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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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House of Commons

Wednesday 24 May 2023

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr Speaker *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Households in Fuel Poverty

1. **Chris Evans** (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): What estimate he has made with Cabinet colleagues of the number of households in fuel poverty in Wales. [905019]

14. **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): What estimate he has made with Cabinet colleagues of the number of households in fuel poverty in Wales. [905033]

The Secretary of State for Wales (David T. C. Davies): I have regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues on a range of issues. As a result of Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine, households in Wales have seen their energy bills increase, which is why the Government have provided support totalling £94 billion, or £3,300 per household, to help with higher bills.

Chris Evans: A constituent of mine who is a mother and a carer for her disabled son wrote to me recently. She told me that she is watching every penny and is deeply worried about how she will afford energy in the coming winter. She is one of the nine in 10 families with a disabled child who the Family Fund says are struggling to afford simple household bills. What direct advice does the Secretary of State have for my constituent and thousands like her who are in a hopeless situation?

David T. C. Davies: There are indeed many people suffering at the moment, and I feel very sorry for the hon. Gentleman's constituent. The Government have supported households with the rising cost of living by maintaining the energy price guarantee at £2,500 from April to June 2023, saving households an additional £160. Over the winter, the Government were paying on average about half of people's energy bills. For those living in households where someone has a disability, there has been an extra payment of £150.

Chris Elmore: The most recent statistics published by the Welsh Government show that almost a quarter of those in the private rented sector in Wales are living in fuel poverty, compared with only 13% of those who own their homes. Will the Secretary of State set out what additional support those who live in the private rented sector will get from the Government? The reality is that their rents and fuel bills are going up, and the Government seem to be sitting idle and doing nothing to support these people.

David T. C. Davies: The Government are certainly not sitting idly around and not supporting people. The Government do not differentiate between people in private and people in rented accommodation; we have stipulated that those who are the least well off will get the most support. That is why we have ensured that pensions have gone up in line with inflation, the minimum wage has gone up in line with inflation, and those living on benefits have seen their benefits rise in line with inflation.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): As fuel poverty runs rampant and families right across Wales are struggling, does the Secretary of State not realise how appalling it looks that Shell is making £61,000 a minute? When will his Government get a grip, close the loopholes worth billions and extend the windfall tax?

David T. C. Davies: The hon. Gentleman should be aware that the Government have extended the windfall tax and are charging very high levels of tax—indeed, about three times the usual level—on companies taking oil out of the North sea. It is extraordinary that those who call for a windfall tax on energy companies do not recognise that we are already levying it and do not want to support the Government in allowing more oil and gas to be exploited from the North sea, which will enable us to raise even more in taxation.

Gerald Jones: Tory Ministers seem to think that the energy crisis is all over. I am not sure when the Secretary of State last struggled to pay an energy bill, but bills are still almost double what they were before the crisis began, and the Tory Government have scrapped vital support. Does the Secretary of State agree that the way to get energy bills down for good is to back Labour's policy to retrofit 19 million homes and reach 100% clean power by 2030?

David T. C. Davies: I have no idea who would be paying for the hon. Gentleman's proposals—no doubt they are among the many things that will be paid for using the same tax about half a dozen times. He will no doubt be pleased that today inflation is down yet again, and the Government are well on course for achieving their target of cutting inflation by half as well as growing the economy.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): None the less, food inflation remains above 19%, and it hits the poorest hardest, with the Trussell Trust warning that the past year saw a record 185,000 food parcels provided in Wales. Meanwhile, supermarkets continue to make record-breaking profits—many speak of a greedflation crisis. European Governments have negotiated with supermarkets to cap food prices. Why will the Secretary of State's Government not do that, too?

David T. C. Davies: I have already mentioned some of the help and support that the Government have given to the least well-off. I remind the right hon. Lady that, in addition to pensions and benefits rising in line with inflation, there are payments of £900 to those on benefits, £300 to pensioners and £150 to those in households

with disability. Quite frankly, if she is seriously worried about food inflation, she should be talking to her colleagues in the Welsh Labour Government who are propping up the Welsh Labour Government about their ridiculous proposals to ban meal deals, which would make meals even more expensive for people in Wales.

Liz Saville Roberts: It is a good job somebody is protecting Wales, because Tory Brexit has served Wales badly. The European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 and the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 have grabbed the Senedd's powers, and paltry post-Brexit funding is robbing Wales of millions. Enough is enough. The House of Lords recently passed Lord Wigley's Government of Wales (Devolved Powers) Bill to prevent any change to the Senedd's powers without a two-thirds vote majority from Members of the Senedd. Will the Secretary of State support Plaid Cymru's Bill and ensure time for debate, or is he happy to see the people of Wales lose the powers for which they have voted time and again?

David T. C. Davies: Far from taking powers away from the Welsh Government, the Conservative Government have, on a number of occasions, actually increased powers to the Welsh Government. By leaving the European Union, we have repatriated powers from Brussels, where we were being governed by an unelectable elite, and brought them back to both Westminster and Cardiff. If the right hon. Lady wants to stop money being wasted, she should have a word with her colleagues in Plaid Cymru, who are propping up the Welsh Labour Government as they waste hundreds of millions of pounds in the Betsi Cadwaladr health service, hundreds of millions of pounds on an airport with no planes, and over £100 million on plans for a relief road that will never get built.

Mortgage Interest Rates

2. **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the impact of changes in the level of mortgage interest rates on homeowners in Wales. [905020]

The Secretary of State for Wales (David T. C. Davies): I have regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues on a range of issues. Interest rates are rising across the world as countries manage rising prices due to the pandemic and Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine. However, I am very pleased to see that the UK average two and five-year fixed mortgage rates have declined in recent months.

Liz Twist: The Chancellor failed to bring in a proper windfall tax in the Budget in March. Does the Secretary of State agree that there are still huge holes in that levy, which mean that billions of pounds that could be used to help Welsh households with the cost of living are being ignored?

David T. C. Davies: The Chancellor and this Conservative Government have brought in windfall taxes on energy companies taking oil and gas out of the North sea. Energy companies are paying around three times more in taxation than other companies. I hope the hon. Lady will be supportive of the companies that want to take more oil and gas out of the North sea, so we can raise even more in taxation to support the least well-off in the United Kingdom.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Since the Secretary of State's Government's mini-budget, 43,000 Welsh households have paid an extra £20.3 million in mortgage payments. That is a £20 million Tory mortgage premium in just seven months. His Government's economic recklessness continues to cause misery for people across Wales, so will he take the opportunity to apologise to them?

David T. C. Davies: The economic policies being pursued by this Government are to bring inflation down, as the news today demonstrates. I very much hope the hon. Lady will want to celebrate the fact that inflation is now falling. This United Kingdom Government are committed to seeing inflation halved. The policies of her party would push inflation through the roof and push us into another financial catastrophe and crisis of the sort we saw the last time it left office.

