters.

Defence Relationships with European Allies

11. **Marco Longhi** (Dudley North) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to strengthen defence relationships with European allies. [902717]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): The UK works bilaterally and multilaterally through NATO and other groupings, including the Joint Expeditionary Force, the Northern Group and the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force with France to advance interoperability and develop a common understanding of the threats we face. I recently met the new Italian Defence Minister to discuss Tempest and the security of the Mediterranean, and later today I will host the Hungarian Defence Minister as we seek to progress Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO.

Marco Longhi: Does the Secretary of State agree that the joint venture between the United Kingdom, Italy and Japan in the Tempest programme for the new fighter jet is a great example of Brexit Britain? Will he also support ensuring that the supply chain that it will ultimately use is country-wide, including my Dudley constituency?

Mr Wallace: Funnily enough, international consortiums and working together with other countries unlock not only expert markets such as for the Type-26, but investment in defence jobs here in the UK, which somehow the Labour party never seems to work out in its simpleton level of economic understanding. Perhaps the penny will one day drop for the Labour party that if we invest in defence here and work with international partners, we will get tens of thousands of jobs and tens of thousands of pounds out of customers around the world—

Mr Speaker: I call Geraint Davies.

Mr Wallace: The only penny that drops for the Labour party—

Mr Speaker: Order. Sit down, Secretary of State! Can I just say to everybody that there are preliminaries then questions, and we are going on very long? I want to get as many Members in as possible, and we have only got to question 11.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Vladimir Putin clearly plans to starve and freeze Ukraine this winter as he replenishes his own armaments ahead of a spring offensive. What is the Secretary of State doing to increase the number of armaments—not just from the UK but from across Europe—so that Ukraine can gain ground now, not later, and why does he not get on with it?

Mr Wallace: We are incredibly alert to that real challenge, which is why in August we set up that fund, which has now accrued €600 million, including donations from Norway and the Netherlands, to purchase from ongoing production lines even Soviet-era-type calibres. It is also why we constantly help with the training of our Ukrainian friends up and down the UK, to make sure that they are using our weapons systems in the best way possible, and to make sure that we have the impact they need on the ground. We will continue to work alongside our international partners to deliver that throughout next year.

Defence Business Services

15. **Ian Byrne** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab): Whether his Department has made an impact assessment of the planned closure of Defence Business Services offices in the North West. [902721]

Alex Chalk: A regional economic impact assessment was undertaken during downselection but did not form part of the decision-making criteria. The consolidation into the Blackpool site meets key user requirements, is an opportunity to bring 700 posts to Blackpool from our other north-west sites, and contributes to the redevelopment at Talbot Gateway through the building of the new Government hub.

Ian Byrne: I thank the Minister for that answer, but I have had many constituents contact me about the planned closure of the Ministry of Defence Business Services office in Liverpool. The movement of jobs will affect them and their families. The new commute of more than two hours—especially with the train service at the moment—will be completely unworkable for many staff, particularly those with caring responsibilities or disabilities. Will the Minister meet me as soon as possible to discuss this situation so that I can share the deep concerns of my constituents with him?

Alex Chalk: Yes, of course, I will meet the hon. Gentleman. But there have actually been some good and constructive conversations with the unions, I am pleased to say, about trying to assist individuals who may want to go—we will try to assist and provide expenses. For those who do not, there is lots of work going on to ensure alternatives should they want to take them. But let us discuss it further—I would be very happy to do so.

Topical Questions

T1. [902732] **James Sunderland** (Bracknell) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): May I place on the record my thanks to the outgoing SNP Front Bencher, the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), for his service and constructive work in this House, and I welcome the hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan) to his new post on the Front Bench.

As we approach the festive season, can I also put on the record my personal thanks to the personnel deployed on various operations and peacekeeping missions around the world, many of whom will be separated from loved ones over the Christmas period? On Christmas Day this year, approximately 6,300 sailors, marines, soldiers and aviators will be deployed around the world, serving on 33 operations in 28 countries. On behalf of the House, I would like to thank them for their sacrifices and wish them and their families, wherever they may be, a very happy and safe Christmas and new year.

James Sunderland: In recent weeks, I have had several conversations with senior military officers who, like me, are becoming increasingly concerned by what they regard as unnecessary distraction within the armed forces. Could the Minister please tell me what is more important: unlawful recruitment policy, identity politics and pronouns, or operation capability?

Mr Wallace: I hear my hon. Friend. Our advantage derives from our people. We must attract, recruit and retain the best people, drawn from the broadest diversity of thought, skills and backgrounds to ensure that we meet the threats we face. That is how we make them the most operationally capable armed forces of today, in the 21st century. We must therefore recognise that diversity and inclusion is not just morally right, but vital to that capability. We can debate how we do that, but it is still vital.

Mr Speaker: Order. Work with me, Secretary of State; I want to work with you. You have given very long answers during questions, and we are now into topicals. We have to be short and sweet. Lots of Members on both sides wanted to get in earlier but failed to because of the long answer. Please, let us work together. I call John Healey—briefly, please.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): At today's Cobra meeting, will the Defence Secretary tell Ministers in other Departments that too often they use our armed forces to bail out their Departments' failings, especially when he is making further deep cuts to the Army? In addition to those deployed on overseas operations, whom he has mentioned, how many of our forces will be deployed or on standby over Christmas in response to requests for military assistance to which he has already agreed?

Mr Wallace: I will do the right hon. Gentleman a deal: I will raise that at Cobra if he tells his union paymasters not to go on strike over Christmas and not to ruin the lives of our soldiers and sailors.

T3. [902735] **Holly Mumby-Croft** (Scunthorpe) (Con): I welcome the Government's steps to support the British shipbuilding industry. Those ships will require a lot of steel. Does the Secretary of State agree that, wherever possible, we should use the world-class steel we make in this country in such projects?

The Minister for Defence Procurement (Alex Chalk): My hon. Friend is a fantastic champion of steel. I agree with her. The support ship competition winner has indicated that it intends to use UK-sourced steel whenever practical and, in any event, for the majority of the build.

T2. [902734] **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): Over the summer, much noise was made about the Government's raising the defence budget to 3% of GDP. That has now transformed into the Secretary of State's accepting a £2.3 billion real-terms cut to the defence budget. Do Ministers accept that that cut will have a negative impact on recruitment, training, family support and pay for our armed forces personnel?

Mr Wallace: First, I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's figures. Secondly, between now and next year's Budget, I have been given enough to insulate us from the effects of inflation, and we can continue within our current comprehensive spending review envelope. We can discuss the next one when it comes up.

T5. [902737] **Selaine Saxby** (North Devon) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that our different cadet groups do great work in inspiring the next generation? Will he join me in congratulating PO Mack on his work with the excellent Ilfracombe sea cadets?

The Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families (Dr Andrew Murrison): Absolutely. Our cadet forces do a wonderful job and I congratulate PO Mack.

T4. [902736] **Kenny MacAskill** (East Lothian) (Alba): Last year, during a British Army exercise at the Lolldaiga training camp in Kenya, a fire was caused, which has led to 6,000 Kenyans seeking compensation. I appreciate that the Minister may not be sighted on that, but will he ensure that the Army's investigation into it is made public, especially if firearms, explosives or drugs are involved?

The Minister for Armed Forces (James Heappey): I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

T9. [902741] **Sir John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con): I welcome the fact that air defence equipment is already being supplied to Ukraine, but does my right hon. Friend agree that Ukraine also needs to strengthen its air force, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) suggested? Will he consider extending the security agreement with Sweden to allow it to supply its Gripen aircraft to Ukraine and to train Ukrainians in its use?

Mr Wallace: We are grateful to Sweden. Swedish personnel are here in the UK training Ukrainian ground forces with us in the north of England. Sweden is one of the contributing countries. Whether Sweden wishes to donate aeroplanes is genuinely a matter for the Swedish armed forces, but I understand the need that my right hon. Friend is trying to tap into. We are doing everything we can to solve that.

T6. [902738] **Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Earlier, the Secretary of State mentioned the lack of long-range missiles in Ukraine. What drone capability has Ukraine got to take out missile sites from Belarus that illegally target civilians in Ukraine?

Mr Wallace: Ukraine has shown itself to be a master of innovation and has already developed several long-range drones that are having an effect. The real question here is scale and numbers, compared with the numbers that Russia is buying from Iran. We need to ensure that that is overmatched.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): Defence accommodation maintenance contracts that work on a fix-it-when-it-breaks basis ignore preventive maintenance, create perverse incentives—the longer a repair is left, the greater the damage and the bigger the cost—and too often remove the ability of accommodation users to look after their homes. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is time we looked at those contracts again?

Dr Murrison: I am sympathetic to what my hon. Friend says and he can be sure that my hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement and I are looking closely at the FDIS—future defence infrastructure services—contract right now.

T7. [902739] **Rebecca Long Bailey** (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): Charities, such as the excellent Forces Employment Charity through to brilliant sector specialists, such as Veterans into Logistics are stepping up to provide structured career paths for ex-military personnel. However, they lack consistent national funding. How will the Minister address the funding support that they require?

Dr Murrison: I hope that the hon. Lady will be aware of the career transition pathway, an innovation that eases people's passage from the armed forces into the veteran community. Let us be clear: most members of our armed forces transition perfectly well. Some need help, and the career transition pathway is designed to provide that.

Mr Speaker: I call Karl McCartney.

Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and may I compliment you on your military grade haircut, and also refer Members to my entry in the register of interests? Just cheering you up, Mr Speaker; it is Christmas.

Lincoln is a city—including Lincoln College and its RAF linked academy—with a concentration of innovative defence technology firms. That is due in no small part to RAF Waddington being located in my constituency and the historical links with the military, particularly the RAF, across the county. What steps has the MOD taken, or will it take soon, to allow those industries, in some cases small businesses, to survive, grow and thrive in this competitive arena?

Mr Speaker: We do not want a military-grade long answer—and I am not sure about the hair.

Alex Chalk: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Innovation is essential and we are supporting it through initiatives such as the defence and security accelerator and the defence technology exploitation programme. We have all the plans we need to give us a competitive edge and ensure we stay one step ahead of our opponents.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): According to the Department's own figures 45% of military personnel in single accommodation in Cheshire are living in substandard accommodation, and that is 4,000 families nationally. That is appalling; are these really homes fit for heroes and what is the Minister going to do about it?

Dr Murrison: I do not recognise those figures but I do recognise the fact that 90% of people living in service family accommodation live in homes that are at or above the Government's decent homes standards. The MOD aspires to decent homes plus and, this year alone, is investing £176 million in upgrading service family accommodation.

Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con): My constituency has welcomed Ukrainian families with open arms. What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the effectiveness of Ukrainian defence against the evil Russian forces invading the country?

Mr Wallace: I read out earlier the losses inflicted on the Russian army by a much smaller army that is defending against an aggression that does not have any basis in international law or respect for human rights, and that is an extraordinary feat by those brave men and women. We will continue to support all the way through the next year, as will the international community, It is vital that Putin fails in Ukraine.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): Christmas leave is precious, so can the Secretary of State or one of his Ministers confirm that any serving personnel losing their leave over the Christmas period in order to support MACA—military aid to the civil authorities—commitments will be properly compensated?

Mr Wallace: The hon. Gentleman will know about this because, I am afraid that, under Governments of both parties, we have been involved as former soldiers in meeting the consequences of strikes, whether the tanker strikes, fire strikes or ambulance strikes, which are potentially approaching. Yes, soldiers and sailors would prefer to be doing their day job of defending their country, but sometimes they are called upon when the unions put at risk the safety of parts of this country and do so over a festive period. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can have a word with his hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench and ask them to get his unions to desist.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Is it not impossible for us to supply ever increasing amounts of munitions to Ukraine and also to replenish our own munitions stocks without a significant increase in our current peacetime defence budget?

Alex Chalk: I was pleased to note an additional £560 million provided from the recent settlement to replenish precisely those stocks. Also, the production lines to re-procure some of the very weapons that are going to go back on to British shelves are already running, and we will continue on that path.

Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con): I welcome the recent changes to the service complaints system, including separating alleged victims from perpetrators during criminal investigations, but can the Minister explain how he plans to implement the latter in restrictive services such as the submarine service?

Dr Murrison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend who has done so much to advance the cause of women in the armed forces. She will be aware of the two current inquiries into behaviour on submarines and I am not going to prejudice their outcomes. I expect them to make their recommendations and will report on them to the House as soon as I can.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): The Secretary of State will be aware of a resolution recently passed by the Russian Duma that no vessel whether merchant or Royal Navy should pass through the waters to the north of Russia without both permission from the Russians and Russian personnel on board. Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to reassure me that if a Royal Navy vessel of any kind wants to transit through the northern sea route, either above the water or beneath it, we will do so without let or hindrance from the Russian Federation?

Mr Wallace: One of the international treaties with the most signatures on it is on freedom of navigation across all seas. The United Kingdom stands strongly behind that and will uphold it wherever we can, hence our transit of HMS Defender in the Black sea. We will do that wherever we are able to do so in accordance with international law, and we will not be intimidated by Russia or any other nation.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): It is clear to me that the armed forces will achieve their full potential only if they are as attractive as possible to neurodiverse thinkers, particularly in cyber. The need for unconventional thinkers has perhaps never been greater than it is now, but there can be challenges for them in meeting the core competencies of "soldier first" as well as in physical tasks, as I recently found out when it took me 25 minutes to put on a belt at Sandhurst as a neurodiverse individual. Will the Secretary of State outline what is being done to better attract the talents of neurodiverse individuals into the armed forces?

Mr Wallace: The services are leading in trying to look at exactly that unconventional route in. If we are to attract people to the National Cyber Force and to cyber, we are going to have to think in different terms from 20 or 30 years ago. That is incredibly important. We need to be flexible, we need to be innovative and we need to be modern.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): The Secretary of State mentioned a Ukrainian innovation in the use of drones. Are Ministers confident that in this country we have the right resources and regulatory framework in place to ensure that our forces can also benefit?

Mr Wallace: No, I am not. We need to look at some of those regulations, because one of the things that holds us back too much in innovation, development and deployment is our own regulation. Too much of that holds us back. The Ukrainians obviously do not have that consideration, and they are making amazing steps forward.

NHS Industrial Action: Government Preparations

3.31 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab) *(Urgent Question):* To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care if he will make a statement on Government preparations for industrial action in the NHS.

The Minister of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Will Quince): I am grateful to the hon. Member for his question, which I am taking on behalf of the Department as the Secretary of State is attending a Cobra meeting on contingency planning for industrial action in the NHS. He also came before the House on the subject twice last week: at departmental questions and for the Opposition day debate.

We are all hugely grateful for the hard work and dedication of NHS staff, so we deeply regret that some union members have voted for industrial action. Our priority must be to keep patients safe. That begins with keeping the door open. The Secretary of State wrote to the Royal College of Nursing on Saturday asking for further discussions as a matter of urgency. At the same time, we are working with the NHS to minimise the disruption to patients if the strikes do go ahead. We are engaged with providers, professional bodies and trade unions to agree safe levels of cover should any action take place.

In addition, this afternoon, Ministers—including the Secretary of State—are attending a Cobra meeting focused on our contingency plans. Our plans draw on extra support from a range of places, including service personnel and the private sector. While we aim to minimise disruption, with the NHS already under significant pressure from the covid pandemic and winter pressures, we remain deeply concerned about the risk that strikes pose to patients.

I want to be clear that, even at this moment of uncertainty, people must keep coming forward to get the care that they need. People should continue to use NHS 111 if they need medical help and dial 999 in the event of an emergency. For more routine treatment, hospitals will do everything they can to ensure that planned procedures go ahead, but it is inevitable that any strike would mean some patients would have their treatment delayed. People will be contacted if their appointments need to be changed.

It is our hope that patients can be spared from unnecessary and unjustified strikes. Industrial action is in no one's best interests, especially in this difficult winter. We have had constructive meetings with the leadership of several unions, including the RCN, Unison, Unite and the GMB, and we look forward to further discussions to find a way forward together that is in the best interests of the patients we all serve.

Wes Streeting: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question. The power to stop these strikes likes squarely with the Government and the Secretary of State. The Royal College of Nursing and Unison have said that they will call off strikes this week if the Government are willing to negotiate with them seriously on pay. That reasonable offer of compromise is surely too good to refuse, so what on earth are the Government playing at? After 12 years of Conservative government, patients can no longer get seen on time and staff have been pushed to breaking point—and the Government cannot even be bothered to try to negotiate to prevent strikes from going ahead, at the worst possible time for patients and the NHS. The Government should ask themselves why, under a Conservative Government, nurses feel they have to take industrial action for the first time in more than 100 years and why ambulance workers are set to follow them for the first time since 1989.

It should be obvious by now what the Conservative agenda is. The Government know that patients are going to suffer this winter and they have no plan to fix the problems of their own making, so instead of taking responsibility for their failure they want to use nurses and paramedics as scapegoats to avoid the blame. It is a disgusting plan, it is a dangerous plan, and it is a plan that will not work. The public know that the power to stop these strikes is in the Government's hands. If they fail to act now, patients will never forgive them.

How many operations have already been cancelled? How does the Minister expect those on the waiting list to feel if their operations are cancelled because of the Government's gross negligence? Can he tell patients which services will be impacted if these strikes go ahead? Is the Secretary of State not embarrassed at Cobra today, asking the Army to come in to clean up the Government's mess?

Even at this last minute, it is not too late to prevent strikes from going ahead. Perhaps the Minister can tell us whether the meeting with the RCN later today will involve discussions on pay. And if not, why not? Because that is all it takes: just a few minutes or a few hours of talk can avoid strike action. Why will they not do it?

Will Quince: The fact is that Labour is all over the place when it comes to strikes. They criticise Ministers while admitting that the unions' pay demands are unaffordable. The hon. Gentleman and his party leader are too tied to their union paymasters to be on the side of patients. He knows that we have an independent pay review body, and is important that both sides respect that independent body. We accepted the independent body's recommendations for this year's increase in full, meaning that over 1 million NHS staff have been given at least a £1,400 increase in their pay. That is on top of a 3% pay rise last year at a time when pay was frozen across the wider public sector. The RCN, one of the unions taking action, is asking for an increase that is 5% above the retail prices index. Based on latest figures, that is an increase of 19.2%, or the equivalent of 6.5% of the NHS budget. To meet such demands, we would have to take money away from clearing the elective backlog that the hon. Gentleman referred to, something no responsible Government would wish to do.

Throughout this period, we have always sought to have a balanced process. Those in the private sector will not be getting a 19% uplift, and there is a clear need to be fair to the wider economy. We have to avoid inflationary pressures that would make us all poorer in the end.

We will continue to listen to colleagues' concerns, not just about pay but many other issues affecting the working lives of those in the NHS. We will work with them to make improvements in a range of areas, from working conditions to patient safety, because we believe

[Will Quince]

there is so much that we can agree on. Strike action is in no one's best interest. We will keep working so that the NHS continues to be there for those who need it most.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Health Committee, Steve Brine.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, may I send our heartfelt sympathies to the parents of the little boys who have lost their lives in the west midlands overnight and say thank you to the emergency service workers, many of whom will have been from the NHS? I am sure they have done their best for those they pulled out and those they were unable to save.

The Minister is right that we have an independent pay review process, but it seems that we are coming to an interesting junction point: either we believe in an independent pay review process, or we do not. We cannot be in a situation where everything is agreed until it is simply not, and then Ministers are negotiating pay. That is not what Ministers do.

I am glad the Minister mentioned patients them at the end of his remarks. We must keep them as our focus. I have more information about my train services over the next few weeks than I do about health services. Is the Minister satisfied that patients have enough information about what is being affected and when, and how much it will impact on the backlog? I suspect none of this will help the workload pressures that are impacting our NHS.

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend for his question, and I echo his comments on the tragic events in Solihull, the boys who lost their lives and the heroic actions of those in the emergency services.

My hon. Friend is also right to say that we have an independent pay review body, and we either agree and accept that that is the process, or we do not.

On advice to the public, my hon. Friend is right that we have more to do in this space. Derogations are still being worked through with both individual unions and trusts. Patients should continue to call 999 as normal if it is an emergency and someone is seriously ill or injured. If they do not have life-threatening conditions, they should use NHS 111. Ambulances will still be responding to 999 calls. If patients have appointments, they should please turn up unless advised not to do so. He is right to make the point about communications, and I will be ramping this up when we know more about derogations.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): Scotland's First Minister has managed in one day to do what the Tory Government could not—agree with the nursing unions to call off strikes planned for this month. NHS workers are the backbone of these countries. If they do not work, the country does not work, and if the country is not working, it is broken. Britain is broken, is it not? And Brexit has broken Britain, has it not? The Tories will not negotiate and the Labour Opposition spokesperson has branded the British Medical Association as "hostile", while in Scotland the strikes are off, and they are off permanently. An offer of 7.5% has been negotiated and agreed, with an 11.24% pay rise for the lowest paid across the board in NHS Scotland. Why are the UK Government refusing to give public servants a decent pay increase when they have all the financial power to do so?

Will Quince: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. My understanding is that the industrial action in Scotland has been suspended, not cancelled, as the hon. Gentleman suggested. The Scottish Government have made a considerably higher offer, partly because a politician has got involved in pay negotiations, directly in contrast to the independent pay review body, and it will be interesting to see whether the First Minister of Scotland is going to do this every single year and go against the recommendations of their pay review body.

Would the hon. Gentleman like to confirm—I appreciate he cannot do it now—whether the Scottish Government have also looked at things such as leave and working times? I think it is important to stress that every 1% increase for the "Agenda for Change" workforce equates to about £750 million. That is £750 million that will come out of the NHS budget and that we will not be able to spend on things such as tackling the elective backlog, which is so important to people up and down the country.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): Our military actually enjoy stepping in when a Government Department occasionally cannot manage, such as with flooding and so forth, or on rare occasions when a strike takes place. However, what we are seeing this month is unprecedented, with so many sectors choosing to strike exactly at the same time, and this places a huge burden on our armed forces. Could I ask the Minister, first, whether all the units that may be required to mobilise have been informed already, and whether, if we are going to see strikes at this level, it is now time for Departments to introduce minimum service levels to make sure that our armed forces are not overwhelmed?

Will Quince: Representing the garrison city of Colchester, I have nothing but the utmost respect for our armed forces. It has not escaped my notice that many of them are on lower pay than NHS staff and will be giving up their time over Christmas to cover strike action. My right hon. Friend is right that to mitigate the impact of planned industrial action in the ambulance sector, NHS England has explored a range of measures, which include engaging with the Ministry of Defence on military support. As a contingency, a MACA request—a request for military aid to civil authorities—for a limited number of personnel has been submitted to the MOD. It was submitted at the end of last week, and the plan is that MOD personnel will be trained to drive ambulances, but only deployed where they are needed across the country.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Government need to stop hiding behind the pay review body. The pay review body sorts out the distribution of the funding, while it is the Government who determine the size of the envelope, and it is the envelope that is in dispute. Why will the Minister not get a Treasury Minister alongside him and make sure they negotiate on the size

of the envelope? If they can afford the right hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss), they can afford a nurse.

Will Quince: The average pay settlements in the private sector range between 4% and 6%, and we want to have a fair deal for both NHS staff and the taxpayer. The hon. Lady makes reference to the pay review bodies, but it is important to stress that they are made up of independent experts. They recommended the uplifts for NHS staff, and in formulating their recommendations, the review bodies carefully considered evidence from a wide range of stakeholders, including NHS system partners and trade unions. The independent pay review body is a respected mechanism, and we should accept its recommendations, which we have.

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): May I commend my hon. Friend on his response to the urgent question, and say how much I agree with him? Can he set out his thoughts on how things would be likely to proceed in the NHS if we ended up in the scenario which the shadow Secretary of State appears to want, in which Ministers negotiate directly with unions on pay every winter? Does he think that that would lead to upward pressure on pay at the expense, crucially, of the public, whom we serve and who need those operations and the elective care for which we have budgeted, and that that should not be eroded by unrealistic pay demands of 19%?

Will Quince: My right hon. Friend is right. We have an independent pay review body mechanism for a reason, and it has worked for a number of years. That is why I made reference to the First Minister in Scotland. Is this a procedure we are going to go through every single year when a pay review body recommendation is made and unions do not like it, and politicians have to get involved? The point of the independent pay review body is that it depoliticises the issue, and Ministers do not negotiate directly with unions. The independent pay review body looks at the issue in the round, along with the wider economy and a number of other factors, then forms a recommendation which the Government can choose to accept or refuse. It is important to stress that in this case the Government accepted the recommendations in full.

Mrs Paulette Hamilton (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): I was a nurse for 25 years. Nurses work long hours, day in, day out, to support people all over the country, often on very low pay. I know from experience how tough it can be, and it is shameful that many hospitals have opened food banks specially to feed their staff. Let us be absolutely clear: the power to stop these strikes, which nurses themselves do not really want, lies squarely with the Government. How can Ministers justify refusing to talk to the unions?

Will Quince: I thank the hon. Lady for her question and for her service as a nurse. We value hugely and appreciate all our NHS staff. We have given them a pay rise this year, on top of 3% last year, when pay was frozen in the wider public sector. As I have said a handful of times, we accepted in full the recommendations from the independent pay review body. Of course, I do not want to see anybody needing to use a food bank, let alone a member of our NHS. That is exactly why the Government have a broader package of support in place.

I have to take issue with one of the hon. Lady's comments. She asked who held the power to call off these strikes. There is only one answer: the unions.

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): I have been out on shift with my local ambulance service, and have seen how hard it works and how important that work is. We are really grateful for what it does, and my constituents are worried. If the ambulance strikes go ahead, will the Minister explain which categories of call we will ensure are responded to?

Will Quince: We are currently having those derogation discussions with the unions, and they will also happen at an individual trust level. As my hon. Friend will know, having been out with her trust, 999 calls are triaged and categorised from category 1 to category 4, and on days of ambulance strike action it is likely that category 1 and category 2 calls, where there is an immediate threat to life, will be responded to. We are looking at ways in which we can provide additional support for category 3 and category 4, including things such as block-booking taxis and support through community healthcare, local authority fall services and community support.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): What we have got is a Government who refuse to govern. Retention and sickness rates were reported to the Health and Social Care Committee in June 2019 as higher than average by Health Education England, and if retention rates were kept at 2012 levels we would have 16,000 more nurses in the system. The Minister has talked about safe levels of cover during the strike, but the unions have told us that when they look at staffing levels, in some places, they are currently below what is safe. The issue for us as Members of Parliament and for our constituents is that none of us knows whether our local systems are safe or not. Can he tell us which hospitals across the country are currently operating at safe staffing levels, and which are below those levels, before the strike even starts?

Will Quince: The hon. Lady talks about NHS staffing levels; we have 1.2 million staff within our NHS, and compared with last year, we have 3,700 more doctors and 9,100 more nurses, and compared with 2019, we have 29,000 more nurses and 2,200 more GPs, but we do have high vacancies. That is why it will not have escaped her notice that we have commissioned NHS England to publish a long-term workforce plan, and that will be independently verified as set out by the Chancellor in the autumn statement.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): Inflation is the real enemy here, because it makes us all poorer. We have a political and economic choice: we either tackle it, or we give in to an inflation pay spiral. The Minister was right to mention that the Royal College of Nursing pay demands are in excess of three times greater than the average private sector payment at the moment. Does my hon. Friend agree that public sector pay demands of almost 20% would embed inflation for years to come and make us all poorer?

Will Quince: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: granting double-digit pay rises would sustain higher levels of inflation and have a bigger impact on people's income in the long term, as well as eroding the value of savings, which is important to many of our constituents.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): These strikes are not just about pay levels; they are also about patient safety. NHS workers care deeply about their patients, and I stand in solidarity with them. Members of the Royal College of Nursing have told me how stressed and burned out they are because they do not have enough colleagues to work alongside them. That is dangerous and extremely unfair on both patients and staff, and it is the result of the failure of consecutive Conservative Governments to provide enough resources and training places and to carry out the necessary workforce planning. The Minister mentions the independent pay review body, but he knows full well that there is a role for Government in ending this dispute. Will his Government get around the table with the unions and avert the strike action?

Will Quince: The hon. Lady is right that this issue is about more than just pay. That is what the unions are telling us. It is about things such as staffing levels and working conditions. If that is indeed the case, let me repeat: my door is always open, and I would be happy, as would the Secretary of State, to discuss those issues with the unions at any point they would like.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Would there not be more money available for relatively poorly paid frontline NHS staff if there were fewer layers of management bureaucracy paid at substantially higher rates within the NHS?

Will Quince: I thank my right hon. Friend for that question. I am sometimes staggered by the number of people on six-figure salaries within our NHS, but in an organisation of its size, management is also important. It is about getting the balance right, but we always continue—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) chunters from a sedentary position. The balance may not be right, and we always continue to look at the ratio of management to frontline staff to make sure we are getting that right.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): The Government will blame anybody and everybody for these avoidable strikes, but he knows full well that the RCN is not even affiliated to the TUC, let alone the Labour party. If these strikes go ahead, the Secretary of State is to blame, because he has the power to sort out this mess. Why does he not just get on with it?

Will Quince: The hon. Gentleman puts it in his usual blunt way. The pay review body process is the established mechanism for determining pay uplifts in the public sector, outside of negotiating multi-year pay and contract reform deals. Despite what he says, industrial action is a matter for the unions, and we urge them to carefully consider the potential impacts of industrial action. The Secretary of State and I have been clear that our door is open. We have already met with the unions, and we would be happy to do so again.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con): Now then. In 2014, the shadow Health Secretary said that he would support strikes within the NHS, even if there was a Labour Government in power, but he is remarkably quiet today about whether he actually supports the strikes—unlike the RMT strikes, which I am sure that he supports. Does the Minister think that the shadow Health Secretary and Opposition Front Benchers are playing politics with this issue?

Will Quince: I am not one to cast aspersions on the shadow Secretary of State, other than to say that I and the Secretary of State refuse to play politics with this issue. This is all about patient safety and ensuring that if industrial action goes ahead—*[Interruption.]* The shadow Secretary of State again shouts "Negotiate" from a sedentary position, but he knows that we have an independent pay review body, process and mechanism. It is important that we respect that.

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): We simply cannot afford to lose any more nurses and valued NHS staff. We already have huge workforce shortages—40,000 nurses resigned last year and there are more than 130,000 vacancies across the NHS—so cancelling Christmas for members of the armed forces will not fix these problems. Will the Minister explain how paying nurses insufficiently and drafting in military personnel over Christmas serves to attract new recruits to the NHS and the armed forces?

Will Quince: That is a bizarre question, because the only reason we have to put in a MACA—military aid to civil authorities—request is that the unions have called strike action over Christmas. As the hon. Member asks about recruitment and retention, let me cover off that issue. As I have set out, we are committed to publishing a comprehensive workforce strategy, which will be independently verified; we have set out new pension flexibilities; we have already recruited about 29,000 more nurses and are on track to meet our 50,000 target; and we plan to boost international recruitment. However, I hope that the hon. Member agrees—in the interests not only of our armed forces, many of whom will have to cancel their Christmas leave, but of patient safety—that we do not want industrial action to take place. I urge the unions to meet us to discuss a way forward.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I find it regrettable, as I think most people do, that Opposition Members continue to use the NHS as a political football. This is about the care of patients, and if Opposition Members do not think that Government Members care about patients, they are living in another world. My hon. Friend is doing a great job. We all accept—even the shadow Secretary of State does—that the NHS needs a radical reform. Surely it is time for an independent body to look at that argument and make the NHS run far more efficiently.

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. We are constantly looking at how we can improve productivity and increase efficiency in the NHS. We have an acute issue not just with winter, but with proposed strike action. The shadow Secretary of State mentioned that the NHS needs reform, and we are undertaking that. Will further reform need to be undertaken? Yes, and if

my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) has particular ideas, I am very happy to meet him to discuss those further.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): During the dark days of covid, it was the NHS that gave us hope, not Ministers partying in Downing Street. The Tories now seek to demonise the very NHS staff that we clapped from our doorsteps, because they have voted to strike. They are overworked, underpaid, without a proper workforce plan, concerned about the security and safety of patients, and forced to use food banks. Do our NHS staff not deserve at least a face-to-face meeting on pay negotiations with the Government?

Will Quince: I do not know where the hon. Lady got the impression that I or anybody else was demonising NHS staff—far from it. The unions have chosen to bring forward this action. As I said, I hugely value and appreciate all NHS staff. That is why we have given them a pay rise this year, on top of the 3% pay award last year, when pay across the wider public sector was frozen.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I think the Minister knows that there is no clinician in the land who really wants to go on strike. Many clinicians feel that the crisis has been coming for a long time because of the issues around morale and lack of workforce, which I have asked the Minister about on many occasions. He keeps saying that the workforce plan is imminent, but that will not solve the immediate problems.

One nurse said to me the other day that what worries her most is that at any one time, several hundred thousand people in the country are waiting for their test results, particularly in relation to cancer. How will the Minister ensure that people get their cancer results in time to meet all the other cancer plan deadlines?

Will Quince: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question; I know that he has a particular interest in the matter. We are looking to ensure that as many NHS services as possible continue during strike days. On his broader point about pay settlements, the average pay settlements in the private sector are within the range of 4% to 6%.

Chris Bryant: Not in the NHS.

Will Quince: Within the private sector it is 4% to 6%. The uplifts strike a careful balance in recognising the huge importance of public sector workers while minimising inflationary pressures and, of course, having an eye on managing the country's debt.

Simon Lightwood (Wakefield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister challenged back on who had the power to avert these strikes. Let me reiterate what my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) said: trade unions have been clear that strikes can be averted if Ministers initiate face-to-face pay negotiations. So far, they have completely failed to do so. The power to stop these strikes lies squarely with the Secretary of State. How can the Government justify refusing to even talk?

Will Quince: We have already been clear that we would be very happy to meet the unions, and I understand that a meeting is being organised, but let me reiterate the point about what exactly the Royal College of Nursing is asking for: an uplift that is 5% above RPI inflation. Uplifting pay for all staff—this is based on 19.2%, within the agenda for change—would cost approximately an additional £10 billion. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) talked about things like test results; the £10 billion that we would spend on such an uplift is £10 billion that would come out of the NHS budget. That is £10 billion that we would not be able to spend on hugely important issues such as tackling the elective backlog.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I was on the picket line with NHS staff in Newtownards in my constituency this morning. I do not expect to be reprimanded for that, by the way—I am quite sure I will be okay.

I want to ask the Minister a positive, constructive question. All the men and women want who were on the picket line at Ards Community Hospital in Newtownards this morning is a wage that helps them to survive. The women and men I talked to this morning are not surviving; they are visiting food banks. It is not just the nurses: it is the porters, it is the ward staff, it is everyone. Will the Minister and the Government go just that wee bit further to get a settlement?

Will Quince: I understand why the hon. Gentleman is asking that question, and I am sorry to sound like a broken record, but we accepted the independent pay review body's recommendations in full. As a result, more than 1 million NHS workers were given a pay rise of at least £1,400. For newly qualified nurses, it was a 5.5% increase. Those on the lowest salaries, whom the hon. Gentleman referred to, are seeing a pay rise of up to 9.3%. Again, that is on top of 3% last year, when public sector pay was frozen.

Nobody wants to see industrial action go ahead. My message to the unions is "It's good to talk—let's talk. I know the meeting is being set up. Let's do all we possibly can to avoid industrial action this winter."

British Council Contractors: Afghanistan

4.3 pm

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con) *(Urgent Question):* To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs if he will make a statement on British Council contractors in Afghanistan.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): The Minister who is responsible for Afghanistan—the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty)—is travelling. I am a poor substitute, but I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) for raising this very important matter.

During Operation Pitting, nearly all British Council staff and some contractors were evacuated and offered resettlement through the Afghan relocations and assistance policy. Some British Council contractors, plus dependants, remain in Afghanistan and are eligible for consideration for resettlement under the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme. The scheme will see up to 20,000 people from Afghanistan and the region resettled in to the United Kingdom. It provides a safe and legal route for some of those affected by events in Afghanistan to come to the United Kingdom and rebuild their lives.

The first year of ACRS pathway 3 is focused on eligible at-risk British Council and GardaWorld contractors, as well as Chevening alumni, honouring the commitments made by the Government to those three groups. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office opened an online process on 20 June this year to seek expressions of interest in resettlement from those groups. They have played a key role in supporting the UK mission in Afghanistan, and it is right that we are honouring the commitments made during the evacuation to support those at risk. Up to 1,500 people from Afghanistan and the region will be referred for resettlement in the UK in the first year of pathway 3, including eligible family members.

The FCDO received more than 11,400 expressions of interest, which are being assessed in terms of eligibility. People are being notified of the outcome, and we are sending names to the Home Office for security checks. Once the checks have been completed, we will provide advice on the next steps for those who are being referred for a place on the ACRS. It remains a priority to honour the commitment made to eligible at-risk British Council contractors, and to offer a route for resettlement in the UK under the scheme. I want to thank the council for its excellent co-operation with the FCDO to date, as we work together to resettle eligible contractors under pathway 3.

We are doing everything we can to bring the first British Council and other arrivals under pathway 3 to the United Kingdom as soon as possible, where we will help them to rebuild their lives. Anyone who is eligible and resettled through the ACRS will receive indefinite leave to remain in the UK, and, under existing rules, will be able to apply for British citizenship after five years in the UK. This is one of the most ambitious resettlement schemes in our country's history, and we are proud to offer a safe and legal route to those affected by events in Afghanistan.

Mr Baron: Thank you for granting the urgent question, Mr Speaker. Let me start by both welcoming the Foreign Secretary's speech on foreign policy this morning, which called for a long-term, resilient approach that will build the long-term, trusting relationships that this country needs for the future, and underlining the fact that that is precisely the purpose of the British Council, which has been building connections for this country throughout the world, quietly, consistently and effectively, since the 1930s. I hope that the Minister sees, as I do, the key role that the British Council can play in helping to achieve those objectives.

I make no apologies for asking this urgent question, because people's lives are at risk. I went through the regular channels a year ago, and was told that progress was being made, which is more or less what the Minister has just said. I raised it again in October/November, but there has been no response. The progress has not been made.

For more than 16 months since Operation Pitting and the fall of Kabul, about 200 British Council contractors and their families have been stuck in Afghanistan. As has recently been highlighted in the media, many of them are in hiding and in fear of their lives, unable to seek medical advice when it is necessary for themselves and their families, and family members have died as a consequence. As the Minister said, British Council contractors are eligible under ACRS pathway 3, but those 200 or so contractors remain stuck in Afghanistan because of a blockage of red tape here in the UK. Until that blockage is cleared they will remain in danger, possibly for a second Afghan winter. Since its launch in January, the scheme has not repatriated a single person from Afghanistan: I have received confirmation of that from the British Council. In July and August, an application window closed for the contractors to submit expressions of interest. British Council employees worked at pace with the FCDO to identify those who had actually worked with them, yet there has still been no progress whatsoever. Having used all the regular channels, I would now like to ask the Minister to do all he can before Christmas to clear these blockages and get these contractors back to the UK.

Mr Mitchell: I thank my hon. Friend for what he has said. He eloquently extols the brilliance of the British Council. I had some responsibility for it 10 years ago, and I know very well that what he says about it is entirely correct. He is quite right about the eligibility, and we very much understand the urgency to which he refers. This particular pathway process started on 20 June and remained open for eight weeks. The Foreign Office has looked at every single one of the applicants, and the process is moving through. I would just say that, although it is taking a lot of time, it is right that officials should look carefully at each and every one of those cases. There is a balance to be struck, but I will ensure that my hon. Friend's words and concerns are reflected across Government as a result of this urgent question.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the shadow Minister.

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): I again thank the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) for securing this urgent question. He has been a great champion of the British Council in this place.

We know that hundreds of British Council contractors are still stranded in Afghanistan following this Government's botched evacuation from Kabul. Earlier this year, the Minister told the House that the Government were "supporting those in need" and that 50 British Council contractors had been evacuated. However, a recent report in *The Guardian* indicated that, as the hon. Gentleman said, the Government had not granted a single ACRS application since the programme was opened—not one. Furthermore, fewer than 10 staff are currently working on the scheme at the FCDO.