Nuclear Power Sites

3. **Chris Clarkson** (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on new nuclear power sites in Wales. [905021]

4. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on new nuclear power sites in Wales. [905022]

The Secretary of State for Wales (David T. C. Davies): The Government have established Great British Nuclear to drive forward the UK's new nuclear programme. GBN will be working with the Government on access to potential sites for new nuclear projects and I will continue to build on the clear cross-party support there is to promote Wales as the destination of choice for one of the first projects.

Chris Clarkson: My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) has been subtly, almost subliminally, making the case for new nuclear in her constituency, but of course with the advent of small modular reactors there is the opportunity for communities across Wales to benefit from clean nuclear energy. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with ministerial colleagues in the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and the Welsh Government to make sure Wales is primed to take advantage?

David T. C. Davies: I had a meeting with the Minister for Nuclear, my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), and yesterday I met the interim chair of GBN, Simon Bowen. We had a very interesting and informative discussion on this emerging technology, which I think is very exciting and offers huge potential for Wales.

Bob Blackman: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answers thus far. Clearly, Wales has a bright future as part of the new nuclear capability across the United Kingdom. What further measures will he take, for example on fusion, as well as on nuclear energy, which has already been provided?

David T. C. Davies: The Government have set out support for investigating nuclear fusion, but I fear that others might be better qualified to provide the detail on that. What I can say to my hon. Friend is that in all the meetings I have had with various stakeholders, I have made the case for Wales to be at the forefront of everyone's minds as a place where we can have a new reactor or SMR technology. And of course, I have been encouraged very much by my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn, who has been an absolute champion for nuclear technology—not for nothing is she known across Wales as the atomic kitten.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): The Secretary of State talks the talk on nuclear, but forgets that the Tories previously pulled the plug on new nuclear in Wales. They have boasted about GB Nuclear, but two years on, nothing at all has happened. Is this not more of the same broken promises from a tired Tory Government who have run out of steam?

David T. C. Davies: It would be tempting, though time will prevent me, to draw attention to the poor record of the last Labour Government on nuclear energy. The fact of the matter is that we are driving forward a new nuclear reactor at Hinkley. We are looking to bring forward a final investment decision on a new nuclear reactor in the next term. The establishment of Great British Nuclear fully demonstrates our commitment to nuclear technology.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): In the Secretary of State's conversations about nuclear with the Welsh, I wonder if he has discussed the pie-in-the-sky nature of small nuclear reactors, the lack of a cogent plan for nuclear waste and the unenviable unit cost in comparison to renewables. Has he indicated that he has a better plan that is not nuclear?

David T. C. Davies: The fact of the matter is that, when one considers all the costs of renewable energy, nuclear comes out very well, not least because it is not possible to predict when exactly the sun will shine or the wind will blow. That is why nuclear has a role to play in our march towards net zero by 2050.

Ferry Services Between England and Wales

5. **Selaine Saxby** (North Devon) (Con): Whether his Department is taking steps to support potential ferry services between England and Wales. [905023]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Dr James Davies): The tourism industry in south Wales and south-west England is incredibly important. I understand that councils on both sides of the Bristol channel are in discussions on how to progress this issue. I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss it in more detail.

Selaine Saxby: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. Ahead of that meeting, might my hon. Friend be able to secure an analysis of a passenger ferry service and the benefits to businesses between Ilfracombe and south Wales?

Dr Davies: It is important that we grasp all opportunities to level up our economy through tourism. That could include a passenger ferry between Ilfracombe and south Wales. Many of the policy levers affecting the visitor economy in Wales are devolved. It is important that interested parties work closely with the relevant councils on the matter. The UK Government are passionate about tourism, unlike the Welsh Government, who seem more focused on putting in place a tourism tax.

Steel Industry

6. **Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support the steel industry in Wales. [905024]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Dr James Davies): Steel is vital to the UK. We are actively engaging with our industry to secure a positive and sustainable future. Industrial sectors, including steel, have been able to bid for Government funds worth more than £1 billion to support them to cut emissions and become more energy efficient.

Stephen Kinnock: The Governments of the United States and the EU have developed active industrial strategies, with multi-billion-pound investments to support their steel industries as they transition to green steel production. Here in the UK, the cavalry is coming in the form of a Labour Government and our £3 billion green steel fund. What a contrast with the Government party, which is completely and utterly asleep at the wheel on steel. When will the Secretary of State start standing up for our proud Welsh steel industry? When will he get his colleagues in Cabinet to wake up to the fact that we are losing the race for green steel investment?

Dr Davies: The hon. Member will be aware that the Secretary of State for Business and Trade visited Tata Steel in Port Talbot only recently. That shows her commitment to it. He will also be aware of the British Industry Supercharger announced only a few months ago, which aims to bring energy costs for energy-intensive industries such as steel production in line with those of other similar countries.

Healthcare Services

7. **Dr Luke Evans** (Bosworth) (Con): What discussions he has had with the Welsh Government on the adequacy of healthcare services in Wales. [905026]

The Secretary of State for Wales (David T. C. Davies): Healthcare services are devolved to the Welsh Labour Government. However, it is deeply worrying that only last week the Welsh Government revealed that their target for people waiting more than two years for treatment has once again been missed, with over 31,000 people waiting in pain over two years for their treatment. In England, which has virtually 20 times the population, the equivalent figure is virtually zero.

Dr Evans: One of the most important things for improving healthcare systems is the ability to compare data. There is a problem, though, if different legislators use different metrics. Will the UK Government commit to an agreement between the devolved nations to share the same data, so that comparisons can be made adequately?

David T. C. Davies: My hon. Friend makes a very good point: we do need comparable data so that we can see exactly what is going wrong in the health service in Wales. From the data that we have, we already know about the 31,000 people who have been waiting more than two years in pain for treatment. We also know that the Welsh Government have a copy of the EY report into what has gone wrong in the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board—a report that they are sitting on and trying to hold secret because it points out that over £100 million was misspent by the health board under a Welsh Labour Government.

Cross-border Transport Connectivity: North Wales

8. **Samantha Dixon** (City of Chester) (Lab): What discussions he has had with (a) Cabinet colleagues and (b) the Welsh Government on cross-border transport connectivity with north Wales. [905027]

The Secretary of State for Wales (David T. C. Davies): I have regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues on a range of transport matters. HS2 will benefit people travelling from north Wales to London, with the interchange at Crewe providing shorter journey times to north Wales than is currently possible on the west coast main line.

Samantha Dixon: Chester station is the key that can unlock connectivity between England and north Wales. Connectivity is vital for not only thousands of rail users but businesses on both sides of the border and beyond. Will the Government commit to the rapid electrification of the north Wales train line, which will transform the north Wales and Cheshire regional economy?

David T. C. Davies: That is one of the best questions I have heard from anyone on the Opposition Benches so far this morning. Yes, I think electrification of the north Wales coast line would be a very good idea, or certainly improvements would be. As the hon. Lady will be aware, various improvements to the Welsh railway structure are being discussed in the rail network enhancements pipeline, and I look forward to it being published shortly.