I am contacted frequently by British Council contractors who are suffering terribly, and I would be grateful if the Minister would allow me to raise these cases with him privately. Many of those that are still in Afghanistan are former security guards who protected British staff at the embassy, and they undertook an extremely difficult task during the evacuation in August last year. We owe so much to those courageous British Council contractors, and the fact that they are still in Afghanistan and facing daily violence and threats as a result of their co-operation with the UK is nothing short of a disgrace.

The last time I put these questions to the Government, answers were not forthcoming, so I am hopeful that this time I might be able to get some clarity. Can the Minister tell us how many former British Council contractors are still stuck in Afghanistan, what measures are being put in place to evacuate the rest of the British Council contractors still stranded in Afghanistan and what engagement he has had with regional partners to facilitate safe passage for British Council staff who attempt to leave? And message does it send to other British Council contractors who work in challenging environments around the world if the UK Government will leave these contractors stranded in this way?

Mr Mitchell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments, and he is quite right to express deep concern about those who are caught in this way. He asks me whether he may raise cases privately with me, and of course the answer is yes. I will make arrangements for those meetings to take place straight after this urgent question is over. He asks a number of questions, and if I do not answer them fully, I will ensure that we write to him. He is right to say that we keep in very good contact with regional partners in countries to try to advance this issue. This particular stream only opened in June this year. The Foreign Office has processed and is informing something in the region of 200 of those who are eligible in principle, and if the dependants are added to that, it is something like 750. So those are proceeding, and it is of course up to the Home Office to procure the necessary security clearance prior to them securing entry clearance. So, the process is going on, but I fully accept his frustration—it is a frustration we all share in this matter—and as I say, perhaps we can proceed with a private meeting, as he has requested.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Is there not a fundamental problem with talking about safe and legal routes for people who, if they expose themselves to the Taliban, are at risk because of that very fact? Last Thursday evening, I was at the Last Supper gallery to attend a photographic exhibition organised by the Sulha Alliance on behalf of Afghan interpreters, several of whom were there, including one who had been shot and another whose brother had not got out and had been murdered. The photographer, Andy Barnham, felt it necessary to anonymise the photographs because of the risks of identification. Do the Government not have to come up with a better idea for how to extract people who are at risk as a result of helping us, without them having to declare themselves openly and thus put themselves in more peril?

Mr Mitchell: My right hon. Friend, with great eloquence, makes a most important point. There are various ways in which we can deal with this, and which it would not be sensible to talk about on the Floor of the House. He makes one of the big difficulties very clear. If it would be helpful, I am happy to discuss this with him.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson—and welcome.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) on securing this important urgent question. It is morally indefensible that, more than a year after the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan, there are still innocent Afghans who worked for the British Government and military who have received zero support from this Government and the Home Office. It is not acceptable to use terms such as "something like." Exactly how many former British Council staff, including support staff, are still living in Afghanistan in fear of their lives and livelihoods? When the Government say they have brought 6,300 Afghans to "safety," what exactly does that mean? How many of them are former British Council employees?

The Taliban's so-called kill list is an active threat. Do the Government know how many of their former employees are on that list? Finally, it is appropriate that 540 staff are working on the Ukraine schemes but, if the Government are taking Afghanistan as seriously as they are supposed to be, why do the figures show a maximum of eight people working on the Afghan schemes?

Mr Mitchell: The frustration expressed by the hon. Gentleman is shared by many of us. It is not possible to quantify the figures in precisely the way he requests, but I will ensure that we write to him with the closest possible approximation.

Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): On 20 January 2022 there was an urgent question on British Council staff, at which I told the then Minister of State for Asia, the right hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling), that

"many of us have thousands of constituents—in my case, up to 150—who have relatives and friends who have worked for the British in Afghanistan and who are in terrible need of resettlement to this country. The ARAP scheme and the ACRS have done very little to bring many, if any, of my constituents' relatives and friends away from the horror going on in Afghanistan."

The Minister pointed out that the ACRS was open and

"will prioritise those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and those who have stood up for values such as democracy, women's rights, freedom of speech and the rule of law, as well as vulnerable people, including women and girls who are at risk and members of minority groups who are at risk."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 2022; Vol. 707, c. 505-6.]

[Sir Mark Hendrick]

We have seen that pathway 3 was open not from January but from June. Six months later, not one person has been settled in this country.

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman conflates the ARAP scheme with the ACRS. The prioritisation is precisely as my right hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) set out. The pipeline is proceeding, and pathway 3 started in June and was open for eight weeks. The process is moving from the Foreign Office to the Home Office, and officials are handling these matters as fast as they can. It is very frustrating for all of us, but that is what is happening and we will get there.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Minister knows that this Government have legislated to make it illegal for anyone seeking asylum to enter this country by any means apart from safe and legal routes. Indeed, the entire moral basis—such as it is—for the claim that this Government are meeting our international asylum obligations rests on safe and legal routes. Given that, how can the Minister speak of pride in a safe route that is so manifestly and entirely failing? It is failing those who are at risk of persecution for promoting British values through the British Council. What does he suggest they do?

Mr Mitchell: There may or may not be validity in the political debate on safe and legal routes that the hon. Lady raises, but in this particular respect there is a safe and legal route. That is one we are expediting.

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): I disagree with the Minister that he is a poor replacement for his colleague at the Dispatch Box—I think he would bring a compassionate, informed and patriotic approach to this portfolio, if it were his. Perhaps he can explain why, instead of sending millions of pounds of taxpayers' money to Rwanda with nothing to show for it, the Government do not spend just a fraction of that money on expediting the safe evacuation of those who risked their lives to host and protect UK service personnel and civilians in Afghanistan.

Mr Mitchell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. He is a distinguished soldier and brings that knowledge to the House. He has rightly championed Britain's responsibilities in this matter. The Government are trying both to advance through our strong partnership with Rwanda and to meet the other objectives he has set out. I commend to him the Government's approach in both respects.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Minister is well known for his compassion and understanding of these issues in this House. I say that in all honesty; he knows it and everyone else knows it. How many people have begun the ACRS scheme, have been given their reference number and are on stand-by, and yet have heard nothing over the last year that the scheme has been operating? How can he change the message sent to those we asked to help us, because we made promises and then appeared to abandon them when our aims were met? It is very sad.

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is quite right to point out Britain's responsibility in this matter. We are, I think, meeting that responsibility. As I mentioned to him, if we look at those processed by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and their dependents, who are equally eligible to come under this pathway, we get up to something like 750 who have been initially processed. That now moves to the Home Office. He will understand that that is nearly half of those who would be expected to arrive under this pathway. We must do better and we are doing everything we can to make sure that we do.

TRADE (AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND) BILL: PROGRAMME (NO. 3)

Ordered,

That the Order of 6 September 2022 (Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill: Programme), as varied by the Order of 22 September 2022 (Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill: Programme (No. 2)), be further varied as follows:

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

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

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

Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill

Consideration of Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee.

[Relevant documents: Third Report of the Welsh Affairs Committee of Session 2021-22, Implications of the UK-Australia FTA for Wales, HC 481, and the Government Response, HC 895; e-petition 554372, Establish free movement and trade agreements with Canada, Australia and New Zealand.]

New Clause 1

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

"The Secretary of State must publish an assessment of the impact of the implementation of the procurement Chapters within twelve months of the coming into force of Regulations made under section 1 of this Act and every three years thereafter."—*(Gareth Thomas.)*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.23 pm

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 2—*Assessment of impact on farmers—*

"At least three months, but not later than six months, after the coming into force of the government procurement Chapter of—

(1) the UK-Australia FTA, and

(2) the UK-New Zealand FTA,

a Minister of the Crown must lay before Parliament an assessment of the impact of the Chapter on farmers in—

(a) each region of England

(b) Scotland

(c) Wales, and

(d) Northern Ireland."

New clause 3—*Impact assessment: equality and human rights—*

"The Secretary of State must publish an assessment of the impact of the implementation of the procurement Chapters on equality and human rights within three years of the coming into force of Regulations made under section 1 of this Act and every three years thereafter."

New clause 4—*Impact assessment (No. 2)—*

"(1) The Secretary of State must publish an assessment of the impact of the implementation of the procurement Chapters within five years of the coming into force of Regulations made under section 1 of this Act and every five years thereafter.

(2) The impact assessment under subsection (1) must present an analysis of—

(a) the impact on each of the four nations of the United Kingdom; and

(b) social, economic and environmental impacts."

New clause 5—*Assessment of impact on hill farmers and crofters in Scotland—*

"(1) The Secretary of State must publish an assessment of the impact of the implementation of the procurement Chapters on hill farmers and crofters in Scotland within six months of the coming into force of Regulations made under section 1 and every six months thereafter.

(2) The impact assessment under subsection (1) must be laid before both Houses of Parliament and before the Scottish Parliament."

New clause 6—*Assessment of impact on Geographical Indications in the United Kingdom—*

"The Secretary of State must publish an assessment of the impact of the implementation of the procurement Chapters on the operation of Geographical Indications in the United Kingdom within two years of the coming into force of Regulations made under section 1 of this Act."

New clause 7—*Impact assessment: British farmers—*

"(1) The Secretary of State must publish an assessment of the impact of the implementation of the procurement Chapters on—

(a) livestock farmers,

(b) arable farmers,

(c) upland farmers,

(d) tenant farmers, and

(e) family farmers.

(2) The impact assessment under subsection (1) must be published within six months of the date of Royal Assent to this Act."

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to report on the impact of the procurement Chapters on British farmers.

New clause 8—*Impact assessment: environmental standards etc—*

"(1) The Secretary of State must publish an assessment of the impact of the implementation of the procurement Chapters on—

(a) environmental standards,

(b) food standards,

(c) animal welfare standards, and

(d) biodiversity.

(2) The impact assessment under subsection (1) must be published within six months of the date of Royal Assent to this Act."

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to report on the impact of the procurement Chapters on environmental, food and animal welfare standards, and biodiversity.

New clause 9—*Review of effect on small businesses—*

"(1) Within six months of the passage of this Act, the Secretary of State must lay before Parliament an assessment of the impact of the implementation of the procurement Chapters on small businesses.

(2) The assessment must consider in particular the impact of those Chapters on the ability of small businesses—

(a) to import goods,

(b) to export goods,

(c) to employ staff, and

(d) to remain solvent.

(3) In this section, "small businesses" means any business which has average headcount of staff of less than 50 in the tax year 2022-23."

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to report on the impact of the procurement Chapters on small businesses.

New clause 10—*Impact assessment: National Health Service—*

"The Secretary of State must publish an assessment of the impact of the implementation of the procurement Chapters on the National Health Service within three years of the date of Royal Assent to this Act."

New clause 11—*Review of negotiation of procurement Chapters—*

"Within one year of the date of Royal Assent to this Act, the Secretary of State must publish—

(a) a review of the lessons learned from the negotiation of the procurement Chapters, and

(b) an assessment of how this experience might inform negotiations of future free trade agreements."

New clause 12—*Super-affirmative procedure—*

"(1) This section applies where an instrument is, or, as the case may be, regulations are, subject to the super-affirmative procedure.

(2) A draft of the instrument or regulations must be laid before the relevant institution.

(3) The appropriate authority must have regard to—

(a) any representations,

(b) any resolution of the relevant institution, and

(c) any recommendations of a committee of the relevant institution charged with reporting on the draft,

made during the 60-day period with regard to the draft.

(4) If after the expiry of the 60-day period the instrument is or, as the case may be, regulations are approved by a resolution of the relevant institution, the appropriate authority may make an instrument or statutory rule in the terms of the draft.

(5) If after the expiry of the 60-day period the appropriate authority wishes to proceed with the draft but with material changes, the authority may lay before the relevant institution—

(a) a revised draft, and

(b) a statement giving a summary of the changes proposed.

(6) If the revised draft is approved by a resolution of the relevant institution, the appropriate authority may make an instrument or, as the case may be, statutory rule in the terms of the revised draft.

(7) For the purposes of this section an instrument or statutory rule is made in the terms of a draft if it contains no material changes to its provisions.

(8) In this section, references to the "60-day" period in relation to any draft are to the period of 60 days beginning with the day on which the draft was laid before the relevant institution.

(9) For the purposes of subsection (8) no account is to be taken of any time during which—

(a) if the relevant institution is the Scottish Parliament, Senedd Cymru or the Northern Ireland Assembly, that institution is dissolved or is in recess for more than four days;

(b) if the relevant institution is both Houses of Parliament, Parliament is dissolved or prorogued, or either House of Parliament is adjourned for more than four days.

(10) In this section, "relevant institution" means—

(a) in the case of an instrument to be made by a Minister of the Crown—

(i) for the purposes of subsections (2), (5) and (8), both Houses of Parliament,

(ii) for the purposes of subsection (3), either House of Parliament,

(iii) for the purposes of subsections (4) and (6), each House of Parliament

(b) in the case of an instrument to be made by Scottish Ministers, the Scottish Parliament;

(c) in the case of an instrument to be made by Welsh Ministers, Senedd Cymru;

(d) in the case of regulations to be made by a Northern Ireland department, the Northern Ireland Assembly;

(e) in the case of an instrument to be made by appropriate authorities acting jointly—

(i) for the purposes of subsections (2), (5) and (8), both Houses of Parliament,

(ii) for the purposes of subsection (3), either House of Parliament,

(iii) for the purposes of subsections (4) and (6), each House of Parliament

and, as the case may be, the Scottish Parliament, Senedd Cymru or the Northern Ireland Assembly."

New clause 13—*Impact assessment: climate change*—

"The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament an assessment of the impact of the implementation of the procurement Chapters on tackling climate change, not less than two years, but not more than three years, after the passage of this Act."

New clause 14—*Impact assessment: labour rights*—

"The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament an assessment of the impact of the implementation of the procurement Chapters on labour rights, not less than two years, but not more than three years, after the passage of this Act."

New clause 15—*Welsh sectoral impact assessment*—

"The Secretary of State must publish an assessment of the impact of the procurement Chapters on each economic sector in Wales within twelve months of the coming into force of regulations made under section 1 and every 12 months thereafter."

This new clause would require the UK Government to publish Wales-specific impact assessments which include an assessment of the impacts on specific sectors.

Amendment 1, in clause 1, page 1, line 15, at end insert—

"(3A) Regulations under subsection (1) may not be made before completion of such public consultation as the appropriate authority considers appropriate with the relevant—

(a) Scottish ministers

(b) Welsh ministers,

(c) department of the Northern Ireland Executive, and

(d) representatives of the English Regions."

Amendment 2, page 1, line 15, at end insert—

"(3A) Where the appropriate authority is a Minister of the Crown, regulations under subsection (1) may not be made until the appropriate authority has consulted the relevant Scottish ministers in relation to any matters affecting farming in Scotland."

Amendment 3, page 1, line 15, at end insert—

"(3A) Where the appropriate authority is a Minister of the Crown, regulations under subsection (1) may not be made until the appropriate authority has consulted the relevant Scottish ministers in relation to any matters affecting Scotland."

Amendment 4, page 1, line 15, at end insert—

"(3A) Regulations under subsection (1) may not come into force before the date on which the procurement Chapters come into force."

Amendment 5, in clause 4, page 3, line 5, at end insert—

"(4) This Act expires on 31 December 2027."

Amendment 6, in schedule 2, page 9, line 5, leave out from "to" to end of line 6 and insert "the super-affirmative procedure".

Amendment 7, page 9, line 8, leave out from "to" to the end of line 9 and insert "the super-affirmative procedure".

Amendment 17, page 9, line 8, leave out from first "the" to the end of line 9 and insert "affirmative procedure (see section 29 of the Interpretation and Legislative Reform (Scotland) Act 2010)."

Amendment 8, page 9, line 11, leave out from "to" to end of line 12 and insert "the super-affirmative procedure".

Amendment 9, page 9, line 14, leave out from "to " to end of line 16 and insert "the super-affirmative procedure".

Amendment 10, page 9, line 20, leave out sub-paragraph (2).

Amendment 11, page 9, line 25, leave out from "to" to end of line 26 and insert "the super-affirmative procedure".

Amendment 12, page 9, line 28, leave out "negative" and insert "super-affirmative".

Amendment 13, page 9, line 29, leave out sub-paragraph (5).

Amendment 14, page 10, line 2, leave out from "to" to end of line 3 and insert "the super-affirmative procedure".

Amendment 15, page 10, line 5, leave out from "to " to end of line 7 and insert "the super-affirmative procedure".

Amendment 16, page 10, line 8, leave out sub-paragraphs (9) to (13).

Gareth Thomas: We made it clear on Second Reading that we want real and meaningful increases in trade, particularly with two of this country's greatest friends and allies, Australia and New Zealand—both led so ably by progressive Labour Administrations. We therefore made it clear that we would not oppose the Bill. After all, trade is fundamental to this country; it is part of what being British means and it will be a vital weapon in our armoury to tackle the economic crisis that this country faces, which the incompetence of the governing party has so greatly deepened.

We also made it clear, as others have done on both sides of the House, that there are significant concerns about the consequences of the slapdash way in which these deals, especially the Australia deal, were negotiated by Ministers. I am told that Canada is already using the precedent of the Australia deal to press for similar access for its farmers. These amendments are needed to mitigate some of the impact of those mistakes that Ministers made to try to make the best of a bad job.

I am afraid that in Committee there was little attempt to acknowledge, or indeed apologise for, those failings. Nothing since suggests that Ministers at the Department for International Trade have learned the right lessons. Indeed, the recent detailed comments by the former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice)—now freed from the burdens of office and therefore the requirement to cover up for his colleagues—confirmed the widely held view that the Australia deal was bad for Britain. He reinforced the need for significant reforms to how deals are delivered. The current Prime Minister also thought that this was a one-sided deal. Therefore, our amendments and new clauses would help ensure that the procurement chapters, at least, of both deals could be implemented only following serious consultation with all parts of the UK, proper impact assessments, and further detailed and specific scrutiny by this House.

On new clause 1, the Public Bill Committee and the International Trade Committee heard detailed concerns from one of Britain's leading procurement experts that the Australia deal would worsen the protection for British firms seeking to win Government contracts in Australia, and that major infrastructure or other high-profile British national projects could be disrupted if an Australian firm, unsuccessfully bidding for a contract, went to court to try to overturn the decision using the legal uncertainties that, he argued, are being written into our contract law by this procurement chapter. He also stated that the potential benefits for British businesses of these procurement chapters were likely to be somewhat less than Ministers had claimed.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a very good point—a point that the Secretary of State for International Trade unfortunately did not seem to be fully up on when we questioned her last week. She has now promised to investigate this area. Is it not a good example of how, not necessarily the legal risk, but the uncertainty will lead multinational companies to divert their trade through regimes that are certain? Britain will therefore lose out as long as there is uncertainty, even if that is not a reality.

Gareth Thomas: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Equally significantly, Professor Sanchez-Graells, in his evidence to the Bill Committee and to the Select Committee, suggested that the protections for British businesses trying to win Government procurement contracts across CPTPP—comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership—countries would be damaged if Ministers continued to negotiate similar provisions to those that are in the Australia procurement chapter. We examined his detailed concerns in Committee. The absence of a cogent and compelling rebuttal from the then Minister was striking. To be fair, shortly after the end of the Committee stage, a further letter from the outgoing Minister of State was sent to me, and a copy was placed in the Library. I shared a copy of that letter with Professor Sanchez-Graells, who reiterated his concerns, noting the lack of clear counter arguments for the assertions in that letter. Indeed, there were not any worked-though, real-life examples of the sort that I raised directly with the Minister in Committee to explain why the concerns articulated by Professor Sanchez-Graells are misplaced.

Given that this Bill is specifically about procurement, and given that Professor Sanchez-Graells was one of only two witnesses asked to comment on procurement by either the Bill Committee, the other place's International Agreements Committee or this House's own International Trade Committee, it was a little surprising that there was not better preparation by the Department for consideration of his arguments. I do recognise that the Department was in a degree of chaos at the time, with Ministers coming and going, but one can only hope that the Minister replying to this debate has a little more to offer.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that this underlines the fact that there is not enough scrutiny and democracy in the process, and that this House should have the opportunity to look at the mandate for future deals and to scrutinise the negotiations as well as the ratifications, so that we do not get a deal that offers a hopeless 0.1% GDP growth over 15 years?

Gareth Thomas: Not surprisingly, my hon. Friend leaps ahead of me; I will come on to the issue of parliamentary scrutiny in just a moment.

My last point on the case for new clause 1 is that such an impact assessment would also allow us to explore the extent to which small and medium-sized enterprises were able to take advantage of this trade deal. We know that SMEs need the most support to take advantage of free trade agreements and, given the cuts to the tradeshow access programme, for example, we know that SMEs

[Gareth Thomas]

are likely to face real challenges in exporting. New clause 1 cannot change the way Ministers negotiate future procurement chapters, but it would at least require an honest and detailed assessment of the impact of those chapters on British businesses.

4.30 pm

On new clause 2, the neglect of British farmers by the Conservative party has been extraordinary. Once upon a time, the Conservatives professed to care about rural communities. Now, as you will know, Mr Deputy Speaker, there are many deficiencies in public transport in many of our rural communities—yet this deal, negotiated by the right hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss), with the current Minister of State at the Department for International Trade, the right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands) as her willing lieutenant, still managed to find a bus to throw British farmers under.

We

"gave away far too much for far too little in return."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2022; Vol. 722, c. 424.],

the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth said. He also stated:

"We cannot risk another outcome such as Australia where the value of the UK agri-food market access offer was nearly double what we got in return."

There was clearly a ministerial decision taken to ignore the concerns, views and lived experience of British farmers and their representatives in the National Farmers Union.

Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): As a member of the International Trade Committee, may I reiterate that point? It was clear to me and many other members of the Committee, as the negotiations went on under two previous International Trade Secretaries, that it was going to be the first deal negotiated from scratch and that therefore there was an attempt to use it as a tick-box exercise, to add to those roll-over deals that were already agreed, and there was haste to get the deal done so they could say for the first time that a separate deal had been done that was not a roll-over.

Gareth Thomas: My hon. Friend makes his point well, and I hope he is able to catch Mr Deputy Speaker's eye later on so that he can draw it out further.

New clause 2 cannot, I am afraid, put right the disregard of those on the Government Front Bench thus far for the vital role that British farmers play in the economic and social fabric of our country, but we can at least learn from that desperate rush to get any deal with Australia, regardless of the price. I hope Ministers will take this opportunity to acknowledge the mistakes made during the negotiations and will back this new clause. If not, I will seek the permission of the House and put it to a vote. I have said I hope Ministers will acknowledge mistakes, but we do not expect any apologies. After all, there have been so many apologies from the Government over the last few months that their worth has devalued more quickly than sterling under the last Chancellor.

New clause 12 and the consequential amendments 6 to 16 are designed to address some of the cross-party concern about the obvious failures on parliamentary scrutiny that my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) alluded to. In the usual Conservative tradition, having made such enormous errors in her leadership of the negotiations with Australia, there was only one option for the then Secretary of State: she was promoted. Indeed, in the lucky dip that was this summer's Tory leadership contest, she won the chance to be Prime Minister for the month and, consistent with her achievements on trade, delivered economic chaos, higher mortgage bills and a return to deep austerity.

The following Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan), swiftly fell out with her colleagues—a scenario almost too difficult to imagine. Tories falling out with each other? Who on earth would have seen that happening? Instead of the world-leading scrutiny process we were once promised for new free-trade agreements, she adopted a new one: invisibility. On at least eight separate occasions, the previous Secretary of State failed to front up at the International Trade Committee to answer important questions about the new deal. She seemed somewhat keener to tour the TV studios questioning the work ethic of her then ministerial team.

There is, I have to say, a striking consensus outside the House—across business groups of every economic sector, and among trade experts, charities and non-governmental organisations working on trade—that the CRaG process is not fit for purpose post Brexit, and that one of the key lessons from the Australian FTA negotiations is the need for better parliamentary scrutiny. We cannot deliver that better scrutiny for all FTAs today—not least given the narrow context of this legislation—but we can certainly make sure that Parliament considers further the regulations that implement the procurement chapters of the deals. A super-affirmative provision would give Parliament an additional layer of scrutiny for trade deal regulations under the Bill before those regulations can come into force. I hope, again, that Ministers will have the grace to accept the amendment and will not force me to divide the House.

New clause 10 underlines our concern that trade agreements must work for the NHS and not undermine or make even more difficult the task of repairing a great public service after 12 years of callous mismanagement by this Government. On procurement specifically, the last thing that anyone would want in a trade agreement is carelessly drafted provisions that enable a dispute about whether an overseas-owned building firm lost a redevelopment contract fairly, for example, to delay much-needed investment in new NHS hospitals, or vital funds that could have been spent on new doctors and nurses having to be used to compensate overseas firms for not winning a procurement contract. If the independent expert from whom the Select Committee and the Bill Committee heard evidence is correct, the drafting of the procurement chapter in the Australia trade deal—and, I understand, this is also likely to be so in the CPTPP—creates legal uncertainty in the remedies available to overseas businesses bidding for UK Government contracts. It is possible, then, that major public services such as the NHS could see delays to the rebuilding of hospitals and/or money that could have been spent on recruiting doctors and nurses being wasted on compensation for overseas firms that have lost out in a procurement competition.

Take the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn, for example, which urgently needs replacing. Its roof must be monitored daily, four out of seven operating

theatres have had to be shut, and the roof is held up by 3,600 props. That is, I suggest, one powerful example of the neglect and mismanagement of the NHS under the Conservative party. Imagine if funding were committed to and tenders issued for such a rebuilding project, only for building work to be held up because of the legal uncertainties in the Australia deal on remedies for firms that lost out unfairly in procurement processes. Surely, a proper understanding of the impact of trade deals on our public services is essential. If there is nothing to worry about, Ministers should not find it difficult to commit to providing such assessments, should they?

On new clause 11, it is clear that these trade deals are not going to deliver the sustained boost to economic growth that this country desperately needs. Yet in the land of make-believe that the Conservative party now inhabits, the Australia deal was sold to us as the start of a brave and amazing post-Brexit era for British trade. The deal does not look like global Britain; it looks to the world like gullible Britain. On the upside, unlike the Conservative party's trade deal with Europe, the Australia and New Zealand trade deals did not lead to the value of the pound dropping, but the tendency of Ministers in the Department for International Trade to exaggerate the benefits of the deals they sign underlines the need for a full review of the lessons learned from each negotiation.

We all remember talk of an "oven-ready" trade deal with the EU—it turned out to be anything but. Then there was the promise of 77 of Britain's most iconic food and drink products, from Shetland wool and Whitstable oysters to Carmarthen ham, getting immediate protection in Japan as a result of the UK-Japan deal. That has yet to happen. We have had the promise of billions more in procurement contracts for British business, but there is little evidence that that will happen.

Geraint Davies: My hon. Friend knows that a large of amount of New Zealand and Australian trade is historically in left-hand-drive cars that were made by Japanese companies based in Britain. Those companies are leaving the UK, and the EU has now got a trade deal with Japan and will have one with Australia and New Zealand. It is therefore likely that those Japanese companies will produce left-hand-drive cars and sell them to New Zealand and Australia, but not via Britain. In other words, the deal will prove negative rather than marginally positive.

Gareth Thomas: I hope my hon. Friend accepts that the case I am making for providing serious and detailed impact assessments for future trade deals will help to ensure that his point gets proper consideration in future.

I hope that new clauses 13 and 14 remind Ministers of the significance of trade for working people and of the need for trade to play its part in helping to tackle climate change and accelerate progress towards net zero. When the Australia deal was negotiated, two Conservative Governments, both with distinctly underwhelming records on climate and workers' rights, were in the negotiating room. In this country, the Conservative party has consistently sought to exclude representatives of working people in the trade unions from all significant consultation on trade deals. The trade deals that we as a country sign should raise standards, support better employment and help to tackle climate change instead of, as the Conservative party seems to want, heralding a race to the bottom.

We have tabled amendment 1 to stimulate serious and sustained detailed consultation with all the nations and regions of the United Kingdom on the details of the chapters of the trade deals. It is a reminder to Ministers of the need to step up and improve further their discussions with the devolved Administrations and with the regions of England about the impact of deals on specific communities and economic sectors. My hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Dame Nia Griffith) gave the example in Committee of farmers in Wales, where 85% of the beef and 60% to 65% of the sheepmeat produced are consumed in the UK. There is genuine concern about the impact of a huge hike in tariff-free quotas of meat from Australia and New Zealand on our farmers' ability to sell into our markets, with all the obvious implications for rural communities, family farms and economic, social and cultural life.

There are similar concerns across the regions of England, in Scotland and in Northern Ireland. The Select Committee on International Trade heard evidence that the Department cannot yet model fully the impact of trade deals on the nations and regions of the UK. That is all the more reason for better consultation before new trade regulations come into force.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): On livestock and meat, is not it the case that a sizeable amount of our imports comes not from Australia or New Zealand—and they would not under the agreement—but from the EU and South America?

Gareth Thomas: Absolutely, but we have conceded that the deals are important and that they must be supported, and we want more trade with Australia and New Zealand. I gently say to my right hon. Friend that it is right to ensure that the deals work much better than they appear set to do at the moment. I hope that our amendments will help to achieve that.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I support the hon. Gentleman's point in relation to Northern Ireland. We export some 65% of our agriculture produce to the EU and across the world. Ever mindful of that, we seek the same assurance from the Minister—perhaps it will come at the end of the debate—that those in Northern Ireland will not be penalised in any way. I support what the hon. Gentleman is saying.

Gareth Thomas: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments and support, and I look forward to the Minister attempting to answer his concerns as well as ours.

Free trade agreements were supposed to be one of those freedoms that would bring us prosperity after Brexit, but, in truth, this is not about Brexit; it is about the competence and ability of this Government, and about the honesty and transparency of Ministers. If they believe in any of those qualities, Government Members will adopt these amendments without Division. If they do not, we will have even more proof that this Government do not even believe in themselves.

4.45 pm

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): I rise to speak in support of new clauses 4, 5 and 6 and amendments 2, 3, 4, 5 and 17 in the name of my colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry).

[Richard Thomson]

The top line for us at this stage of proceedings is that we cannot support this Bill with the agricultural terms of the trade agreements left unamended, particularly as the Scottish Government have responsibility for agriculture in Scotland but have had no direct role in negotiations and remain deeply concerned by the impact that both of these agreements could have on the Scottish farming sector as well as food and drink.

These deals are being rushed through at an horrendous time for UK farmers. Farmers are already battling with skyrocketing fertiliser prices, animal feed prices jumping by on average 30%, the avian flu outbreak, the Brexit labour shortages, and the rising diesel costs, to name but a few of the issues at present. Therefore, we would think that at this point, rather than rushing on at breakneck speed, there would be opportunity to take the time to get this right—to make sure it is carefully calibrated and is in the interests of farmers and the food and drink industry, and indeed all industries across the totality of the UK economy.

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con) *rose—*

Richard Thomson: If the hon. Member can explain why there is such indecent haste I will be delighted to yield.

Anthony Mangnall: I apologise for interrupting the hon. Gentleman, but perhaps he might tell us what the perfect amount of time is for a trade deal to be signed?

Richard Thomson: I am not sure there is a perfect amount of time, but we can certainly spot a duff deal when it is being rushed through.

Anthony Mangnall *rose—*

Richard Thomson: If the hon. Gentleman will be patient and remain seated I can perhaps go through some of the shortcomings that have arisen, because we were helped enormously in coming to an assessment—

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Thomson: Of course.

Hywel Williams: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to inform the hon. Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) that the Canada trade deal took seven years and that the much-heralded trade deal with the United States is still awaiting further progress.

Richard Thomson: The hon. Gentleman has communicated that most deftly. The House can see why there was such a rush because we were done a very valuable service the other week by the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), who blew the gaff comprehensively when he revealed that at some point in early summer 2021 the then Trade Secretary took a decision to set an arbitrary target to conclude the trade deal by the G7. I am sure the hon. Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) can see straightaway the problems in trying to conclude any trade deal on such an arbitrary timeline and that the outcomes from doing so would be suboptimal even if it were not for the revelation that was about to follow.

Anthony Mangnall: Since the hon. Gentleman has challenged me, I see no problem in setting timelines if we can achieve them, and in fact what the Government have managed to do is start negotiations with the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-pacific partnership, do a trade deal with Japan on digital partnerships, do a digital partnership with Singapore, undertake the Australia and New Zealand deals, look at where we can do a trade deal with India, and start negotiating with Canada. If we set ourselves some objectives, that sets a standard for what we can achieve.

Richard Thomson: If only that were actually the case—*[Interruption.]* When it comes to achieving good outcomes, the problem here is that this was not done from a position of strength; it was done from a position of considerable weakness, as we will go on to hear. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not in the House to hear what the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth said, but allow me to elucidate and then he might elect to put the shovel down for a moment. He said that

"at one point the then Trade Secretary asked her Australian opposite number what he would need in order…to conclude an agreement by…G7. Of course, the Australian negotiator…set out the Australian terms, which eventually shaped the deal. We must never repeat that mistake."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2022; Vol. 722, c. 425.]

I accept that there has been a duality in much of what the right hon. Member has said at different times. I wonder whether the hon. Member for Totnes is also to reveal such a duality.

Anthony Mangnall *indicated dissent.*

Richard Thomson: No, he is not. Somehow, I did not think that he would.

Clearly, there is nothing quite so liberating as a loss of ministerial responsibility. The right hon. Member went on to tell the House that

"the Australia trade deal is not actually a very good deal for the UK",

that

"the UK gave away far too much for…too little in return"

and that, further, in his view,

"the best clause in our treaty with Australia is that final clause, because it gives any UK Government present or future an unbridled right to terminate and renegotiate the FTA at any time with just six months' notice."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2022; Vol. 722, c. 424-5.]

The SNP happens to agree that that is probably the best clause in the Bill as it stands—

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is the only good clause in the Bill.

Richard Thomson: I hear my hon. Friend say that it is the only good clause; we are not looking to amend it.

Clearly, the right hon. Member's views in 2022 are significantly more closely aligned with reality than those that he was obliged to defend publicly in 2021 and those which the current crop of Trade Ministers are clearly obliged to defend now.

Drew Hendry: My hon. Friend is doing a much better job than the previous guy did in his role *[Laughter.]* Is it not a fact that while Government Members try to defend this awful deal, not only have they lost the

support of a former Minister who once supported the deal and now, freed from office, thinks it is awful, but, actually, their own Prime Minister thinks that this is a bad deal as well?

Richard Thomson: I thank my hon. Friend for that. It is quite clear that the objective was to get chalk on the board rather than to get any trade deal in place that might actually improve on or even equal or replicate that which was there. The thing is, the Government did not need to travel far to get the feedback that this was not a good deal. Scottish sheep and beef farmers could have told them that it was not a good deal; indeed, they tried to do so from the outset. They knew fine well that these deals would undercut UK farmers while delivering next to no benefits for the agrifood sector at large. It was clearly far more important for the then Prime Minister to be seen to be getting Brexit done and forging on with deals—whether they were any good or not—than to secure positive outcomes for consumers and producers in this country.

As there is clearly nothing quite so liberating as the loss of ministerial office, there is evidently nothing quite so constraining as the gaining of ministerial office. While I am glad to congratulate my constituency neighbour, the Under-Secretary of State for International Trade, the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), on his elevation to his new post—this is the first chance we have had for exchanges across the Floor since he took that role—I will take him back to comments he made on the BBC's "Debate Night" programme in March 2021. I am sure that he is already pulling that out of the memory banks. In response to a question from the audience, he said that young people are not reaping the benefits of Brexit. Surely that is a candidate for understatement of the year. I think we can now add the Scottish food, drink and agrifood sector to that, for whom there are absolutely no benefits.

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): Will the hon. Member give way?

John Spellar: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Thomson: I am spoilt for choice. I think I heard the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord) first. I will then come to the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar).

Richard Foord: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. Mary Quicke from my part of Devon has become an export mentor, but she has indicated that exporting cheese to the Indo-Pacific is becoming more difficult. She said that

"we've had cheese that's taken four weeks to leave here, with a vet's certificate to Japan and then it sits at customs at Tokyo for three weeks."

Given that it is now more difficult for cheese sellers to sell to the UK's biggest market in the EU, does he agree that that is a disgrace?

Richard Thomson: Absolutely. As I was listening to the hon. Gentleman's intervention, I was working out what my punchline was going to be, and I see that he already had it there. It certainly is a disgrace that those barriers have been put in place to hinder the exports of what I am sure is fine produce indeed.

John Spellar: Surely it is not as simple as the hon. Gentleman is making out. Did we not have a substantial trade deficit in agricultural products with the countries of the EU as well?

Richard Thomson: There may have been a deficit in totality, but I hope the right hon. Gentleman is not trying to contend that the situation has been made any easier by the trade environment we now find ourselves untimely ripped into.

We have to ask, "To what end?" Even the UK Government's own analysis shows that the trade deal with New Zealand will deliver a mere 0.03% benefit in GDP to the UK over 15 years and the Australian deal 0.08%, all the while the UK-EU trade and co-operation agreement will lead to a contraction of UK GDP by 4.9% over 15 years.

A number of safeguards could have been put in place in the agricultural chapters to protect farmers: no full liberalisation irrespective of time period; lower quota terms; percentage controls on the ratio of frozen to fresh carcases to protect the high quality Scottish fresh meat trade; clauses that work out beef and lamb tonnage quotas in a carcase-specific way, so premium cuts are protected; seasonality clauses; clauses to ensure the exports and imports of high value meat are properly valued; and trigger safeguards that could have been applied to protect the domestic market against any surge in imports in a particular year.

On new clause 5, it is important that an assessment is carried out on the impact of implementation of the procurement chapters on hill farmers and crofters in Scotland. Many in the hill farming and crofting communities are highly economically marginal. They have a huge economic importance in terms of supporting their areas, but the economics can be precarious at the best of times and they will certainly not be made any easier by the terms of this trade deal. The risk of undercutting standards through the deal means that meat is likely to end up costing less in the UK if it is shipped in from Australia or New Zealand, rather than if it is produced at home.

Analysis by Quality Meat Scotland has concluded that New Zealand beef farmgate prices are anywhere between 25% and 30% lower than Scottish farmgate prices, and 10% lower than their Scottish counterparts for lamb, undercutting on price. Matters relating to food standards fall within the competency of the devolved Administrations, but they have absolutely no power to exclude imported products on the basis of how they have been produced or on the undercutting of standards that feed into the undercutting of prices.

Donald MacKinnon, the chair of the Scottish Crofting Federation, speaking of the 15-year-long transition period, said:

"This is about changes that can happen over a much longer period of time. Agriculture does not operate on year-to-year, short lifecycles. We operate in generational terms in our businesses, and 15 years is a relatively short period of time in that sense. So it is not that we are concerned that the negative impacts are going to happen straightaway. This is about the long-term future of our industry. That is what my members are concerned about."

Jonnie Hall, director of policy, National Farmers Union of Scotland, said:

"Ultimately, an awful lot of procurement contracts will be negotiated on price, given that there will be a written understanding, at least, that the standards in them will be of an equitable value,

[Richard Thomson]

if that is the right expression. It is the competing on price piece that will probably be of more concern to Scottish producers than anything else, because we operate under different agricultural production systems and our cost structures are therefore different…it may be that New Zealand and Australian produce is more attractive simply in terms of value for money—I will call it that, but the word 'value' is not right."

It is notable that the EU managed to secure the same market access into New Zealand for its exporters as the UK, but at a much lower cost to its domestic producers.

The Secretary of State has said that she is a huge believer in British farming and the role it plays in our national life, and has written about her fears of the impact that opening up our markets will have on domestic producers. We firmly believe that she should allay those fears by renegotiating the agricultural chapters of these deals with the new Australian Administration and the New Zealand Government. We should ensure that we monitor very closely the impact it has on our agricultural communities. While renegotiating, she might also want to consider the fact that Australia is one of the few countries in the world that maintains an effective absolute ban on the importation of UK beef. The Secretary of State has said that she does not believe the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs raised concerns with the World Trade Organisation via the Department for International Trade on this issue. That should certainly happen, and it should certainly have been addressed in the trade deal to make sure that this barrier was lifted.

5 pm

Amendment 3 is a measure designed to protect devolution and make sure that it is respected not only in law, but in spirit. Sadly, it is wholly in keeping that, even in such a narrowly focused Bill as this, the approach taken by the UK Government undermines the precepts of devolution. The Scottish Government have consistently and successfully implemented international obligations on procurement since 2006, when they first transposed EU directives into Scottish law. The Scottish Government, unlike the UK Government at certain points over the last few years, have never wavered in their commitment to upholding international law. It is our firm belief that the powers in this Bill should not be exercisable by UK Ministers in relation to Scotland without a requirement to secure the consent of Scottish Ministers. That is also the belief of the cross-party Economy and Fair Work Committee in the Scottish Parliament.

The Scottish Government have said in their legislative consent memorandum that they do not intend to lodge a legislative consent motion for the Bill as introduced, based on two concerns: first, UK Ministers would be able to make secondary legislation in devolved areas without a requirement to first seek consent from Scottish Ministers; and, secondly, the delegated power allows for implementation of the agreements as amended in the future without the Scottish Parliament knowing what any future amendments might be at the point of giving consent. Of course, the Scottish Government will continue to try to engage constructively with the UK Government to find an approach to this Bill that is acceptable, and we encourage the relevant UK Departments to do the same. However, it should never have got to the point where the Scottish Government are having to ask for these basic requirements to be respected at such a late stage in the negotiation and ratification of these deals.

It is a matter of great regret that the devolved Administrations with responsibility for agriculture, wherever they are in the UK, have had no direct role in the negotiation of these deals, and that absolutely has to change when we are negotiating future trade deals to replace those left behind.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Is it not the case that in most countries that have federal, confederal or other such arrangements with devolved nations, those nations are involved and embedded in the negotiating teams? Does that not show the arrogance, in relation to co-operative relations across the Union, of this Conservative party, which seems determined to fulfil the hon. Member's party's wish, which is to annoy people in Scotland so much that they want independence?

Richard Thomson: That is certainly an interesting take, and entirely understandable, but I would far rather be making the arguments for Scottish independence on their merit, rather than on how much we and all the devolved Administrations are being vexed by a high-handed UK Government who are over-mighty and overreaching in this respect.

We have already been forced against our will in Scotland to trade outside of the EU and to be tied to a UK Government who seem hellbent on agreeing trade agreements at almost fire-sale prices just so they can pretend that Brexit is working. That is a thoroughly invidious position to be in, but it is the position we find ourselves in, for the moment at least, and we are determined to do all we can to try to mitigate the damage on this before we go back to the issue of principle that the hon. Member has raised. Make no mistake: the impact of these agreements will be felt throughout Scotland, and to that end it is vital that not just the Scottish Government but all devolved Administrations can have a full role, with their input being listened to, respected and acted on in future negotiations.

The Bill did not have to be like this. It was entirely possible to take a longer period of time to reach a more considered view. For those absolutely hellbent on leaving the European Union, there were better ways of doing it than the unmitigated car crash that has followed from the way successive iterations of Conservative Governments have gone about it. They seem to have spent more time negotiating among themselves than negotiating with those who matter. There are better ways of doing this, and there are better outcomes that can yet be agreed. I strongly urge the UK Government to repent, go back and try to achieve something better. It is within their grasp if they have the will to do so.

Sir Mark Hendrick: I support the new clauses on impact assessments after various periods on issues affecting farmers, procurement, the UK regions, equality and human rights, and I shall make reference to the way in which the negotiations have been handled, the attitude of various Secretaries of State to scrutiny and, in particular, the role of the International Trade Committee.

As a member of that Committee, I have seen at first hand the Government's mishandling of the trade measures that the Bill will implement, as well as their lack of transparency and of a coherent strategy on negotiating free trade agreements. Under the two previous Secretaries of State—the right hon. Members for South West Norfolk

(Elizabeth Truss) and for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan)—the Government have deliberately prevented MPs from having a say in the details of the deals. It is painfully obvious how haphazardly negotiations have been handled.

Meanwhile, the Government have continued to tout the number of trade deals that they have secured, but the truth is that a majority of those deals are simply rolled-over deals forged when the UK was a member of the European Union. They are not even close to achieving the 80% of UK trade that they claimed would be covered by trade agreements by the end of 2022, including an agreement with the USA, which was pledged in the 2019 Conservative manifesto.

Australia and New Zealand have the distinction of being non-EU countries with which the UK negotiated trade deals from scratch post Brexit, but the proof is in the pudding. The trade deals are terrible for Britain. They benefit Australian and New Zealand exporters more than UK exporters, while UK agriculture, forestry, fishing, and its semi-processed food industry are left to suffer the consequences. Australia and New Zealand received full liberalisation on beef and sheep and unfettered access to the UK food market, but the UK did not receive the same concessions in return. The Government's own Back Benchers have exposed what we have known for some time—that securing those trade measures was a box-ticking exercise, rushed through to get a deal done, and not necessarily in the best interests of the UK.

The former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), recently criticised the Australia trade deal in the Chamber as not actually being a very good deal for the UK, admitting that

"the UK gave away far too much for far too little in return."

Indeed, he said that

"since I now enjoy the freedom of the Back Benches, I no longer have to put such a positive gloss on what was agreed…unless we recognise the failures the Department for International Trade made during the Australia negotiations, we will not be able to learn the lessons for future negotiations."

He went on to say:

"We did not need to give Australia or New Zealand full liberalisation in beef and sheep—it was not in our economic interest to do so, and neither Australia nor New Zealand had anything to offer in return for such a grand concession."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2022; Vol. 722, c. 424.]

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The hon. Gentleman is giving a very good speech. The former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whom he has just quoted, also said that he felt that the Government were in such a rush to get a deal signed off before the G7 summit in Cornwall last year that they bypassed a great deal of scrutiny of the agreement, even by themselves, so for political reasons they cast aside the interests of British farmers. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is truly reprehensible?

Sir Mark Hendrick: I totally agree that that is reprehensible, but it was not the first time that it happened. The Japan deal was a roll-over deal, but parts of it were new and were added at the last minute. The Government delayed the details until 24 hours before the report was published, so the International Trade Committee could not scrutinise it properly and comment on it. It happened with Japan before it happened with Australia.

John Spellar: Does my hon. Friend agree with me about the irony that the Liberal party, which was founded on free trade and campaigning against the corn laws, is now becoming an agriculturally protectionist party?

Sir Mark Hendrick: I will not comment too much on that. There are rules to free trade—it is not a free-for-all—but at the same time, I do not think that the Liberal Democrats believe in totally free markets any more than we do.

Records show that the former Prime Minister, then the Trade Secretary, the right hon. Member for South West Norfolk, pressed ahead with the deal despite receiving detailed warnings from her own officials in 2020 that she was acting against the UK's best interests. The British agricultural industry and farmers already facing pressures from inflation and labour shortages stand to lose the most from this Bill, as the NFU has long maintained. These deals are not in our economic interest and are a threat to domestic business and food security. They could also force many farmers out of business, according to the NFU president, Minette Batters. Ultimately, the Government may see implementation of these deals as a stepping stone to accession to the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership, but I am dismayed that that is at the expense of our own farmers and our wider economy.

May I ask the Government to review the negotiations on the chapters of this agreement, and the lessons learned from those negotiations, and to make an assessment of how this experience might inform the negotiation of future trade agreements? If other countries, in CPTPP or elsewhere around the world—whether in South America or wherever—can see that this country can be rolled over so easily in its negotiating power, it sets a bad precedent for future trade deals.

Sarah Green (Chesham and Amersham) (LD): The trade deals between our country and Australia and New Zealand are historic. They are the first deals that this Government have negotiated outside of the European Union. They will have significant consequences for our farmers, exporters and a number of key industries and, importantly, they chart the course for the UK's journey as an independent trading partner and negotiator. It is disappointing, then, that today's debate is the most extensive opportunity many of us will have to feed into such agreements.

The provisions of the Bill apply to just one of the 32 chapters of the UK-Australia agreement, and one of the 33 in the New Zealand agreement. That means that the impact of the Bill and the amendments tabled by Members is restricted and does not go nearly as far as we might like. It is no secret that these deals are a disaster for British farming. That is why the Liberal Democrats have proposed new clauses 7 and 8, which would require the Government to report on the impact of these chapters on British farmers and on environmental standards, food standards, animal welfare and biodiversity.

Our farmers have been sold out by a Government willing to sacrifice far more than they should have to get new deals across the line. It is farmers who will be forced to pay the cost of the Government's shiny new deals, with a combined hit to the agricultural, forestry and fishing sector of £142 million and to the semi-processed food sector of £322 million. The costs of producing

[Sarah Green]

sheepmeat are 65% lower in Australia and 63% lower in New Zealand than in the UK. While the Minister, the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston), has reassured us that his Department is confident that the UK market will not experience an influx of the import of such meat as a result of these agreements, the risk remains that the complete removal of tariffs will allow UK markets to be filled with this cheaply produced meat.

Tim Farron: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is obvious that one reason why Australia and New Zealand can compete with us unfairly and more cheaply is that, with no offence to those two great countries—they are friends of ours—their animal welfare and environmental standards are significantly lower than the United Kingdom's? It is not right to give their farmers an advantage over our farmers by virtue of their having lower quality standards.

Sarah Green: I agree. This country's high environmental and animal welfare standards, which we are rightly proud of, mean that if such an outcome were to happen, British farmers would simply be unable to keep up. It is hardly surprising that the chief executive of the Meat Industry Association of New Zealand hailed the FTA as delivering

"a major boost for sheep and beef farmers and exporters".

The Australian farming industry has similarly celebrated its deal. By contrast, the UK's NFU is clear that the deals will benefit those in the southern hemisphere far more than farmers here at home. Even a former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), has commented that these deals are "not very good" for Britain.

5.15 pm

Our farmers are an essential part of our economy and our society. They are key to delivering food security and to maintaining environmental and animal welfare protections. The Government have already botched the transition to the environmental land management scheme and have now, with these first two free trade agreements, made it clear that protecting farmers' interests is not a priority.

Current commitments to evaluate the impact of the deals as a whole will not show the full impact on the farming industry. The Government must provide an agriculture-specific evaluation, so that they can identify the damage done, and intervene to support farmers in other ways as soon as possible.

Turning to the impact on business, the Bill has been welcomed by UK business organisations including the British Chambers of Commerce. I welcome the inclusion of a chapter dedicated to small and medium-sized enterprises in both deals, but this is a challenging time to run a small business. Increased bills and operating costs combined with reductions in consumer demand have left business owners struggling to pay suppliers and forced to reduce staff numbers and hours. When I surveyed small business owners in Chesham and Amersham earlier this year, I found that almost a quarter of those impacted were being forced to consider shutting up shop entirely.

Recent changes to our trade landscape have made it particularly difficult for small exporters to stay in business. HMRC found that between 2020 and 2021, the number of UK firms classing themselves as exporters fell by 15%. That decline was most acute in the south-east of England, where the number of exporters fell by 23%. That will not be a surprise for business owners in Chesham and Amersham, several of whom have told me that the difficulties they have experienced exporting to Europe have forced them to give up on exporting altogether. It is clear that efforts to increase our exports are much needed, yet securing tariff-free trade alone will not do that. It must be accompanied by a concerted effort by the Government to ensure that new exporters and those looking to expand their horizons can access the new markets.

Although the Government have promised guidance, their recent efforts to support exporters have left much to be desired. The quality of advice on trading with Europe in recent years has been so low that it has left even experienced international exporters tearing their hair out. A repeat of that failure would seriously limit access to the benefits of the deals promised to exporters. Detailed guidance and expert advice is essential.

In particular, clear steps must be taken to assist SMEs seeking to participate in procurement processes in Australia and New Zealand. The procurement chapters covered by the Bill offer a real opportunity for our small businesses. However, there is concern over the difficulties encountered by SMEs accessing public procurement in the UK and how that might translate to their attempts to take advantage of access to procurement overseas. That was illustrated eloquently by Lucy Monks of the Federation of Small Businesses during the Bill Committee, and I hope that the Government will take heed. Boosting trade is about not just creating opportunities, but ensuring that those opportunities are open and accessible to a range of businesses of all sizes.

Reviewing the Bill's impact on SMEs would allow the Government to monitor the extent to which promised benefits are successfully translating to real business gains and to reassess the support on offer if they are falling short. That is covered by new clause 9, which has been proposed by the Liberal Democrats.

The central concern about the Bill is its extremely narrow scope. Back in July, the previous Secretary of State promised us that it would provide Members with an opportunity to scrutinise the Australia deal in detail, yet the impact of the deals goes far beyond the chapters covered by this Bill. The Government have stated that the deals'

"impacts cannot be disaggregated by individual chapters",

so the Bill is clearly not the opportunity for scrutiny that we were promised. It is not only the Bill's scope that is limiting, but the timing of this debate, which takes place after the end of the period set out under the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 for both deals, meaning that we have no practical ability to object to them or amend them.

The Government conceded far too much to get the deals facilitated by this Bill over the line as quickly as possible. I note that the current Secretary of State has committed to taking a different approach to future deals by prioritising quality over speed. I hope that she might also consider forging a new path on scrutiny and ensuring that hon. Members have a proper say on future deals.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: We are here to talk about a very small part of a much wider trade Bill. To some extent, we are only talking about it because the Procurement Bill has not been brought to this House from the other place. If it had, we might not even be talking about some of this Bill's clauses at all. Is that not a disgrace? Almost no other country has such poor scrutiny of its trade arrangements.

Of course, Britain did not have such poor scrutiny of its trade arrangements before we left the European Union. In this place, we were able to use the negative resolution procedure at several stages, including the pre-stage. The European Parliament had the right to vote down the deal at the pre-negotiating stage, as well as the final deal, and our Government could do so through the Council.

Now the Government, in all their ineptitude, are the ones who decide. They forced the CRaG process through, which in itself was unnecessary because ratification cannot be fully implemented until all the legislation has been laid down. There was no need for the CRaG process to happen last year without any substantive debate or vote in this place, because the trade deal cannot be fully brought into force until this Bill has passed.

The Government's whole about-arse process on trade —we have heard all the criticisms made by the former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice)—shows that they have no real plan and no real idea about how to negotiate. When I ask my Australian colleagues what they may have compromised on and what we may have gained, they say, "It's a pretty good deal for us—we wrote it."

Through the amendments on procurement, there are several things we can do to ameliorate the mess that the Government have made of this deal. First, we can ensure that Parliament has scrutiny over how the details will be implemented. If the deal goes through, as we heard in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) and in my intervention on him, it might weaken the protections on procurement.

Ensuring that the statutory instruments laid before the House are not written as poorly as the Bill and the trade deal, so there is no wiggle room on procurement, should be our first step. The way to ensure that is by holding Ministers' feet to the fire. In the Bill Committee, the Minister seemed a bit unsure about how the affirmative procedure and the negative procedure work. It is clear that if statutory instruments are made via the negative procedure, there will almost never be a debate in this House. They will go through without debate, because Members of this House will not be able to pray against them in time; sometimes we have seen Governments deliberately laying statutory instruments when the House is not sitting and cannot pray against them. That is the reality.

The only way to ensure debate and discussion, either on the Floor of the House or in Committee, is to ensure that the affirmative procedure is applied. That must be the bottom line. It is not hard, and it will not delay the process, because the Australians themselves need to go through an affirmative procedure when they implement measures. This is asking for nothing more than our counterparts are getting; to offer anything less would be to devalue and degrade Britain. We know that the Conservative Party is doing quite a lot of that at the moment, but come on; let us, at least on this one, show that Britain counts. Britain should be able to get something as good as what is available to Australia and other countries around the world. Underselling Britain is disgraceful, and we need to reverse that.

Secondly, we need clarity on the legal clauses. It needs to be made clear that they will not undermine the current protections around the world. As I said in my intervention, it is not a question of whether, in a court of law, we might reach a point at which British companies would be successful; that is irrelevant. The question is, would it be necessary to go to a court of law to determine whether British companies would be able to obtain compensation, or would everyone be so clear about the fact that a French company would be able to obtain compensation that a French competitor would be given a marginal competitive advantage? That is the question that arises from the poor wording in the Bill.

If a marginal advantage is given—even a theoretical advantage that in practice does not come about—multinational companies that can channel their trade either through their British company or through their French company for large procurement deals will do it through the French company, and then where will the tax be paid? Where will the revenue return? It will return to France, and Britain will lose out again. It is therefore vital for this clause to be included.

I am also deeply disappointed—and I wish the Government would accept some of the amendments that deal with this—about the fact that for Australia, the procurement requirements do not count at state level because Australia is a federal system. All its procurement, in respect of education, roads and building, universities and community facilities—I could go on—is at state level, so this trade deal does not bind the Australians. Because of the way this Government have negotiated the deal, they want to tie the hands of our devolved authorities and local government in a way in which Australian hands are not tied; again, selling Britain short. What we could see is the proper integration of our devolved authorities and local government, particularly big strategic local government—for instance, London-wide government and Metro Mayors. We could include them in the negotiations, or, even better, ensure that future negotiations do not allow an asymmetrical position in which we are included and others are not.

This is a poor deal, as we know from the other side. This is a poor Bill, which accepts everything from one side and protects Britain not one jot. The Opposition new clauses and amendments go some way towards ameliorating that. Ministers should accept them, thus ensuring that we can truly champion British businesses that are trying to trade around the world. That is what I genuinely believe we all want.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I was not expecting to be called at this point, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was just removing a mint from my mouth.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Did you think I was going to go on for longer?

Jim Shannon: Yes, I would expect the hon. Gentleman to do that—but what a pleasure it is to follow the hon. Gentleman, who brings knowledge to these debates and, probably, to every debate. Let me also to say how pleased I am to be able to throw some of my thoughts and those of my party into this debate.

[Jim Shannon]

As a proud Brexiteer—that is no secret—I am pleased to see the opportunities that can and will come from Brexit, and we in Northern Ireland hope that we too will benefit from them. We await the Government's endorsement of the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill, which will give us the same opportunities as everyone else, but that is for a future debate rather than this one.

The potential of the Australian and New Zealand trade agreements is exciting for me and many others. The agricultural and fishing sectors are vital for my constituency, so my request to the Minister will be to provide the support to enable our agricultural sector to be protected. We in Northern Ireland are fortunate, in that we export food and drink products worth some £5.4 billion, and we export some 65% of that produce to the EU and across the world. We are already the epitome of what the Government are trying to achieve through this deal, and we are doing that right across the whole world. Lakeland Dairies is a good example. It is already moving to sell its produce in the far east, the middle east, Africa, south America and the USA, so it is very much to the fore. We also have Mash Direct, a buoyant company that is seeking markets overseas, and Willowbrook Foods and Rich Sauces, which likewise have farmers who feed into them. So we have a strong agri-sector in my constituency. The Minister knows that already; I am not telling him anything he does not know. He is always very astute and does his research so he will know what I am referring to, but I seek that wee bit of reassurance that my agri-sector in Strangford will be in a position to have those protections, and that we can be part of that export push that the Government clearly want to bring about.

5.30 pm

The Bill is the outworking of the groundwork to enable us to begin to reach the trading successes that are so needed for all our countries. It is clear that we must make changes to our domestic procurement law, as the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) said, in order to implement the public procurement chapters of each agreement. Further, the Bill will enable the UK Government and the devolved authorities to make the regulations to implement the changes in domestic procurement law required to implement the UK free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand. It will also change domestic law to reflect any specific amendments that may come from the Northern Ireland Assembly and other bodies that are required under the agreement with Australia, and apply those provisions to suppliers from the UK and other countries. I should probably have declared an interest at the beginning, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am a member of the Ulster Farmers Union, and I am also a farmer. I live in an area outside Greyabbey where almost all my neighbours are milk farmers and dairymen, and they want to see the potential to sell their products further afield through their company, Lakeland Dairies.

In an intervention on the shadow Minister, I talked about the need for reassurance that the regional Administrations would not be ignored if their viewpoints were in conflict with the central Administration here in Westminster, although hopefully that will not happen. Can the Minister tell me how the process can be handled in such a way that the protection we in Northern Ireland are seeking to achieve can be one that the Government can respond to in a positive fashion? I genuinely understand that the Government are trying to do that, but I just need to see that in *Hansard*, if he does not mind, to give reassurance to the farmers back home.

I was also pleased to see a specific role for the devolved Administrations to be a part of this process. If the Government could only sort out the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill as a priority, perhaps Northern Ireland could be a part of this trade deal in totality. As things stand, our farmers would be precluded from state aid help that would allow them to compete with New Zealand sheep farmers. I understand that this is a debate for another day, but it would be helpful if the Minister could give us some reassurance on that. There is no doubt among Unionists as a whole that the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill should be the No. 1 priority for this House, and I am disappointed to see in today's press that the Prime Minister is putting it on the back burner and perhaps not bringing it before the House of Lords until February or March of next year. We need to have a strong focus on the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill.

People in Northern Ireland receive no Government aid towards their heating bills—that is not sorted either. We cannot help people to heat their homes and stay alive if we do not do it centrally from Westminster. We must stop playing with the health of our elderly and vulnerable. If we have not addressed the concerns of the agriculture sector in Northern Ireland, I can understand why other things have not been addressed either.

My colleagues have expressed the key concern of trading differentials in food production. My hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Carla Lockhart) highlighted the issues of land being deforested for cattle production, and of systems that rely on the transporting of live animals. Will the Minister provide clarity on the protections we need?

UK producers, including those in Northern Ireland, must not be disadvantaged or penalised for abiding by better, more costly standards. It is a privilege for us in Northern Ireland to have the best conditions, rules and regulations for the quality of our products and produce because, when we send them across the world, they can meet the conditions of any country anywhere in the world, including the EU and anywhere else.

Such trade deals are essential as we move away from Europe, which is crumbling, and look towards alliances with global markets that are happy to live with a give-and-take mentality for our mutual benefit, rather than the one-way system whereby our needs were secondary to those of the EU as a whole.

Northern Ireland has premium beef, cattle, pigs, poultry and sheep produce. The dairy sector in my constituency is the envy of many other parts of Northern Ireland. The cereal farmers and potato producers around Comber are among the best. Northern Ireland's food and drink sector is worth some £5.4 billion. It is the region's largest manufacturer, and its exports are important.

Our farmers and producers aim for the highest targets, and they have delivered. My farmers in my Strangford constituency, and my fishermen in Portavogie in my constituency and in Ardglass and Kilkeel in South Down, and across Northern Ireland, are dedicated to traceability and are passionate about quality. That needs

to be encouraged, and I think the Minister wants to encourage it. I look forward to his winding-up speech and, even at this stage, I ask for reassurance that the fears of my farming community in Strangford, and of farming communities across Northern Ireland, will not become a reality. The farmers back home want to know they are part of what the UK Government are pushing.

Hywel Williams: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for once. It is a unique experience.

New clause 15, standing in my name and in the names of my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts), would require an assessment of the impact of the procurement chapters on different sectors of the Welsh economy. It is worth noting that the Senedd's Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee has called for future trade deals to include impact assessments for the sectors and sub-sectors in Wales, which is important.

The assessments published so far for both the Australia and New Zealand free trade agreements are light on Welsh-specific detail, particularly regarding the potential sub-sectoral and regional impacts within Wales. Understanding the full impact of FTAs on the Welsh economy is necessary to assess what support businesses and organisations will need from the Welsh and UK Governments to prepare for implementation. The better the economic information available to Westminster and Senedd Ministers, the more effectively this can be done. As has been said, farming is not a five-minute occupation; it takes 10, 15 and 20 years.

I urge the UK Government to commit to publishing cumulative assessments, updated every time a new FTA is signed, showing the impact of post-Brexit trade policy on Wales's economy and on the UK economy. That is particularly important for our agriculture and semi-processed food sectors. As a result of the agreement with Australia, the agriculture and semi-processed food sectors across the UK are expected to see a reduction in gross value added of £94 million and £225 million, respectively. The New Zealand agreement is expected to lead to a reduction of £48 million and £97 million, respectively.

Welsh farming unions have warned that both FTAs have set a damaging precedent for unfettered access to agricultural produce. We need to understand how individual procurement agreements and individual FTAs impact different sectors, and how those sectors are affected in the long term by post-Brexit trade policy. Many in those industries believe that Ministers were dashing heedlessly for glossy headlines and failing to fight for the interests of the Welsh and the UK economies, as we have heard. Rather than plugging the Brexit-sized hole in trade, these tiny trade deals will be a body blow to Welsh agriculture and food production. In general, they are not of great interest across the UK, but they are of huge interest to Welsh agriculture and food reproduction.

Today's debate narrowly relates to the procurement chapters of both FTAs. It looks like the control that we supposedly took back from the EU goes no further than the Minister. Had Parliament and the devolved legislatures been able to properly scrutinise these deals, the former Environment Minister, the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), might not have been on his feet just a month ago criticising the Australia FTA for giving away too much for too little in return. Plaid MPs have met both the Australian and New Zealand ambassadors. Without divulging anything improperly, I would say that both were very pleased with the deal that they secured, and more than a little surprised by the UK's generosity.

The right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar), who is not in his place and is very much in favour of Brexit, talked about the value of free trade. He would profit, as would many people, from reading the proceedings of the Exiting the European Union Committee, on which I served for a while. We had before us Mr Pascal Lamy, who was twice Trade Commissioner for the EU, and also head of the World Trade Organisation. He said that all trade, in theory, is free, and that tariff and non-tariff barriers are there partly as bargaining chips. If we abandon those bargaining chips, as appears to have happened to a great extent in these two FTAs, we have nothing to offer in return. What do we get? Happy ambassadors from countries that have profited enormously and our own sectors, such as agriculture and food production, dismayed because so little has been secured.

We believe that MPs and the devolved Administrations should have full votes on the objectives of each future trade deal, and access to negotiating texts for that very reason—to ensure that the people of Wales, Scotland and parts of England and Northern Ireland are getting a good deal. Giving the Welsh Government a say is vital if we want trade deals that enhance rather than undermine our local economies. For example, had the Welsh Government been able to amend the FTAs, we would have likely seen a push for geographical indications in the UK-New Zealand FTA. That would have proved extremely valuable for Welsh lamb and Welsh beef, as I am sure the trade body Hybu Cig Cymru would confirm.

I add my support to new clause 6 tabled by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry). NFU Cymru has argued forcefully that the use of geographical indicators would have allowed Wales to differentiate our products in the world market, thus accessing a premium and increased profitability. I add our support to amendments 3 to 5, tabled by the Scottish National party. Both the Welsh and Scottish Governments have expressed their grave concerns about the use of concurrent powers in this legislation.

On Second Reading, the former Secretary of State for International Trade, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) told this House that discussions were taking place with the Welsh Government on their request for the Bill to be amended to include concurrent-plus powers. Therefore, I would appreciate it if the Minister updated the House on what progress has been made in those discussions with the Welsh Government.

5.45 pm

Geraint Davies: It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams), who has underlined what this debate is about. The Government are in the dock for selling out British interests, in particular farming interests, at a time when Parliament has basically been blindfolded in the process, unable to see the mandate or the negotiations, or to properly ratify the outcome.

[Geraint Davies]

What we have before us is an array of amendments to address the impact of these deals, which have already been signed, on all our sectors—in particular on agriculture, procurement and the NHS. Those are fundamentally important sectors. The amendments, which I support, have been tabled because it is still unclear how much damage has been done by these deals. They were done in haste and rushed through the door, which put us in a weak bargaining position. Any concession was simply just given. We do not know the detail of how much harm has been done. The former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said that we gave far too much for far too little, which I would call the understatement of the year. The Government's projection is that GDP will grow by 0.1% in 15 years, but we do not really know the details.

What we do know though, to take the perspective of a Welsh sheep farmer—we heard from the hon. Member for Arfon—is that Australian sheep farms are on average 100 times the size of Welsh ones. We know too that in New Zealand and Australia they only focus on three or four main breeds of sheep. There are also economies of scale—New Zealand focuses on ensuring that nearly all sheep give birth to twins, as opposed to three lambs, which might kill the mother, or one, which would be less productive. We also know that their shelf life and mechanisation of food processing are far in advance of ours.

We know, therefore, that our farmers face a major threat, at a time when exports to the EU have been stifled by unnecessary barriers as a result of a botched Brexit deal, thanks to which we have seen a 15% reduction in overall trade. So it does not look too good; and what is more, the Government have signed up to giving Australia and New Zealand unlimited access in 15 years, in terms of beef and lamb. What precedent does that set for food exports when we do a deal with Brazil, for example?

With the war in Ukraine, we are now in a world where people are quite rightly concerned about food security, yet we are basically undermining our domestic production, at a time when Russia has increased its overall agricultural production by 15% since invading Crimea and facing sanctions. Basically, we are saying that we will turn our back on the EU and do a deal with Australia, undermining our own farmers. Is that a good idea? Surely, we need to be producing more healthy food locally, at a time when one in four people in Britain is in food poverty.

As it happens, I take a particular interest both in food, as a member of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, and in trade, as the rapporteur for the Council of Europe, charged with ensuring that democracy, human rights, the rule of law and sustainability are embedded in agreements, but none of those are embedded in the Australia and New Zealand agreements. On democracy, there is no facility for the mandate, the negotiations, or ratification to be properly looked at, hence all these amendments. On due diligence, there is none when it comes to climate change, human rights and so on, where we can find best practice. For example, the EU deal with New Zealand refers to the rights of indigenous people, the Maori people, and various issues about due diligence in supply chains. Our deal does not have those things because it was rushed forward.

Trading further afield is more environmentally damaging, at a time when we should be concerned about climate change. We also know that Australia is the worst carbon emitter in the world, at 17.5 tonnes per person, compared with the 4.8 tonnes claimed for Britain in terms of production—for consumption, it is 8 tonnes per person. I hope we will have an opportunity to superimpose a carbon border tax in due course and that this deal will not rule that out.

Sir Mark Hendrick: I have recently returned from visiting Singapore on behalf of the International Trade Committee, where it was mentioned to us that Singapore has done a green economy agreement with Australia, which looks at emissions as part and parcel of that trade package. Given what my hon. Friend has said about Australian emissions, could he perhaps comment on that?

Geraint Davies: My comment would be that Britain should be taking a lead, as it claims to, on mitigating climate change. The way to do that is to take best practice, from Singapore or anywhere else, and hardwire that into current and future agreements. That has not been done, because our economic, climate and other interests have been thrown to one side in order to just tick a box and say that we have got a trade agreement.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: My hon. Friend mentioned carbon border adjustments. Is it not the truth that both Europe and America are now leading on these discussions, because they understand that trade deals without proper carbon and border adjustments are just ways of exporting jobs out of countries—degrading those countries, their workers and the environment in one fell swoop?

Geraint Davies: I am certainly a big supporter of what the EU is doing on carbon border adjustments, for instance ensuring that we have a level playing field for steel made in south Wales, which emits half the carbon of Chinese steel, and that there is an incentive to invest in green production domestically. The EU has taken a lead and we need to catch up. The United States is subsidising green industry and, as my hon. Friend will know, there is a tension between the two different strategies when it comes to ensuring a sustainable and greener future for all.

Turning to procurement, clearly it is not exactly a new idea that big multinational corporations will use unelected, private, often secretly held tribunals to try to fine democratically elected Governments who want to pass laws to protect the environment and public health. We saw that in investor-state dispute settlements. Most obviously, at the moment, we have got the Energy Charter treaty, which binds countries for 20 years to being sued if they try to pass laws to help the environment.

People will know that Germany, France, Poland, Spain and others are trying to withdraw from that treaty, although we have not heard much for the United Kingdom—because of its fossil fuel interests, I assume. My question is: why, when we know those companies will be quick on the draw in taking us to court and suing us, do we allow them a way in on procurement, so that when they do not get the business with the NHS, they can suddenly sue us? That concern is covered in new clause 1, which I very much support.

Finally, it is obvious that, out of the carnage of the botched Brexit deal, while obviously we want deals with Australia and New Zealand, the haste with which we have approached these deals has left us in a situation where they get all the benefits and we face a prospective loss. That is absolutely disgraceful maladministration from the Government, and I support the amendments to try to mitigate some of the harm done by their hopeless negotiation.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Nigel Huddleston): May I say what a pleasure it is to speak on behalf of the Government today as we scrutinise this landmark piece of legislation? I thank colleagues for their contributions to the debates on this Bill, including the general debate, where many of the points raised today were also covered and responses were given by my hon. Friends on the Government Benches. I will try not to repeat that debate now.

The Government are of the view that the amendments tabled are ultimately unnecessary, and I hope that I will be able to persuade right hon. and hon. Members to withdraw them. The new clauses that deal with issues on impact assessment are unnecessary, as the Government have already committed to undertake assessments of impact of these deals at regular intervals.

First, the Government have committed to publishing a monitoring report every two years and a compressive evaluation report for each of the agreements within five years of their entry into force. Those evaluation reports will aim to show how, why and for whom the agreements and their implementation have delivered, addressing many of the points raised by hon. Members in the debate.

Hywel Williams: Can the Minister therefore confirm that there will be detailed assessments for Wales, including within regions and sectors in Wales?

Nigel Huddleston: We will be happy to discuss with many stakeholders the precise nature, content and scope of those reviews, and we will do that in due course.

This Bill is based on procurement, but while procurement is the only area that requires primary legislation for implementation, it should not be the only area that is subject to review. Therefore, publishing and considering impact assessments that only cover procurement implementation would not be an effective use of parliamentary time, nor would it give parliamentarians a full picture of the economic impact of the agreements. On multiple levels, the proposed amendments relating to impact assessments would not be fit for purpose.

Regarding the negotiation of the procurement chapters, both chapters build on the baseline in the World Trade Organisation's agreement on Government procurement, or GPA, setting new international precedents, notably on data transparency and facilitating SME involvement in procurement. While all negotiations are different, my Department is committed to learning from each negotiation and applying those lessons directly to its work. I am confident that that approach towards negotiating procurement chapters allows for high-quality chapters that work well for British business and consumers.

As mentioned by several hon. Members today, the Bill Committee heard evidence from Professor Sanchez-Graells. We respectfully disagree with the professor's reading that the chapters do not align with the GPA or that suppliers will not have access to legal remedies against contracting authorities and so cause confusion for and disadvantage British businesses. We do not believe that is the case. My predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (Sir James Duddridge), wrote in detail to the Committee on that and I have nothing more to add.

The Government are resolute in our determination to protect the NHS, recognising that it is an institution that is very important to the UK and its citizens. That is reflected in the specific protections negotiated in respect of the NHS in the agreements: health services are expressly excluded from coverage under the procurement chapters and both agreements specifically refer to the NHS and the general exclusions that apply to it.

On small businesses, the procurement chapters in both agreements include articles on facilitating the participation of SMEs in procurement. We will have people on the ground in the UK, Australia and New Zealand to help to fully exploit the opportunities, and I can assure the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) that we will be providing that support across the UK. The Government have an active agenda of facilitating SME participation and continue to advance that agenda across the free trade agreement programme. We have consulted with businesses throughout the negotiations, including with small and medium-sized enterprises, and will continue to do so throughout the implementation.

On protecting farmers—again, a hot topic in previous debates—in both the Australia and New Zealand FTAs, the UK secured a range of measures to safeguard our farmers, including tariff rate quotas for a number of sensitive agricultural products and product-specific safeguards for beef and, for Australia, sheepmeat, alongside a general bilateral safeguard mechanism providing a temporary safety net for all products. Equally, this Government are committed to ensuring that UK farmers have the tools they need to secure the export benefits of these trade deals.

Additionally, it is unlikely that products from Australia or New Zealand will flood the UK market. In 2021, more than 80% of Australian beef exports and nearly 70% of Australian sheepmeat exports went to markets in Asia and the Pacific. New Zealand already has a significant volume of tariff-free access into the UK for sheepmeat but used only a third of that quota in 2021, meaning that New Zealand could already export more sheepmeat to us tariff-free, but chooses not to.

6 pm

Geraint Davies: If New Zealand is not utilising its current quota, why have we chosen to give a completely unlimited quota in 15 years' time? Given the Minister's reasoning, New Zealand presumably does not need it, and it just exposes us to unnecessary risk.

Nigel Huddleston: All negotiations involve give and take. The hon. Gentleman will also acknowledge, I am sure, that we are also seeking market access right across the globe for farmers and our fantastic food and beverages—for example, by opening up the market in the US for sheepmeat for the first time in 20 years. At the same time, we are seeking opportunities right around the world. Of course, as several hon. Members have mentioned,

[Nigel Huddleston]

we are proud of our high animal welfare and food safety standards, which is why we are ensuring that this deal does not compromise on them and that no new permissions for imports such as hormone-treated beef were granted.

On the Government's engagement with the devolved Administrations, right hon. and hon. Members will be aware that the Minister for Trade Policy, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands), chairs the inter-ministerial group for trade, previously known as the ministerial forum for trade. That forum provides an opportunity for discussion on all matters of trade policy, including the implementation of UK free trade agreements. The forum is not the only opportunity for ministerial discussions; there are frequent bilateral meetings between Ministers. Indeed, later this week, my right hon. Friend is set to meet the Scottish Minister for Business, Trade and Enterprise, to whom I spoke last Tuesday. I also spoke to the Welsh Minister for the Economy on 1 December on a similar basis. In addition to ministerial engagement, discussions with devolved Administrations at official levels have totalled hundreds of hours across the Australia and New Zealand FTAs, including frequent updates by chief negotiators and detailed discussions to draft text.

It may be helpful to also remind the House that on Second Reading, the previous Secretary of State for International Trade, my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan), who is sitting near me now, committed at the Dispatch Box never to use the power in clause 1 without consulting the devolved Administrations first. That is a sincere commitment, and one that we will honour.

Hywel Williams: Is not the Minister confirming that taking back control extends to Ministers and officials in the devolved Governments but not to the elected representatives?

Nigel Huddleston: I am afraid that the hon. Member is misrepresenting the situation. In terms of concurrent powers, this is an established part of our devolution settlement. We are not, in these proposals, proposing anything unusual.

The breadth of our trade agreements means some policy issues will be within the competence of the devolved Administrations. The Government have always recognised that modern trade deals cover an increasingly broad array of policy matters. To enable more technical discussions, of course, we share draft treaty text with devolved Administrations for comment. That facilitates more detailed and comprehensive discussions between Department for International Trade officials and officials in devolved Administrations. There have already been discussions with the Scottish Government on the drafting of secondary legislation. In respect of the amendments, I understand that the Scottish Government wish to make the necessary statutory instrument to amend Scottish procurement regulations.

On new clause 12 and its consequential amendments, the super-affirmative procedure is used for statutory instruments when an exceptionally high degree of scrutiny is thought appropriate. An example would be remedial orders, which the Government can use to amend Acts of Parliament should the courts find them in breach of the European convention on human rights. It is therefore wholly disproportionate to use that process to approve a minor technical change needed to implement procurement commitments in the Australia and New Zealand deals. The potential unnecessary use of the affirmative or super-affirmative procedure could lead to delays in those agreements entering into force.

The Government are working to enter the agreements into force to ensure that UK businesses and consumers can benefit from the significant economic advantages as soon as possible. That is, of course, also the desire of the Labour Governments in Australia and New Zealand.

I hope that I have reassured hon. Members and that they will not push their amendments.

Gareth Thomas: It is always a pleasure to listen to the Minister, but it was rather striking that not one Conservative Back Bencher was willing to come along tonight to defend their party's deal. We have nevertheless had an important debate with important speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Preston (Sir Mark Hendrick), for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) and for Swansea West (Geraint Davies), and the hon. Members for Gordon (Richard Thomson)—whom I congratulate on his appointment—for Chesham and Amersham (Sarah Green), for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Arfon (Hywel Williams), as well as important interventions from my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar) and the hon. Members for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall), for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) and for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord).