Transport Links: Wales and Rest of UK

9. **Alexander Stafford** (Rother Valley) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on improving transport links between Wales and the rest of the UK. [905028]

The Secretary of State for Wales (David T. C. Davies): I have regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues to discuss transport links between Wales and the rest of the UK. Roads are devolved to the Welsh Labour Government, and their opposition to the M4 relief road, and indeed to any kind of road building at all, continues to hold the Welsh economy back—a matter that is of great disappointment to me and my Cabinet colleagues.

Alexander Stafford: The economy of Wales has always worked on an east-west basis, so a journey starting from Bangor in the north takes three times longer to Cardiff in the south than it does to Manchester or to my seat of Rother Valley. Can the Secretary of State offer an explanation, then, of why the Welsh Government have banned all new road development and how that might possibly help the Welsh economy?

David T. C. Davies: My hon. Friend raises an excellent point. The Welsh Labour Government's response to the roads review is absolutely extraordinary. Their opposition to road building is going to hold the Welsh economy back, and I urge them to reconsider the impact of banning all road building on the long-term prosperity of Wales.

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): When he delivered his Budget in 2020, the Prime Minister, who was then the Chancellor, promised a bypass for Llanymynech and Pant in my constituency on the road that links Oswestry and Welshpool. Will that road ever come to fruition, or is it just another broken promise?

David T. C. Davies: I did not hear all of that question, but I think it related to the Llanymynech bypass in mid-Wales. The fact of the matter is that the Welsh Labour Government will continue to receive Barnett consequentials for the road building that takes place in England, and it is for them to decide whether they wish to spend that money on building new roads, which is something I would like to see them do, or to keep throwing it away on white elephants such as the airport that has lost hundreds of millions of pounds over the last few years.

Energy-intensive Industries: Decarbonisation

10. **Stephen Morgan** (Portsmouth South) (Lab): What steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help support the decarbonisation of energy-intensive industries in Wales. [905029]

11. **Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): What steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help support the decarbonisation of energy-intensive industries in Wales. [905030]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Dr James Davies): This Government are committed to supporting the decarbonisation of Welsh industry. We have committed £20 billion over the next two decades to the deployment of innovative carbon capture technology. This builds on existing support for the HyNet cluster in north Wales and north-west England and the £21.5 million to develop the South Wales industrial cluster.

Stephen Morgan: The best way to bring down bills in the long term for businesses in Wales and across the UK is to help transition industries away from fossil fuels. That is why Labour is calling for a national wealth fund, so that we can help industries such as steel to win the race for the future. Will the Minister tell the House specifically what steps he is taking to help heavy industry decarbonise?

Dr Davies: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. He will of course be aware of the array of measures that are in place to help decarbonisation—the carbon capture, utilisation and storage infrastructure fund, the industrial fuel switching fund, the Industrial Decarbonisation Research and Innovation Centre, the competitive industrial energy transformation fund and the industrial strategy challenge fund among others.

Bill Esterson: The UK is the only country in the G7 whose steel industry is currently in decline. Why will the Government not end their sticking-plaster approach, match Labour's commitment to a £3 billion green steel fund, and invest in a long-term plan to decarbonise the vital steel sector in Wales?

Dr Davies: Let me I repeat what I said earlier. The Secretary of State visited the plant in Port Talbot recently, and is committed to it. We need to see an electric arc furnace, because that is the way to protect jobs and ensure that we have steel production in the UK.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): The industrial corridor that runs west along south Wales all the way to my constituency is one of the most important in the UK. It is also one of the most challenging when it comes to decarbonisation. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government's policies, the "Powering Up Britain" set of energy interventions and the Celtic freeport that we have secured point the way to a successful decarbonisation strategy for this critically important part of Wales?

Dr Davies: My right hon. Friend is, of course, entirely right. South Wales does not have former oil and gas fields in which we can store carbon, but it does have the Celtic freeport, and non-pipeline transport of captured carbon to fields elsewhere will secure decarbonisation for south Wales.

Strength of the Union following the Coronation

12. **Robbie Moore** (Keighley) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the strength of the Union following the Coronation. [905031]

The Secretary of State for Wales (David T. C. Davies): The coronation saw people in Wales and throughout the United Kingdom come together to celebrate the monarchy. It was a wonderful occasion, which united our public and demonstrated just how strong our Union is.

Robbie Moore: Over the coronation weekend I had the pleasure of attending a fantastic coronation church service at Haworth parish church and listening to our brilliant "Yorkshire Harpist", Fiona Katie Widdop, as well as joining in many of the community events that undoubtedly brought the whole United Kingdom together. I know that my right hon. Friend attended similar events in Wales. What does he see as the legacy of the coronation and that fantastic weekend of community spirit?

David T. C. Davies: I thought it notable that His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales spoke of the importance of service and of volunteering being at the heart of the coronation, and encouraged us all to take part in some voluntary work. I was pleased to join the residents of Llanhennock village in my constituency for an afternoon of litter picking on the day after the coronation, which I thought was almost as great an honour as attending the coronation itself.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The celebrations for the coronation in Wales were exceptional, and the celebrations for the coronation in Northern Ireland were equally successful. Does the Minister agree that when it comes to cementing the Union, the fact that all four regions—Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England—can be one country is an indication of why royalty is so important to this whole great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland? Always better together.

David T. C. Davies: To that wonderful question, I can only reply "Yes."

Renewable Energy Support

13. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What discussions he has had with the Welsh Government on support for renewable energy in Wales. [905032]

The Secretary of State for Wales (David T. C. Davies): The UK Government are committed to supporting renewable energy generation in Wales—including the innovative tidal stream technologies at Morlais, through our flagship contracts for difference scheme—and supporting the huge potential of our floating offshore wind industry through the £160 million in floating offshore wind manufacturing investment scheme funding for port infrastructure.

Alan Brown: The devolution of the Crown Estate in Scotland has allowed the Scottish Government to have a more coherent supply chain development for renewable energy, and 75% of the Welsh public want to see it devolved in Wales so that it too can benefit from those natural resources. Will Westminster listen to the people of Wales, or is this another case of "Westminster knows best"?

David T. C. Davies: Devolving the Crown Estate would be very risky for Wales, given that at present the revenue spent by the UK Treasury is invested across the whole United Kingdom, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that this UK Government will be committed to seeing renewable energy spread across the UK, alongside our other priorities of halving inflation, cutting debt, ending small boat crossings and reducing NHS waiting lists in the areas where we are responsible for doing so.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): Anglesey leads the way in renewable energy but it is being let down by poor connectivity. This week the Britannia bridge closed suddenly and, given that there is a 7.5 tonne limit on the Menai suspension bridge, that created chaos. Does the Secretary of State agree that Labour in Cardiff should be focused on building a third crossing?

David T. C. Davies: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about this. The Welsh Labour Government need to start building roads and start building bridges as well.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [905142] **Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 24 May.