Ministers know that there are real concerns about the Australia deal and the precedent that it sets for future deals, and that here have been real concerns across the House about the parliamentary scrutiny of all trade deals, particularly the Australia deal. The behaviour of the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan), has only underlined those concerns. Many have noted the huge giveaway of access for Australian farmers and how little we have secured in return in the same space. That is the fault not of the Australian negotiators but of the Government's own wilful determination to get a deal by an arbitrary deadline, whatever the price.

The House will inevitably return to the issue of procurement. We will certainly encourage those in the other place to explore the concerns that I in particular have articulated in the debate—particularly as negotiations on CPTPP accession are moving forward. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 2

Assessment of impact on farmers

"At least three months, but not later than six months, after the coming into force of the government procurement Chapter of—

(1) the UK-Australia FTA, and

(2) the UK-New Zealand FTA,

a Minister of the Crown must lay before Parliament an assessment of the impact of the Chapter on farmers in—

(a) each region of England

(b) Scotland
(c) Wales, and
(d) Northern Ireland."—*(Gareth Thomas.)*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 192, Noes 296.

Division No. 119] [6.7 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman, Kirsty
Bonnar, Steven
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Clark, Feryal
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Davies-Jones, Alex
De Cordova, Marsha
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dixon, Samantha
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Doughty, Stephen
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Edwards, Jonathan
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Flynn, Stephen
Foord, Richard
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Gardiner, Barry
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Grant, Peter
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Dame Nia
Hamilton, Fabian
Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Hanna, Claire
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
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lavery, Ian
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lightwood, Simon
Linden, David
Lockhart, Carla
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
MacAskill, Kenny
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, James
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes*
Norris, Alex
Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owatemi, Taiwo
Owen, Sarah
Pennycook, Matthew
Phillips, Jess
Pollard, Luke
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, rh Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smyth, Karin
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Tonia Antoniazzi and Christian Wakeford

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Sir Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
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
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo *(Proxy vote cast by Marcus Jones)*
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey

Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Double, Steve
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James
Duguid, David
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Evans, Dr Luke
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh 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
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Heappey, rh James
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, Tom
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenrick, rh Robert
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, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark *(Proxy vote cast by Marcus Jones)*
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McVey, rh Esther
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morrissey, Joy
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nokes, rh Caroline
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, rh Victoria
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, rh Jeremy
Quince, Will
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Roberts, Rob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, rh Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, Royston
Spencer, Dr Ben
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Trott, Laura
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Mr Robin
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:
Amanda Solloway and Jacob Young

Question accordingly negatived.

"(1) This section applies where an instrument is, or, as the case may be, regulations are, subject to the super-affirmative procedure.

(2) A draft of the instrument or regulations must be laid before the relevant institution.

(3) The appropriate authority must have regard to—

(a) any representations,

(b) any resolution of the relevant institution, and

(c) any recommendations of a committee of the relevant institution charged with reporting on the draft, made during the 60-day period with regard to the draft.

(4) If after the expiry of the 60-day period the instrument is or, as the case may be, regulations are approved by a resolution of the relevant institution, the appropriate authority may make an instrument or statutory rule in the terms of the draft.

(5) If after the expiry of the 60-day period the appropriate authority wishes to proceed with the draft but with material changes, the authority may lay before the relevant institution—

(a) a revised draft, and

(b) a statement giving a summary of the changes proposed.

(6) If the revised draft is approved by a resolution of the relevant institution, the appropriate authority may make an instrument or, as the case may be, statutory rule in the terms of the revised draft.

(7) For the purposes of this section an instrument or statutory rule is made in the terms of a draft if it contains no material changes to its provisions.

(8) In this section, references to the "60-day" period in relation to any draft are to the period of 60 days beginning with the day on which the draft was laid before the relevant institution.

(9) For the purposes of subsection (8) no account is to be taken of any time during which—

(a) if the relevant institution is the Scottish Parliament, Senedd Cymru or the Northern Ireland Assembly, that institution is dissolved or is in recess for more than four days;

(b) if the relevant institution is both Houses of Parliament, Parliament is dissolved or prorogued, or either House of Parliament is adjourned for more than four days.

(10) In this section, "relevant institution" means—

(a) in the case of an instrument to be made by a Minister of the Crown—

(i) for the purposes of subsections (2), (5) and (8), both Houses of Parliament,

(ii) for the purposes of subsection (3), either House of Parliament,

(iii) for the purposes of subsections (4) and (6), each House of Parliament

(b) in the case of an instrument to be made by Scottish Ministers, the Scottish Parliament;

(c) in the case of an instrument to be made by Welsh Ministers, Senedd Cymru;

(d) in the case of regulations to be made by a Northern Ireland department, the Northern Ireland Assembly;

(e) in the case of an instrument to be made by appropriate authorities acting jointly—

(i) for the purposes of subsections (2), (5) and (8), both Houses of Parliament,

(ii) for the purposes of subsection (3), either House of Parliament,

(iii) for the purposes of subsections (4) and (6), each House of Parliament

and, as the case may be, the Scottish Parliament, Senedd Cymru or the Northern Ireland Assembly."—*(Gareth Thomas.)*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 192, Noes 299.

Division No. 120] [6.21 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman, Kirsty
Bonnar, Steven
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Clark, Feryal
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Davies-Jones, Alex
De Cordova, Marsha
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dixon, Samantha
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Doughty, Stephen
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Edwards, Jonathan
Elliott, Julie
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Flynn, Stephen
Foord, Richard
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Gardiner, Barry
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Grant, Peter
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Dame Nia
Hamilton, Fabian
Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Hanna, Claire
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
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lavery, Ian
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lightwood, Simon
Linden, David
Lockhart, Carla
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
MacAskill, Kenny
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, James
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Norris, Alex
Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owatemi, Taiwo
Owen, Sarah
Pennycook, Matthew
Phillips, Jess
Pollard, Luke
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, rh Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smyth, Karin
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Trickett, Jon

Turner, Karl
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Christian Wakeford and Tonia Antoniazzi

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Sir Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
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
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Double, Steve
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James
Duguid, David
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Evans, Dr Luke
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh 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
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Heappey, rh James
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, Tom
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenrick, rh Robert
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, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McVey, rh Esther
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morrissey, Joy
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, rh Victoria
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, rh Jeremy
Quince, Will
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Roberts, Rob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, rh Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, Royston
Spencer, Dr Ben
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stewart, rh Bob

Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Trott, Laura
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:
Amanda Solloway and Jacob Young

Question accordingly negatived.

6.33 pm

More than two hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on consideration, the proceedings were interrupted (Programme Order, this day).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).

Clause 1

POWER TO IMPLEMENT GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT CHAPTERS

Amendment proposed: 3, page 1, line 15, at end insert—

"(3A) Where the appropriate authority is a Minister of the Crown, regulations under subsection (1) may not be made until the appropriate authority has consulted the relevant Scottish ministers in relation to any matters affecting Scotland."—*(Richard Thomson.)*

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 34, Noes 300.

Division No. 121] [6.33 pm

AYES

Bardell, Hannah
Blackman, Kirsty
Bonnar, Steven
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Callaghan, Amy *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Cowan, Ronnie
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Edwards, Jonathan
Flynn, Stephen
Grady, Patrick
Hendry, Drew
Hosie, rh Stewart
Lake, Ben
Linden, David
Lucas, Caroline
MacAskill, Kenny
Mc Nally, John
McDonald, Stuart C.
McLaughlin, Anne
Monaghan, Carol
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Oswald, Kirsten
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Stephens, Chris
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Williams, Hywel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Marion Fellows and Peter Grant

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Sir Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
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
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Double, Steve
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James
Duguid, David
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Evans, Dr Luke
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh 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
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Heappey, rh James
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard

Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, Tom
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenrick, rh Robert
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, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McVey, rh Esther
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morrissey, Joy
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, rh Victoria
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, rh Jeremy
Quince, Will
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Roberts, Rob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Seely, Bob
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Sharma, rh Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, Royston
Spencer, Dr Ben
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Trott, Laura
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:
Amanda Solloway and Jacob Young

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Before I call the Minister, I should tell the House that we have had reports that Division bells in Norman Shaw South are not working, along with a number of other things. As we anticipate further Divisions this evening, I advise Members in and around Norman Shaw South to look for other means by which they can work out whether a Division is on, including the Annunciators, mobile phones and various other things. If they cannot do that, they should really stay around the main building.

Third Reading

6.47 pm

Nigel Huddleston: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Our deals with Australia and New Zealand are the first trade agreements in almost 50 years that the UK has negotiated from scratch. Members from across the House have rightly been eager to engage with the Bill, and I thank them all for continuing to do so. I also thank Members who sat on the Public Bill Committee for their work in scrutinising the Bill, and in particular my right hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mark Pritchard) and the hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) for their expertise in chairing the Committee.

Members have rightly shown a great interest in the Bill, and I would like to use this opportunity to give the House further assurances. First, Members expressed concerns about the opportunities that the devolved Administrations have had to shape the Bill. I can assure the House that our procurement teams have consistently held roundtables with their counterparts from the devolved Administrations. During negotiations with Australia and New Zealand, they discussed the text of procurement chapters. Discussions on the Bill, and the changes in procurement regulations that it creates, have regularly taken place. Indeed, during negotiations, ministerial and official level engagement on these free trade agreements totals hundreds of hours. That includes 25 meetings with the Australia FTA chief negotiator, specific discussions at the ministerial forum for trade, and senior official conversations on policy content. My officials continue to work closely with their counterparts at the devolved Administrations to address the concerns raised regarding the powers in the Bill. I myself have also had constructive conversations with Ministers from the devolved Administrations. The Government remain committed not to using the concurrent power in the Bill without first consulting the devolved Administrations. I want to stress to the House that the powers are the most logical and efficient way of making minor, technical changes to our procurement regulations.

On Report, we discussed how the Government are committed to providing, for each agreement, a monitoring report every two years, and an evaluation within five years

of entry into force. The reports will assess the entirety of the agreements and not limit themselves to the procurement chapters alone.

I would like to say a couple more thank yous: first, to the Bill team at the Department for International Trade—James Copeland, Donald Selmani, Jack Collins, Alex Garcia-Pineiro and Catherine Ajani—as well as the other officials who make up my fantastic team. I would like to thank the parliamentarians who have taken part in this and other debates on the legislation, and of course the International Trade Select Committee, as well as the wonderful staff here in the House.

I also want to thank the Opposition spokespeople for the constructive way in which they have approached scrutiny of the Bill. It was remiss of me earlier not to welcome the new SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for Gordon (Richard Thomson) to his role, and I do so now. I also thank his predecessor, the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry). Who knows, but perhaps under the new leadership we may actually get the SNP to vote in favour of a trade deal. *[Interruption.]* Indeed, I suspected that may be the case.

Drew Hendry: Will the Minister also extend the hope that the Government may accept one of the SNP amendments one of these days?

Nigel Huddleston: The key thing is that we estimate that these deals will considerably boost the UK economy and all nations. Businesses in every single constituency will be able to grasp new opportunities from this Bill. It will therefore benefit the whole of the country, and I hope that just perhaps it will get the support of the whole House. I am delighted to commend this Bill to the House.

6.51 pm

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I want to put on record my thanks to all parliamentarians who have contributed to the passage of the Bill. I thank officials at the DIT for their work and all those House staff who have supported the debates both in the Chamber and in Committee.

I also want to put on record my desire to see a deepening of our trade links with our friends in Australia and New Zealand through trade agreements and, indeed, ever closer relationships at all levels. Both countries are close global allies through a common history, and face similar challenges and have similar opportunities in the years to come. I particularly welcome the two very fine Labour Governments they have in office. The next UK Labour Government will work with these free trade deals for the benefit of our people here, and indeed of our friends in Australia and New Zealand.

Specifically on the negotiations, the high commissions of Australia and New Zealand have been remarkably helpful in briefing colleagues as talks progressed, and I am very grateful to them. I was very grateful this morning to meet Mr Don Farrell, the Minister for Trade and Tourism in Australia, to emphasise the Opposition's desire to deepen that relationship. The Minister mentioned on Report that he was working on the commencement of the deals, but gave no particular date for that. I urge him to set out the commencement dates for both deals.

Our debate on this Bill has not been about the commitment of the Opposition to our deepening relationship with Australia and New Zealand. Rather, it has been about two things. The first is the failure of this Government to achieve the best possible deals for the United Kingdom. The Australia deal is "one-sided"—not my word, but that of the current Prime Minister. In addition:

> "The first step is to recognise that the Australia trade deal is not actually a very good deal for the UK… overall, the truth of the matter is that the UK gave away far too much for far too little in return."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2022; Vol. 722, c. 424.]

Those are not my words, but those of the former Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), and we can see why he said it. The impact assessment for the Australia deal shows a £94 million hit to our farming, forestry and fishing sectors, and a £225 million hit to our semi-processed food industry. On the New Zealand deal, the Government's own impact assessment states that:

"part of the gains results from a reallocation of resources away from agriculture, forestry, and fishing",

which will take a £48 million hit,

"and semi-processed foods",

which will take a £97 million hit. Perhaps it is no surprise that Australia's former negotiator at the WTO said:

> "I don't think we have ever done as well as this".

British produce can be a huge success in new markets, but we recognise the need for a level playing field for our farmers, and it is to a proper plan for our agricultural sector that Ministers must now turn.

On climate change in the Australia deal, the Government failed to include a specific commitment to limiting the rise in global temperatures to 1.5 degrees. On workers' rights, there was a failure to include commitments to the International Labour Organisation conventions, and there was a lack of substantial concessions on geographical indicators. Unless there is a change of negotiating approach, this weakness in negotiations will have even further consequences for this country in deal after deal.

Secondly, there is the lack of scrutiny. The deals were already signed and agreed before they came before Parliament, so the scope for any amendments, and therefore for meaningful debate, was fatally curtailed. It is impossible to argue that these processes represent scrutiny worthy of the name. The International Trade Committee has rightly criticised the process on the Australia deal and the Government's premature triggering of the 21-day CRaG process without the full Select Committee consideration being available to Members. When pressed on that, the Government refused to extend the process, and all the while the previous Secretary of State swerved eight invitations—eight—to attend the International Trade Committee.

Perhaps it is no wonder that the Government keep dodging scrutiny, given their record, because as we approach the end of the year, it is a tale of broken promises on trade: no trade deal with the United States; a trade deal with India done by Diwali—promise broken; and 80% of UK trade under free trade agreements by the end of the year—not going to happen. The truth is that Conservative trade policy is a tale of bad deals or no deals at all.

6.56 pm

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): On Third Reading, could I take the opportunity to thank the Clerks for all their help in assisting with amendments throughout the process? I thank those on both Front Benches for their kind words on my recent appointment to my party's Front Bench as a trade spokesperson. I also thank my group's researchers, Clorinda Luck and Katie Dominy, for the excellent research they have carried out for us throughout. Of course, I thank my good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), who led for the Scottish National party group of MPs throughout the previous stages, including in Committee.

The Minister said that he hoped, when we scrutinise future trade deals, that he might be successful in persuading the SNP to back them. I would give him a little bit of hope on that. The SNP is in favour of good trade deals, and we are not in favour of poor trade deals. Trying to help Ministers understand the difference does at times appear a little like Father Ted trying to explain to Father Dougal McGuire the difference between cows that are near and cows that are in fact far away. I would observe that certainly the benefits of this trade deal are very far away indeed.

I was going to comment on the existence of some dispute about whether or not the deal is a good one, but I am afraid that description simply would not do it justice. The Australian and New Zealand Governments certainly think that this is a good trade deal, and it is very telling, is it not, that there are so few individuals outside the ranks of the parliamentary Conservative party who are prepared to say the same from the UK side. I think there is a fundamental reason for that. It is quite clear that the Australian and New Zealand Governments were very focused on securing beneficial outcomes for their economies, whereas the UK Government seemed to be focused primarily on getting a deal as quickly as possible, no matter what that cost.

It is often said that the art of negotiation or diplomacy is the subtle art of letting somebody else get your way, and the Australian and New Zealand Governments certainly allowed the UK very successfully to get their way in the negotiations that took place. It is sad to say, but it will be our consumers, our producers and our economy that will end up picking up the price tag for that in the years to come.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The House divided: Ayes 294, Noes 46.

Division No. 122] [6.59 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
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
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Double, Steve
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James
Duguid, David
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Evans, Dr Luke
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh 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
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heappey, rh James
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, Tom
Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenrick, rh Robert
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, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline

Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morrissey, Joy
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, rh Victoria
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, rh Jeremy
Quince, Will
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Roberts, Rob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, rh Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, Royston
Spencer, Dr Ben
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Trott, Laura
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallis, Dr Jamie
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Amanda Solloway and Jacob Young

NOES

Bardell, Hannah
Blackman, Kirsty
Bonnar, Steven
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Callaghan, Amy *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Chamberlain, Wendy
Cowan, Ronnie
Davey, rh Ed
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Edwards, Jonathan
Farron, Tim
Flynn, Stephen
Foord, Richard
Grady, Patrick
Green, Sarah
Hendry, Drew
Hobhouse, Wera
Hosie, rh Stewart
Lake, Ben
Linden, David
Lockhart, Carla
Lucas, Caroline
MacAskill, Kenny
Mc Nally, John
McDonald, Stuart C.
McLaughlin, Anne
Monaghan, Carol
Morgan, Helen
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Olney, Sarah
Oswald, Kirsten
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shannon, Jim
Stephens, Chris
Stone, Jamie
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Noes:
Marion Fellows and Peter Grant

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time and passed.

Council Tax

[Relevant documents: Fifth Report of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee of Session 2021-22, The Elections Bill, HC 597, and the Government Response, HC 1133; Second Report of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, The Work of the Electoral Commission, HC 462; Oral evidence taken before the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee on 1 March 2022 on the work of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, HC 1066; Correspondence between the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities of 12 April, 25 April, 19 July and 30 August 2022.]

7.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Lee Rowley): I beg to move,

That the draft Voter Identification Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 3 November, be approved.

This statutory instrument is a key part of how we implement the voter identification policy in the Elections Act 2022. This area was debated extensively during the passage of the Act earlier this year. Through this SI, we will be fulfilling a Government manifesto commitment to protect the integrity of our democracy by introducing identification to vote at polling stations. Gaps in our current legislation leave open the potential for someone to cast another vote at the polling station. Our priority is adopting legislation that ensures the public can have confidence in the integrity of our elections and certainty that their vote belongs to them, and them alone.

The introduction of a voter identification policy is the best solution to the problem. It has been long called for by the independent Electoral Commission, as well as by international organisations, such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which regularly monitors and reports on our national polls.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The Minister mentions the Electoral Commission. It issued a press statement at the weekend that expressed continued concerns about the delays in the Government getting their act together on this policy. It said it was not now sure that all the considerations it wanted taken into account to ensure the policy works properly could fully be met. That was in the press release. That comes alongside the Local Government Association and other council leaders expressing real concerns about whether this matter could be implemented properly and fairly and give people full access to voting in the May local elections. Does the Minister not just want to stop and think for a minute about the timing of the implementation, if not the policy itself?

Lee Rowley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments. We absolutely are thinking about how best to implement this policy. In the period while I have been in post, I have already met the Electoral Commission to talk about it. I have spoken to the Association of Electoral Administrators about it, and today I have spoken to the LGA about it. There are a range of views, but we are confident and focused on ensuring that this policy is implemented properly. We will continue to be so. On the key point, the Electoral Commission has been clear since as early as 2014 that

"we should move to a system where voters are required to produce identification at polling stations."

This SI sets out further detail on the new processes that will be put in place to help us to implement this policy in practice. First, it sets out the updated polling station conduct rules for a range of elections and referendums, and details exactly how photographic identification documents will be checked and how data will be recorded by polling station staff. Secondly, it sets out a series of updates to election forms. As Members would expect, a number of existing forms, such as poll cards, have been updated to inform electors of the new requirement to show identification and of the types of documents that will be accepted.

On top of those changes, there are also new forms, such as those for polling station staff, which we will use to record data that will help our planned reviews of the policy in the future. Lastly, the policy sets out the details of the new electoral identity documents that can be obtained if someone does not already have an accepted document: the voter authority certificate and the anonymous elector document. These forms of photographic identification will be available to voters free of charge and will ensure that everyone who is eligible to vote will continue to have the opportunity to do so.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I might be one of the minority on the Opposition Benches who think that what the Government are bringing forward is the right thing. The proof of pudding is in how the voter ID system works in Northern Ireland. The system sets the example for all the UK, and I know the Minister has had many discussions with his officials in Northern Ireland to ensure that the system in Northern Ireland can work here. It reduces electoral fraud and increases fairness in the democratic system. The Minister has had discussions with Northern Ireland, and electoral ID is of some use to people in their daily life. Those are four things going for it; it seems to me to be the thing to vote for. I just cannot understand why anybody would not.

Lee Rowley: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for outlining the importance of these policy changes. I fear it may be the only thing we agree with coming from the Opposition Benches tonight, but he has made an important point and he speaks from experience and more than 15 years of knowledge about how these kinds of changes make a difference to the integrity of our voter process.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): As someone who served on the Elections Public Bill Committee, I know that the regulations that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) referred to were actually brought in under a Labour Government. Might the Minister like to comment on that?

Lee Rowley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I look forward to hearing Opposition Front Benchers' comments in support of this statutory instrument, based on their previous support for strengthening the integrity of our democratic processes.

This SI also sets out the processes for how electors can apply for these documents, both online and via paper forms, and for how electoral registration officers can process, determine and issue the documents. Showing photo ID is a part of day-to-day life for people in all walks of life. It is a perfectly reasonable and proportionate way to confirm that a person is who they say they are when it comes to voting.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): I reassure the Minister that surely the Opposition will support this statutory instrument, because only three weeks ago, my Labour opponent was selected and as part of the rules for the hustings, people had to bring voter ID.

Lee Rowley: My hon. Friend makes a significant intervention that highlights the importance of consistency, which I am sure will shortly be coming from those on the Opposition Front Bench. Showing photo ID is a part of day-to-day life already, and as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) has already outlined, it has been a requirement to show photographic identification since 2003 in Northern Ireland.

We are all rightly proud of the long history of our democracy, but we should never take it for granted. An essential part of how we keep our system functioning is by keeping the right structures in place, through measures such as this SI, that stop our elections being undermined. This SI will strengthen the integrity of our elections, and I hope that Members will join me in supporting these measures.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I remind hon. Members that this is not a general debate on voter ID; it is about the regulations that pertain to it, so I ask people to stick to the regulations.

7.19 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I would like to say that it is a pleasure to speak in this debate, but frankly, I am sad that we have reached this point. It is a stain on Britain's democratic history that, if the Government have their way with these regulations, we will take a historic step away from making our democracy more open and accessible and towards closing it down, shutting people out and making it harder to vote.

Opposition Members have been clear from the start that this legislation is a wasted opportunity. It is a step backwards at a time when so many improvements are needed to widen participation in our democracy and to make it fit for the 21st century. The regulations arise from a slapdash, short-sighted and politically motivated act that turns the clock back on democratic progress. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) for his work throughout the stages of the Elections Act 2022, highlighting the dangers of mandatory photo ID, which we are debating today. I thank him for helping to secure this debate on the Floor of the House when Ministers would no doubt have preferred to sneak it through upstairs.

The basic fact is that voter ID is not only a backwards step for democracy, but completely pointless. It is a solution in search of a problem. Ministers claim it will combat voter fraud, but voter personation—the voter fraud which voter ID apparently targets—is vanishingly rare. Over the last 10 years, there have been about 243 million votes cast in elections, and how many people have been convicted of voter fraud? Four. That is 0.00000005%. I am under no illusion that the Government are in the slightest bit interested in genuinely tackling fraud. The Tories' Minister responsible for fraud summarised it when he resigned at the Dispatch Box, saying that the Government had

"no knowledge of, or little interest in, the consequences of fraud to our economy or society."—[*Official Report, House of Lords,* 24 January 2022; Vol. 818, c. 20.]

While the Government focus on measures like these regulations, serious fraud, where criminals target vulnerable people with scams to steal bank details, is running rife under this Government. Our economy loses around £190 billion every year to fraud—more than the UK spends on health and defence combined. People are being left terrorised by scammers pretending to be their banks, mobile networks or family members, but instead of actually tackling that, the Government are using parliamentary time to tackle the virtually non-existent crime of voter personation, costing millions of pounds in taxpayers' money to boot.

Justin Tomlinson: Will the right hon. Member explain why, if the system is so bad, it is used in Labour selections?

Angela Rayner: I have just explained why this is such a tiny, not even significant, minuscule issue that the Government are trying to make hay over, when, in fact, we have fraud that results in people being terrorised by scammers pretending to be their banks. Millions of pounds of taxpayers' money is being wasted on this Bill instead of dealing with the fraud that the hon. Member's constituents have to face every single day, which is not being tackled. He needs to tackle that.

Perhaps the Minister lives in a bizarre alternative reality where, across the country, people are attempting to impersonate their neighbours to steal their votes, but meanwhile, in this universe, you are more likely to be hit by lightning 54 times than fall victim to voter personation fraud. So let us get back to the reality that we face. The British public face a cost of living crisis, freezing temperatures, with people too scared to put their heating on, and cancelled Christmases, with working parents unable to afford festive treats. And this Conservative Government are planning to spend £180 million of taxpayers' money to introduce a completely pointless and eye-wateringly expensive change.

Aaron Bell: We heard evidence from the police in the Bill Committee. They thought that the measures on voter ID and the extra measures that we are taking to avoid intimidation would make the Act really useful for them on polling day, so that they can get on with the job that we want them to do—that is, to keep our communities safe—and not have to spend as much time dealing with cases of personation at polling stations.

Angela Rayner: I say to the hon. Member: show us the evidence. Where is the evidence of that? We have not seen the evidence, but we do know that people are choosing between heating and eating this winter. We do know that crime is on the rise and that people just do not see the police on the beat any more. We do know

[Angela Rayner]

that people are targeted by online fraud every single day of the week, with no protection and no action by their Government.

I ask the Minister: why will he not spend his time and energy tackling the huge array of issues that face the British people instead of flushing away yet more hard-earned taxpayers' cash on this pointless measure? I might be able to hazard a guess. I notice that the regulations allow 60-plus, but not 18-plus, Oyster cards—why is that? I notice that OAP bus passes will be valid, yet students IDs will not—why is that? I notice that some 4.2 million voters do not have a photo ID allowed by these regulations, yet the Government demand that we plough on—why is that?

The Minister said that voter ID does not discriminate, but I am afraid that the evidence does not quite stack up. When the Minister's colleague, a former Cabinet Office Minister—the right hon. Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith)—said that

"the evidence of our pilots shows that there is no impact on any particular demographic group from this policy."—[*Official Report*, 11 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 394.]—

the answer was based on the Electoral Commission's evaluations of the 2018 and 2019 voter ID pilots. However, in its most recent report, the commission said that it had no way of measuring the effect of voter ID on minority communities. It said:

"Polling station staff were not asked to collect demographic data about the people who did not come back, owing to the practical challenges involved in carrying out that data collection exercise".

Let us take a look into the pilots more closely. Pilots for voter ID took place in just 10 local authority areas in England. In all elections that took place in 2019, there was one conviction and one police caution for using someone else's vote at a polling station, but during the pilots, 2,000 people were turned away because they did not come to the polling station with ID. More than 750 of those did not return with ID to cast their vote. How can the Minister stand there and tell us that these measures will not make it harder for people to vote? Perhaps they are less keen on having the Government chosen by the voters than having the voters chosen by the Government.

I come on to the Government's so-called "free elector IDs". Not only are they unworkable, they are hugely expensive for already overstretched local authorities. Council leaders have warned the Government that voter ID risks damaging access to democracy and must be delayed. They say that there is simply not enough time to deal with all the risks that will be created by the new system. I wonder what the Minister has to say to the Conservative chair of the Local Government Association, James Jamieson, who said that voter ID must be delayed because:

"It is a fundamental part of the democratic process that elections can run smoothly and effectively where every citizen is able to exercise their right to vote."

What does the Minister have to say to the leader of his party's councillors?

The language and politics around voter ID used by this Government is frankly dangerous. Does the Minister not trust the voters of this country to continue to cast their ballots securely, as they have done for generations? Does he really believe that voting is not safe and secure in Britain? Ministers should be promoting confidence in our elections, not spreading baseless scare stories that threaten our democracy.

Finally, the Minister will be aware of an amendment tabled in the other place by my noble Friends on the Labour Front Bench to establish a Select Committee to conduct an assessment of the impact of the voter ID regulations on turnout in the local elections next May. If the Minister is so confident that the regulations will not create barriers to people voting, surely he cannot object to that pragmatic, common-sense proposal. Surely he has absolutely nothing to be afraid of.

I urge Members across the House, when they enter the voting Lobbies this evening, to think about our constituents who have the right to vote and may have done so for decades, but will be turned away for the first time in May. It is for that fundamental reason that these backward, unworkable and anti-democratic regulations must be stopped in their tracks.

7.30 pm

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): I will make just a few quick comments. My seat of North Swindon, as part of the Swindon Borough Council area, was part of one of the initial pilots in 2017 or 2018, so I want to make a few observations. First, turnout was up, not down. Secondly, when the pilot came to an end and we were not made part of the bigger pilot, we were inundated with complaints, because people thought that the new system was far better. That is why I am very pleased to advocate this welcome change.

I have a bit of a soft spot for the deputy leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), perhaps because we have similar music tastes. She talked about trusting people. I have now had not one, not two, not three, not four, but five Labour opponents. I can assure her that every single time one of them has been selected, the adverts for the selection meetings—in which, of course, we take a mild interest—very clearly say, "You must bring voter ID."

The whole thrust of the argument against the draft regulations is that the number of people looking to cheat the system is so small. That seems to indicate that the right hon. Lady believes that North Swindon Labour party members must all be truly terrible people—that the terrible people must all be consolidated there. I want to reassure her that that is not the case. They are actually very nice people.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman is misinterpreting the Labour rules, is he not? They do not require photo ID; they require any ID. They allow student ID, student bus cards and student railcards, all of which the Government have excluded in their gerrymandering efforts. Does he acknowledge that this Government have gerrymandered voter ID?

Justin Tomlinson: The hon. Gentleman, bless him, has got absolutely muddled. As he would have seen from the pilots if he had taken the time to look, anybody can access IDs. They are commissioned by the local authorities. It is straightforward.

The proof of the pudding was that turnout in Swindon was up during the pilot. Sadly, that pilot came to an end and we were not part of the second pilot, so we were inundated with complaints. People want to have trust in our democracy. The regulations are a brilliant thing to have brought forward.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The hon. Member talks about increased turnout. One of the highest turnouts in British history was for the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, which had a very clear result: Scotland voted to remain part of the United Kingdom. A conspiracy theory was circulated at the time that votes would be altered if people put their cross in the box with a pencil instead of a biro or a pen. That was rubbished by the general public and put in the dustbin where it belonged. Should we not trust the great British public to get these things right, as they have in the past?

Justin Tomlinson: Yes, it is about trust: trust in our world-leading democracy and trust in making sure that we can safeguard what matters. I will not stray into conspiracy theories about Scottish elections, but trust is the proof of the pudding. When there was a pilot in my constituency, voter turnout went up and people complained when the pilot came to an end. It is quite straightforward.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): The hon. Member talks about trust. Trust is incredibly important, so can he tell me why anybody should trust the Conservative party when it comes to voter fraud, given that its last leadership election—not the coronation that we have just had, but the leadership election—was delayed because of security fears and possible breaches of ballot paper processes?

Justin Tomlinson: If there is ever any question of any threat in any form, it should always be investigated. The sun comes up in the morning—it is that obvious.

I say to the Minister: hold firm. This is what the public want. It has worked in the pilots, and proceeding with it is an absolute must.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the SNP spokesperson.

7.34 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): When we stand for election, every one of us appeals to the electorate to get out and vote. We impress on them how important it is that they use their democratic right to express their will through the ballot box. We want bigger turnouts and we seek more and better engagement, yet voter ID will have a detrimental effect on turnouts. We know that because we can measure it.

The UK Government have tried on several occasions to justify voter identification cards by stating that they already exist within the UK: they are used in Northern Ireland. What they cannot say with any conviction is that they have been a success in Northern Ireland. In fact, the turnout in the first election in Northern Ireland after photographic ID was introduced was 2.3% down. If we extrapolate from the data to a UK general election, approximately 1.1 million people would not vote. That would not fall evenly across the population, so who is it that we are disenfranchising?

Angela Kitching, head of external affairs at Age UK, points out that the Government's own research has found that 6% of people over 70 would have problems with presenting the right kind of ID. It is reasonable to believe that that estimate is low, because the UK Government did not include the 500,000 people in care homes and sheltered accommodation in their research. It is no surprise that Angela Kitching has described the idea as being "for the fairies".

The Royal National Institute of Blind People says that

"this will disproportionately disenfranchise blind and partially sighted people, particularly older blind and partially sighted people."

The Royal Mencap Society has raised concerns that

"voter ID could simply result in yet another barrier to people with a learning disability participating in elections."

Sense, the national charity that supports people with complex disabilities, has also raised concerns, saying:

"Given the barriers that already face disabled people while voting, Sense is concerned that this could make it harder for some disabled people to vote."

Concerns have been raised by groups representing LGBTQ+ communities, including the LGBT Foundation, Mermaids and Stonewall. The Runnymede Trust has raised concerns that introducing a voter ID requirement would add further barriers to voting for black and ethnic minority groups.

Those groups should not be disadvantaged. Their votes and their views are not worth less. Pilots have shown that 30% of people who had their ballot paper refused for lack of ID did not return later with an ID to vote. Were all those people trying to impersonate someone? I do not think so.

As has been mentioned, this measure will disproportionately impact younger voters. ID such as an Oyster 60+ card is valid, but an Oyster 18+ card is not. Despite the calls for railcards or student IDs to be accepted, the Government have refused.

Of course, change attracts a financial cost. Disappointingly, the UK Government do not know how much this change will cost. Their assessment is £150 million, based on an assumed take-up of 2%, but a UK Government survey found that 31% of people said they would apply for a voter ID card. The impact assessment estimates that an additional £10.2 million should be added for each additional percentage point, which brings the cost of that 31% to £450 million.

In truth, we do not know, because the people surveyed were not informed of the existing photographic ID that would be acceptable, nor were they informed that out-of-date photographic ID would be acceptable. There is more confusion on which we are supposed to legislate: we need a clearer explanation of how having a period of validity for a voter card could work if its expiry date was not a bar to using it for its sole purpose at a polling station.

What is driving this change? Photographic voter ID is supposed to be required to address the issue of personation—occasions when somebody pretends to be another elector and votes on their behalf. We are asking people who work a very long day in polling places to verify visually that each voter looks like the photo ID that they present and, if they are not happy, to refuse that

[Ronnie Cowan]

person the right to vote. That is a burden that will weigh heavily on many of those who, until now, have diligently staffed polling places.

For us to go to such lengths as introducing photographic voter ID, placing such a burden on electoral staff and risking disenfranchising 1.1 million voters, personation would have to be a massive problem. Yet, as the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) said, with more than 58 million votes cast in elections in 2019, there were 33 counts of personation at a polling station. As we have heard, that comprises 0.000057%. When we consider the number of people cautioned for or convicted of personation, the proportion is reduced to 0.0000035% of votes cast. This is a sledgehammer looking for a nut to crack. It is a solution looking for a problem. The long and short of it is that this legislation has been pushed through with little substantial evidence of its value.

For as long as Scotland remains part of the United Kingdom and Westminster has the power to affect the voting franchise and the electoral process in Scotland—even if that involves elections to this place—we in the Scottish National party will hold Westminster to account, and will demand that any changes must be transparent, considered, constructive and inclusive. The motion does not satisfy those criteria.

7.40 pm

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): I have listened with great interest to the Minister's assurances to the House and the country, but it will not surprise Conservative Members to learn that I am not assured, nor will my constituents be assured.

Tony Benn talked of the importance of the vote. He talked very movingly of the way in which universal suffrage had helped to transfer power from the marketplace to the ballot box, giving our citizens the right to obtain through voting what they could not obtain through their wallets, whether it be free healthcare, free education, or a say in our country's laws. That right is under threat from these regulations, which are littered with discriminatory inconsistencies. They are not, in fact, a sledgehammer to crack a nut, but, in my view, a deliberate voter suppression strategy—a strategy not to suppress just any voters, but to suppress certain groups of voters in particular.

These regulations are straight out of the right-wing United States Republican playbook. Over there, they try to find ways of stopping people being able to vote. How else can we explain the way in which young people are discriminated against in the regulations? I believe they are a deliberate voter suppression strategy against working-class communities in particular, and, in particular, black and ethnic minority working-class communities and young working-class people, because the Conservatives have taken the view that those are the people who are less likely to vote for them.

The regulations also have a broader context that should disturb all of us who are concerned about hard-won British democratic freedoms. In our society, there are three main ways for people to fight back against unpopular policies or express discontent with a Government they do not like, or an employer they do not like. There is the right to protest peacefully, the right to take industrial action and withdraw labour, and, of course, the right to vote. These regulations on voter ID need to be seen within the context of an authoritarian drift on the part of a Government who have in their sights the right to protest peacefully, the right to take strike action, and the right to vote with ease. That is profoundly disturbing. The Members on the other side of the debate are probably split between those who believe that this is necessary and desirable and those who do not really believe that it is necessary and desirable, but are going along with it because they are going along with that authoritarian drift.

Even if we were to accept the introduction of voter ID, which I and others certainly do not, when we look at the inconsistencies in the regulations with regard to which voter ID is acceptable and which is not, we see that it is a real dog's dinner—a real anti-democratic dog's dinner. These regulations should send a shiver down the spines of all those who believe in civil and democratic liberties in our society. They should send a shiver down the spines of people, regardless of their political views, who believe that the right of every citizen to vote, the right of every worker to withdraw labour and the right of every citizen to engage in peaceful protest are rights that were hard won and should be cherished and defended. It is because we defend those hard-won civil liberties and principles that we oppose these regulations, and oppose this Government's disgraceful authoritarian drift.

7.44 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The proposal will result in voter suppression, and I want to raise a number of concerns about its implementation, based on feedback from colleagues on Plymouth City Council, which represents one of the poorest communities in the country. Being in the south-west of England, surrounded by lovely beaches and gorgeous countryside, we are often not considered to be one of the poorest communities, but many of the problems experienced by some of the poorest communities in the north and the midlands are also present in the south-west.

I greatly fear that this proposal will not increase turnout, and I think that any Government who seek to introduce electoral reforms with the objective of not increasing turnout should look again at why they are doing it. What is their motivation? The proposal will cut turnout; in certain target demographics, the Conservative party will have a partisan advantage over other parties, which should also make us look again at the reasons for the proposal.

Many of the concerns were expressed during a group discussion between Councillor Tudor Evans, the leader of the Labour opposition on Plymouth City Council, and his councillors. I think they are genuinely meaningful, and I should be grateful if the Minister responded to them when he sums up the debate. One of them relates to the number of people who might be unable to obtain voter ID. On the basis of Government figures, the council estimates that about 4% of voters—8,000 people in Plymouth—will not have access to the photo ID that will be required for them to vote, which means that a great many people will not be able to cast their ballot without embarking on a bureaucratic process to secure it.

The concern in this regard is that councils will not be able, in the time that is allowed, to process the necessary number of applications. Councils are not full of staff

twiddling their thumbs and looking idle, but they do not have the capacity to enable electoral officers to work flat out to process these IDs. Even if it were possible for that to be done on time—which it is not—resources would be diverted from jobs on which councils should be focusing.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): My hon. Friend is right to say that this is about the disenfranchisement of, in particular, young people and black and ethnic minorities. As he also said, it is impractical too. The Local Government Association has talked of delaying the timetable beyond the local elections. I am fundamentally against the proposal and will vote accordingly, but I hope my hon. Friend agrees that we need to look again at this unrealistic timetable.

Luke Pollard: I agree that the timetable is important. Regardless of party, we should all be seeking to make good legislation, with a good outcome. Rushed legislation will not lead to a good outcome, and I fear that rushed legislation is exactly what we have before us.

One of the concerns that many councils have is that the software required for them to produce valid certificates enabling people to vote if they do not have what legislation defines as legitimate forms of photo ID will not arrive until the start of next year, and has not been tested and integrated into other local IT systems that councils possess. Even councils that want to process the IDs for as many people as possible cannot yet do so. Plymouth City Council estimates that it will take eight minutes to process a single piece of voter ID for someone who does not have one, and 8,000 people in Plymouth do not have one. That means an awful lot of work: someone will be working their socks off to be able to deliver it.

This will also involve additional bureaucracy and cost. I asked a parliamentary question about the number of mirrors that would be required for the legislation to work, which produced some very puzzled faces. Why was I asking about mirrors? The answer is that the legislation will require 40,000 mirrors to be purchased by local councils to enable people in polling stations to readjust their masks or religious garments after taking them off to demonstrate that they are who they are, should they be asked to do so. It will also require the purchase of 40,000 privacy screens so that people can do that outside the public gaze, particularly for religious reasons.

Furthermore, the legislation will require a woman to be present as one of the polling clerk staff throughout the day. I think we should be seeking more women to be polling clerks, but we know that many polling stations do not have female coverage across the entirety of the day. That would now be required, under these regulations, so we are asking councils that are deeply in debt and struggling to afford social care for some of our poorest people to go on to eBay and buy mirrors. We would need one mirror for every polling station and we would probably need some spares in case one got smashed along the way.

It is a warped priority for councils to be buying mirrors, so can the Minister say whether the Government will be providing privacy screens and mirrors for every single polling station, or whether that cost will be put on to hard-pressed council taxpayers? I suspect that if the parties were in opposite positions and we were introducing this, Conservative Members would be saying, "Look at this Labour Government waste, buying mirrors and privacy screens." Why is that not being said here? The £180 million cost is a significant amount of money that should be being spent on social care. The Tory-run Plymouth City Council is £37 million in deficit at the moment, and I want it to spend every single penny on essential public services, not on this type of bureaucracy.

Another concern I would like the Minister to address is the safety of polling clerks at the polling stations. We have to assume that refusing people or asking them for ID will generate a certain level of friction among some of the people seeking to cast their vote. Plymouth has 105 polling stations and there is real concern about what advice has been and will be given to those polling clerks about what happens if that friction turns into violence. Will there be adequate policing resources available on polling day to ensure that those polling clerks are safe when they ask people for ID or when they have to refuse them? What about the people who do not return when they have been refused? Our SNP colleague, the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan), estimated that this would involve nearly a third of the people. That is an enormous number of people who might be in possession of the correct form of identification but do not have it with them when they go to vote. That is an awful lot of people who simply will not return, and not just for that election, because it will damage their voting experience for the rest of their lives.

I want to put on record a concern about the rural impact of the proposal. People who live in an urban area who are refused because they have left their ID at home might be able to walk back to their polling station easily, but those who live in a rural area and must travel large distances to get to their polling station are less likely to return. There is an urban-rural divide.

How will the Minister judge the success or failure of this measure? We know that there has been only one conviction, so in the Minister's eyes, how many people being refused their right to vote will class the proposal a success, and what is the level at which it tips over to be a failure? I think that a single person being denied the right to vote is a failure, but I understand that the Government have taken a different view, and I would like to understand how many people must be turned away for this not to be successful.

This is not a piece of legislation of which the House can be proud. More importantly, it is not a piece of legislation of which the Minister should be proud. After this piece of voter suppression delivers partisan advantage in May and turns out to be a failure because people are refused their right to vote on a widespread basis—heaven help us if there is violence or if a poll clerk gets injured because of this—what do the Government think success looks like? Denying people their vote is never a success; it is always a failure, and I think that is what this piece of legislation will be.

7.53 pm

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): In mid-October, the Chancellor of the Exchequer stood here and warned us that eye-wateringly difficult decisions would need to be made by the Government to stabilise public finances following the disastrous October mini-Budget, yet today we are being asked to pass regulations and put the final touches to a scheme that will cost £180 million over

[Helen Morgan]

the next 10 years to solve the issue of just 33 allegations of voter fraud in 2019, with only one conviction and one caution. That might look like good value for money to the Conservatives, but the truth is that it is a staggering waste of money. In the midst of a cost of living crisis and a self-inflicted financial disaster, it beggars belief that this scheme is going ahead. Our councils are cutting critical services because of extreme financial pressure and we should not be burdening them with the additional cost of a scheme that is totally unnecessary. Whether it is for mirrors, privacy screens or ID cards, it is all a complete waste of their time.

But is worse than that: not only is photo ID for voting not really needed, but the plan is not even expected to work particularly well. The chair of the Electoral Commission has told Ministers that the plans cannot be delivered in a way that is

"fully secure, accessible, and workable"

in time for next May's local elections. The Conservative chair of the Local Government Association is calling for the implementation of voter ID to be delayed because the LGA simply does not have time to get the plans in place for May without access to votes being put at risk.

The most worrying element, as colleagues have pointed out, is that the likely effect of all this will be selective voter suppression. Research has shown that there might be around 3.5 million people without the right ID and that those people are more likely to be the most vulnerable in society, such as those with limiting disabilities, as well as younger voters, black and ethnic minorities and the least well off in society. The Cabinet Office has already admitted that around 42% of those without photo ID are estimated to be unlikely to apply for a voter ID card. The proposed acceptable forms of ID include a 60+ Oyster card or bus pass, but not the young person's equivalent. This will disproportionately disadvantage students and young people. The Government have shown no concern at all about the possibility of postal voter fraud, which will not require any form of ID; I fear that is down to the fact that postal voters are most likely to be older and to vote Conservative, while the young and the other groups I have mentioned are more likely to support an Opposition party.

There is no need to go into any further detail. In summary, I urge the House to consider the facts: we do not need photo ID, we cannot afford to implement the scheme and the proposals will simply lead to voter suppression. This Government should be trying to give the next generation a reason to vote for them, not to supress their view because they have offered them nothing. Scrapping this legislation is not an eye-wateringly difficult decision. It would be a common-sense course of action. The Liberal Democrats are determined to end this legislation and I therefore urge all Members to vote against it today.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): Where are they, then? Where are all the Lib Dems?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. No shouting out. I call John McDonnell.

7.57 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): The debate so far has been superb and I want to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) on the expert way in which she completely took apart the Government's arguments. I was 20 years in local government before I came here, and the last exercise in voter suppression was the poll tax. I was in local government at the time—I was chief executive of the Association of London Authorities, which represented both Conservative and Labour councils—and we explained to the then Government what the effect of introducing the poll tax legislation would be. It might well have been advertised as a fairer way of funding local government and collecting resources, but we argued that the Government needed to be careful because it could also possibly result in voter suppression. Naively, we did not think that that was an exercise being deliberately undertaken by the Government.

Although the poll tax brought down Mrs Thatcher as Prime Minister, it ensured that a Tory Government were elected in 1992 because of what happened in many constituencies. Take my own constituency as an example, where 5,000 mainly working-class people dropped off the register. As a result, there were four recounts and I lost by 54 votes. I know every one of them and I visit them every so often, but there we are. That was an exercise that was done for one reason but actually had a sub-reason, which was voter suppression, and unfortunately I think that is what is happening today.

My second point is that, because of my local government background, I know that there is a long tradition that we listen to our electoral administrators. They are the one group of people in an authority whose professionalism we do not contest, because they serve all political parties, and they do so independently and to the best of their abilities. Most of them have limited staff and limited resources, and they are not particularly well paid either. Survey after survey shows the majority have no confidence that they can deliver this change in time for the local elections. First, they do not have the staff in place because of cutbacks. Secondly, they do not have time to have their computer systems properly tested and operating effectively. Thirdly, they do not have time to launch campaigns informing people of what they need to do to register. Even if they launch a campaign and it is sufficiently successful, the prediction is that anything up to 16% of the electorate might apply but there will not be the staff to administer it.

We should listen to the constitution unit's report: this is an accident waiting to happen. Just in administrative terms, whatever the political motivations, this policy is not supportable and is not needed, as has been demonstrated by speech after speech. Unfortunately, not only is it a policy that will ensure some people do not get the right to vote and will cause conflict and contests at individual polling stations, but it is a policy that people will come to regret. It smacks of the dangerous dogs legislation, on which we cannot find anyone who supported it or promoted it.

My only reason for speaking in this debate, apart from my local government experience, is so that when people examine this legislation in six, 12 or 18 months' time, or in the years ahead, I will be on the record as speaking out against it. I think this is a disaster waiting to happen.

8.1 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): The policy of requiring people to have ID to vote is simply a corruption of our democracy. It knowingly suppresses poorer communities, so the Tories can cling on to power during their economic disaster.

We know that some 30% of people do not vote in general elections already; we know that, of the 243 million votes cast in the past 10 years, there are only a handful of examples of fraud; and we know that some 2% of the population do not have a driving licence, a passport or another form of ID, and that they will now be required to go and get that ID. Many of them will not get that ID and will therefore be automatically disenfranchised.

We know that the poor will be disproportionately hit; we know the disabled will be hit; we know black and ethnic minorities will be hit; and we know the young will be hit. We also know these regulations allow older people, but not younger people, to use travel cards, such as Oyster cards, as voter ID. This policy is overtly discriminatory and is clearly designed to suppress votes and to load the dice at a future election.

Aneurin Bevan, who famously started the health service, would be 125 years old if he were still alive today. In "In Place of Fear", his political analysis was that British politics is a struggle between property and the interests of property, by which he meant the Conservatives, and poverty, by which he meant the mass of people represented by the Labour party. He took the view that, in difficult economic times, property would attack democracy itself.

At a time when one in four people is now in food poverty, thanks to the incompetence and cynicism of the Conservative party, we have a situation in which the Conservatives are attacking democracy itself. They are attacking the right to peaceful protest, and they are now attacking the right to vote by requiring voter ID. This is a transparent attempt to corrupt democracy. It is totally wrong, and I hope a future Labour Government will repeal it immediately.

8.4 pm

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): The whole debate around voter ID and the safety of our voting system is slightly Trumpian. This is exactly what happened in the US: the far right tried to claim the system is not safe and that people cannot trust it, and then, when a clearly democratic result came around that it did not like, the far right whipped up its henchmen by saying, "This was an unfair vote." We know that that is not the case in Britain, and we know it has never been the case in Britain.

The Conservative party and this Government talking down the safety of our electoral system is exactly what these voter ID regulations are about. It my view, it is extremely dangerous. I asked numerous times in Committee on the Elections Act 2022 for a public assessment of why certain forms of voter ID are acceptable and others are not. I was particularly concerned about why student cards and young people's cards will not be accepted. Not once have the Government published their rubric of why certain ID cards will be accepted and others will not.

It is interesting that, in applying for temporary or permanent voter ID, one piece of evidence that a local authority can accept is that the applicant is on the roll of a local educational institution, but a polling station will not accept the card from that educational institution. That barrier makes no sense. The Government cannot say, on the one hand, that evidence from the educational institution is not acceptable to vote but, on the other hand, that it is perfectly acceptable as the sole piece of evidence to get a voter ID card from a local authority—no further evidence is required—other than the barrier of having to apply days in advance.

Under the regulations, however, a voter can apply for a temporary ID card up to the day before an election, if the electoral returning officer believes they would not have been able to apply in advance. Why on earth could they not apply for it at the polling station by showing another form of ID, by allowing the polling clerk to make a determination? Surely it is only because the Government want to make sure that people who would not have ID cannot vote.

Government data shows that about a third of people have only one piece of ID. My mother has only a passport. She has an old-fashioned paper driving licence, and she does not have any other form of ID. What would she do if her passport needed to be renewed and an election were called? Given the mess in the Home Office, she might be waiting months, if not longer, to get her passport. It is the same with a driving licence. A person who moves house might wait months to get their new driving licence, but they have rightly chopped up their old licence and sent it back. They might then have no voter ID. Despite the Government saying that only a single-figure percentage of the population do not have ID, anyone renewing an equivalent ID might have no form of voter ID during the renewal period.

According to the Government's data, 6% of people say they will be less likely to vote. What is 6% in each constituency? It is about 3,000 voters on average. About 40 Conservative constituencies have a majority of less than 4,000. That is 40 Conservative constituencies that might hold on a bit longer, meaning the Conservatives claw on to power despite the popular will.

Let us consider travelcards, for example. Even the Government's own research shows that 4% of young and middle-aged people believe their travelcard can be used as voter ID. If they turned up to the polling station with that ID, every single one of them would be refused a vote—that is not to mention the embarrassment of being turned away—and many of them, about a third, would not bother to return. Those numbers would change about 15 results at an election. That might make a difference in a tight election.

The Minister said the professional world has mixed views about the implementation of voter ID, which I am afraid is just not true. The Minister is either mistaken or something far worse, and I would not believe that of this very good Minister. The reality is that every single professional body—the Local Government Association, the Electoral Commission, the Association of Electoral Administrators—says that the implementation of these regulations at this time is dangerous. They know it is dangerous because they have not been able to roll out even a card-based voter ID. It will be a piece of paper produced by the local authority. A piece of paper! Really? They will accept a piece of paper that an electoral services officer may have authorised, but they will not accept a travelcard that has to be applied for with a proper form of ID. It is ridiculous.

[Lloyd Russell-Moyle]

The regulations will allow people in the community to attest that someone is who they say they are, but they will allow a person in the community to attest for only two people every election publication cycle. A doctor, a teacher or the one lawyer in a poor community might want to attest for many people, to say that they have known a person for a long time, but they will only be able to do so for two people. If those people cannot prove through other means who they are they are—there are other means, I grant that—they will not be able to go to their doctor, because the doctor will have used up their two for that year. Those are unnecessary burdens. We do not put that burden on applying for a passport or any other form of ID. Those arbitrary numbers are deliberately designed to attack the poorest who would not have access to others.

The Government's own data says that those who are trans or non-binary, who might be sick or have cancer, or who have experienced large amounts of weight loss and look significantly different, might face difficulties getting past the electoral services officer, but they have no plans to do anything about that apart from highlight to the polling stations that they should be cautious about that. How can they highlight to someone that they should be cautious that someone might not look like their ID, and at the same time say that they must refuse anyone who does not look like their ID? The Government's own impact assessment does not make sense. The impact assessment on age says that they do not think that will be a significant difference, but the data itself says there will be a 4% to 6% drop in young people going to the polls. We know that those people are already less likely to vote.

We can have an argument about whether we should have electoral ID or not. We can have an argument about whether it should be photo ID or the wider version. The Electoral Commission said that it preferred any form of ID, such as a credit card or other form of named evidence. We can have those arguments and we will continue to do so, but this instrument is being introduced with less than five months to go before nationwide polls, and no council administrator believes that they will be able to operate it safely. That is undermining our local councils. We know why the Government are trying to do that: they know that they will lose a load of their councils because people are fed up with the nasty Conservatives undermining their democracy and their councils. This should not pass.

8.12 pm

Lee Rowley: It has been an interesting debate, with quite a large proportion of it rerunning the previous legislative discussion, which I will not spend time at the Dispatch Box responding to. There is a question about temperateness of language, particularly some of the language used in places. This is our attempt to ensure there is integrity within the voting system. Quite frankly, some of the statements tonight should be considered in the round.

The Government's focus is on ensuring that the system is set up fairly, working with those who want to ensure that the implementation works, dealing with the detail and making sure that happens. We can rerun the previous debate, as many Members seem to wish to, or we get on with the job. We are choosing to get on with the job.

I will turn briefly to a number of comments from Opposition Members. The hon. Members for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) and for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan) both talked about resource and funding. There is additional funding coming for this activity. Some of it has already been provided to local councils and is already being used today to prepare for what is coming in a number of months' time.

The Opposition spokesperson, the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), made a series of statements, or claims—or however one would like to state it. One of them was that voter personation is rare, but the OSCE report says about the United Kingdom:

"concerns are regularly expressed with regards to the lack of safeguards against possible fraud resultant from a weak system of voter registration and postal voting, compounded by the absence of a requirement to produce identification at any stage of the process."

[Interruption.] The right hon. Lady heckles because she does not want to talk about what independent assessors have highlighted. The Government are trying to respond to that over time.

Secondly, the right hon. Lady talked about the use of dangerous language. She calls voter ID backwards and unworkable. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who was the only Opposition Member who rose to support the changes we are making, has been dealing with this system for the last 15 years. Thirdly, the right hon. Lady highlights the concern about the breadth of ID that can be used. *[Interruption.]* For the record, I will read the list of acceptable documentation, because the right hon. Lady does not seem to want to either read it or understand it: a United Kingdom passport, a passport issued by a European economic area state or Commonwealth country, a driving licence—*[Interruption.]*

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am trying to listen to the Minister. Four Opposition Members are speaking at the same time. It would be easier if they did not.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. There is quite a lot of noise on both sides. I would suggest that we listen to the list being read out by the Minister.

Lee Rowley: For the record: a United Kingdom passport, a passport issued by an EEA state or Commonwealth country, a full driving licence, a provisional driving licence, a UK biometric immigration document, an identity card bearing proof of age, a standard scheme hologram PASS card, a defence identity card, a blue badge, a voter authority certificate or a temporary voter authority certificate, an anonymous electors document, a Northern Ireland electoral identity card, or a national identity card issued by an EEA state. *[Interruption.]* The list goes on, because we are trying to ensure that this approach works over the long term.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. If the Minister does not want to give way, he is not going to. It is up to him.

Lee Rowley: I am not giving way only because the Opposition asked a series of questions and I am seeking to answer them. Indeed, it is incumbent upon the Opposition to listen to the answers that I am giving.

Finally, the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon), with his liberal sprinkling of rather outrageous hyperbole, talked of Tony Benn and the working class. This working-class kid from Tony Benn's constituency knows exactly what constituents in places such as Chesterfield or the one that I have the privilege to represent would say if they were asked about this. Their views would be closer to mine than the hon. Gentleman's quite outrageous indications. It is for that reason, and for the security and integrity of the ballot box, that I commend this SI to the House.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 298, Noes 199.

Division No. 123] [8.18 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Sir 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
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davison, Dehenna
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Double, Steve
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James
Duguid, David
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh 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
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heappey, rh James
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, Tom
Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lockhart, Carla
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McVey, rh Esther
Mercer, Johnny
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morrissey, Joy
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, rh Victoria
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, rh Jeremy
Quince, Will
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Roberts, Rob

Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, rh Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, Royston
Spencer, Dr Ben
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Trott, Laura
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallis, Dr Jamie
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jacob Young and Amanda Solloway

NOES

Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman, Kirsty
Bonnar, Steven
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Clark, Feryal
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Davies-Jones, Alex
Davis, rh Mr David
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dixon, Samantha
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Doughty, Stephen
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Flynn, Stephen
Foord, Richard
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Dame Nia
Hamilton, Fabian
Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lavery, Ian
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Linden, David
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
MacAskill, Kenny
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McLaughlin, Anne
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Norris, Alex
Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owatemi, Taiwo
Owen, Sarah
Pennycook, Matthew
Phillips, Jess
Pollard, Luke
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Reeves, Ellie
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheppard, Tommy
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thomas, Gareth
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
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Mary Glindon and Christian Wakeford

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Voter Identification Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 3 November, be approved.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Penny Mordaunt relating to Standards: Code of Conduct and Guide to the Rules not later than two hours after the commencement of proceedings on that Motion; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; the business on that Motion may be entered upon and proceeded with at any hour, though opposed; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—*(Penny Mordaunt.)*

Standards: Code of Conduct and Guide to the Rules

[Relevant Documents: First Report of the Committee on Standards, New Code of Conduct and Guide to the Rules: promoting appropriate values, attitudes and behaviour in Parliament, HC 227; Third Report of the Committee on Standards, New Guide to the Rules: final proposals, HC 544, and the Government Response, HC 709.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I inform the House that I have selected amendments (a) and (b) as listed on the Order Paper. I shall call Chris Bryant to move his amendments at the end of the debate.

8.31 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Penny Mordaunt): I beg to move,

That—

(1) this House takes note of:

(a) the First Report from the Committee on Standards, on New Code of Conduct and Guide to the Rules: promoting appropriate values, attitudes and behaviours in Parliament (HC 227), and approves the revised Code of Conduct for Members annexed to that Report, subject to the following amendment:

In section C (Seven Principles of Public Life): leave out "; as set out below, they are supplemented by descriptors, which apply specifically to Members of Parliament" and the Principles and descriptors as set out in the Report and insert:

"**Selflessness**

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs."

(b) the Third Report from the Committee on Standards on New Guide to the Rules: final proposals (HC 544), and approves the revised Guide to the Rules relating to the Conduct of Members annexed to that Report, subject to the following amendments:

(i) In Introduction, paragraph 14, leave out, "Whilst Members are not required to register Ministerial office" and insert, "Members are not required to register either Ministerial office or benefits received in their capacity as a Minister".

(ii) In Chapter 1 (Registration of Members' Financial Interests), paragraph 17, at end insert: "() Donations or other support received in a Member's capacity as a Minister, which should be recorded, if necessary, within the relevant Government Department in accordance with the Ministerial Code."

with effect from 1 March 2023, except that paragraph 8 of Chapter 3 of the Guide to the Rules shall only have effect in respect of past financial interests or material benefits from six months after the date on which the revised code and guide come into effect.

(2) previous Resolutions of this House in relation to the conduct of Members shall be read and given effect in a way which is compatible with the Code of Conduct and the Guide to the Rules relating to the Conduct of Members.

The House is being asked to consider a motion today which would take note of the first report from the Committee on Standards, "New Code of Conduct and Guide to the Rules: promoting appropriate values, attitudes and behaviours in Parliament", and approve the revised Code of Conduct for Members annexed to that report. The motion would also take note of the third report from the Committee on Standards, "New Guide to the Rules: final proposals", and approve the revised Guide to the Rules Relating to the Conduct of Members annexed to that report.

This is House business, and Members will be asked to make up their own minds on these matters—I sense the panic already, but I hope Members, even if they do not contribute to the debate, will feel free to ask questions and fully apprise themselves of the issues at hand. As Members of Parliament we must uphold the highest standards in public life, acting with integrity and professionalism. I believe these reforms are an important step in that process, building on the progress this House made in October when we approved the introduction of a new formal appeals process.

I am grateful to the Committee on Standards for its work reviewing the code of conduct for Members and the overall operation of the standards system in the House of Commons. I welcome the engagement that is happening in this area and the conversations I have had with the Chair of the Committee, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant); I look forward to hearing from him and I expect he will wish to take Members through the details of his Committee's work, so I will not steal his thunder.

The Government have carefully considered his Committee's recommendations and reports. The Committee has proposed around 20 substantive changes; at the time of the Government response, we had disagreement with five of those, but that has subsequently been reduced to disagreement with just two.

We have already acted in one vital area. In October, the House of Commons unanimously agreed the introduction of an appeals process for standards cases. We have reflected upon and now accept the Committee's recommendation on the "serious wrong" exemption, and the recommended introduction of a requirement for Members who undertake outside work to obtain a written contract or separate letter of undertaking that their duties will not include lobbying or the provision of paid parliamentary advice. The Committee has also moved on its position on initiation versus participation, and now agrees with the Government. I hope those changes will show that the Committee and the House are listening, and that we are seeking ways of finding cross-party consensus on addressing these issues.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I think the Leader of the House means that the Government now agree with the Committee, because the Committee certainly has not changed its position on initiating and participating. I think that that was the tenor of the letter that she sent me last week.

Penny Mordaunt: I understood that it was the other way around, but the important point is, I think, that we agree. My remarks will, for the benefit of Members, focus largely on the areas in which we disagree, because I think those are what people would like to hear about.

The first area is in relation to the seven principles in public life. Amendment (a) in the name of the hon. Member for Rhondda seeks to reinsert into the code customised descriptors of the seven principles in public life. The Government have chosen to leave out those recommendations from the Committee and maintain the status quo in relation to the seven principles. The Government believe that those principles and their descriptors should remain the basis of the MPs' code of conduct, and that the principles, as set out in the code, should be updated to the version published by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in 2013. The strength of the principles lies, in part, in the fact that they are a long-standing and widely understood set of standards expected of all public office holders. Adjustments of the kind suggested to the descriptors would undermine that universality. It is therefore preferable to retain the descriptors put forward by the Committee on Standards in Public Life when the principles were last updated as a whole.

The second area of disagreement is in relation to ministerial declarations. The hon. Gentleman has claimed that there is an exception for Ministers. That is not the case. We have two systems of reporting interests. First, there are MPs' interests, which are in accordance with the rules of this House and subject to oversight by the commissioner, the Committee on Standards and, ultimately, the House. Secondly, there are ministerial declarations, the basis of which is the ministerial code. The rules regulating Members' interests and ministerial interests are distinct for a good reason, reflecting the underlying constitutional principle of the separation of powers and the operational differences between the role of an MP and that of a Minister. In addition, Members should not have to use the resources of their parliamentary offices, which should be focused on constituency business, to declare ministerial interests.

The hon. Gentleman is asking in amendment (b) for dual reporting. He wants, by March, to make Ministers and envoys—trade envoys and others—report on a monthly basis information that will, at that time, be available only quarterly. If an MP is in breach, they may face two possibly concurrent investigations—one on the ministerial route and one by this House. Nor is it clear how that would be applied. Perhaps in his remarks, the hon. Gentleman could clarify for the House what the threshold for a Minister would be. If the hon. Gentleman wants parity between Ministers and MPs, is he asking for the threshold to be £300 or the current, more stringent threshold for Ministers of £140? Could he confirm whether that applies to shadow Ministers?

Despite the problems that I have outlined, and the suggestion of the hon. Member for Rhondda, I agree that there needs to be more parity between MPs' and ministerial reporting. I will set out the changes that the Government intend to make.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): I am grateful for the way in which the Government have moved on many aspects of the report by the Committee on Standards, but I hope that the Leader of the House agrees that there is a problem with ministerial reporting. On many occasions, Departments fail to deliver their quarterly reports. I understand that the Government have some proposals and I am looking forward to hearing them, but will my right hon. Friend assure us, given that we will vote tonight, that the proposals will be delivered in a timely manner so that there is transparency about the way in which Ministers publicly report their receivables?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. He is right: the current situation is unacceptable and the Committee has a valid point. I hope that I will suggest a way in which we can address that. However, it is important to say that if we do it in the way that the Committee suggests, we will end up in some difficulty, which I shall explain.

First, we have extensively reviewed the existing guidance on transparency data. I have also audited each Department's returns and sat down with the propriety and ethics team to look at ways in which we can improve the timeliness, quality and transparency of Ministers' data and ease of access to it. The guidance, which we have reviewed, will be published online on GOV.UK for the first time. It commits Departments to publishing data within 90 days of the end of each quarterly reporting period. That is a modest, but necessary first step.

Our goal will be first to ensure that all Departments are complying with their current obligations consistently, as reflected in the new guidance as soon as it comes into effect. We will then look to move to a system of reporting that provides the parity that the Committee on Standards is seeking on transparency and timeliness. That means monthly reporting.

The Cabinet Office will also consider the alignment of ministerial returns with the House's system and the frequency of publication, as part of the Government's wider consideration of the Boardman and Committee on Standards in Public Life recommendations. It is reasonable to conclude that work by the start of the summer. My plan is therefore about three months' adrift of that of the Committee on Standards.

The Government are fully committed to transparency and to ensuring that all Ministers are held to account for maintaining high standards of behaviour and upholding the highest standards of propriety, as the public rightly expect, but we need to avoid creating a system that delivers further confusion and unintended consequences. That is why I have outlined the alternative proposal from the Government today. I have worked closely with colleagues across Government to set out how we will improve our system, and if the Committee on Standards remains concerned, I commit to revisiting the issue and engaging with ministerial colleagues to drive further improvements.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I am grateful for the way in which the Leader of the House has engaged with the matter. The whole House understands that there are what a "Yes Minister" script would describe as "administrative difficulties" with recording ministerial interests in a timely manner. However, surely the objective should be—we had a lot of evidence about this—that a member of the public can find in one place where Members have registrable interests, whether they are Ministers or not. Could we end up with a system, even if it were just a reporting mechanism that put stuff on the register without obligation, whereby the Register of Members' Financial Interests showed all ministerial declared interests as well as all other Members' interests in one place? That is the sort of accountability and transparency that the public are entitled to expect.

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I have had those discussions with the propriety and ethics team. This needs to be taken in steps, and we have to get Departments producing the right data in a consistent fashion for that to happen, but I have already had discussions with them about how we would design a system that puts all this in one place. I am very clear that the objectives the Standards Committee have are that this information is as accessible as the Register of Members' Financial Interests and on a par with the timing of the register. In amendment (b) the hon. Member for Rhondda proposes a system of reporting immediately in March, when this comes into effect, that the Whitehall machine will currently not be able to deliver on.

Chris Bryant: Really?

Penny Mordaunt: It will not, but we can move to that system. At the moment Departments can produce this information only on a quarterly basis, and by March that will still be the case.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Imagine I am a layman: may I ask why? This does not seem beyond the wit of man; we all have to do it as Members of Parliament. There are considerably more staff in Whitehall than I have in my office. So I simply ask: really?

Penny Mordaunt: I am afraid so, and if the hon. Lady would like to know more I can bore her for hours on this. I have been through literally every single Department's processes and returns, and some of the information takes a while to extract, such as that from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. That is not an acceptable situation and it needs to change. I have set out how we will do that and by when I think we will have been able to do so, but I cannot stand at the Dispatch Box today and say that by March we will have a system where Labour Members of Parliament and Members of Parliament on the Government side of the House, if they are envoys or Ministers, will be able to report on a monthly basis. We can move to that system, and I think for the sake of a few months we should do this properly and get Whitehall in the place it needs to be in.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I am concerned to hear that the Leader of the House is hiding behind officials, really. Members on the Opposition side of the House have a responsibility to make sure our records are correct; surely that applies to Members on the Government side of the House, whether they are a Minister or not?

Penny Mordaunt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this point, because this does apply to those on his side of the House: among his colleagues on his Benches there will be trade envoys and other people

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undertaking work for the Government, and this will apply to them. I do not disagree that there should be parity between the two systems in access, transparency and timeliness; what I am saying is that the way in which the Committee has suggested this happen in amendment (b) will fail, and in a few months' time—beyond March, when this system will come in—we will be in a position where we can succeed. That is what I am setting out for the House; it is for Members to decide, and they can vote whichever way they like. I am just apprising them of the facts. Anyone who wants to come and look at the audits I have done will regret it, but they are more than welcome.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): Given that we have not had ministerial reporting since the end of May 2022 and the Leader of the House is now asking us to give her more time to bring a process into place, when can we expect to see up-to-date ministerial reporting?

Penny Mordaunt: As I have outlined in my speech, the new guidance has been put in place and will come into effect this spring. By the time the Committee wants the reforms we are voting on today to come into effect, Whitehall will be back up to what it is supposed to be doing now, and I think a few months after then, as we head into summer, we should have a system in place that will enable us to report at the same timeframes as MPs' interests. Then we can potentially look at moving to having just one system rather than separate reporting by each ministerial Department. Those are the conversations I have had with the propriety and ethics team.

The effectiveness of our standards system and the code of conduct rests on its commanding the confidence of both the public and Members on a cross-party basis. Approval of the proposed reforms and strengthening of the rules will represent an important step towards restoring and strengthening trust in our democratic institutions. We support the work being done to undertake and introduce measures to empower the standards system in Parliament, and I am committed to continuing conversations both within Government and with parliamentary colleagues to continue to bring forward any further improvements proposed by the Committee on a cross-party basis.

I assure the House that my door is always open to discuss these matters with all Members. I hope that hon. Members will approve the reforms in the main motion, which I commend to the House. I thank the Committee for its work.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the shadow Leader of the House.

8.50 pm

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I start by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and his cross-party Committee for all the hard work that they put into their comprehensive and far-reaching inquiry into the operation of the code of conduct for MPs. They worked diligently, thoughtfully and cross-party with their external members. They came up with sound proposals, consulted carefully and revised their proposals further. It then fell to the Government to table the motion—I will come back to that. I also thank the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and her team for all their dedication to making sure that rules are understood and, when not adhered to, thoroughly and fairly investigated. I also thank them for their recent review.

Since 1695, as my hon. Friend once told me, Parliament has had rules against lobbying and taking payments for conferring or attempting to confer benefits on an individual, business or organisation. Until 2015, those rules only ever got stronger, which is the right and only reasonable direction that the public would expect. When a respected Select Committee does its job—consults, revises and employs independent judicial expertise—and makes its recommendations, my view is that that should be respected fully by the Government. So it is bittersweet to be debating the Government's eventual motion today. After months of many of us calling for the full set of recommendations to be implemented as recommended, the Government have tabled a motion, but in the process they have ditched crucial elements that would have strengthened parliamentary standards still further. I am dismayed but hardly surprised, because this is, unfortunately, a Government with form.

Let us remember how, just over a year ago, the Tories took an approach to standards taken by no Government before them. The then MP Owen Paterson had been found absolutely bang to rights, having taken a large amount of money for a large amount of access to benefit the company who paid for him. Most importantly, the Commissioner for Standards and the Standards Committee had investigated the claims carefully, reviewed the evidence, considered every angle and concluded a sanction. That is the backdrop to the motion: a Government who, within the past 12 months and roughly three weeks, did that to their system of standards—and there was more to come.

The Government, led by the then Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg)—I have notified him of my intention to mention him—along with many others in the Cabinet and on the Government Benches, tabled and supported a motion as recommended, but in name only. The then Leader of the House spoke for 40 minutes in support not of the motion in his name but of the amendment in the name of his predecessor, the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom). In so doing, he simultaneously tabled a motion and undermined the standards system and the case in hand by trying to introduce a new process.

Dame Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): Does the hon. Member accept that the amendment tabled was designed to set up a Select Committee to look exactly at the problems that we are debating? That was its intention.

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the right hon. Lady for that intervention. It may have been the amendment's intention in the abstract, but, by introducing it during that process, the Government undermined that existing, living process. Their case when approaching matters of standards is affected even now by that decision to propose a motion and then basically speak in support of one undermining it in the middle of a live process.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): I take the point that the hon. Lady makes, but will she not accept that the Opposition deliberately sought to conflate the two issues of Owen Paterson's guilt and that of procedure? I voted against the procedure; I was not voting on whether Owen Paterson was guilty or not.

Thangam Debbonaire: I cannot answer for the hon. Gentleman's decision-making process, but I note considerable dissent in various parts of the House.

Concluding that an existing structure and process had delivered an undesirable outcome, the Government seem to have believed that the structure and the outcome must be at fault, not the person involved, and decided to change the process when it was nearly complete to try to get a different outcome. I am afraid that that is the backdrop. The resulting vote caused chaos.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): My recollection of that vote is slightly different from that of my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), as the hon. Lady may realise. What the Government are doing today is incredibly well intentioned and I would ask her to tone down the political tone, because we are all going to make our own decisions on the motion. The Leader of the House is trying to find a way forward, with the complications she has spoken about with regard to Whitehall and the principles of public life. I had some real concerns with what the Committee was putting forward and I will be voting with the Government tonight, despite the fact that I voted against them in that vote back in 2021.

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I do support the motion—I will vote for the motion, should there be a Division. I will also vote for the amendments tabled by the Committee, and I will come on to the reasons why shortly. I just want to make sure we are clear about the backdrop. A Government did ask their MPs to support the indefensible and to vote for what appeared to be nonsense.

The farce, unfortunately, continued the very next day. The right hon. Member for North East Somerset undermined himself still further by reversing the impact of the amendment, which had passed thanks to his Government's own urging. I will not go over that in detail, but it is worth noting that it created a mess in the middle of the ongoing process. It meant that an MP then resigned rather than working with the system of standards, as the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire said, with the good intention of attempting to strengthen and improve the system.

By this point, the Committee on Standards had already begun its work and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards had announced her review of the code of conduct to complement the Committee's activities. I am glad the Government have brought forward some of the Committee's recommendations. It is already Labour policy that MPs should not be paid parliamentary lobbyists or consultants on how to get better access to Parliament and Government. Where MPs do have an outside job, it is right that strict protocols are followed, so I welcome the measure that will require them to have a written contract making it explicit that their duties cannot include lobbying Ministers. I am glad that has Government support. A Labour Government would go further and ban second jobs altogether, with limited exceptions.

I note the commendable work of the right hon. Sir Ernest Ryder, who conducted the independent review into the system. The Committee made good use of his extensive experience and reflections on the very important issues of fairness, natural justice and the right to appeal. Unfortunately, some Members, in their attempts to defend their friend—an urge I completely understand; to defend one's friends is a good quality—attacked the system on the grounds of fairness, natural justice and the right to appeal. They were exposed further on when Sir Ernest Ryder concluded that the present inquisitorial procedure for standards inquiries is fair and complies with article 6 of the European convention on human rights, or the right to a fair trial. He made further recommendations, including introducing a more formal appeal stage to the process, while noting that the existing standards process contained such a right, but that it was not clearly identified. I welcome both his and the Committee's recommendations.

However, the Government have ditched some key reforms. I note what the Leader of the House says, and I do not doubt that her intentions are honourable. I am glad to hear her say that more things are coming. I think she will recognise, however, that I am growing rather weary of hearing the word "soon". That does not just come from her—she is not the only one. In fact, I do not think she did say "soon" this evening. But if it is not soon, then when? The Government have had the recommendations for some months. Given the backdrop I have outlined, on what basis does the Leader of the House think there is a moral basis for picking and choosing which of the standards they will accept and which ones to ditch? They appear to be ignoring that backdrop.

The first specific issue I want to mention is the register of ministerial interests and the measures, which have been raised briefly already, requiring Ministers to register gifts and hospitality in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. The history is fascinating. A 1993 report from the Select Committee on Members' Interests stated that Ministers were required to register benefits they received in just the same way as other Members, even if it was in a ministerial capacity. Subsequently, the 1997 ministerial code provided that Ministers should register hospitality in their capacity as a Minister in the House if it was

"on a scale or from a source which might reasonably be thought likely to influence Ministerial action".

The 2007 ministerial code went even further, providing that Ministers should register hospitality with both the permanent secretary in their Department and the House.

Only in 2010 did the ministerial code completely separate the registering of ministerial and Member interests. It is worth noting that there was a change of Government that year, and it feels to me as though the subsequent amendment in 2015, with the then Government introducing the provision that

"Members are not required to register either Ministerial office or benefits received in their capacity as a Minister"

was a step backwards. I would like us to have transparency, with Ministers registering all hospitality above a certain agreed level with the House so that there is parity with

[Thangam Debbonaire]

Members, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda will explain in more detail. However, I feel this is an opportunity for the Leader of the House just to reconsider. Will she do so? The Government have had months to respond to these proposals, and I am really disappointed to see them thus weakened.

My second criticism is about the examples of the principles of public life. The right hon. Lady the Leader of the House referred to the Committee on Standards in Public Life, so she must know that the chair of the committee said in oral evidence to the Committee:

"We strongly support the idea that although the seven principles remain central and important for standards issues right across the public realm, they need to be interpreted for particular institutions and organisations."

Are we not a particular institution or organisation? We are. He also pointed out that

"the civil service code…takes the same sort of direction…but identifies specific priorities and principles that are relevant to the civil service",

so why not Parliament?

Does the Leader of the House agree that MPs should not misuse our position to gain financial or other material benefit? If so, the Government should not be nervous of making the principles of public life specific to our profession, as the Committee has recommended. In particular, I wonder about the weakening of the example given by the Committee on leadership. What, I ask, have the Government got against the recommendation that Members

"should actively promote and robustly support the principles, abide by the Parliamentary Behaviour Code",

and what have they got against the recommendation that we

"should refrain from any action which would bring Parliament or its Members into disrepute"?

Surely that is something the Government should support.