The Prime Minister (Rishi Sunak): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall have further such meetings later today.

Mrs Hodgson: Does the Prime Minister agree with his friend the Tees Valley Mayor that the National Audit Office must investigate the Teesworks affair? Will the Prime Minister share details of all conversations he has had on the subject with his former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke), and the current Levelling Up Minister, given that they have all received donations from Ian Waller, one of the project backers?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Levelling Up Secretary has already announced an investigation into this matter. This is just the same old, same old—*[Interruption.]* It is the same old bunk from Labour. That is all we get. After years of neglect, it is the Conservatives who are delivering for Teesside.

Q2. [905143] **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): Everyone here has NHS trusts in their constituencies that are grappling with backlogs, so can I highlight the commitment and hard work of the Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in bringing down the waiting lists over 18 months ahead of the Government deadline and vastly reducing the over-65s waiting list? Does my right hon. Friend agree that those who imagine that the Opposition have a magic wand up their sleeve to solve these problems need look no further than the woes of the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board in north Wales, which has been under Labour political control for a generation?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend says, Gloucestershire in particular has seen a significant reduction in A&E waiting times since December. We recognise that there is more to be done, and that is why we are delivering on our plan to recover urgent and emergency care to ensure that people get the care they need, easier, faster and closer to home.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the Leader of the Opposition.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): How many work visas were issued to foreign nationals last year?

The Prime Minister: The new statistics, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, will be out later this week. The most recent statistics we have, as the Office for National Statistics said at the time, contained a set of unique circumstances including welcoming many people here for humanitarian reasons.

Keir Starmer: The figures are out. A quarter of a million work visas were issued last year. The right hon. Gentleman knows that answer; he just does not want to give it. The new numbers tomorrow are expected to be even higher. The Prime Minister has stood on three Tory manifestos, and each one promised to reduce immigration. Each promise broken—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members all stood on those manifestos as well. Why does he think his Home Secretary—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I am going to hear this question. For those who do not want to hear it, we know the answer to that.

Keir Starmer: Conservative Members all stood on those manifestos, so why does the Prime Minister think his Home Secretary seems to have such a problem coping with points-based systems?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The same respect will be shown.

The Prime Minister: Just this week we announced the biggest ever single measure to tackle legal migration, removing the right for international students to bring dependants, toughening the rules on post-study work and reviewing maintenance requirements. But what is the right hon. and learned Gentleman's contribution? There are absolutely no ideas. There are absolutely no ideas, and absolutely no semblance that there would be any control. Why? Because he believes in an open-door migration policy.

Keir Starmer: If anyone wants to see what uncontrolled immigration looks like, all they have to do is wake up tomorrow morning, listen to the headlines and see what this Government—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Bristow, I think you are going to be leaving. I am asking you to leave now; otherwise, I will name you. I am not having it, and I have warned you before. It is the same people—*[Interruption.]* And the same will happen on the other side of the House.

Keir Starmer: The reason they are issuing so many visas is because of labour and skills shortages, and the reason for the shortages is the low-wage Tory economy. Under the Prime Minister's Government's rules, businesses in IT, engineering, healthcare, architecture and welding can pay foreign workers 20% less than British workers for years and years on end. Does he think his policy is encouraging businesses to train people here or hire from abroad?

The Prime Minister: The Leader of the Opposition talks about immigration, but we know his position, because it turns out that Labour would like to see even more people coming to the UK—increasing the numbers. That is not just my view; his own Front Bencher, the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), says having a target is "not sensible," and that the numbers might have to go up. It is clear: while we are getting on with clamping down on illegal migration, listening to the British public, the Leader of the Opposition is perfectly comfortable saying that he wants to bring back free movement.

Keir Starmer: They have lost control of the economy, they have lost control of public services and now they have lost control of immigration. If the Prime Minister was serious about weaning his Government off the immigration lever, he would get serious about wages in Britain and get serious about skills and training. The apprenticeship levy is not working. It is hard to find a single business that thinks it is, and the proof is that almost half the levy is not being spent, which means fewer young people getting the opportunities they need

to fulfil their potential. Businesses are crying out for more flexibility in the levy, so they can train up their staff. Labour would give them that, why won't he?

The Prime Minister: It is right that we are talking about education and skills. What the Leader of the Opposition fails to mention is that, in the past week, we have discovered that, thanks to the reforms of this Conservative Government, our young people are now the best readers in the western world—reforms that were opposed by Labour. He also talks about our record on the economy, and I am very surprised, because I have stood here, week after week, when he has been so keen to quote the International Monetary Fund. He seems to have missed its press conference yesterday, at which it raised our growth forecast by one of the highest amounts ever, saying that we had acted decisively to make sure the economy is growing, and crediting this Government with having a very positive effect on future growth.

Keir Starmer: Is the Prime Minister seriously suggesting that breaking the economy, breaking public services and losing control of immigration is some sort of carefully crafted plan? His policies are holding working people back, and all he offers is more of the same. But fear not, because speeding into the void left by the Prime Minister comes the Home Secretary, and not with a plan for skills, growth or wages. No, her big idea is for British workers to become fruit pickers, just in case—I can hardly believe she said this—they

"forget how to do things".

Does the Prime Minister support this "Let them pick fruit" ambition for Britain, or does he wish he had the strength to give her a career change of her own?

The Prime Minister: The Leader of the Opposition talks about public services and the economy. Again, he has failed to notice what is going on. The IMF, which he was very keen to quote just a few months ago, is now forecasting that we will have stronger growth than Germany, France and Italy. What does the IMF say? It says that we are prioritising what is right for the British people. He talks about public service, and as I said, we have the best reading results in the western world. When it comes to the NHS, what did we discover just last week? The fastest ambulance response times in two years. That is a Conservative Government delivering for the British people.

Keir Starmer: The Home Secretary may need a speed awareness course, but the Prime Minister needs a reality check. This mess on immigration reveals a Tory party with no ambition for working people and no ambition for Britain, just the same old failed ideas, low wages and high tax. Labour would fix the apprenticeship levy, fill the skills gap and stop businesses recruiting from abroad if they do not pay properly. That is because we are the party of working people. What does it say about him and his party that they will not do the same?

The Prime Minister: I think the right hon. and learned Gentleman has said this six times, but I do not think we actually know how he is going to do any of these things. That is the difference between us: every week, we hear a lot of empty rhetoric from him, but in the past week we can measure ourselves by actions. What have the Government done? We have introduced new powers to curb disruptive protest; we have protected public services against disruptive strike action; and we have new laws to stop the boats. What has he done? He has voted against every single one of those. That is the difference between us: while he is working on the politics, we are working for the British people.

Q3. [905144] **Gareth Johnson** (Dartford) (Con): We have all witnessed how Putin is carrying out his savage war against Ukraine. He commenced it, he is the aggressor and he cannot be allowed to win. That war is now at a pivotal point, so will the Prime Minister use his friendship with President Zelensky to ensure that whatever military equipment Ukraine needs, it will get, be it missiles, drones or jets?