The other part of the backdrop is the loss of two independent ethics advisers in a matter of months. I will not take up too much of the House's time on this point, but I do want the right hon. Lady the Leader of the House to convey to the rest of the Government our dismay that, week after week, when I or my colleagues ask when we are going to get an ethics adviser, the answer is always "soon". I am sure the right hon. Lady wants to give us something clearer than "soon" soon.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I asked the Minister in the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee what "soon" meant. There was an offer—given that the previous ethics adviser resigned shortly after giving evidence to our Committee—of a private session about the process, but the Minister said that there would not be time, as it would come very soon. If the offer still stands, we could work with the Government to try to expedite the process.

Thangam Debbonaire: I can only echo my hon. Friend's call to the right hon. Lady to give us some more clarity on what "soon" actually means.

The new Prime Minister's reference to previous Governments was to show that he would bring in a new professionalism, and so on and so forth, but this is exactly the same cast: there has just been another round of ring-a-ring o' roses, and one of them tumbled into the middle to become Prime Minister. In this brave new world, their dictionary proclaims that "soon" means "as far down the road as we can kick this without actually having to deal with it". The word "soon" is an important one to define when it relates to such important constitutional matters, and to transparency, ethics and integrity. We know that ethics matter and standards matter, and they matter whether or not the demonstrator on Parliament Square is calling for them—in fact, all the more so—because I am afraid that this lot skipping ring-a-ring o' roses around successively failing Prime Ministers has cast such a long shadow on ethics that the Parliament Square demonstrator thinks everyone here is just as bad and that none of us can be trusted. That should shame the Governments responsible for it, because Members are subject to rules and standards. There are systems: there is a Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards who investigates fairly and there is a Standards Committee that goes on to do likewise. Those checks and processes are designed to hold us all to account and ensure appropriate consequences if we fail. The vast majority of Members register their interests properly.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): I was not planning to intervene, but the hon. Lady struck a chord when she spoke about the watering down of standards and what people on the street—the public and voters—think. We are all tarred with the same brush when Members break the rules egregiously. The reality is that that makes our jobs more dangerous right now, and it makes it more dangerous to go into politics, which we want to be accessible to all. Does she agree?

Thangam Debbonaire: I completely agree, and that brings me back to the deletion of descriptors in "Seven Principles of Public Life", and the Committee's recommendation that Members

"should refrain from any action which would bring Parliament or its Members into disrepute."

Watering down standards does exactly that, so I completely agree with the hon. Lady.

The vast majority of Members from all parts of the House, as I have said, correct the record when mistakes are made, register their interests properly, do their job diligently, and work in the national interest and that of their constituents. Every time this shadow falls—every time a Government try to protect one of their own by meddling with the system—it falls, as the hon. Lady said, on us all. Worse still, it falls on the system that we have built up over centuries to protect the public from political corruption.

I do not want to detain the House, but we have a Government whose use of the word "soon" is as casual as to be the equivalent of a parent answering a demanding child at the start of a car journey about the time of arrival, and who refer to whether or not they need an ethics adviser when clearly they do. When they do those things, it affects us all.

In closing, I am saddened but not surprised that this has happened, and that there has been a mangling of what I regard as a very good set of recommendations. I support the motion—of course I do—and I encourage colleagues from all parts of the House to back the work of their colleagues from all parts of the House on the

Standards Committee and do likewise. It should not be this way, so I also urge colleagues to back the amendments tabled by members of the Committee.

The Leader of the House and her colleagues had an opportunity today to draw a line. Instead, by messing around with the recommendations, making us wait for months and omitting key parts, they have undermined the strength of the argument. I hope that hon. and right hon. Members will work to strengthen standards and make a commitment that we will not tolerate their weakening. We will only ever support their strengthening and the creating of new transparency. I urge all Members to vote for the motion and the amendments on the Order Paper.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call Sir Bernard Jenkin.

9.7 pm

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): The former Leader of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom), might want to speak before me, Madam Deputy Speaker, but that is at your discretion. Thank you very much for calling me to speak.

It is important that the House understands that the Committee on Standards recognises what a huge amount of anxiety and tension the regulation of standards in the House of Commons can cause. The vast majority of Members strive—I was going to say "manfully", but womanfully as well—to uphold the seven principles of public life and our standards, and to observe the rules. When I first joined the Committee, I was struck by how different the conversation is within the Committee from the conversation outside. I have argued forcefully that we need a much more intensive engagement and understanding between the Committee and Members so that the conversations in the Tea Room about what our code of conduct means are supportive and constructive, rather than fearful and about "How do I just stay out of trouble?" I am afraid that quite a lot of the conversation is about that.

The shadow Leader of the House would acknowledge that something that came out of last year's debacle was the appeals process. The main contention at the time was that there was not a sufficient appeals process. There was a form of appeal, but when we had it reviewed by a retired judge, Sir Ernest Ryder, who looked at our processes and their compliance with article 6 of the European convention on human rights, it was found that our system could be made substantially better by introducing a completely separate appeal process. Had that appeal process existed last year, I do not think the debacle would have happened.

Michael Fabricant: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I will, but I do not want to detain the House for long.

Michael Fabricant: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, and I totally agree with what he says. It was the appeals process that many of us objected to and, additionally, the fact that the commissioner gave her view on that case before the inquiry had begun. As it happened, I agreed with her view, but it is not for a judge to state it beforehand. That was, I think, the objection of most of us.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: My hon. Friend touches on a key change, which is that in the serious cases that come to the Committee on Standards, the commissioner will now present her findings, but will not present a conclusion. It will be for the Committee to adjudicate on the conclusion, and then for the subject of the inquiry to appeal that conclusion on various grounds to an Independent Expert Panel. That is a significant improvement, and it should significantly reduce the anxiety that Members felt about the system before.

There are only two other points I wish to make about the areas of contention. First, I argued very strongly for the changes to the descriptors of the seven principles of public life, because the bald descriptors of the seven principles on the Committee on Standards in Public Life website are difficult to translate into what we actually do as MPs. For example, selflessness—how do you become an MP if you are completely selfless? You have to advance your own interests. How do you have influence as an MP, unless you advance your own interests and you advance your publicity? Navigating selflessness as a Member of Parliament is a complicated business, and to anybody who says that it is easy to apply the seven principles of public life to all our activities, I say no. We are navigating a difficult landscape where we are constantly beset by conflicting values that we have to reconcile, and the idea is that these revised descriptors will help inform the conversation.

The idea that these descriptors will have a chilling effect on the free speech of Members is a nonsense, because the descriptors themselves have no force in the rules whatever. They simply are there for information and conversation and to help Members to think about how we apply the seven principles of public life. Indeed, any Member who has fallen foul of the rules who could argue in front of the commissioner, "Here are the seven principles of public life, and here are the descriptors, and I felt I was following these principles", would certainly have a mitigation, in that they had thought about the principles they were seeking to uphold, but nevertheless had fallen foul of the rules. These descriptors are completely innocuous. They are designed to help Members, and I cannot for the life of me understand why the Government have decided to object to them. I do not understand the argument that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has presented.

We did not argue long and hard over the question of the declaration of ministerial interests. We would not be having this conversation if we had the situation described by my right hon. Friend, with timely, publicly accessible and regular declarations of ministerial interests on a par with the declarations that Members—non-Ministers—have to make as a matter of course in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I wish that we were not in this situation.

I have listened carefully to what my right hon. Friend has said, and I will listen further to the debate. I hope she is saying that this will be sorted out and that, in response to my earlier intervention, we will finish up with a member of the public being able to see on one register all the interests relating to that Member of

[Sir Bernard Jenkin]

Parliament, whether a Minister or not. I quite understand the anxiety about dual adjudication of the code and of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. We do not want to get into a situation where—I do not think this is accurate, by the way—there is anxiety that the Parliamentary Commissioner will somehow be adjudicating on matters that are strictly for the ministerial code.

I will listen to this debate. I have added my name to the relevant amendment, but I may well conclude that if the Government need the time to sort this out, we should give them that time, and this would not be some dereliction or watering down of standards. I appreciate that the shadow Leader of the House has to make her points on behalf of the official Opposition, for perhaps not entirely selfless reasons. However, as long as we finish up with both sets of interests being declared within 30 days and the ability to have them all in one place on one website, so that any member of the public or journalist can see exactly what interests are being declared in the name of that Member, we would be in a much better place. I wish we could do that by agreement rather than by dividing the House, but I do not know that we can.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the SNP spokesperson.

9.15 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I will make a brief contribution. It has been very interesting to listen to everything that has been said so far and I look forward to hearing the take of the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on all of this.

The Scottish National party welcomes any proposals that ensure that standards in this Parliament are strengthened and that MPs fully represent their constituents, uninhibited by external vested interests. Lobbying is an important part of the democratic process, but only when it is carried out ethically and transparently. As we live in a representative democracy, the responsibility of an MP, first and foremost, is to represent their constituents who voted to elect them to Parliament. Being a Member of Parliament is a full-time role—many of us realise that it is more than a full-time role—and must fundamentally be treated as such. Elected officials should not abuse their power as an MP to earn significant incomes in a second job. The increased transparency of MPs and their interests, financial records, and activities carried out behind closed doors merits and deserves public attention.

We therefore very much welcome the ban on providing paid parliamentary advice, consultancy or strategy services. Second jobs must be limited and regulated, although of course a formal contract enabling MPs to work in public service as doctors or nurses, or in the legal profession is a reasonable proposal.

We are also completely committed to the reform of practices that enable MPs to abuse in any way their positions of power for private gain at the expense of their constituents. It is wrong that influence can be bought in our politics, and we have to make every effort as responsible MPs to stamp that out.

There has been a rise in the reporting of abuses of the system in recent years. That has highlighted its various loopholes and shaken our constituents' faith in their MPs. It is good to see at least some of those being closed down through the Government's acceptance of most of the Standards Committee's recommendations. I pay tribute to the work of the Committee and its hard-working Chair, the hon. Member for Rhondda, and I commend its excellent inquiries and reports.

We welcome the addition to the code of conduct of a new rule prohibiting a Member from subjecting anyone to unreasonable and excessive personal attack. However, I, too, am disappointed that although the Committee recommended a set of descriptors based on the Nolan principles of conduct in public life—which other public bodies have adopted and which form the basis of the Scottish ministerial code—the Government replaced them with a much more generic version, and I think "generic" is being a little kind.

I therefore support the cross-party amendment (a) from the hon. Member, which backs the Committee's position on that. I again express real disappointment that the Government will not accept those descriptors for Members of Parliament. They are principles that none should object to if they want to stand for public service. As the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) said, they are designed to help Members, so why would we not welcome them?

Improving the transparency and searchability of the House of Commons Register of Members' Financial Interests is essential. The public deserve to know what is in it. We therefore also support amendment (b), which would end the ministerial exemption that has been in place since 2015.

Many people listening to this debate may not realise that MPs are required to declare any financial interests, including travel, gifts and hospitality worth more than £300 within 28 days. I just cannot see why Ministers should not have to register benefits received in their ministerial capacity in the same way. I listened carefully to the Leader of the House, but I just do not understand the justification. Such benefits are supposed to be published in the Government's transparency returns, but those returns do not include details and appear only sporadically.

The alternative proposals that the Leader of the House has outlined are certainly a welcome shift from the Government; I look forward to hearing the hon. Member for Rhondda give his views on them. He said that he thinks that some Government Members agree with his Committee's recommendations as they stand and may support the amendment. I hope they do. It is obviously for Members to decide on these matters, as the Leader of the House says, but personally I think the time for delay is over. I certainly hope that Members across the House will support these amendments.

9.20 pm

Dame Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): I am really pleased that this debate has returned to the House. I refer to my submission to the Committee on Standards' review of the code of conduct in February 2022; I had asked if I could give oral evidence to the Committee, but sadly that did not happen. I will refer to some of the points that I made, because I think they are important and I do not think that anyone else has mentioned them yet.

In short, we need a review far broader than the one before us tonight of how the standards processes work in Parliament. All our constituents want to be able to hold us all to account. Most importantly, we want to hold ourselves to account. Members across all parties have said that almost all of us are doing our best at all times, working with honour and integrity and doing the best job we can, yet somehow the drip, drip, drip of bad behaviour is destroying the reputation of this place on a constant and ongoing basis. The measures before the House this evening, which with one notable exception are frankly trivial, are just not going to change that.

As colleagues will know, I was closely involved in a cross-party attempt to create an Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme. There are no other colleagues present who were closely involved, but all seven political parties in this place were represented. It was intended to create a change in the culture. What we always see when we come to this place is people pointing fingers—"The Government have done this, the Standards Committee has done that, the Opposition have done this"—and all we do is make it worse.

The ICGS was designed to change the culture by doing things like proper induction for new members of staff, so that people know what to expect; proper exit interviews, so that when a Member has a group of staffers leave every three months, something can be done about it; and proper training programmes for staff and Members. Sometimes people laugh and say, "I don't need to do unconscious bias training." Well, my challenge to them is: "Okay, define it, then. If you don't need to do that training, you define it. Show me how good you are at that."

The Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme was set up to tackle those issues, but what we have now is a scheme that has sucked in every single complaint—"So-and-so won't let me go for lunch on time," or, "My holiday was cancelled." Those frankly more trivial workplace grievances, which have nothing to do with the serious challenges, overload the system, so that when there is a serious complaint of serious bullying, sexual harassment or even worse, there is not time for it. The system is too slow. It delivers neither the confidentiality that it was supposed to deliver nor the speed of justice.

I am afraid that, in coming up with this review, the Committee on Standards is looking thoroughly only at non-ICGS complaints, although it has certainly indicated its interest in the ICGS. Since 2018, the ICGS, which is independent—the clue's in the title—and non-ICGS complaints, which are presided over by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, have got sucked into one amorphous blob. It has become a punishment routine that embarrasses us all, drags us all down and is destroying our reputation.

Andy Carter: May I clarify a point that my right hon. Friend has just made? I think she said that the Standards Committee had not looked at the independent complaints system. That is because, as she probably knows, the Standards Committee has no remit to look at it.

Dame Andrea Leadsom: As a matter of fact, the Standards Committee can look at whatever it wants. It was not established to look at the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme. In a sense, however, my hon. Friend has made my point for me: the fact that the Standards Committee is looking at how we can improve the conduct and the reputation of Parliament without looking at the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme is a nonsense, and that is my thesis this evening. We need a much broader review.

I am sorry to say this, because I am extremely fond of the Speaker and all the Deputy Speakers, but the Committee concluded that the behaviour of the Speakers and the Deputy Speaker was untouchable. The fact that behaviour in the Chamber is a matter for the Chair and should be above investigation by the Standards Committee is extraordinary. In very recent history, someone in the Chair was the person who wound up the Chamber the most, making people miserable and bringing the whole House into disrepute, yet for some reason the Committee will not consider the behaviour of those in the Chair. Nor will it consider what is going badly or well in respect of the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme. If the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) wants to intervene, he is welcome to do so.

Now, under the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards has some sort of authority over that. It was intended that the investigation would be carried out independently and confidentially, but we are finding that investigations are now being presided over by the commissioner, who is requiring Members to stand up in the Chamber and apologise. That is outside the remit of the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme. Some may say, "Fine: if you have been rude to someone, you should stand here and apologise." My response would be: "You try saying that to someone who works at John Lewis or McDonald's. Are you seriously going to make them apologise to the entire firm, so that that will be on the record forever?"

There are serious issues involving the mental health of MPs and the way in which we behave in this place—the way in which we protect colleagues from the problems that occur and bring us all down. So many people say to me that they are sick and tired of the fact that we are all tarred with the same brush. It is very easy for people to be tribal and say, "It's you", "No it's not, it's you", but actually it is all of us. We are all held in incredibly low esteem, and it is because we have not sorted this out.

While I am on the subject of big subjects, let me say that in my opinion—this is open to discussion and challenge; does anyone want to intervene?—it is all about the House of Commons Commission. Talk about a totally opaque organisation! It is chaired by the Speaker, it has appointments, and it is simply extraordinary. It is not accountable, and it makes financial decisions with very little transparency. Ultimately, all the authority in this place to establish Committees, to appoint Committees and so on, comes from the House of Commons Commission. In my opinion, we should have a fundamental review of that and then take it from there. The Standards Committee should look again at the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme and make sure it is doing what it was set up to do.

Dame Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making some very good and important points, and I hope that those who are listening to the debate may come up with a mechanism whereby we can review some of these issues. We are always told that they are issues for the House to decide, but what is never obvious to me is the process we can undertake to effect the discussions to which my right hon. Friend is referring.

Dame Andrea Leadsom: That—I say this slightly tongue in cheek—was the point of the amendment that was tabled last year, but nevertheless that did not happen during the debate on standards that took place then. It seems to me that we need something like the Straw Committee, which, back in the day, reviewed the way in which the processes of the House worked much more fundamentally than this review.

The one development that I genuinely think has been brilliant is the new appeals process. It was essential and has been a long time coming, and I hope it will get the balance right between just punishing MPs and trying to change the culture in this place and give people fairness.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the Chair of the Standards Committee.

9.29 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom) knows that I agree with nearly everything that she has said, and in particular what she said about the Commission. Indeed, further to the point that was made earlier by my fellow member of the Committee, the hon. Member for Warrington South (Andy Carter), I think we on the Standards Committee would like to look more at the independent complaints and grievance scheme. We were conscious that when she set it up, part of the rationale was that MPs should not get their sticky fingers on this area of the work, so I feel as if I have been charged by her to carry on looking at this area of work. She and I have had quite a few conversations about this and, as she knows, I have some concerns of my own. It is important that we get this absolutely right.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: We need to remember that the ICGS came into being because Members of Parliament were not trusted to adjudicate on these matters. If the Committee is going to look at this, will the hon. Gentleman join me in making an undertaking that in no respect are we going to interfere with the process or the adjudication of cases, but that we are possibly going to look at the governance of the process and the governance of the scheme as a whole?

Chris Bryant: Absolutely; I completely concur with every single word that the hon. Gentleman has said, not only just now but in his speech earlier. He and the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire have made the point that we are in the business not only of setting up rules but of trying to change the culture. That is normally a more difficult process, and I will come on to that.

If I might irritate the House briefly, a constituent has asked me to remind everyone that we pronounce "Rhondda" as "Rhontha", with the "dd" sounding like a "th". I apologise to everybody.

Advent is, as we know, a penitential season, and it was the 35th anniversary of my ordination as a priest last week, so let me start with my traditional confession that I am no better than any other Member in the House, with not just feet of clay but ankles, calves and thighs. I have to say that, as I look round the Chamber every day, I see colleagues of different stripes and from different parties who have made considerable contributions, often way beyond the call of duty, to our national life. Politics really is an honourable profession, but it is also true that the public want us to do better.

I am painfully aware that 18 Members of this House have been suspended or have withdrawn for a day or more during this Parliament. That is quite a significant number. That may in part be because we are getting our act together, and that things that were formerly swept under the Pugin carpet are now dealt with not secretly and behind closed doors but through a proper process. I am also conscious that on top of that we have 15 Members in the independent group who have been suspended from their political parties, and justice sometimes comes through these processes very slowly. That is not fair to complainants, and it is not fair to the Members either. I want to make sure that Members are entitled to fairness. That is why I want us to have a set of rules that is clear, simple and unambiguous, and it genuinely worries me, as I know it does the whole Committee, that we now have 12 separate bodies that regulate Members of Parliament, and that we are now even considering creating a 13th. Whether that is right, I hate to think. I am sightly conscious, however, that other countries have it even worse. The House ethics manual in the United States of America consists of 456 pages, so I think we have been remarkably concise.

I am grateful to the Committee, and especially to its lay members: Mehmuda Mian, Tammy Banks, Rita Dexter, Michael Maguire, Paul Thorogood and Victoria Smith, plus the former members who played a part in getting us to this point, Arun Midha and Jane Burgess. This has been a long, iterative process, and the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin)—who I sort of think of as the deputy Chair of the Committee—is absolutely right to suggest that the lay members often bring an insight, as we bring an insight to them, that results in a creative mix that is in the interests of the whole House.

Let me deal briefly with a few important changes that we are making as a result of today's motion, because it is important that Members understand them. First, we are completely banning MPs from providing paid parliamentary advice, including providing or agreeing to provide services as a parliamentary adviser, consultant or strategist. I believe that that always was, effectively, selling the title of MP on the open market.

Secondly, we are requiring a Member who takes on an outside role to obtain a written contract or a written statement of particulars detailing their duties. The contract, or a separate letter of undertaking, must specify that the Member's duties will not include lobbying Ministers, MPs or public officials on behalf of the employer, or providing paid parliamentary advice, and that the employer may not ask them to do so. I think that is a very good defence for a Member who takes on outside earnings.

Thirdly, we are significantly tightening the rules on conflicts of interest resulting from outside interests by extending, from six months to 12 months, the period during which an MP cannot engage in lobbying on a matter in which they have a financial interest.

Fourthly, we are closing the "serious wrong" loophole that Owen Paterson sought to exploit. From now on, if a Member wants to claim this exemption when approaching a Minister or official, they must show that any benefit to their client is merely incidental to the resolution of the wrong or injustice. They must state at the outset that they are providing evidence of a serious wrong, and they may not make repeated approaches, otherwise it

just becomes a loophole through which they can drive a coach and horses. I am glad the Government now agree with us on that.

We are also ending the false distinction between a Member initiating and participating in a proceeding and an approach to a Minister or official where they have an outside financial interest. It is not enough simply to register and declare an outside interest. It is surely axiomatic that a Member who is in receipt of outside reward or consideration should not seek to confer a benefit through parliamentary or political means on the person or organisation providing that outside reward or consideration. That is paid advocacy and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) said, it has been banned in some shape or form since 1695.

I now turn to the matters on which the Government disagree with the Committee. First, like the other members of the Committee, I simply do not understand the Government's argument on the Nolan principles. They have got it wrong, and it is not in the interests of the House or of individual Members to stick with the Government's position. Acting on the advice of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, which originated the Nolan principles, the Standards Committee drafted and consulted on more detailed descriptions of the individual words—selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership—as they apply specifically to Members of Parliament. Lord Evans, the chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, told us:

"We strongly support the idea that although the seven principles remain central and important for standards issues right across the public realm, they need to be interpreted for particular institutions and organisations."

That is why, for instance, the police have gone down precisely this route and produced their own set of descriptions.

More importantly, the Nolan principles need fleshing out in a parliamentary situation. What does "selflessness" mean in the context of Parliament? I would argue that a Member cannot be entirely selfless, unless they renounce any form of payment, unless they travel to London every single day from their constituency, wherever it is in the land, and unless they eschew any ambition whatsoever. But if they have no ambition, would they want to come to Parliament in the first place?

We have written descriptions to help explain not only to us but to our constituents and to members of the public, who might be the people complaining about our behaviour, precisely how those principles apply to how we do our business. Put simply, I think the Standards Committee's version is more helpful to MPs and the public than the Government's version.

Secondly, I think ministerial declarations are a no-brainer. I understand the arguments, but I do not think they particularly wash with the public. I start from three basic principles. First, Ministers in the House of Commons owe their position to their membership of the House, and they are answerable to the House. Secondly, all MPs should be treated equally under the rules. And thirdly, the public have a right to know, as close to real time as possible, of any financial interests that might reasonably be thought to influence an MP's speeches, actions, decisions or votes. As Ministers actually make decisions, whereas most of us in the Chamber just talk about other people's decisions, transparency is even more important for them, not less important.

Following those principles, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West said, the 1993 Select Committee on Members' Interests—at around the time of cash for questions—concluded that

"Ministers are and should be subject to the House's rules for the registration of financial interests in exactly the same way and to the same extent as all other Members of the House."

That was the House rule under the Major Government. On the back of that, the new ministerial code in 1997, under Major and then under Blair, said that Ministers should register hospitality received in their capacity as a Minister in the House if it was

"on a scale or from a source which might reasonably be thought likely to influence Ministerial action."

The 2007 ministerial code provided that ministers should register hospitality both with their permanent secretary and the House.

It was only in 2015—really quite late in the day—without any announcement, discussion or debate in the House, or any comment in a Select Committee report, that the rule was changed to grant Ministers in the code of conduct of this House an exemption from registering anything that they considered they had received in a ministerial capacity. The theory is, as the Leader of the House helpfully explained, that in exchange for that exemption, Ministers register through their Department any gifts, hospitality and travel that they have received in their ministerial capacity. That is published somewhere between three and nine months later, but without the value, which is a key point. That means that a member of the public cannot judge whether the hospitality was on a scale that might reasonably be thought likely to influence ministerial decisions.

The Committee, Transparency International, the Institute for Government, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, the 1922 committee, the Labour Front Bench, the Scottish National party Front Bench, a substantial number of Ministers and I think that the system is manifestly unfair for the ordinary Back-Bench MP. They declare it all within 28 days and can be investigated and sanctioned if they fail to declare it correctly. However, the Minister's declaration, without details, appears months later and cannot be investigated. It is not uncommon for a group of MPs—some of whom are Ministers and some are not—to go to the same event, which might cost more than £300. The Back-Bench MPs all declare it and the *Daily Mail* writes a story about it, but the Minister's attendance is recorded nine months later and nobody notices. That seems somewhat unfair to me.

Incidentally, in answer to a point that the Leader of the House made, the Committee has said that the Government could set a lower threshold for further ministerial registrations if they wanted to—lower than £300 threshold in the House of Commons. However, it is worth pointing out that, though the ministerial threshold at the moment is said to be £140, since the Government do not publish the value of what is received, we have no idea whether that threshold is being met. I have been to events with Ministers that I have registered, but which the Minister has never subsequently registered anywhere.

I am not convinced that the system is working. I have a great deal of time for the Leader of the House. I love ministerial promises, especially when they come before Christmas and they talk about spring, but previous Leaders of the House have said to me that this would be sorted out by spring—a different spring. That spring

[Chris Bryant]

has now sprung, and now we are into the winter. It seems extraordinary that Government Ministers will not be able to work out for themselves—not the Department—whether they have been to an event or received hospitality worth more than £300, and to register it in two minutes by sending a quick email to the registrar of interests in the House. I simply do not understand the logistical argument from the Leader of the House.

I urge colleagues to support my amendment, first, because the public expect full transparency and openness, and wonder what Ministers are trying to hide. Secondly, Ministers, in effect, now choose whether to register with the House or the Department. That does not make any sense at all. Thirdly, even if the Leader gets her way, the information will not all be in one place.

Fourthly, nobody presently or in future, so far as I can see, is expected to regulate or monitor the ministerial declarations. Fifthly, there are bizarre anomalies such as the previous Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss), and the previous Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel), going to a Bond premiere, supposedly in their ministerial capacity because, as another Minister explained, James Bond exercises Executive functions. That argument simply undermines the whole system. I am not making that up, incidentally.

My next point is that this is the bare minimum that the public expect of us. I have had many emails, texts and helpful pieces of advice on Twitter saying that we should not be taking any hospitality or gifts whatsoever. If a person was working in local government or in most of the private sector today, they would have to declare everything. I do worry that sometimes our belief in our own exceptionalism, and Ministers' belief in their own exceptionalism, grows with every extra day that we are an MP or a Minister.

Ministers have a habit of becoming ex-Ministers, but under the present rules, their registered interests do not come with them to the Register of Members' Financial Interests. So if we stick with the Government's proposals, they could easily and inadvertently fall foul of the new paid lobbying rules, which now apply for 12 months after the interest is accrued. They might have accrued the interest when a Minister, but then end up not being a Minister any more and wanting to lobby Ministers. They would be precluded from doing that, but then they would not have registered the interest with the House. That is yet another reason why it is simpler—far, far simpler—to return to the system that we had from 1997 to 2015, instituted by both Conservative and Labour Governments on the back of the cash for questions crisis, of treating all MPs equally.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Bryant: I am very near the end, the hon. Gentleman will be glad to know, but of course I will give way.

Tim Loughton: I have been listening very carefully, but I am undecided on this subject. When I was a Minister, the difference was that I had a permanent secretary who was on my case to make any declarations that I needed to make on outside interests, shareholdings and so on. An ordinary Back Bencher does not have that. A Back Bencher may take hospitality because it is quite a fun thing to do, but a Minister may have to attend something that could be seen as hospitality but is actually part of their brief. He or she might not enjoy having to do that, but that comes along with the job. The hon. Gentleman is trying to group everything together as if it were the same, but, actually, receiving hospitality is different case for a Minister and a Back Bencher.

Chris Bryant: I have heard the argument, "Oh, we go to lots of events that we don't really enjoy", but let me put this case to the hon. Member—it is not a real case, but it is a perfectly possible case. Let us say that Formula 1 invited three MPs: the shadow Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Minister; the Minister; and the Chair of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee. The event was at the weekend and the value of the hospitality was about £2,000. The shadow Minister would have to declare it. They might not particularly like Formula 1—They might be going because it is part of their work in that role. I personally cannot imagine anything worse than going to a Formula 1 event—*[Interruption.]* I can see that the hon. Gentleman agrees.

The Chair of the Select Committee would also have to register the Formula 1 weekend. They would have to register who had paid for it and how much it was worth, which is an important part of judging whether it might be of such a scale that it could influence a person's decision making. Furthermore, those two people would not then subsequently be able to lobby on behalf of Formula 1. That is a really important part of the rules of the House. However, the Minister merely tells the permanent secretary that they have been on this weekend and does not register the value, and it appears many months later, even though the Minister might be the person who is making executive decisions that affect Formula 1. That is our fundamental problem.

What we have at the moment is a lesser degree of transparency and openness for Ministers who make decisions than for Back Benchers who do not make decisions. The Leader of the House has been very helpful on many of these issues and I do not have a big beef with her, although she is still yet to visit the Rhondda tunnel, but if I am honest, her arguments sounded a bit like Augustine of Hippo saying, "Make me chaste and continent, but not yet."

There is no reason why we cannot do this. I have heard Ministers promise many things over the years—indeed, I might have promised a couple of things that never came to pass myself when I was a Minister. The easiest way for the House and for Parliament to deal with this is to go back now to the system that we used to have, then if the Government come back to us in six months' time having sorted out ministerial transparency, they can have the exemption back. All MPs should be treated equally under the rules, just as every member of our society should be treated equally under the law, and that is why I urge all right hon. and hon. Members to support the two amendments I have tabled.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I do not wish to curb debate at all, but this debate has to finish in about 40 minutes and I want to give the Leader of the House a good amount of time to respond. I ask colleagues to bear that in mind.

9.50 pm

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): I thought I would start by reflecting on something the Prime Minister said back in his days as a junior Minister in the then Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government:

"The conduct of local councils and their councillors has a direct impact on the reputation of an area and of their fellow members. Their ability to lead a community and impact the lives of all those they serve is significant, and it is only right that they are held to a high standard."—[*Official Report*, 25 January 2018; Vol. 635, c. 521.]

He was speaking in his role relating to local government, but as we again debate how we carry our duties, those words are incredibly relevant to why this issue is important. We could equally say that the conduct of parliamentary parties and their MPs has a direct impact on the reputation of a country and their fellow members—or even the conduct of the Government and its Ministers.

The Prime Minister said it himself: how elected officials behave matters immensely for their institution and for the people they serve. That is why I am pleased that we have consensus on some much-needed improvements to our code of conduct, which will come in as a result of this motion, but it is also why I am disappointed that the Government are failing to implement the code of conduct as recommended by the Committee in its entirety. I hope the Prime Minister has not changed his mind on the importance of integrity in public life since taking senior Government office.

I place on record my good wishes to the Commissioner for Standards, Kathryn Stone, as she departs her role at the end of the year, and thank her and her team for their efforts to date. Several hon. Members have brought up the Owen Paterson vote in November last year. Part of my own compunction to table the application under Standing Order No. 24 after that debate was driven by the importance of understanding—given that we all make decisions here as individual Members about what we hear during debates—that what we do and say in this House can have a direct impact on those outwith it. I know the abuse the Commissioner for Standards experienced following that debate.

I will start with the first of the two amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), amendment (a)—I, too, thank the Standards Committee. I have put my name to both amendments, because it seems frankly ridiculous that in this place of a million minute rules the Government would push back on something so sensible as tailored descriptors for the Nolan principles.

That makes me think of my own time in HR. I worked for multinationals and in the public sector, and in many of those organisations there were behaviours or soft skills that all people within an organisation would be assessed against in their appraisals. We provided guidance so that the chief executive of an organisation and somebody on the shop floor were assessed in relation to those behaviours at the level that was appropriate to them, and that is exactly what these descriptors are setting out to do.

The argument that the Government are making is that we do not need any guidance, but basic logic tells us that broad principles such as openness and leadership will mean different things to people carrying out different functions. As the hon. Member for Rhondda said, the Committee on Standards in Public Life acknowledged that in its 2015 report looking into how regulators embody those principles. For example, in the case of a regulator, selflessness—it is funny that we all seem to have touched on selflessness in this debate—means putting aside their own views and opinions, something that we as MPs we definitely do not do. For us, I believe it means ensuring that we cannot be compromised through any outside interests. I would argue that those two ways of interpreting the first Nolan principle for those in different sorts of public office are entirely compatible, and I can see no problem in giving specific guidance to Members, to regulators or, indeed, to any other office holder. In fact, I would argue that additional guidance benefits Members.

It is 12 December 2022. I think we were all up to something else exactly three years ago today. When I came to this place the following Monday, it was pretty overwhelming. There are lots of rules, customs and corridors to get lost in, and constituents instantly need help. But I can also imagine that for someone who has been here a few years, it might feel easy to feel too comfortable and simply to let things slide when we should, arguably, know better. We should never allow a lack of knowledge, or complacency, to be a barrier to how we conduct ourselves in this place. Guidance is arguably a way to help us in that. It sets expectations both for those following the rules and for those making the judgments on whether those rules have been adhered to.

Turning to amendment (b), I would like to hear from the Leader of the House why she does not support bringing the process for Ministers to declare gifts, hospitality and so on in line with that for other Members. Perhaps she will try again to argue that it is justified on the basis of the separation of powers, as she did when we debated this in October, but I simply do not buy that. Separation of powers takes place when the Government and the legislature are, well, separate. But in case the Government have forgotten, they too are Members of this legislature. This is a combined system—that has its pros and cons—but it is not separate. Even if it were, I just do not find it acceptable to argue that being in Government rather than on the Back Benches means being subject to less scrutiny, and I am pretty sure that my North East Fife constituents do not think so either. I would think that is the case for many Members in this House.

Perhaps I will be told that Ministers should be trusted to do the right thing, but we know that they get things wrong, as recent reports of Ministers using their personal emails for Government work, in breach of security, tell us. Clearly, it is easier for everyone when there is one straightforward system to be used so that mistakes cannot be made.

Furthermore, as colleagues have pointed out, Back-Bench MPs, and even Opposition spokespeople, have 28 days to register financial interests, which are then published every two weeks. We have had two Prime Ministers and countless Secretaries of State and junior Ministers—many of whom now sit on the Government Back Benches—since the last ministerial report was published in June 2022. That is simply not an equal system.

I am here representing my constituents, as is every single Member in this place. I remember the first Monday I was here. I saw the right hon. Member for—oh,

[Wendy Chamberlain]

I cannot remember where he represents, but I remember seeing him as he was getting coffee and thinking, "Oh my goodness! That's such and such." And a little voice in my head said, "No, at this moment in time, he is in exactly the same job as you: he is here to represent his constituents."

What the Government are proposing is not an equal system. This country rightly has high standards for politicians to meet, and I believe that the vast majority of Members want to put procedures in place so that we meet those standards. We will fail without this change. Ministers are Ministers because they are elected as MPs in the first place. Their constituents should be able to find information about them in one place.

I could go into further changes we need to improve standards in this place and the trust that the country places in us, about which we have heard from other Members, but, in focusing on the two amendments, I will keep it simple: vote for amendment (a) to make it easier for Members to keep to the high standards that we all want in this place. Vote for amendment (b) to make it easier for Ministers to demonstrate the integrity that we rightly demand. If the Government fail to do that, it will not just be them explaining why not; it will be all of us in this place. This Government decision impacts on us all in how we conduct ourselves here.

9.58 pm

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): I have listened carefully to all the contributions in the debate. I congratulate in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on the assiduous way in which he has approach this matter as Chair of the Committee.

I will address the Committee's third recommendation, on the matter of an outright ban on MPs providing paid parliamentary advice, consultancy or strategy services. I welcome that report as a genuine advance. I was given the opportunity to provide oral evidence to the Committee about a Bill that I drafted and introduced last year, which would have banned MPs' second jobs, with a few exceptions, for example, for those working on the frontline in public services. [Hon. Members: "Why?"] It is interesting that Conservative Members shout out, "Why?" when I talk about the proposal to ban second jobs for MPs, with an exception for, for example, nurses, firefighters, people in the armed forces and doctors. I do not understand why that proposal was met with such incredulity and such a loud chant of, "Why?" from Conservative Members.

When we debated the issue previously, I almost lost count of the Conservative Members who said, "What about nurses? What about doctors?" Yet when those exceptions are mentioned now, they ask why. When Conservative Members said, "What about nurses? What about doctors? You can't ban second jobs for MPs", I felt that they were using exceptions as a way of keeping the rotten status quo.

The public do not object to MPs spending their spare time working on an A&E ward as a nurse or a doctor, working as firefighter, or being in the Territorial Army. They rightly object if a Member is paid £1,500 an hour to advise a US investment bank. [Hon. Members: "Why?"] Again, there is a call of, "Why?" That is good evidence for why people outside all too often think that this place and MPs are out of touch with them.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I do not want to be too partisan about this, but were I a writer like Michael Foot, could I go on writing and get my royalties? Were I a farmer like Jim Callaghan, could I keep my farm? Should we say to people like my former colleague, Peter Thurnham, who built up an engineering business, "Don't come into Parliament. You'll have to give away your business while you're here"?

Richard Burgon: I did not expect the Chamber to come to life, but when it comes to attempting to ban MPs' second jobs, everybody gets energetic. I thank the hon. Member for his intervention. I did not want to speak about my Bill at such length, but it deals with his point. Members who write books, for example, could continue to do that, but could not keep the proceeds. That may seem unfair to many, and some people would perhaps be treated harshly under my proposal, but that is because people have found ways of exploiting loopholes. One could imagine a situation whereby, if one could keep the profits from writing, an MP would write a book about the oil industry, get paid a lot of money for it and work for an oil company for free on the side. However, I digress. I understand that MPs are annoyed at any suggestion that second jobs should be banned, but they are out of touch with the public when they get so angry about it.

I welcome the advances that have been made on an outright ban on MPs providing paid parliamentary advice, consultancy or strategy services. I also welcome the advance in requiring MPs to have a written contract. That is a step in the right direction. However, the House must recognise that the public are rightly angry because when MPs chase corporate cash, they short-change the public. The public are also outraged because, a year after the Owen Paterson scandal, MPs are making more money from second jobs than they were a year ago—£5.3 million, the highest figure ever. That is the problem: this place and MPs end up being out of step with what the public want. The public rightly believe that we get paid enough and that being a Member of Parliament is a full-time job.

I am not surprised that my contribution has annoyed Conservative Members so much, but I will support the motion and the amendments. They are certainly a step in the right direction. On second jobs, we need to go further in future. They should be banned with a small number of exceptions. I introduced a Bill on that and the Government repeatedly blocked it. It is still there if the Government want to do the right thing and take it forward. I am glad that Labour Front Benchers support a ban on second jobs for MPs with a small number of exceptions. I hope that we get in at the next election, introduce that proposal, and help to clean up our politics and restore public trust.

10.5 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I shall be extremely brief. I will support both amendments but do not believe either of them goes far enough. In an ideal world we would all conduct ourselves in public and private by principles conducive not just to our own benefit and wellbeing, but to the benefit of the wider community, but we do not, so we have laws that enable the prosecution of lawbreakers.

In Parliament we like to think we adhere to standards and principles, and we primarily refer to the code of conduct for those in public life; as we all know, the seven principles of public life are the Nolan principles, but like all guidelines, memorandums of understanding and conventions, the Nolan principles only work if individuals have the self-discipline and moral compass to adhere to them. When they do not, the abuse of their position is often clear for everyone to see, but rather than hold them to account, this place too often turns a blind eye or gently reprimands them with a rap on the knuckles.

Unfortunately, past behaviour leads me to believe that we could extend the Nolan principles to 107 principles and those who currently adhere to them would, but those who think they are above and beyond such practices as self-control would ignore them all because they feel entitled to do so. In ministerial and Members' registers of financial interest, transparency is crucial and that information must be provided in a timely fashion. Why would it not be? Why is it not already? As many MPs have shown time and again during covid, it is one set of standards for them and one set for everybody else.

In summary, while we rely on principles and guidelines and conventions, some MPs will walk right through them, and the time for navel gazing is over.

10.7 pm

Kim Leadbeater (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Despite the late hour, it is a pleasure to speak in this important debate. I rise to speak briefly on the motion today and to speak in favour of amendments (a) and (b).

Members from across the House will understand my personal interest in ensuring our politics and our political discourse are conducted with transparency, respect and civility and are free from the dangerous toxicity we have seen in recent years. I believe we all have a responsibility in this regard, but, sadly, we have seen behaviour in this Chamber and outside that is clearly unacceptable, and we must raise the bar. That is why I am pleased to see us acting to strengthen the code of conduct, which I wholeheartedly support.

We in this House have a sincere duty and obligation to adhere to the highest standards of public life and to set an example of what robust, passionate, healthy debate and discussion in our country looks like. If we cannot demonstrate appropriate values, attitudes and behaviours and find a way to behave with civility and to show respect despite our many differences of opinion and perspective, how can we expect others to do so, and how can we expect them to respect us?

We have seen multiple examples of how the language, tone and behaviour of Members in this House trickles down to wider society both online and offline. It trickles down and creates an unhealthy and dangerous climate and a culture of abuse and intimidation. It trickles down and it puts good people off entering public life, whatever their political persuasion, when we should be working to open politics up to people from every background, creating a welcoming, tolerant and safe environment—one that strengthens our democracy, not damages it.

But this has to start with all of us. Stamping out the type of unacceptable behaviour we have seen in recent times and increasing transparency will undoubtedly help to reduce the toxicity that has spread across our public discourse and help to stop the unfortunate narrative that we in this place are "all the same" or "all in it for ourselves" with little regard for the public interest.

We in here know that the vast majority of Members are in this place to make a difference to their community and their country, with the public interest at heart. But if the public do not see that unacceptable behaviour in public life is effectively and rapidly stamped out, they will be disengaged, breeding suspicion and, at worst, driving people to the extremes.

I believe we have a clear responsibility to stop this happening. I am therefore pleased that we are strengthening our code of conduct today. I believe we can and should go further and therefore also support the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), which I believe will bring much-needed further transparency and higher standards in public life.

10.9 pm

Penny Mordaunt: I will try to respond to all the points made by hon. Members. I appreciate everyone being in the Chamber at this late hour and listening as well as contributing to the debate. I turn to the points made by the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire). She was disappointed that it has taken this long to get to the motion. If we had debated it earlier this year, we would have had not two points of disagreement but five. I hope she recognises that we have not been idle and that we have spent our time well. It has been my mission to try to find consensus on all these issues; that is the best thing for the House.

The hon. Lady made comparisons to the situation involving Owen Paterson. I would dispute that and point to the fact that the votes that we will have are free votes. It is controversial, but people can make up their own minds and decide what they think is the right thing to do. The Government clearly need to have a view, and that is what I set out. I also point out that we accepted the serious wrong issue put forward by the Standards Committee.

If the hon. Lady is to support amendments, I hope that she will be consistent in her party's policy. The Labour Welsh Government's hospitality threshold is higher than that for this House, and certainly that of ministerial thresholds. The Welsh Government also publish an annual list of gifts. So if she, as I do, wants us to move to monthly reporting, I hope that that Government will follow. I will also give her this quote from page 130 of Gordon Brown's report, "A New Britain", in which he says:

> "The Ethics and Integrity Commission dealing with Ministers should be…separate from the system which investigates ethical breaches by MPs and members of the second chamber, comprised of the Committee on Standards, the Parliamentary Commissioner on Standards, and the Independent Grievance and Complaints System."

That is a sensible approach.

It is difficult for us to conflate the two systems. I have tried to eradicate the word "soon" from my vocabulary—although I hope that the hon. Lady appreciates that, when I have said "soon", I have delivered—so I did not say "soon". I have said, "summer". Looking at these issues, I think that is a reasonable timeframe—*[Interruption.]* That is to move to monthly reporting.

[Penny Mordaunt]

With regard to the point made by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) about bringing forward guidance and publishing it, the motion originally would have come into effect on 1 January. He suggested that we push it out until March so that everyone can be brought up to speed and know where they are. That is a sensible approach. I will do my utmost to ensure that the civil service meets that deadline of when the motion comes into effect, which I think is reasonable. If hon. Members want this to work well and orderly, that is the timetable that we must work to.

The hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) pointed out that it is incredibly important that we take care of hon. Members' wellbeing. It is in our interests to remind anyone who might be listening to the debate that whatever motion is voted on tonight—amended or unamended—it will improve and strengthen the standards of this place. That is an important point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin), who is also a Member of the Standards Committee, was pleased that we had acted swiftly on the appeals process. We have a different view from him on the Nolan principles, but, as I explained to him earlier, people can vote on it. This is House business. Hon. Members can listen to different viewpoints and vote on that. That is how we should be doing things, and that is how we will do things tonight.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) also supports amendment (b), which would move us immediately to monthly 28-day reporting. That came as a surprise to me, because my understanding is that the Scottish Parliament reports on a quarterly basis. I look forward to the Scottish Parliament moving in line with amendment (b). Maybe we could have a race and see who gets there first.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom) spoke about many issues, some directly related to the motion, and she was supported by my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Dame Maria Miller). She is right that we have to build trust in Parliament. We want to be the best legislature in the world. We have to continually address those issues, and I have heard what she has said.

Turning to the hon. Member for Rhondda, the Chairman of the Committee on Standards, I will not repeat the arguments I have made before, but I will just touch on a few points. First, I agree with him when he says it is important that justice is served swiftly. I have shared some concerns with him on how quickly we carry out investigations, and we want to do better on that. I was grateful to him for outlining the many positives that I hope the House will support tonight. We still disagree on the Nolan principles issue. I looked into the police issue he raised; I do not think the police have done as he outlined. What they have done is produce a code of ethics, which was signed off by the Home Secretary, but that is different to what is being proposed for Ministers.

On ministerial declarations, I completely agree with the three principles that the hon. Gentleman set out. What I am interested in doing is getting there in an orderly way, to ensure parity with the House's reporting system. I am telling hon. Members, having looked at this in detail and probably more than any other Leader of the House, that if they wish this measure to come into effect in March, they will have a problem. It will be a problem not just for Ministers, but for anyone undertaking an envoy role, including Labour Members. The hon. Gentleman also helpfully proposed a manuscript amendment earlier this evening, which chimed with the sentiments of the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Bristol West, with regard to having "scale and source". Again, I think Members want clarity. They want an amount, a threshold. They want clarity on the rules. I do not know whether it would be means-tested. Is something that is materially important to me materially important to someone else?

Chris Bryant: I am sorry, but it seems to me that the clearest outcome for all right hon. and hon. Members is a single rule of £300 registration for everybody within 28 days, with the full value shown. Everything else is muddying the waters.

Penny Mordaunt: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I am just addressing the point that he and the shadow Leader of the House raised earlier. The bottom line is that the Government agree that the system has to improve. We agree entirely with the principles that the hon. Gentleman set out. If amendment (b) goes through, he will be requiring Members who are also Ministers, or envoys of some description and trade envoys, to report in March at a pace that he knows the Whitehall machine will not currently be able to deliver on. In a few months after that point, it will. I suggest that we wait until Whitehall can deliver, which will not be far away—I did not say soon; I said summer—and we can move towards that in an orderly way.

Sir Peter Bottomley: When the Chairman of the Committee on Standards, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), talks about his fallibility, he reminds me of article XXVI of the articles of religion. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has convinced me that amendment (b) is too soon and too rushed. Will she consider having a button or a link on both registers, so that people can find other information about a Member who is also a Minister?

Penny Mordaunt: On that point, which has also been made by the Committee Chairman, who accuses me of using the argument of saying "not yet", we have already started this work. I have already been working with the propriety and ethics team, and we have audited every Government Department, which is why I can bore Members senseless about why there are some problems. We have already started to look at how we might have a system that everyone in Whitehall could report into, instead of doing it in a million different ways, but also at our goal being that transparency. For example, if someone is looking at their MP, they want to have a comprehensive picture, so we have already started looking at that, and I hear what hon. Members have said.

Ronnie Cowan: Can the Minister assure me that we are not trying to delay beyond March because it falls during the current financial year?

Penny Mordaunt: No, I can assure the hon. Member on that point. We have moved the date in the motion from January to March, at the request of the Committee Chair, because we want everyone to know what the new standards rules are that we are voting on today, and we felt that was right.

From the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain), we had a different view, but I thank her for her contribution. I would ask the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon)—I am just trying to read my own handwriting—to read the report we have been discussing, because it does not come to the same conclusions that he does. I thank the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) for his remarks. I do not think that colleagues are a bunch of rotters; I am sure he was not suggesting that.

Finally, I will end, rightly, on the very salient point that the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Kim Leadbeater) raised, and she is absolutely right. Although we focused on the areas of disagreement, one of the areas where there is huge consensus is about the duty of care we have to each other. She is very genuine, for reasons we all understand, in her remarks.

I would conclude by saying that this is a huge step forward. I thank the Committee for its work. It made 20 recommendations, and the Government want 18 of them brought in. We want, particularly on ministerial interests, for us to move to the position the Committee wants, but in a way that is doable and orderly. This is a free vote. All Members will have heard the arguments and listened, and they will be voting and deciding what the best thing they think is to do. I do not expect, particularly given the subject matter we are debating, any party or Member to criticise the decision that hon. Members will have taken this evening in good faith, me included.

With that, I urge all Members to support the Government motion unamended. This is a big step forward. We do want to move to clarity and parity for both systems, but both systems of reporting should remain distinct.

Amendment proposed: (a), leave out from "annexed to that Report" to

"(b) the Third Report from the Committee on Standards".—*(Chris Bryant.)*

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 135, Noes 241.

Division No. 124] [10.23 pm

AYES

Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Chamberlain, Wendy
Charalambous, Bambos
Cowan, Ronnie
Creasy, Stella
Cunningham, Alex
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Davies-Jones, Alex
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dixon, Samantha
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Dorans, Allan *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Doughty, Stephen
Edwards, Jonathan
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Fabricant, Michael
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Foord, Richard
Foy, Mary Kelly
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Dame Nia
Hanna, Claire
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Jarvis, Dan
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Khan, Afzal
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Leadbeater, Kim
Lightwood, Simon
Linden, David
Loughton, Tim
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
Madders, Justin
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Stuart C.
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McLaughlin, Anne
Mearns, Ian
Mills, Nigel
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Olney, Sarah
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owen, Sarah
Phillips, Jess
Pollard, Luke
Poulter, Dr Dan
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Rayner, rh Angela
Reynolds, Jonathan
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Sheppard, Tommy
Slaughter, Andy
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Webbe, Claudia
Western, Matt
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mary Glindon and Christian Wakeford

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bone, Mr Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Brady, Sir Graham
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Chalk, Alex
Churchill, Jo

Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Crosbie, Virginia
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davison, Dehenna
Dines, Miss Sarah
Double, Steve
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James
Duguid, David
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Everitt, Ben
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heappey, rh James
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, Tom
Jenkinson, Mark
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Fay
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Keegan, rh Gillian
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Lockhart, Carla
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morrissey, Joy
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, rh Victoria
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, rh Jeremy
Quince, Will
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Roberts, Rob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Shannon, Jim
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Smith, Royston
Spencer, Dr Ben
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stuart, rh Graham
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Trott, Laura
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallis, Dr Jamie
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William

Tellers for the Noes:
Jacob Young and Amanda Solloway

Question accordingly negatived.

10.36 pm

More than two hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the motion, the Deputy Speaker put the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Order, this day).

Amendment proposed: (b), under "Leadership", in paragraph (b), leave out from "annexed to that Report" to

"with effect from 1 March 2023". *—(Chris Bryant.)*

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 135, Noes 239.

Division No. 125] [10.36 pm

AYES

Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Bone, Mr Peter
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Chamberlain, Wendy
Charalambous, Bambos
Cowan, Ronnie
Creasy, Stella
Cunningham, Alex
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Davies-Jones, Alex
Davis, rh Mr David
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dixon, Samantha
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Dorans, Allan *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Doughty, Stephen
Doyle-Price, Jackie

Edwards, Jonathan
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Foord, Richard
Foy, Mary Kelly
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Dame Nia
Hanna, Claire
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Khan, Afzal
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Leadbeater, Kim
Lightwood, Simon
Linden, David
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
Madders, Justin
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Stuart C.
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McLaughlin, Anne
Mearns, Ian
Mills, Nigel
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John *(Proxy vote cast by Martin Docherty-Hughes)*
Olney, Sarah
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owen, Sarah
Phillips, Jess
Pollard, Luke
Poulter, Dr Dan
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Rayner, rh Angela
Reynolds, Jonathan
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Sheppard, Tommy
Slaughter, Andy
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Webbe, Claudia
Western, Matt
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Wragg, Mr William
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mary Glindon and Christian Wakeford

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Brady, Sir Graham
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Chalk, Alex
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo *(Proxy vote cast by Marcus Jones)*
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davison, Dehenna
Dines, Miss Sarah
Double, Steve
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James
Duguid, David
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Everitt, Ben
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heappey, rh James
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, Tom
Jenkinson, Mark
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Fay
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Keegan, rh Gillian
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Lockhart, Carla
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark *(Proxy vote cast by Marcus Jones)*
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Karl
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morrissey, Joy
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy

Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, rh Victoria
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, rh Jeremy
Quince, Will
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Roberts, Rob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Shannon, Jim
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Smith, Royston
Spencer, Dr Ben
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stuart, rh Graham
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Trott, Laura
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallis, Dr Jamie
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike

Tellers for the Noes:
Jacob Young and Amanda Solloway

Question accordingly negatived.
Main question put and agreed to.
Resolved,

That—

(1) this House takes note of:

(a) the First Report from the Committee on Standards, on New Code of Conduct and Guide to the Rules: promoting appropriate values, attitudes and behaviours in Parliament (HC 227), and approves the revised Code of Conduct for Members annexed to that Report, subject to the following amendment:

In section C (Seven Principles of Public Life): leave out "; as set out below, they are supplemented by descriptors, which apply specifically to Members of Parliament" and the Principles and descriptors as set out in the Report and insert:

"**Selflessness**

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs."

(b) the Third Report from the Committee on Standards on New Guide to the Rules: final proposals (HC 544), and approves the revised Guide to the Rules relating to the Conduct of Members annexed to that Report, subject to the following amendments:

(i) In Introduction, paragraph 14, leave out, "Whilst Members are not required to register Ministerial office" and insert, "Members are not required to register either Ministerial office or benefits received in their capacity as a Minister".

(ii) In Chapter 1 (Registration of Members' Financial Interests), paragraph 17, at end insert: "() Donations or other support received in a Member's capacity as a Minister, which should be recorded, if necessary, within the relevant Government Department in accordance with the Ministerial Code."

with effect from 1 March 2023, except that paragraph 8 of Chapter 3 of the Guide to the Rules shall only have effect in respect of past financial interests or material benefits from six months after the date on which the revised code and guide come into effect.

(2) previous Resolutions of this House in relation to the conduct of Members shall be read and given effect in a way which is compatible with the Code of Conduct and the Guide to the Rules relating to the Conduct of Members.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

Exiting the European Union (Consumer Protection)

That the draft Product Safety and Metrology (Amendment and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 14 November, be approved.—*(Andrew Stephenson.)*

Question agreed to.

Architects

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

That the draft Architects Act 1997 (Amendment) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 14 November, be approved.—*(Andrew Stephenson.)*

The Deputy Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 14 December (Standing Order No. 41A).

Exiting the European Union (Protection of Trading Interests)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

That the draft Extraterritorial US Legislation (Sanctions against Cuba, Iran and Libya) (Protection of Trading Interests) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 8 November, be approved. —*(Andrew Stephenson.)*

Question agreed to.

Moles and Skin Tags: Testing for Cancer

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Andrew Stephenson.)*

10.48 pm

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I am delighted to initiate this debate on melanoma in memory of my constituent Zoe Panayi, after whom "Zoe's law" is named.

Zoe died of skin cancer in May 2020 at the age of just 26, after having an unusual mole removed at a private beauty clinic. She had trained to become a carer before finding a rewarding role as an assistant to the radiography and CT department at St Mary's Hospital in Newport, in my constituency. She was the mother of two boys, Theo-Jay and Tobias.

On the night of 3 April 2020, Zoe went home from work feeling poorly. By 11.30 pm she had been admitted back to St Mary's hospital, where she worked, and it was then discovered that she was in the late stages of cancer. Biopsy results four days later found that the melanoma, which had started in a mole on her back, had spread to her lymph nodes, liver, bone marrow, pelvis, and spleen. Very sadly, after the biopsy Zoe survived for just 55 days.

Over the course of the two years prior to her death, Zoe had raised numerous concerns with GPs about the unusual mole on her back. She had been told on multiple occasions that there was nothing to be concerned about, and after being advised to see a beauty clinic to have the mole removed, staff again raised no concerns about the removal of the mole. Tragically, it was later found that the act of removing the mole probably caused the cancer to grow and spread more rapidly. Zoe's family, and especially her mum, Eileen Punter, to whom I pay tribute in this debate, have campaigned tirelessly since then to raise awareness of melanoma cancer and to ensure that others do not have to go through the same pain. I will make two suggestions to the Minister in the course of this speech.

By way of background, malignant melanoma is the fifth most commonly diagnosed cancer in the UK, and there are thought to be some 111,000 people living with malignant melanomas in this country. Approximately 16,700 cases are diagnosed every year, and about 2,300 people die every year from this cancer. This should not be the case, because the good news is that since the 1970s, the five-year survival rate for cancers of this type has increased from 52% to about 90%—nine out of 10—especially if they are caught early.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising this subject. As he knows, I had a stage 3 melanoma and I was told that I would have a 40% chance of living a year, but the science has moved on dramatically in the nearly four years since then. My biggest anxiety is that we do not have enough histopathologists and pathologists, and that people are getting their results slowly. There are also not enough dermatologists in the country, and lots of GPs are simply not trained in recognising potentially malignant melanomas fast enough. Do we not need to do far more to ensure that this cancer is fully understood, because it can kill, and to ensure that we have enough staff in the NHS to be able to treat it?

Bob Seely: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I am going to follow up on several of those points, but I am delighted to see that he is one of the many people who have survived a malignant melanoma.

If Zoe's mole had been diagnosed early—especially at stage 1 or 2, and possibly even at stage 3—she may have well survived. Just before I come to some of those suggestions, I must point out that these melanomas are a specific concern on the Isle of Wight, because we have one of the highest rates of skin cancer.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for his assiduous attention to his constituents and to the family who have been bereaved. By his words today, we all recognise that he is deeply concerned and compassionate, and we thank him for that.

May I gently tell the hon. Gentleman—perhaps the Minister might take note of this as well—that in Northern Ireland a new mole mapping and melanoma service has been introduced in my local South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust? It is a nurse-led, two-year pilot project that offers an advanced mole mapping technique for specific patients identified by the clinical team as being at higher risk of developing melanoma skin cancer. I suggest that that should be a standard for everyone not just in my trust area but everywhere else, so that we do not have a postcode lottery. Would the hon. Gentleman be interested in that pilot scheme? If so, maybe the Minister will take note.

Bob Seely: I thank the hon. Gentleman for yet another excellent intervention, and I completely agree. In fact, I will come to those points now.

The Isle of Wight is a specific hotspot for skin cancer. I think it has the worst skin cancer rates in the United Kingdom, primarily as a result of certain factors. First, we still have a very white population, and the paler your skin, the more likely you are to develop melanomas. Secondly, we have an ageing population, and melanomas are cumulative. Thirdly, we have a very outdoors lifestyle on the Island, with golf, sailing, a lot of community activity and a lot of gardening. For the Isle of Wight's retirement community especially, to be out in the sun aged 60 or 70 doing activities such as sailing, which is very harsh on the skin because of the interaction of sun and water, encourages melanomas. Fortunately, we have one of the best dermatology centres in Britain at Newport's Lighthouse clinic, and I thank its doctors and staff for doing an excellent job. I have been there myself in the past couple of years, and I know what a great job they do.

In the NHS long-term plan, the Government committed that the proportion of cancers diagnosed at stages 1 or 2 will rise from about half to three quarters of all cancer patients, meaning that some 55,000 more people a year should survive cancer for at least five years after diagnosis.

Pilot schemes in various parts of the country are trying to improve the diagnosis of skin cancers and melanomas. One option to improve this still further is what, on the Island, we call Zoe's law, but it would effectively be a change of practice within the NHS. Eileen, Zoe's mum, and her family are doing it in memory of Zoe, and it would require all moles and skin tags removed from the body to be tested for melanoma. I am not expecting an off-the-cuff answer from the

[Bob Seely]

Minister on this point, but I would very much like her to write to me so that I can pass on her comments to Eileen and the rest of Zoe's family. If that cannot be done now, I would like to know why not.

I would also like to know what more could be done in future, because thousands of people are needlessly dying every year. Skin cancers kill more slowly than many other cancers and are certainly more treatable than cancers such as lung cancer and pancreatic cancer. Eileen said Zoe thought of everyone before herself. When Zoe was dying, she said, "The most important thing is that other people do not have to go through this"—she left two young kids.

The idea of testing all removed moles and skin tags is potentially very popular, and a petition started by the family has now reached some 35,000 signatures. Tanya Bleiker, the previous president of the British Association of Dermatologists, recommended that all skin lesions, even if removed for cosmetic reasons, as Zoe's was, should be sent for histopathological testing to confirm that they are benign—the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) also made that recommendation—because they might be deep rooted in the skin. Mr Ashton, one of our consultant dermatologists on the Isle of Wight, explained to me on Friday that innocent-looking moles can sometimes be the most deadly. They might look benign on the surface, but underneath they are malignant and hide melanoma.

I urge the Government to set out further plans on raising awareness of moles, as this is relatively easy to do. If I understand correctly, including this in nurse training and general practitioner training, especially in sunnier parts of the country along the south coast—places like Cornwall, Devon, the Isle of Wight and Hampshire—could be exceptionally valuable.

Chris Bryant: No one can see the back of their own head, but their hairdresser can, and quite often they are the person who can spot a melanoma.

Bob Seely: The hon. Gentleman reminds me of what Mr Ashton was telling me on Friday, because it is not only hairdressers but dentists. Dentists spend a lot of time looking at people's faces, so they could potentially help to spot these things, too. Eileen, Zoe's mum, spends a lot of her time trying to get this education process going, as she does not want other families to suffer as her family have.

At stage 1, a small and localised melanoma has a 97% five-year survival rate, which is extraordinarily high. By contrast, the five-year survival rate for a stage 2 melanoma is 76%, and it is 58% for a stage 3 melanoma, as the hon. Member for Rhondda had. By the time a cancer has spread from the skin to the lymph nodes, the bone marrow and other parts of the body, the five-year survival rate is only 15%. Sadly, Zoe was one of those who did not survive, because despite her worry, her visits to the GP and the fact that she had it removed, that cancer had been spreading all the time in her body.

I respectfully ask the Minister to write to me on the potential for 100% testing of moles for melanoma, cancer and whether they require further treatment. If there were such testing, some of the 2,341 people who died of the disease last year might have survived, including my constituent Zoe.

I pay tribute again to Zoe's family, especially her mum for all the great work that she is doing. I ask the Minister to respond not only on the issue of testing for melanomas but on broader education for GPs, hairdressers, dentists and nurses, so that they are better able to spot cancerous moles before they spread.

11 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Helen Whately): I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) for securing this debate, and on telling us Zoe's story so powerfully. It is a truly heartbreaking story of a young mum of just 26 with so much life ahead of her. It was harder still to hear because Zoe did the right thing and asked her GP about her mole, yet her skin cancer was not diagnosed until so late that she died just 55 days later. I pay tribute to Zoe's family, including her mum, Eileen, who have campaigned to stop other people going through what they have gone through, and to Zoe herself. When I looked earlier this evening, more than 34,000 people had signed the petition.

Like Zoe's family, as cancer Minister I want to stop people going through what they have been through. I want us to get better at preventing, diagnosing and treating cancer. Although we cannot remove the risk of skin cancer in its entirety, we can raise awareness of the things that increase the risk and help people take steps to protect themselves. Most skin cancers are caused by exposure to the sun. Getting sunburnt increases the risk—especially getting sunburnt as a child—as does using sunbeds. Those who have fair skin are at greater risk. As my hon. Friend told us, the lovely sunshine of the island he represents has its downsides, as does the healthy outdoor life that he describes.

As well as raising awareness of risks, we need to raise awareness of early signs and symptoms, and then what to do. We in Government are doing that. For instance, the NHS "Help Us, Help You" campaign has used TV advertising, social media and regional press to get the message out to people to get worrying signs checked out. We know that some people delay getting a check. That campaign has particularly sought to overcome those fears. If you are worried, it is always better to get checked out. Most people will get the all-clear, but the sooner you get a check, the better, because an early diagnosis improves the chances of successful treatment.

I know that Zoe did the right thing and asked her GP, which brings me to the importance of accurate diagnosis. For Zoe's specific case there has been a full investigation locally, and I know the findings have been acted on. Specifically, teledermatology is now offered by all GPs on the Isle of Wight, and is increasingly available across the NHS. It involves a specialist medical photographer taking a detailed photograph of a skin lesion to check it for signs of cancer. That is a step on the path to more tests to confirm whether someone has cancer or is given the all-clear that no further tests are needed.

On the role of teledermatology, almost £1.5 million of our elective recovery funding has been allocated to seven cancer alliances to pilot self-referral for cancer symptoms, including skin cancer symptoms. I heard my

hon. Friend's argument for Zoe's law to require all moles or skin tags removed to be tested for melanoma. I also heard him saying that he was not expecting an answer here and now, which I appreciate. I can assure him that I will take his argument away, look into it and then write to him with a full response on his proposal. I will also take away the suggestion from him and from other hon. Members about looking at the broader education of other people who might be able to spot something that might be an early sign of skin cancer. I recognise that people may not be able to see their back or the back of their head, for instance. Indeed, there may be opportunities to look at wider education. For sure, raising awareness overall of skin cancers and of what a person should do if they have a sign or a symptom will indeed mean that more people will know what to look out for.

Jim Shannon: I commend the Minister for her very positive answer and for what she said in relation to the nine centres across the United Kingdom, which is where the hotspots are. In an intervention on the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely), I referred to a pilot scheme in my trust area, the South Eastern Health And Social Care Trust, which seems to be having some good results. I always believe that the exchange of ideas is good for us all. It helps us to see what is being done here and it might help the Minister to know what we are doing back home.

Helen Whately: I thank the hon. Member for his intervention. I will look into the scheme in his area that he mentioned. One of the good things about the NHS is that all sorts of fantastic things are going on in pockets across the United Kingdom. One of the best things that we can do is find out what is working somewhere, and then spread that best practice more widely, so, indeed, I will look into what he suggests.

We are now seeing the most incredible advances in how we diagnose cancer as well as how we treat it. An example of this is the NHS-Galleri trial, which looks for blood markers to identify cancer risk. It can identify signs of more than 50 cancers and the trial has 140,000 participants. We should in no way limit our sights as to what can be achieved in the here and now. The crucial thing here and now is early diagnosis, which much improves the prospects for successful treatment. Zoe's family wants those who do have cancer to get an early diagnosis so that they have the chance to survive and live their lives as, sadly, Zoe did not. That is something that I want, too. I want fewer people to get cancer, those who do have cancer to be diagnosed earlier, and, in turn, to be treated successfully so that they can live their lives to the full.

Question put and agreed to.

11.7 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 12 December 2022

[Sir Robert Syms *in the Chair*]

State Pension

[Relevant documents: e-petition 581736, Move the State Pension age back to 60 for both men & women; e-petition 609243, Increase the state pension to £19,760 a year (£380 a week); e-petition 605503, Increase the basic state pensions by £500 a year as an emergency measure; e-petition 591161, Support the pension triple lock; e-petition 587703, Reduce the state pension age to 63 for all; and e-petition 620839, Set a Minimum Pension Guarantee (MPG) of at least £200 pw for state pensioners.]

4.30 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): On a point of order, Sir Robert. I do not intend this to be an unnecessarily long point of order, but I am aware that the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) has just arrived in Chamber and will probably take a moment or two to find her notes. I think she has done that now, so I will stop this pointless point of order.

Sir Robert Syms (in the Chair): Thank you. There are still gentlemen in the House of Commons.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 617603, relating to the state pension.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Robert. I thank the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) for his point of order.

I start by congratulating Michael Thompson on creating the petition, as well as the creators of the six other petitions being debated today. I thank Age UK and Silver Voices for their briefings, and the whole of the Petitions Committee team for all their hard work. The petition calls on the Government to increase the state pension to £380 a week, and to lower the retirement age back to 60. The petition has already been signed by more than 110,000 people.

The current full state pension is £185.15 per week, and the basic state pension is £141.85. Many of us are here today because we believe that the state pension should provide adequate financial support for the 12 million pensioners in the UK, ensuring that they are protected in old age after paying into the system. Given this country's wealth, we can afford to look after our pensioners. By increasing the state pension or introducing a minimum pension income guarantee, we could lift thousands of pensioners out of poverty.

While financial support is vital, the issue is not just about money. Measures to address pensioner poverty must include a broad range of actions to underwrite acceptable living standards, including support for our wider public services, such as social care to support our pensioners to live independently, and day centres to reduce loneliness and social isolation. On that point, I thank Age UK Wandsworth in my Battersea constituency. I visited last week and met many of the older people who value the services provided by that day centre, but they really want more access to it, more often. More importantly, all of them wanted the state pension to increase.

Poverty and inequality among pensioners are rising, with more than 2 million people in relative poverty. There are many reasons why some are falling into poverty. The first and most urgent is the cost of living crisis. Research by the Centre for Ageing Better found that a further 200,000 elderly people have already been pushed into poverty in the last year, and a recent report by Age UK found that this Christmas will be among the most difficult ever for nearly 3 million older people.

The measly 3% rise in the state pension this financial year was dwarfed by inflation and the intersecting impacts of rocketing food, fuel and energy bills, with the latter alone forecast to rise to £3,000 by next April. After shamefully reneging on their manifesto commitment on the triple lock last year, the Government finally committed to its reinstatement, as well as a cost of living payment for pensioners, in last month's autumn statement. However, given that neither measure is scheduled to come into force until next year, they will be too little, too late for many who need the support right now. The misery is compounded by cuts to public services and the Government's U-turn on their social care reforms: 10% of older people will reduce or stop their care in the coming months because of the cost of living crisis.

These causes of poverty only add to the challenges faced by pensioners. Although older people have a higher rate of home ownership than the general population, many are asset rich but cash poor. That means that some are driven to sell their homes to make up for shortfalls in pensions and are pushed into the higher-cost private rented sector.

Inequalities in state pension rates are also dragging the elderly into poverty. Department for Work and Pensions statistics for the 2020 financial year show that less than 10% of all pensioners received the full new top rate of pension—£185.15—and less than a third of those on the old pension receive the full rate.

The rise in the eligibility age for the state pension from 65 to 66 from 2018 has also increased hardship. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, more than 700,000 65-year-olds have missed out on entitlements and postponed retirement. The elderly are compelled to remain in the job market, and they simultaneously lack opportunities to increase their income. The Government need to consider targeted support for people who are much older as endemic age discrimination in employment affects their ability to build a work pension or find work to complement their state pension.

The third factor is the pension credit system, which can play an important part in helping to close the pensioner poverty gap, especially for women, disabled people and black, Asian and ethnic minority pensioners. Since Labour introduced the measure, its efficacy has been undermined by low take-up. In its July report, the Work and Pensions Committee stated that

"an estimated further 850,000 eligible households are not claiming Pension Credit worth £1.7 billion a year."

It strongly recommended that the Government improve the identification of eligible people, streamline the application process and make it more accessible.

[Marsha De Cordova]

The risk of pensioner poverty is amplified for women, disabled people and black, Asian and ethnic minority pensioner groups. Women disproportionately experience later-life poverty, with the proportion of those suffering rising from 14% to 20% in the eight-year period from 2013. The equivalent figures for men were 12% and 18%. Those figures are expressions of the wider inequalities endured by women. The Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign highlights a particularly egregious instance of those disparities. The Government have a legal and moral obligation to deliver for the many WASPI women in our constituencies. Pensions, lifetime earnings and national insurance contributions are typically lower for women due to the gender pay gap and caring responsibilities—we are all aware of those factors.

For black, Asian and ethnic minority pensioners, the inequalities are even starker. According to Age UK, 33% of Asian and 30% of black pensioners are in poverty—double the proportion of their white counterparts. Similarly to those faced by women, these inequalities are the expression of lower average wages and labour market discrimination, which translate to less generous state pensions. That has often led to some ethnic minority people earning below the minimum salary threshold for auto-enrolment in workplace pensions. Lowering that threshold would be an easy fix for this injustice; according to a report by The People's Pension, it would double the enrolment of ethnic minority employees.

Employment and pay disparities also create later-life poverty for disabled pensioners, who are less likely to possess a work pension or a private pension as a result. We know that those effects will be exacerbated by higher living costs of around £600 per month on average for disabled people, including older disabled people.

All that shows emphatically that some pensioners are really struggling. The Government need to look at how they can support them. I hope that the Minister will address the issues I have raised, as well as making reference to the following points. First, the Government talk a lot about tackling pensioner poverty. If they are serious about doing so, why will they not commit to increasing the state pension, or introducing a minimum pension income guarantee for everybody, irrespective of their contribution record, their sex and gender, their age or their marital status?

In the current crisis, the additional cost of living payments announced in last month's autumn statement clearly will not be enough for some pensioners. Will the Government therefore introduce additional financial support targeted at those pensioners who are most in need?

Have the Government carried out an impact assessment of how the delay caused by the U-turn on social care reform will impact our pensioners? What plans do they have to address the inequality I highlighted of the low percentage of people on the full new state pension rate?

My next point is probably the most crucial; it concerns pension credit. Why will the Government not deliver a take-up campaign to identify eligible pensioners, and introduce a streamlined and accessible application process, so that the pensioners who are entitled to that additional top-up can receive it? Pension credit is there to top up income, and I strongly believe that the Government could be proactive in identifying pensioners who might qualify.

The WASPI women need justice. When will the Government provide compensation for the failings? Will they commit to ensuring that there is a proper, lengthy notice period for any future change to the state pension age?

Will the Government seek to bring down the minimum salary for auto-enrolment to workplace pension schemes? That would increase the participation of under-represented groups, particularly our black, Asian and ethnic minority communities.

We all know, particularly at this time of year, that loneliness and social isolation are key contributors to material deprivation. More investment is needed in public services and the social support networks that are available to older people; in fact, we need an overarching strategy to address that. What are the Government doing to support community and local organisations, such as Age UK Wandsworth in my constituency? It provides a lifeline and vital services to people who live in the local area. I reiterate the point I made earlier: because of the funding available, many can attend that centre only a couple of days a week, but they would like to go three or four times a week. It is unfair that the time they can spend at such centres is being limited.

Finally, I call on the Government to explore alternative ways to fund our pension system. The state pension is unfunded, meaning that its obligations are not underpinned by assets that could generate investment and return. That funding model is implicitly appealed to when the Government object to the rising cost of pensions due to our ageing population and the impact that will have on younger people, although that probably does not apply to any of us in the Chamber, as none of us is very young. *[Interruption.]* Well, some might be. However, an appreciation of funding models used in other countries could point the way towards a systemic shift that could help fund the state pension system.

We owe it to our elderly and all our pensioners, as well as to the generations that come after us, to be progressive in our thinking and innovative in our approach. We must look at all options to ensure that when people reach their later years they will not fear retirement but embrace it, because they will know that, in the state pension system, there is a safety net in place to support them and they will not be struggling.

4.46 pm

Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Thank you, Sir Robert, for the opportunity to speak. Before I became an MP, I conducted more than 10 years of research on how poverty and inequality affect older people's inclusion in society, so this subject is a particular interest of mine.

Pensioner poverty is significant in the UK, and it continues to increase. It is estimated that over 2 million—one in five—older people are living in relative poverty, with the greatest impact on women and other vulnerable groups. The level of pensioner poverty is similar in my country, Wales. The Older People's Commissioner for Wales—I am very proud that Wales is still, I think, the only nation in the UK to have an older people's commissioner—along with other organisations, has expressed serious concern about the detrimental impact that the cost of living is having on older people. My constituency had

the third highest death rate from covid in the whole of the United Kingdom. That exemplifies the effect that poverty and the industrial legacy of Cynon Valley have on the health and wellbeing of older people.

Just before the summer, I conducted a cost of living survey in Cynon Valley. Nearly nine out of 10 pensioners who responded said that they felt worse off than they did 12 months earlier. Security in retirement was the biggest cause for concern among pensioners. One older person said:

"Us elderly people have worked very hard over the years and we get very little back to survive on."

I pay tribute to a range of organisations in Wales, including Age Cymru and Age Connects in Cynon Valley, who are doing amazing work with older people, trying to empower them and giving them a voice in our communities.

The petition calls for an increase in the state pension to £380 a week and a reduction in the state pension age to 60, which would be a significant change. However, the demands of the petition open up a debate on where pension levels are set and what is the right age to start receiving the state pension.

At the 2019 election, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), the then shadow Chancellor, rightly sought to deal with state pension inequality for women and offered a major compensation scheme. He said:

"This is an entitlement. This is not a benefit…This is a historic injustice. We have to address it."

Over 4,000 women in my constituency are affected, and I am working closely with an active group of local women to continue campaigning for justice for the WASPI women. I have continued to support their demand for compensation, through demands for full restitution and through the minimum compensation proposal of the WASPI campaign and the all-party parliamentary group on state pension inequality for women. As we know, the ombudsman has found that there was maladministration, and we are now waiting for the full report to be published and for the recommendations for remedy. We must compensate these women.

The other group of older people I am working closely with in Cynon Valley are former miners. I welcomed the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee report in 2021, which recommended giving £1.2 billion held in the investment reserve to former miners. It really is regrettable that the Government have rejected the Committee's recommendations, and I urge them to look at those again. The WASPI women and former mineworkers are examples of pensioners who have been let down—and let down massively—by the UK Government.

More broadly, there is a debate around the level of the state pension. Much is being said about how pensioners' incomes have been safeguarded, compared with real changes to incomes and social security in recent years. However, pensioner poverty is growing, and the petition demands a significant increase in the state pension. The National Pensioners Convention says that the state pension should be set at 70% of the living wage and above the official poverty level, at £242.55 a week. That is what a pensioner in the Netherlands gets, with an equivalent of more than £250 a week. The petition demands £380 a week, and in Denmark the folkepension for a single pensioner is £370 a week. This can and should be done here. These other countries' pensions put the demands of the NPC and this petition into perspective—they are not unreasonable demands.

The question about funding these increases is welcome. There are many sources of untaxed wealth that could deliver the revenues to pay for higher pensions. A wealth tax could raise in the region of £260 billion to £300 billion. The country has the money; it is a political choice not to redistribute the wealth of this country to ensure that older people and many millions of other vulnerable people have the money to maintain a basic standard of living. That is a basic human right, and everybody should have that entitlement.