The Prime Minister: It was an honour to welcome my friend President Zelensky to the UK last week. Everyone will be collectively proud of the UK's leading role at the forefront of supporting Ukraine: we were the first country to provide support for Ukrainian troops; the first country in Europe to provide lethal weapons; the first to commit main battle tanks; and, most recently, the first to provide long-range weapons. My hon. Friend will have seen the powerful scenes coming out of the G7 summit in Hiroshima last week, and I have always been clear that we will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes.

Mr Speaker: I call the leader of the Scottish National party.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): We learned today that the price of milk, cheese and eggs is up by 29%, the price of pasta is up by 27% and the price of a loaf of bread is up by 18%. Does the Prime Minister agree that this is no longer just a cost of living crisis—this is a cost of greed crisis?

The Prime Minister: It was welcome that inflation has fallen today, but, as the Chancellor said, we should not be complacent because there is more work to do. The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the impact of food inflation, which is too high, in common with levels we have seen in other European countries, such as Sweden and Germany. We are providing significant support to help people with the cost of living, and the Chancellor has met companies in the supermarket and food supply chain to make sure that they are doing everything they can to bring prices down.

Stephen Flynn: Let's get real, because food inflation remains at a near 45-year high. Yesterday, the Treasury indicated that the Chancellor "stands ready" to act, but his actions seems to be predicated on the outcome of a review by the Competition and Markets Authority. So will the Prime Minister enlighten us: when does he expect that review to conclude? Working families cannot afford to wait much longer.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will know that the CMA is independent of Government, but the Chancellor did meet it recently to discuss the situation in the grocery industry. It will be for the CMA to make decisions on that, but we are doing everything we can to help consumers manage the challenges on the cost of living. If the SNP wanted to do its bit, perhaps it could reconsider its deposit return scheme, as it is very clear what people have said. As they have said, it will reduce choice and increase prices for consumers.

Q5. [905146] **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): The primary care access plan, published this month, is a welcome and substantive one, and my constituents want to see rapid delivery of it. So how quickly will the Government start providing the £645 million to pharmacists and how quickly will the SAS—specialty and specialist—doctors come to GP surgeries to make prompt access to primary care a reality for my constituents?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his contributions to our primary care plan. He and I know that pharmacies already work to help many people with their health needs, and to help deliver on our priority to cut NHS waiting lists they will be put at the front and centre of our primary care recovery, with £645 million of additional funding. That will be released later this year, as pharmacies start to provide more oral contraception and more blood pressure checks. Crucially, for seven common ailments, such as ear infections and throat infections, pharmacists will now be able to provide people with the medicines they need.

Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP): One quarter of the population of Northern Ireland is on a health waiting list, our workers are on strike for fair pay, and our public finances are in a mess. Will the Prime Minister give a commitment that the Treasury will begin work immediately on a public sector rescue package so we can transform the health service and ensure that our public sector workers are given a decent wage—and will he join the people of Northern Ireland in telling the DUP to get back to work now?

The Prime Minister: As I have been clear, I firmly believe that Northern Ireland is governed best when governed locally. I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. Gentleman that the major challenges he raises can only be properly addressed by the restoration of the institutions, but I also understand the immediate and pressing concerns he raises. That is why we have prioritised health in the Northern Ireland budget for this year, with £20 million more funding. I know that he will be an important contributor to the conversations that the Secretary of State is having, to embark on public service reform and restore the Executive.

Q6. [905147] **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Two weeks ago, I raised with the Prime Minister the issue of artificial intelligence. Just since then, we have had announcements from firms such as BT that tens of thousands of jobs are likely to be lost to this new technology, but many will be created, too. Does he agree that we need to map the jobs and the regions that will be most affected by AI so that we can target the skills to best prepare Britons for the jobs of the future?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Like him, I believe that AI has the potential to transform our economy and society, but of course it has to be introduced safely and securely. We are investing more in AI skills, not only in top-tier talent but in enabling those from non-science, technology, engineering and maths backgrounds to access the opportunities of AI. I look forward to more recommendations from him for how we can strengthen our investment in skills to make sure that everyone can realise the benefits that AI may bring.

Q4. [905145] **Anna McMorrin** (Cardiff North) (Lab): While the Prime Minister upgrades his local energy grid to heat his 40-foot swimming pool and hands oil and gas companies—the likes of BP and Shell—£11.4 billion in tax breaks, he scraps the energy price guarantee scheme, plunging record numbers of people into poverty. Is it just a coincidence that those same energy giants funded the Prime Minister's leadership campaign, or is he simply out of touch?

The Prime Minister: What we are doing is taxing the windfall profits of energy companies and using that money to help pay around half of a typical household's energy bill. That support is worth £1,500—it was extended in the Budget by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor—and we all look forward to energy bills coming down, which hopefully will happen very soon.

Q8. [905149] **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): The Prime Minister will recall the commitment he gave back in January to the building a brighter future plan for major investment at Torbay Hospital. Does that commitment remain unchanged?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his continued campaign to improve Torbay Hospital. I am delighted to reconfirm the Government's commitment to major new facilities there as part of our new hospitals programme, and I look forward to further work progressing in the months ahead.

Q7. [905148] **Sarah Olney** (Richmond Park) (LD): Under the Conservatives, so much of the UK's potential is going untapped, with anaemic growth, falling living standards and declining international competitiveness. Just this morning, a solar power company developing an innovation from Oxford University said that the UK is the "least attractive" market in which to base its business due to a lack of incentives. That is a home-grown company that could have provided well-paid green jobs—lost to this country thanks to the Government's lack of an industrial strategy. Why does the Prime Minister think that each week more and more promising businesses choose to leave the UK?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady obviously missed the comments by the International Monetary Fund yesterday upgrading our growth performance, she obviously missed the survey of thousands of global chief executives just recently placing the UK as their No. 1 European investment destination, and it sounds like she also missed my trip to Japan last week, when we announced £18 billion of new investment in the UK economy.

Q12. [905153] **Anthony Browne** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Liberal Democrat-run South Cambridgeshire District Council is the first in the country to put its staff on a four-day week without any reduction in pay, which has led to a reduction in services and an increase in costs. Yet last week the Liberal Democrats decided to extend the trial to a year. Why? Because the staff were happier. Now unions are pushing to spread the four-day working week across the public sector, something that the TaxPayers' Alliance estimates will cost £30 billion. Does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agree that the public sector is here to serve the public and that the Liberal Democrats are not working?

The Prime Minister: Public servants should rightly focus on delivering for the public and taxpayers. It is disappointing to hear from my hon. Friend that his local Liberal Democrat council is not doing that—instead reducing, as I have heard, staff contact hours and costing residents more. I urge the council to reconsider its decision, because his residents and constituents under South Cambridgeshire District Council clearly deserve better.