Before I conclude, I will take the opportunity to highlight the fact that a third of those entitled to pension credit—over 750,000 people—do not claim it, although they are entitled to. As my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) said, that equates to about £1.7 billion of unclaimed money. I urge the UK Government urgently to take action on this issue. I truly wish that they would pay as much attention to ensuring that people claim what they are entitled as they do to stigmatising people on social security benefits, who are entitled to that money and should have it as a matter of right.

To conclude, pensioner poverty is rising. Combatting it is a question of principle and values. If we are to achieve justice for pensioners, we must take action to deliver it.

Sir Robert Syms (in the Chair): We now move to the Front Benchers, who normally have 10 minutes or less.

4.53 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): As ever, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Robert, and to reply to a debate on behalf of the Scottish National party. I congratulate the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) on opening the debate, and I commend the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter) on her speech.

Before I get into the substance of my speech, I want to note that my remarks today are my first since returning to the SNP Front Bench. I pay tribute to the hard work and dedication of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), who as my party's spokesperson on work and pensions repeatedly held the British Government to account, fought for the poorest in society and highlighted the sheer inadequacy of the UK's social security system. She will be a tough act to follow, and I wish her well in her new position as Cabinet Office spokesperson—a role I am sure she will thrive in.

The petition that triggered this debate calls for an increase to the state pension and for us to reduce the state pension age to 60. I will come to the appalling financial inadequacies of the state pension in a moment, but I will first address the age at which people become eligible. We are by no means outliers among developed nations in having an ageing population, which presents the state with many problems to solve in terms of service provision and many fiscal challenges.

As we debate this issue, every one of us in this room should be mindful of the fact that not all jobs are the same. As we sit here in the luxurious comfort of a

[David Linden]

palace, people out there are carrying out manual labour jobs—indeed, some today in sub-zero conditions. Sir Robert, you and I may not think that we will be ready to retire at 60, but many others will, so I believe that a balance must be struck. Although, for practical reasons, the Scottish National party cannot support reducing the retirement age to 60, the notion that the pension age needs to go up and up, as a simple solution to the British Government's problems, is both cruel and unrealistic.

It feels like little has changed at the Department for Work and Pensions since I last shadowed this brief. The British Government continue their heartless policies, the cost of living crisis ravages on, and it is the poorest and most vulnerable who bear the brunt of the hardship. As I was preparing for today's debate, I found myself despairing, because for me, as a Scottish nationalist, Westminster often feels like groundhog day, and no more so than when we are looking at the policies of the Department for Work and Pensions.

I find myself today critiquing the same Tory policies that I criticised last year. It seems that the DWP's strategy for addressing the cost of living crisis is largely to shove its fingers in its ears and just hope that inflation comes down. Despite that, the cost of living crisis continues to spiral out of control and inflation has risen to 11.1%—a 41-year high. The cost of essential family goods has risen sharply over the past year, and the Office for Budget Responsibility predicts that average household disposable incomes will fall by 7% this year and next.

Food banks, such as Glasgow NE Foodbank in my constituency, are struggling to keep up with the rising demand. Across the constituency, I have heard food bank volunteers say that many people are, sadly, using food banks for the very first time—I was surprised to hear from one volunteer that a family who had previously donated to the food bank were now forced to use it themselves.

One thing I reflected on when I previously held this brief was that we as politicians are used to talking regularly about child poverty, but some of us find it a lot less natural and a lot more embarrassing—we wince a lot more—to talk about pensioner poverty, which is something that we do not give enough focus. However, as Independent Age has emphasised, with

"more than 2 million pensioners already living in poverty and the cost-of-living crisis hitting hard, we know people are being forced to make impossible choices on how to cut back to be able to afford heating, electricity and food."

As Christmas approaches, research by Age UK has shown how frightened older people are about surviving the next few months, with a significant number this year anticipating a more solitary and lonely Christmas period than usual. Age UK's polling also found that more than one in five older people are already reducing or stopping their spending on medication or specialist foods, or expect to do so in the coming months, and that one in seven is skipping meals or expects to do so in the same period.

I have genuine respect for the Minister, and I know that she will say that the cost of living crisis has come about as a result of Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, but it is not solely because of Putin's invasion of Ukraine or, indeed, the economic hangover from the coronavirus pandemic. I would certainly argue, and I am sure others would as well, that the touchpaper was lit on the cost of living crisis 12 years ago, when a Government that Scotland did not vote for embarked on a brutal assault via Tory austerity. I am afraid that that has been exacerbated by Brexit—something else that people in Scotland did not consent to.

The UK has one of the lowest state pensions in north-western Europe, and after a decade of Tory austerity cuts, pensioner poverty is now on the rise. Some 85% of social security and the state pension itself is reserved to this institution and the British Government, so Scotland has little say in this hugely important policy area. SNP MPs have campaigned vehemently for the Tories to maintain the triple lock. Only after multiple U-turns and breaking their manifesto pledge last year—and after a very unhealthy dose of uncertainty for pensioners across these islands—did the British Government finally retain the triple lock.

However, the suspension of the triple lock in 2021 shows that Scotland does not have the powers to prevent Tory cuts for pensioners. The suspension ended up costing each pensioner £520 on average during the cost of living crisis. Additionally, the Scottish Government under the current devolved settlement have no power to raise the state pension, as Ministers know fine well, although some often like to pretend otherwise.

The SNP has continually implored Ministers to devote a larger percentage of GDP to state pensions and indeed to pensioner benefits. The British Government are allowing £1.7 billion of pension credit to go unclaimed during the cost of living crisis. We know that pension credit is a vital lifeline for many older people, but only seven in 10 of those eligible claim the money that they are fully entitled to. The British Government must introduce a full take-up strategy for reserved benefits, including pension credit, as the Scottish Government have done in respect of devolved benefits. I genuinely welcome the conversation I had with the Minister before the debate, when we said that we would discuss this issue offline.

The Conservative Government have a rather long track record in picking the pockets of our pensioners: from the WASPI women and the triple lock to the low take-up of pension credit, the frozen pensions of overseas pensioners, many of whom are veterans, and the scrapping of free TV licences for the over-75s, the list goes on and on. This Government have very much been found wanting in terms of their record on pensioners.

Only with full powers over pensions can the Scottish Government at least remedy these injustices. In an independent Scotland pensioners could be protected from Westminster austerity. We in the SNP want Scotland to be the best place to grow old—a place where retirement means dignity and fairness for all. I know that adhering to manifestos or, in some cases, leadership election pledges is a bit of a quaint novelty for the two biggest parties in this House. However, my party's 2019 manifesto committed me and my colleagues to continue advocating for a fairer pensions system and to oppose plans to increase the state pension age beyond 66.

Alongside that, we will continue to call on the British Government to establish an independent saving and pension commission to ensure that pension policies are fit for purpose and genuinely reflect the demographic

needs of the different parts of these islands. I am struck by the fact that the life expectancy in Kensington and Chelsea is very different from that in my own constituency.

Of course, all of this is predicated on Ministers in Whitehall listening to the voices of those that Scottish voters send to this House—something the Government have a poor track record on. Therefore, the only way to ensure that our pensioners grow old with dignity is for Scotland to become an independent country, with powers to protect pensioners and ensure that they live their final days in prosperity, not poverty.

5.3 pm

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Robert. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) for her work on this important issue. I also thank other hon. Members who have spoken in the debate. Above all, I want to thank the hundreds of thousands of people from across the country who signed the petition that led to this debate. Constituents have expressed their concern for older people, so it is right that we consider this matter today.

Pensioners face the worst cost of living crisis for over 40 years. The cost of food and fuel is up, and the cost of living as a whole is going up. Yet, at the same time, support for pensioners is failing to keep up with the severe pressure on older people. Those who have worked hard and contributed all their lives deserve to receive a decent state pension in retirement. The official Opposition support the triple lock and have repeatedly called for the state pension to rise in line with it during the last two years, but the Government's approach has fallen well short of what is expected by pensioners and the country as a whole.

I will set out the scale of the cost of living crisis and then address the Government's failure in this regard. It is clear that this crisis is the worst squeeze on the incomes of families and pensioners since the 1970s. Sadly, inflation has hit over 10%—something unheard of in living memory. The situation facing people on low and fixed incomes is particularly difficult. Pensioners and others on modest incomes spend more of their disposable income on food and fuel, the prices of which have increased to a far greater extent than those of other goods. The prices of staples such as bread, cereals, tea, meat, dairy produce and eggs have all risen rapidly, and some have increased by far more than the headline rate of 10%. As is well known, the same is true of energy. Not only has the price of gas risen dramatically, but so has the price of electricity and heating oil. In the meantime the Government have dithered and delayed, and put off addressing these important issues.

I turn to the Government's poor record and to the lack of—indeed, the delays to—support for poor pensioners. Despite raising the state pension in line with the triple lock being a manifesto pledge, Ministers repeatedly failed to meet that commitment. Last year the Government said that earnings appeared to have grown by a larger amount, because the return to work after furlough created the impression that earnings had increased by 8%. They used that as an excuse for disapplying the triple lock, preventing pensioners from getting the rise in the state pension that they clearly deserved. We repeatedly challenged the Government, but they simply would not listen to our concerns.

To make matters worse, this year Ministers refused for months to commit to increasing the state pension in line with inflation. Campaigners repeatedly pressed them on the issue, and the official Opposition raised the matter in Parliament a number of times. As a result of the Government's dither and delay, pensioners were left wondering what would happen to them at a time when they were facing a very difficult winter. After months of delay, and considerable pressure and stress for older people, Ministers eventually confirmed at the autumn statement that the state pension would rise in line with inflation. Those failures and persistent delays let pensioners down badly, so I hope the Minister will find time to apologise for them when she replies.

The Government have failed pensioners on a number of other matters relating to the state pension—for example, pension credit and some of the problems relating to the energy price guarantee. I want to raise those related issues, because both policies should be offering far more help than they do at present.

Pension credit tops up the incomes of some of the most vulnerable pensioners, who receive a particularly modest income. However, about 1 million pensioners who are entitled to the benefit are not claiming it. Will the Minister explain why the Government are still failing on this matter? What more can be done to ensure that pensioners claim pension credit to raise their incomes, as they deserve?

Although help is now available with heating costs, there are gaps in the scheme—not least that it will be scaled back next year. In the meantime, payments for some pensioners in rented accommodation are still not being passed on by landlords. Concerns have been raised in my constituency, and I am sure Members across the House have experienced the same issue. I hope the Minister will respond to that point.

Time is pressing, but I want once again to thank the members of the public who signed the petition, as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea, who spoke so eloquently, and other Members from across the House. I look forward to the Minister's reply.

5.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Laura Trott): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Robert. I thank all hon. Members for their valuable contributions, and the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) for opening the debate.

The Government disagree with the petition's proposed approach. It makes two suggestions: to increase the state pension and to lower the retirement age. I will first address the proposal to increase the state pension to £380 a week. That would equate pensioner income with the national living wage in 2022-23. However, the national living wage and the state pension are two very different provisions, with distinct purposes. A direct comparison cannot be drawn between the levels of the two. The national living wage aims to protect low-income workers and to provide an incentive to work, by ensuring that workers benefit from being employed. However, most pensioners have already left the labour market. Comparisons made in the e-petition between headline state pension amounts and the national living wage do not consider the full package of state measures available to support

[Laura Trott]

people in retirement or the fact that pensioners do not pay national insurance or into a pension scheme through automatic enrolment.

We need to be clear with the public that a state pension of £380 per week for every UK pensioner would be unaffordable. It would mean an annual cost of up to £251 billion if it was applied for 2022-23. That compares to the £110 billion we are currently forecast to spend on the state pension. In the UK we have a system of state and private pensions, which jointly provide an income for people in retirement. Most people will have a private or occupational pension on top of the state pension. In the 2021 financial year, the average net income of all pensioners was £361 per week, after housing costs. Crucially, the Government also provide around £67 billion each year in tax relief to boost private retirement savings. It is important to consider all aspects of Government support for retirement, rather than solely the state pension amount.

The Government are committed to ensuring that the state pension continues to provide the foundations for people's retirement income, and we are proud of the assistance we have given pensioners since 2010. Since 2010, the full yearly amount of the basic state pension has risen by over £2,300 in cash terms. That is £720 more than if it had been uprated by prices, and £570 more than if it had been uprated by earnings.

As all hon. Members here today recognise, the Government have announced plans to apply the triple lock this year. It was announced, according to the normal parliamentary timetable, that from April the state pension will be over £3,000 per year higher in cash terms, which is double what it was in 2010, £790 more than if it had been uprated by prices, and £945 more than if it had been uprated by earnings.

Pension credit has come up a lot today, as it should. Pension credit provides vital additional financial support by topping up the state pension and other retirement incomes. The hon. Member for Battersea referred to the minimum income guarantee, which is what we put in place to ensure that pensioners do not fall below a certain base. It also acts as a gateway to other help, including assistance with rent, council tax, NHS prescriptions and heating bills. Of immediate importance, it is a gateway to the additional cost of living payments we are paying to those on qualifying means-tested benefits. There is more that we need to do to link that up with other information that the Government have. I will be pleased to work with Opposition Members, as well as the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden), in order to try to make that happen.

We have taken direct action when pensioners have needed it, both through the pandemic and now with the rising cost of living. That includes the £650 cost of living payment, paid in two instalments, to help those on pension credit with the rising cost of living. As we all know—and I would like to emphasise this again—it is not too late for pensioners who are not already getting pension credit to qualify for the second instalment. That is because a claim for pension credit can be backdated for up to three months, provided the entitlement conditions are met throughout that time. To ensure that a successful backdated claim falls within the qualifying period for the second cost of living payment, we are urging people to claim pension credit as soon as possible, and by no later than 18 December.

David Linden: I appreciate that the Minister will not necessarily have the figures to hand, but would she be willing to write to me with information on how much the Government are spending on, for example, billboard campaigns and radio advertising to encourage pensioners to take part—in the same way they do with the levelling-up campaign?

Laura Trott: I would be more than happy to do so. I know that we spent £1.2 million over the summer. I have signed off a campaign for this winter, with more coming after Christmas, but I will write to the hon. Gentleman with the exact amounts.

That leads me nicely on to the hon. Member for Battersea, who referred to the take-up campaign. We have had a huge take-up campaign over the summer, and we have done one recently as well. We have further communication planned. It is something I am very focused on, and I would like to work with all hon. Members who are interested to ensure that it happens.

Marsha De Cordova: Is any work being done to measure the impact of the summer campaign on the take-up of pension credit? Going forward, I am very happy to work with the Minister on this.

Laura Trott: We know that claims for pension credit have tripled since the summer. On average, we used to get 2,000 claims a week—that has gone up to 6,000. The seven out of 10 figure that everybody uses comes from the family resources survey, which was last done in 2019-20, which has caused the difficulty with exact details on eligibility. Because of the pandemic, the survey has not been repeated, and there is an 18-month delay on the figures. It is very difficult to get up-to-date data on actual eligibility levels, which is something that we need to address over the longer term. In the interim, though, we have the numbers of people who are making the claims through the line, which, as I have said, have gone up threefold.

Matt Rodda: Could the Minister explore the issue of pensioners who do not have English as their first language and other hard-to-reach groups whom Government information often struggles to reach? There have been success stories in the past where particular approaches have worked with some minority groups. Perhaps the Minister could write to me and other colleagues present on that matter.

Laura Trott: I am very happy to do so. If there are any specific approaches the hon. Gentleman thinks the Government should be taking, I am very open to any ideas he may have and would happily take them forward.

The £650 cost of living payment is one of a number of measures in the Government's £37 billion cost of living support package, which will ensure that the most vulnerable households will receive at least £1,200 this year. The package also includes a £400 reduction on energy bills for all domestic electricity customers over the coming months, plus a £150 council tax rebate for 85% of all UK households.

In addition to the steps we have taken to address the cost of living for pensioners, we have also made long-term reforms to the state pension and introduced automatic

enrolment to boost private saving. In 2016, the Government introduced the new state pension, which forms a clear foundation for individuals' private savings to provide the retirement they want. At the heart of its design, we sought to correct some historic unfairness in the previous system, in particular for women, self-employed people and lower-paid workers. More than 3 million women are set to receive an average of £550 more a year by 2030. State pension outcomes are also expected to equalise for men and women by the early 2040s—more than a decade earlier than they would have aligned under the old system.

I want to pause here to mention pensioner poverty, which was brought up by a number of hon. Members. I know it is something we all care deeply about. The Government are committed to action that helps to alleviate the levels of pensioner poverty. We are forecast to spend more than £134 billion on benefits for pensioners in 2022-23, which amounts to 5.4% of GDP and includes spending on the state pension that is forecast to be over £110 billion in 2022-23. Thankfully, there are 400,000 fewer pensioners in absolute poverty, both before and after housing costs, than in 2009-10, but there is, of course, always more to do.

Automatic enrolment, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter), is transforming private saving. More than 10.7 million people have been automatically enrolled into a workplace pension and more than 2 million employers have complied with their duties to date. This has helped to supply around an additional £33 billion into pensions savings in real terms in 2021 compared to 2012. I want to bring up the findings of the 2017 review of measures for automatic enrolment, as the hon. Member for Battersea mentioned her support for the lower earnings limit. The 2017 review of automatic enrolment set out the ambition to enable people to save more and to start saving earlier by abolishing the lower earnings limit and reducing the qualifying age for automatic enrolment to 18 by the mid-2020s. We have always been clear that changes would be made in a way and at a time that are affordable, balancing the needs of savers, employers and taxpayers, and the Government are absolutely still committed to that.

Together, the new state pension, automatic enrolment to workplace pensions and the safety net of pension credit will provide a robust system for pensioners for decades to come. A number of Members talked about international comparisons; OECD rankings show that, thanks to this Government's reforms, the UK pensions systems will provide future workers with income replacement rates comparable to the OECD average and higher than countries such as Switzerland, Norway and Germany.

Let me turn to the second suggestion: decreasing the state pension age to 60. The Government have no plans to reverse changes to the state pension age. Previous reforms have focused on maintaining the right balance between affordability, the sustainability of the state pension and fairness between generations. Changes to state pension age were made through a series of Acts, and by successive Governments, from 1995 onwards. Those reforms followed public consultations and extensive debates in both Houses of Parliament. The state pension is funded through the national insurance and tax contributions of the current working-age population. Like increasing the state pension, reducing the state pension age to 60 would massively increase the tax burden on the current working-age population and carry significant cost.

David Linden: I wonder whether the Minister might put on record the point that she just confirmed. In the debate on Scottish independence, Unionist campaigners often talk about how the UK somehow furnishes pensions. However, as the Minister just pointed out, the state pension is funded by ongoing national insurance contributions each and every day, which rather bursts the myth that is made by the Better Together campaign in Scotland.

Laura Trott: State pension entitlement is obviously built up through contributions over a period of time, but equally there is a huge burden on the state, and that has to be met at a given point. As we have discussed, pension pots are funded widely by both the working-age population and people later in life.

The Government previously estimated that, had we not increased the state pension age for both men and women, the total additional cost to taxpayers—in 2018-19 prices—would have been around £215 billion for the period from 2010-11 to 2025-26. Lowering the state pension age is clearly unaffordable, and would place an ever-increasing and unfair burden on taxpayers. That would not be right, particularly as life expectancy continues to rise.

A number of hon. Members mentioned the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. The PHSO is undertaking a multi-stage process, and it has not given its final findings on the overall investigation. If the PHSO finds injustice, it will move on to stage 3 and consider any recommendations. The DWP will wait before taking any further steps.

The UK has an ageing population and workforce. The proportion of people aged 50 years and over compared to those aged 16 and over is projected to increase from 42% in 2010 to nearly 50% by 2035. That is nearly 29 million more people. Older workers will bring a wealth of skills and experience to the workplace, and they are vital to the economy. By working for longer, older people have the opportunity to improve their retirement income and benefit from the social engagement that employment brings. The hon. Member for Battersea was absolutely right that we need to support workers in later life, and BEIS is working on exactly that.

In conclusion, I welcome today's debate and acknowledge the proposals set out in the e-petition. As I have mentioned, the Government provide wide-ranging measures to support people in retirement. Our recent announcement of plans to apply the triple lock this year demonstrates our commitment to providing a strong foundation of support for pensioners.

5.23 pm

Marsha De Cordova: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter) for her incredible speech, which shone a light on the impact of pensioner poverty in her own constituency. She brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to these debates. I thank the petitioners—it is because of them that we are here—and the tens of thousands of people who signed the petition. No one should ignore pensioner poverty, but we are having this debate because many pensioners are not being supported.

[Marsha De Cordova]

We are in a cost of living crisis, and the Government have talked about the support that is being provided, but we have to be aware that some of the targeted support will go only to people in receipt of a qualifying benefit—pension credit or some sort of housing support. People on a state pension who do not get any top-ups will probably not qualify for that additional support, so that places an additional challenge on their finances. That is what I was talking about when I said that there should be additional targeted support.

All hon. Members mentioned pension credit take-up. It is right that the Government are doing take-up campaigns, because that will help to alleviate some of the challenges that many face.

This has been a good debate. I strongly believe that we have to support pensioners and those in greater need. Although we cannot see the Government increasing the state pension to £380 a week, we need to look at some sort of minimum income standard for pensioners.

The Minister did not address the point about streamlining the application process and making it more accessible. I hope she will take that back, because it was a recommendation from the Work and Pensions Committee. It is important that people are able to claim that aspect of social security. If the process is not streamlined, accessible and easy to use, it will deter people, particularly those whose first language is not English and disabled people who are unable to access the forms. I hope that, in their activities around pension credit take-up, the Government consider that issue. I highlighted the inequalities within certain groups—women, disabled people and ethnic minority communities—particularly around auto-enrolment, so I am pleased that that is still on the Government's radar.

I thank everybody for being part of this debate. I only wish there were more people here, but I appreciate that it is probably due to the travel challenges that many are facing.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 617603, relating to the state pension.

5.26 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 12 December 2022

DEFENCE

Contingent Liabilities: Skynet 6

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): I am pleased to inform the House that I am today laying a departmental minute to advise that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has received approval from His Majesty's Treasury to recognise new contingent liabilities associated with the Skynet 6 programme. This programme, as set out in the defence Command Paper "Defence in a Competitive Age", will provide the MOD with a world class, modern military satellite communications network to support our and our allies' operations globally. This will be achieved through new capital investment in the ground stations, spacecraft and user terminals that form the Skynet strategic capability. These new contingent liabilities are specifically related to the launch of our first next generation satellite, known as Skynet 6A, which is scheduled to take place in financial year 2025-26 using a SpaceX Falcon 9 launch vehicle from Cape Canaveral. This follows four Skynet 5 satellites (A, B, C and D) currently in orbit, which will be initially supplemented, and then incrementally replaced by 6A and a further four satellite systems being procured through the Skynet 6 enduring capability (EC) project. His Majesty's Treasury approved the proposed three contingent liabilities and Chairs of the Public Accounts Committee and Defence Committee were notified on 23 June 2020.

Three contingent liabilities are recognised.

The first contingent liability relates to loss of capability of the Skynet 6A system. The MOD will take ownership of the Skynet 6A spacecraft at launch and has not sought to secure insurance for the launch or acceptance phases, as it was assessed as not providing value for money. The post mitigation worst-case financial exposure of risk of loss of capability related to these events, assuming the need to re-procure a spacecraft with similar capabilities, has been assessed at a value of £720 million.

The second contingent liability relates to long delay of launch. The MOD has agreed to bear the allowable costs of a launch-related delay which arise for reasons entirely outside of the control of the contractor. A long launch delay would result in the MOD incurring additional storage, prelaunch insurance, maintenance, launch service provider and other delay-related allowable costs. The post mitigation worst-case financial exposure of a long launch delay has been assessed at a value of £253 million.

The third contingent liability relates to a cross-waiver of liability in favour of the Skynet 6A launch service provider. Cross-waivers are standard practice in space launches. The MOD has agreed a cross waiver of liability in favour of SpaceX and related parties in respect of damage to Ministry of Defence property and personal injury, death or property damage incurred by Ministry of Defence employees. This liability is assessed as unquantifiable due to the nature, scope, range, and scale of possible scenarios that might occur, which means that it is not currently possible to provide a realistic estimate of cost.

The attachment can be viewed online at: http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2022-12-12/HCWS436/.

[HCWS436]

EDUCATION

Skills Update

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Robert Halfon): As part of the Government's commitment to provide a comprehensive and clear skills offer for employers and individuals, the Government have decided to integrate the Traineeship programme into 16-19 study programme and adult education provision from 1 August 2023. Integrating Traineeships into general provision means the Department for Education will no longer fund the delivery of Traineeships through a standalone national programme. All the elements of the Traineeship programme—English and maths, work experience, employability and occupational skills, and qualifications—will continue to be funded for 16-19 year olds as part of the national 16- 19 study programme, and for adults through the adult education budget. This means that providers with access to funding can choose to continue to offer Traineeship programmes for young people who need support to get into work, apprenticeships or further learning.

In addition, there are other great alternative opportunities provided by other programmes such as T-levels and the T-level transition programme, Bootcamps, Apprenticeships, and Sector-Based Work Academies.

In areas where the adult education budget has been devolved, Mayoral combined authorities and Greater London authority will decide on how best to support young adults in their areas.

Integrating the national Traineeship programme will simplify the skills landscape making it easier to navigate for young people and employers. It will also enable employers, training providers and local authorities to tailor their programmes, as they will have greater flexibilities to design a Traineeship around the learner or business need as we will be removing the national framework which sets strict requirements on providers, in how they must deliver a Traineeship. This will better support individual learners and focus on local needs to support growth at a local level, and help young people gain the skills they need to get into apprenticeships and sustainable employment.

The Traineeship programme has been running for nearly 10 years and the number of starts has remained relatively low. To encourage growth, we introduced occupationally specific Traineeships, an employer incentive and featured Traineeships within various communications campaigns. However, the 17,400 starts achieved in the 2020-21 academic year and the 15,500 starts in 2021-22 remains a small number of starts for a nationally administered programme. It is right, therefore, that we focus our offer on our mainstream provision. This change will make it easier for young people and employers to navigate our skills offer and will enable providers to better tailor their programmes to deliver the key skills needed to drive growth in local communities.

[HCWS434]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review: Progress Report

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): In July 2021, the Government published their response to the recommendations of the independent medicines and medical devices safety review (the review). In this, we accepted the overarching conclusion of the review that the system failed to listen to patients, or to put patients at the centre of their care. We accepted the majority of the review's nine strategic recommendations and 50 actions for improvement.

We also committed to publishing an update on progress made in the following year to implement the accepted strategic recommendations and actions for improvement. I am happy to be able to publish that report today, which shows that we have made substantial progress and sets out the remaining next steps. The key points are set out below.

Putting patient voice at the centre of patient safety

Dr Henrietta Hughes was appointed as the first patient safety commissioner in July 2022. Dr Henrietta Hughes is already championing the value of listening to patients to seek improvements to patient safety around the use of medicines and medical devices.

Pelvic mesh

In April 2022, the ninth specialist mesh centre opened in Bristol. Women from every region now have access to the specialist support services they need, including pain management, psychological support and surgical mesh removal. As of October 2022, over 1,900 patients had been referred for treatment.

The first annual clinical summit took place on 6 December 2022, where all nine mesh centres came together to share best practice in setting up the centres, delivering patient-centred care, and ensuring robust data collection to support continued improvement. To ensure these centres are supporting women as intended, I have asked the Department to work with NHS England to review mesh centre outcomes and patient experience.

Sodium valproate

Government take safety concerns associated with sodium valproate very seriously. Significant measures were introduced by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) in 2018 to further reduce the use of valproate during pregnancy, including the introduction of the pregnancy prevention programme and smaller pack sizes to encourage monthly prescribing with a pictogram/warning image on valproate packaging.

The MHRA and NHS Digital have developed the medicines and pregnancy registry to improve our ability to monitor implementation and compliance with the pregnancy prevention programme. This tracks all women in England who are taking NHS-prescribed valproate and identifies when they are pregnant and accessing NHS care for that pregnancy. The latest data from the registry shows that the number of pregnant women prescribed valproate in a six-month period has fallen from 68 women in April to September 2018, to 17 women in October 2021 to March 2022. Last year the registry was also expanded to cover other anti-epileptic drugs in addition to sodium valproate.

Existing approaches to reduce the number of pregnant women exposed to sodium valproate are important and are making a difference, but there is no room for complacency, and we still need to do more. For that reason, the independent Commission on Human Medicines (CHM) has considered a comprehensive assessment by MHRA which included input from patients and other key stakeholders and a review of the available data.

The CHM has advised that there should be greater scrutiny of the way sodium valproate is prescribed and that further risk minimisation measures are required, in particular that two specialists should independently consider and document that there is no other effective or tolerated treatment. The CHM has established an implementation group to support the safe introduction of the new measures into clinical practice. The implementation group includes representation from across the healthcare system.

The proposed new measures will be implemented over the coming months according to patient priorities so that they can be introduced safely. In the meantime, health professionals are being reminded that sodium valproate should not be used in female children and women of childbearing potential unless other treatments are ineffective or not tolerated, and the pregnancy prevention plan should be closely adhered to. It is important to note that patients taking sodium valproate are strongly advised to continue to do so until reviewed by a healthcare professional.

I will also be hosting a roundtable on valproate prescribing with key stakeholders on 19 December 2022, to discuss how we can work together to further improve monitoring and compliance with the regulatory controls.

Last year we held a consultation on original pack dispensing and whole pack dispensing of medicines containing sodium valproate, which included a proposal that medicines containing sodium valproate are always dispensed in the original manufacturer's packaging. This would ensure patients, and particularly women and girls of childbearing potential, always receive the patient information leaflet with warnings about taking the medicine while pregnant. The Government have considered the responses received and will shortly publish a response to the consultation.

Medical device information system

Following extensive scoping work we have concluded that the best and fastest way to deliver a medical devices information system is by increasing the scope and coverage of outcome registries.

We aim to increase the scope and coverage of medical device outcome registries from 15% to 80% of high-risk procedures over the next three years. As well as device tracking the registries will include patient outcomes and patient experience, helping us deliver on wider objectives such as better information about individual consultants' performance, which was highlighted in the Paterson inquiry.

Declaration of interests

The IMMDS review stated that transparency of payments made to clinicians needs to improve. We are in a piloting phase for the declaration of doctor's interests in NHS and independent settings. Healthcare providers will publish this information to ensure it is more accessible to patients.

During the pilot, we will seek feedback from healthcare providers, doctors, and patients on the feasibility and cost of establishing and maintaining systems across different healthcare settings; the content of standardised templates and guidance; and the accessibility of information for patients. Full implementation will begin in 2023. Once we have a system in place for doctors, we will consider systems for other healthcare professionals.

Next steps

We know there is more work to do to improve women's experiences of the healthcare system, and patient safety. The Government are committed to continuing to work with partners across the health and care system to implement the accepted recommendations and actions for improvement.

The review also brought into sharp focus the importance of listening to women's voices and was a key driver behind the decision to develop the first ever women's health strategy for England, which we published this summer. Through the women's health strategy, we will continue to improve the health and wellbeing of women and girls.

[HCWS438]

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Local Government Finance Settlement: England

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove): Today the Government have published details on the Local Government Finance Settlement for the next two years for English councils, which prioritises protecting local taxpayers and vital core services. Local government has long called for greater certainty on funding following repeated one-year settlements, greater local control of finances, and a focus on social care. This two-year policy statement delivers on all of these fronts.

The Government estimate that on average councils will see an increase of around 9% in their funding next year. We have delivered on the sector's requests for additional funding through the £2.8 billion announced at the autumn statement for social care. We are also ensuring that this year's settlement provides support across all tiers of local government through a new, one-off funding guarantee that ensures all local authorities will see a minimum 3% increase in their core spending power before taking any local decisions on council tax levels. Councils are best placed to make local decisions to meet pressures and ensure that our most vulnerable in society get the support they need, and therefore it is for individual local authorities to determine the level of flexibility they use in setting council tax. The policy statement confirms a core referendum principle of up to 3% for both 2023-24 and 2024-25.

The Government's manifesto commit to continuing to protect local taxpayers from excessive council tax increases, and it is for the House of Commons to set an annual threshold at which a council tax referendum is triggered. This is an additional local democratic check and balance to avoid the repeat seen under the last Labour Government when council tax more than doubled. This package of referendum principles strikes a fair balance. The council tax referendum provisions are not a cap, nor do they force councils to set taxes at the threshold level.

Councillors, mayors, police and crime commissioners, and local councils will rightly want to consider the financial needs of local residents at this challenging point in time, alongside the public's support for action on keeping our streets safe and providing key services.

The Mayor of London has requested flexibility to levy an additional £20 on band D bills to the Greater London Authority precept to provide extra funding for Transport for London. The Government have expressed ongoing concern about the management of TfL by this Mayor, and it is disappointing that London taxpayers are having to foot the bill for the GLA's poor governance and decision making. While the Government will not oppose this request, any decision to increase the precept is solely one for the Mayor, who should take into account the pressures that Londoners are currently facing on living costs and his decision to raise council tax by 9.5% last year.

This will be a settlement that also recognises the importance of funding adult social care by confirming significant additional funding for social care. Additionally, for social care authorities, the Government will consult on a 2% precept, for both 2023-24 and 2024-25. When taking decisions on council tax levels, local authorities should recognise the pressures many households are facing.

In addition, the policy statement has set out key assumptions behind the second year of the settlement. This includes confirming that the review of relative needs and resources and a reset to business rates growth will not be implemented in the next two years, to give councils more certainty for budget planning. For 2024-25, the policy statement refers to the significant new funding stream expected from the extended producer responsibility for packaging scheme.

Finally, we are encouraging local authorities to consider whether they can use their reserves to maintain services in the face of immediate inflationary pressures, taking account, of course, of the need to maintain appropriate levels of reserves to support councils' financial sustainability and future investment. The Government note the significant increase in some local authority reserves over the two years of the pandemic.

All of the proposals set out in the policy statement will be subject to the usual consultation process within the Local Government Finance Settlement.

This written ministerial statement covers England only.

[HCWS437]

Community Ownership Fund: Update

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Dehenna Davison): Over the weekend I was delighted to announce the outcome of round 2 window 1 of the £150 million Community Ownership Fund, which will see £6.7 million awarded to 32 projects across the United Kingdom. Combined with round 1 projects, this additional funding takes our overall funding total to £16.7 million for 70 projects. The full list of successful applicants can be found here.

This targeted support is delivering much needed investment to ensure that important parts of our social fabric, such as pubs, sports clubs, theatres and post office buildings, can continue to play a central role in

towns and villages across the United Kingdom. In this round we will be funding a diverse range of projects, from the Margaret Haes Riding Centre in Bury to the Llandyrnog Community Shop in the Vale of Clwyd.

The Community Ownership Fund is helping to reduce geographical disparities across the United Kingdom. To this end, the funding provided in round 2 window 1 will see over £800,000 awarded to projects in Scotland, £1.1 million to Wales and £555,000 to Northern Ireland. This, so far, brings the total funding awarded across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to £4.9 million collectively.

The funding provided in round 2 window 1 will also see £4.2 million awarded to projects in England. This brings the total funding awarded across English regions to £11.8 million collectively.

The projects supported by the Community Ownership Fund, such as the United Kingdom's most remote pub, The Old Forge in Scotland, Ballymacash Sports Academy in Northern Ireland, and the Leigh Spinners Mill in Greater Manchester, are already making a genuine difference to their communities. With the additional investment awarded in this bidding window, I am delighted to be supporting many more small but mighty local assets across the United Kingdom, levelling up the places we love and cherish.

Interested groups can submit an Expression of Interest form to start their application process at any time. With a four-year window until 2024-25 for investment to be released, there is plenty of opportunity for interested community groups to apply to take over invaluable community assets and to run them as businesses—by the community, for the community.

[HCWS435]

Petition

Monday 12 December 2022

OBSERVATIONS

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Right of refusal of development on green belt land

The petition of residents of South Shields,

Declares that the development of 156 residential properties on GA2 land is inappropriate and unwanted by the community; further that the development lies west of Sunniside Farm in South Shields, a site within the green belt which has had a food producing arable field for over thirty five consecutive years; further that, if allowed, the development would disrupt the heavily used 7th century Bede's Way footpath which links the two ancient monasteries of St Paul's and St Peter's which are dedicated to The Venerable Bede; and further that all communities should have a clause or exception of a right of refusal of development on green belt land which is used to produce arable food or where local communities do not want development that would destroy the openness and permanence of the land.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to change the National Planning Policy Framework to include a clause of a right of refusal of development on green belt land, thus giving local people the right to say what is to happen in their community.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—*[Presented by Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck , Official Report,* Wednesday 7 September 2022; Vol. 719, c. 348.]

[P002766]

Observation from The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Lee Rowley):

This Government recognise the importance of green belt and are committed to its protection and enhancement. The latest figures show that around 1,638,150 hectares—or 12.6 per cent of England's land area—remains green belt. Indeed, the green belt is actually larger now than in 1997 when our records began—if we disregard land reclassified as national park, and it increased by more than 24,000 hectares last year.

Over the last decade, the Government have placed significant weight on the retention of green belt. The revised National Planning Policy Framework has retained strong green belt protections. The framework states, for instance, that a green belt boundary may be altered only in exceptional circumstances through the local plan process. A local authority should consider releasing land from green belt only if it can demonstrate that it has explored all other reasonable options—including using brownfield land as much as possible or optimising the density of development.

The framework also makes clear that planning applications for inappropriate development—including most forms of new building—should not be approved in green belt unless in very special circumstances, as judged by the local authority.

While retaining strong provisions in the framework for the protection of green belt, the Government also recognise that there may be times when a local area deems it appropriate to review a green belt boundary. Consequently, we believe decisions about such changes should be taken locally where possible. Local authorities are legally required to consult local people at the outset, both on local plan proposals, including any green belt release, and on individual planning applications. Local authorities are best placed to plan their areas taking into account all the material facts and circumstances, which are often very locally specific.

Given the strong existing protections, the existing consultation requirements, and the ability of local communities to ultimately remove their local elected representatives at a democratic election, we are not proposing to change this part of the process at this time.

Ministerial Corrections

Monday 12 December 2022

CABINET OFFICE

Independent Adviser on Ministerial Interests

The following are extracts from the answer given to the urgent question on the appointment of an independent adviser on ministerial interests on 30 November 2022.

Alex Burghart: The right hon. Lady refers to rumours in the press, but let us look at the facts. The Prime Minister has been in office for 31 days.

[Official Report, 30 November 2022, Vol. 723, c. 904.]

Letter of correction from the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart):

An error has been identified in my response to the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner).

The correct response should have been:

Alex Burghart: The right hon. Lady refers to rumours in the press, but let us look at the facts. The Prime Minister has been in office for **36 days**.

Alex Burghart: As I have said, there is a process ongoing to appoint an independent adviser as fast as possible. The Prime Minister has been in post for 31 days, and there is standing advice on the use of WhatsApp and private messaging.

[Official Report, 30 November 2022, Vol. 723, c. 905.]

Letter of correction from the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart):

An error has been identified in my response to the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones).

The correct response should have been:

Alex Burghart: As I have said, there is a process ongoing to appoint an independent adviser as fast as possible. The Prime Minister has been in post for **36 days**, and there is standing advice on the use of WhatsApp and private messaging.

Alex Burghart: The hon. Lady will have heard me point out that the Prime Minister, who has said he will appoint an independent adviser, has only been in post for 31 days and that a process is going on at speed. In answer to her other question, it is very much the view of this Government that it is the Prime Minister who appoints the independent adviser to give advice to the Prime Minister, who answers ultimately to Parliament.

[Official Report, 30 November 2022, Vol. 723, c. 905.]

Letter of correction from the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart):

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine).

The correct response should have been:

Alex Burghart: The hon. Lady will have heard me point out that the Prime Minister, who has said he will appoint an independent adviser, has only been in post for **36 days** and that a process is going on at speed. In answer to her other question, it is very much the view of this Government that it is the Prime Minister who appoints the independent adviser to give advice to the Prime Minister, who answers ultimately to Parliament.

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Monday 19 December 2022

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