Q9. [905150] **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): In Lewisham we are gearing up to mark the 75th anniversary of HMT Empire Windrush arriving in the UK. Our deputy mayor Brenda Dacres is co-ordinating our local events and is herself a daughter of Windrush generation parents. Sadly, at the same time, she is organising advice surgeries for families who have been denied their rights and are still waiting for support from the Windrush compensation scheme, four years after it opened. With that landmark anniversary coming next month, will the Prime Minister commit to ensuring that everyone finally gets the compensation they deserve?

The Prime Minister: I pay tribute to the hon. Lady's constituents for all the work they are doing locally. The Home Office and the Government are delivering on the vast majority of the recommendations from Wendy Williams's report into the situation. We have already paid out or offered more than £70 million in compensation, I believe, and there are hundreds of engagement events happening to ensure that people are aware of what they are able to access. We will continue that engagement, as we promised.

Q13. [905155] **Brendan Clarke-Smith** (Bassetlaw) (Con): Bassetlaw has benefited from the multi-billion-pound spherical tokamak for energy production fusion project and £20 million in levelling-up money for Worksop town centre, and it will now be among the 20 areas selected as part of a new £400 million levelling-up partnership. However, my constituents in Retford feel neglected by the Labour district council, which is yet to apply for any funds for the town and is more concerned with trying to play the two towns off against each other. Can the Prime Minister confirm that there is no reason whatsoever why Retford cannot benefit from that latest investment, and will he accept an invitation to visit Bassetlaw to see the great impact that Government investment is already having in the area?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind invitation to visit and I shall certainly ask my office to keep it in mind. As he says, levelling-up partnerships are a commitment to work hand in hand with 20 different places in England most in need of levelling up, to make sure that they can realise their potential and ambitions. They are backed by £400 million-worth of investment so that they can be supported to thrive. I know my right hon. Friend the Levelling Up Secretary is looking forward to working with colleagues in Bassetlaw to identify the best place to focus their work—which could, of course, include Retford.

Q10. [905151] **Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): In 2016, the Prime Minister told people to vote for Brexit because it would stop "unelected officials in Brussels" having more of a say than his constituents. In 2023, he is asking his MPs to block amendment 42 to the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill and give unelected officials in Downing Street more say over laws than this Chamber. Given the worries and the warnings from his colleagues, why is he going to let "the blob" have more say over things such as holiday entitlements than the people who were elected to do that?

The Prime Minister: That is just simply not the case. It is the elected Government who will be making decisions about what the right regulations are for our country, and it is absolutely right that as a result of Brexit we can now do that. That is why we are repealing and reforming more than 2,000 pieces of retained EU law, making sure that our statute book reflects the type of rules and regulations that are right for the British economy and will deliver growth and cut costs for consumers. That is what our reforms do.

Q14. [905156] **Robbie Moore** (Keighley) (Con): A key issue that has haunted Keighley for many decades is child sexual exploitation and grooming gangs. I want to see a full Rotherham-style review of child exploitation across my area, but Bradford Council's leader and our West Yorkshire Mayor both refuse to back one, because political correctness is getting in the way, simply sweeping the issue under the carpet. Will the Prime Minister, for the sake of victims, work with me to ensure that our local leaders do the morally right thing and instigate a full Rotherham-style inquiry across the Bradford district?

The Prime Minister: May I thank my hon. Friend for campaigning on this? As I have said before, we should not let political correctness stand in the way of keeping vulnerable girls safe or of holding people to account. As he knows, it is for authorities in the local area to commission local inquiries, and I have no doubt that he will continue to encourage them to do so. For the Government's part, we have commissioned the relevant inspectorate to examine current policing practice in response to group-based sexual exploitation of children, and the Home Office will not hesitate to act on its recommendations when they are published this summer.

Q11. [905152] **Wendy Chamberlain** (North East Fife) (LD): Before I was elected, I worked for a number of years in learning and development in both the police and the private sector. I am sure we can all agree that training is absolutely vital for encouraging innovation and creativity, as well as for compliance. Given that that seems to be a particular issue for the Prime Minister's Cabinet, will he support my Ministerial Conduct (Training) Bill, which I will present later today?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Lady knows, there are processes and procedures in place for ensuring professional standards across Government. With regards to training, I am pleased that we are rolling out the lifelong learning entitlement to ensure that people can, at any stage in their career, get access to years of Government-subsidised financing. That will ensure that we have a workforce who are fit for the future, and that everyone can realise the opportunities that are there.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): Owen Carey died just across the river from here, underneath the London Eye, after suffering a severe allergic reaction while out celebrating his 18th birthday. He had simply eaten a chicken burger at a restaurant. Unbeknown to him, and

despite his asking, it had been marinated in buttermilk. Owen's sister, Emma, who is my constituent, was in Parliament last week with her dad and brother for a debate on food labelling and support for those with allergies. They are fighting for Owen's law, which is, among other things, a campaign to change the food information regulations on allergy labelling in restaurants. It has attracted huge support. Will the Prime Minister meet me and Owen's family to see how we can ensure that something positive comes of that tragic loss of a young life?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising Owen's case, and I know that the whole House will join me in expressing our condolences to Emma and all of Owen's family for what happened. I will absolutely ensure that my hon. Friend gets a meeting with the relevant Minister to discuss appropriate food labelling so that we can ensure that such things do not happen.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Will the Prime Minister instruct his officials to publish the list of 1,700 veterinary medicines that will no longer be made available to Northern Ireland vets and the agrifood sector after the grace period has ended? Will he explain to the Ulster Farmers Union why that list has not been given to them? Will he meet me and the Ulster Farmers Union, go through that list, and show us how that has removed the border in the Irish sea?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, when we concluded the Windsor framework, we made sure that there was an extension in the grace period for veterinary medicines to give us the time to find a long-run solution to that particular issue. He should take heart, because on human medicines, which I know are important to him and everyone else in Northern Ireland, we achieved complete and full dual regulation of medicines, as well as a dialogue with the EU to resolve the issues in veterinary medicines. I know that he will want to ensure that we engage closely with him and the UFU, which we have been doing, to find a resolution in the time we have. I know that he will also join me in being very happy that we have protected access to human medicines in Northern Ireland, which was a priority for him and his party.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): I really look forward to welcoming the Prime Minister to Portman Road for Ipswich Town against Southampton next season. Of course, in addition to Ipswich Town, Ipswich Wanderers have also been promoted, which is great news for the town.

Yesterday, despite the Public Order Act 2023, we saw images of Metropolitan police standing around doing nothing while eco-protesters were wreaking havoc in our capital. Does the Prime Minister agree that the moment those activists stand on the road, they should be immediately turfed off the road, as they would be in many other countries?

The Prime Minister: On my hon. Friend's first observation, all I can say is "Ouch!" But thank you: I look forward to the game.

On the second, more substantive matter, this Government have passed the serious disruption order, which will ensure that the police have the powers they need to tackle slow-moving protests. It is a power that the police specifically asked the Government for. We have delivered it and put it in legislation, and my hon. Friend knows what I know, which is that the Labour party tried to block that from happening.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): We have 4 million children living in poverty in this country, yet we are the fifth richest economy in the world, so why does the Prime Minister not support universal free school meals for all children, to help end child poverty?

The Prime Minister: The numbers are actually as follows. Since 2010, there are 1.7 million fewer people living in poverty as a result of the actions of this Government, and that includes hundreds of thousands fewer children living in poverty. Most importantly, like the hon. Lady, I want to ensure that children do not grow up in poverty, and we know that the best way to do that is to ensure that they do not grow up in a workless household. That is why we have reduced the number of children growing up in a workless household by several thousand, and that is the most powerful thing we can do in the long run to give those children the best possible start in life.

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): Nancy Spencer from Darlington has raised over £35,000 for St Teresa's Hospice in the last 25 years. Nancy's next adventure was to do a sky dive, but her doctor refused to sign it off because she has had a pacemaker fitted. However, undeterred, my 80-year-old constituent managed to secure sign-off for a wing walk. Will my right hon. Friend join me in wishing Nancy well as she takes to the skies this Saturday?

The Prime Minister: May I join my hon. Friend in thanking Nancy for all her fantastic fundraising work, and of course I wish her the best of luck for Saturday? I wonder if my hon. Friend will be joining her. Many of my own constituents have used St Teresa's Hospice over the years, so I know what fabulous work it does. More generally, the hospice sector supports more than 300,000 people with life-limiting conditions in the UK every year. I pay tribute to all the staff and volunteers working in palliative and end-of-life care for the incredible work that they do.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Reclaim): Does the Prime Minister agree that it is completely inappropriate for schools to encourage young people under the age of 18 to socially transition, for example by changing their names and pronouns? All this is going on without parental consent or even knowledge, in breach of parents' human rights. Will the Prime Minister instruct the Department for Education to order schools to stop indoctrinating our children and to concentrate on their duty of care to protect them?

The Prime Minister: I have been very clear that when it comes to matters of sex and education, and of personal, social, health and economic education, it is absolutely right that schools are sensitive in how they teach those matters and that they should be done in an age-appropriate fashion. The Department for Education is currently reviewing the statutory guidance and curriculum that

go to schools, so that we can tackle this particular issue. Cases have been raised with the Government and others, and I do not think that that is acceptable. We must protect our children, and that is what our new guidance will do.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): Last year the independent members of the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board in north Wales became so concerned about the board's finances that they arranged for Ernst and Young to produce a forensic accountancy report, which revealed serious misconduct on the part of several senior board executives, including a conspiracy to falsify accounts. Astonishingly, the response of the Labour Welsh Minister to the scandal was to demand the resignation of those independent board members, while almost all the senior executives in question have been allowed to remain in post, many of them drawing six-figure salaries. Does the Prime Minister agree that this disgraceful state of affairs should be investigated by the police, and does he further agree that it demonstrates why Labour is unfit to run important public services in any part of our country?

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend knows, I am deeply worried about the Betsi Cadwaladr hospital trust in Labour-run north Wales. It has been in special measures for six of the last eight years and, as he remarked, the official audit said that there was worrying dysfunctionality. I hope that this issue is investigated properly, and I believe that my right hon. Friend is in contact with the Secretary of State for Wales to take it further.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): Working people are barred from receiving legal aid if they earn £12,750 a year, so why is the Prime Minister forcing the British public to foot the bill—which I think is currently £250,000-plus—for the inquiry into the alleged lying of the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson)? Why can the Prime Minister not stand up for the British people? Is it because he is too weak?

The Prime Minister: It is actually a long-established process across multiple Administrations that former Ministers are supported with legal representation after they have left office to deal with matters that relate to their time in office. That has been the practice for many years, as I say, across multiple political Administrations, both Labour and Conservative.

Dean Russell (Watford) (Con): I welcome the Government's ongoing engagement to ensure that mental health is treated equally with physical health. In my constituency, Watford General Hospital recently received about £350,000 for improvements to mental health facilities, which will help massively. Given the importance of the issue, will the Prime Minister join me in encouraging colleagues from across the House to attend an event I will be hosting for the Baton of Hope on the Terrace Pavilion after Prime Minister's questions today, to raise awareness around mental health and suicide prevention?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is a fantastic campaigner on mental health, and I am pleased to learn about all the work he is doing with the Baton of Hope. I am also pleased that we are putting more Government money into mental health services and taking more action on this issue than any previous Government, investing an extra £2.3 billion a year. I encourage all colleagues to join my hon. Friend in attending the reception on the Terrace Pavilion.

Student Visas

12.37 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP) *(Urgent Question):* To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to make a statement on the changes to the student visa route.

The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick): Net migration is too high, and the Government are committed to bringing it down to sustainable levels. The most recent official statistics estimated that net migration in the year to June 2022 was at 504,000. This is partly due to temporary and exceptional factors such as the UK's Ukraine and Hong Kong schemes. Last year, more than 200,000 Ukrainians and 150,000 Hong Kong British nationals overseas made use of the routes to life or time in the United Kingdom. Those schemes command broad support from the British public, and we were right to introduce them.

The Government introduced a points-based system in 2020 to regain control of our borders post Brexit. We now need to decide who comes to the UK and operate a system that can flex to the changing needs of the labour market, such as the skills needs of the NHS. However, immigration is dynamic, and we must adapt to take account of changing behaviours and if there is evidence of abuse. The number of dependants arriving alongside international students has risen more than eightfold since 2019, from 16,000 in the year to December 2019 to 136,000 in the year ending December 2022. Dependants of students make a more limited contribution to the economy than students or those coming under the skilled worker route, but more fundamentally, our system was not designed for such large numbers of people coming here in this manner.

Yesterday, we introduced a package of measures to help deliver our goal of reducing net migration. The package includes removing the right for international students to bring dependants unless they are on research postgraduate courses and removing the ability for international students to switch out of the student route into work routes before their studies have been completed. This is the right and fair thing to do. It ensures we protect our public services and housing supply against undue pressure and we deliver on the promises we have made to the public to reduce net migration.

Our education institutions are world-renowned, and for good reason, and the Government remain committed to the commitments in the international education strategy, including the goal of 600,000 international students coming to the United Kingdom each year. But universities should be in the education business, not the immigration business. We are taking concerted action to deliver a fair and effective immigration system that benefits our citizens, our businesses and our economy. We are determined to get this right because it is demonstrably in the national interest.

Carol Monaghan: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question, and while I thank the Minister for his response, it is disappointing that the Home Secretary is not here, and that we have had to ask an urgent question rather than a statement being made to the House.

International students make an invaluable contribution to our economy. According to the Higher Education Policy Institute, last year they provided nearly £43 billion to the UK economy, and in my constituency of Glasgow North West alone the economic benefit was over £83 million. What assessments have been carried out of the economic impact of this change on the university sector, and on university towns? International students enrich our society and have skills that are proving ever more vital in this post-Brexit climate, which has seen the UK deprived of workers across key sectors. There are currently labour shortages in healthcare, STEM—science, technology, engineering and maths—and IT to name but a few sectors; how can the Minister fail to recognise that this policy will simply exacerbate these?

The reality is that many students coming to the UK look beyond their studies and want their families to be part of that experience. Without a way for overseas students to bring their families, many will opt to go elsewhere, and any drop in international student numbers will cause further harm to universities that are already facing financial difficulties. This policy makes the Home Secretary's agenda crystal-clear: she is launching an attack on migrants regardless of the benefits they bring to the UK, and in pursuing this short-term reactionary programme international students are being caught in the crossfire.

In Scotland international students' contribution to university campuses and our wider society is celebrated, but Scotland will suffer the consequences of this misjudged policy. Once again this is indicative of how out of tune this Conservative Government are with the Scottish people. If the Government are insistent in pursuing their hostile environment, will they now accept that Scotland's needs, and wants, are different from theirs?

Finally, will the Government now devolve immigration powers to the Scottish Parliament, to allow us to choose a way that benefits our communities and society?

Robert Jenrick: No, we will not devolve immigration policy to the Scottish Government: it is right that the UK benefits from one immigration policy and that is the way it will always continue to be under this Conservative Government.

I am afraid that the hon. Lady was misguided on a number of fronts. First, it was this Government who created the international education strategy, which set a target of attracting 600,000 international students to the UK. We have met that target 10 years early and are likely to exceed it this year. The action we are taking today does not take away from that goal: it ensures that there are no unintended consequences. It was never the intention of that policy to enable a very large number of dependants to come to the UK with those students. It is right that universities attract the best and the brightest and that those who are on longer courses, such as PhDs or MPhils, can bring dependants with them, but it is not right that education is a back door for immigration into the country.

The statistics I quoted earlier show the significant increases in the number of student dependants. In 2019, 16,000 visas were issued to student dependants. Last year, the number was 136,000—an increase of eight and a half times. In 2019, for every 10 Indian students, there was one visa issued to a dependant. Last year,

that doubled to one in five. For Nigerian students studying in this country, 65,000 dependant visas were issued in 2022 to only 59,000 students.

We do not want to do anything that would harm the international reputation of our universities, but it is right that we pay particular concern to pressure on housing supply and public services, to integration and community cohesion and to making good on our commitment to the British public that we will bring down net migration, which is what the vast majority of the public want to see done.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): When we invite people to our country, it is important that there is good provision of housing, school places and healthcare, but there are huge stresses on the system. Can the Minister give the House some guidance on how much the capital and revenue set-up cost is for a migrant family coming in? When we were in the EU some time ago, it reckoned the cost was €250,000 for a migrant coming to an advanced country.

Robert Jenrick: Obviously that cost varies widely depending on the country of origin and the skills of those individuals. The points-based system is set up in such a way as to encourage higher-skilled individuals to come to the UK for work purposes, but my right hon. Friend is right to say that it is a relatively accessible system, and that has meant large numbers of people entering the UK for a range of different reasons in recent years. We should be acutely concerned about the pressures that is putting on housing supply, public services and integration, particularly in those parts of the country with heated housing markets, such as the one he represents. That is why it is right that we take action of the kind we are taking today.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): International students are much-valued contributors to our world-class higher education system, which is a great asset to our country. We and Universities UK recognise that a tenfold increase in the number of dependants joining students in the UK since 2018 creates significant challenges and that enforcement measures are long overdue. Therefore, as the Leader of the Opposition has made clear, our entire Front-Bench team does not oppose these changes for masters students.

However, as usual, the Government have failed to deliver an impact assessment for the new rules and have left many of the details vague. How many people will this change affect, in terms of both students and dependants? What will the actual impact be on the numbers? The Office for National Statistics defines an immigrant as somebody who has been here for more than a year or who is coming for more than a year, yet masters students are typically here for less than a year.

What is clear is that dependants of students are only a fraction of the story. In their 2019 manifesto, the Conservatives acknowledged that the Brexit vote was a bid to take back control of immigration, but since then net migration has skyrocketed from 226,000 to 500,000, which is a record high even if we exclude Ukrainians and Hongkongers. The number of work visas has increased by a staggering 95%. We are clear that that has happened because for 13 years, the Conservatives have failed to train up Britain's home-grown talent to fill the vacancies we have and because there are 6 million people on NHS waiting lists in England alone, most of whom wish to return to the workforce.

We want and expect net immigration to reduce, and we have set out plans for how we will get more of Britain's workers trained up and back to work. Today, the Leader of the Opposition has announced that we will ditch the flawed Government policy that allows businesses to undercut British workers by paying migrant workers 20% less in sectors assigned to the shortage occupation list. Will the Minister commit to scrapping the 20% wage discount on the going rate for shortage occupations? Nothing could be clearer: the Conservatives have lost control of immigration. We are committed on the Opposition Benches to maximising opportunities for Britain's home-grown talent.

Robert Jenrick: I am delighted to hear that the hon. Gentleman has had a damascene conversion to tighter border controls. Unfortunately, I do not think the British public will believe that. It is the same old Labour party—the party that has always believed in open borders. Its own leader campaigned for the leadership of the Labour party saying that he wanted to defend free movement. Only the other day, the chairwoman of the Labour party, the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), said that she expected migration to rise under a future Labour Government. It is the same flip-flopping approach—and the same open door policy.

We want to ensure that we bring net migration down. We consider that to be a solemn promise to the British public, and an important manifesto commitment. This is a significant policy, which I am glad to hear the hon. Gentleman support, that will make a tangible difference on this issue. It will reduce very substantially the number of people coming into the country as dependants, but there might be more that needs to be done. We are determined to tackle this issue and to ensure that we bring net migration down.

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): The Minister is doing a difficult job very well. He has set out the context, and it is notable that the Opposition spokesperson shares that analysis. However, most students are temporary visitors, yet many of them are counted as permanent immigrants. Has my right hon. Friend considered changing the definition to include in the count only those who stay?

Robert Jenrick: I respect my right hon. Friend and his deep knowledge of this area, but I do not think it is helpful to change the way in which the statistics are reported. I do think that we have to consider the fact that anyone coming into this country will place pressure on our housing supply and on public services, particularly if they are bringing dependants, including young children or elderly relatives, into the UK. In the present climate, in which there is significant pressure on public services and significant pressure on housing, particularly in certain parts of the country, that is extremely important.

We have seen, historically, that the vast majority of students leave the country and go back to their home country to continue their careers and lives. It is too early to say whether the graduate route will make a material difference to that. It may be, if individuals

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come to the UK to study and then spend a period of time here on the graduate route, and certainly if they bring dependants, that we will start to see a significant increase in the number of people staying here, making a life in the UK and not returning home, in which case policies of this kind will become more important.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): In a week when universities are celebrating all that international students bring with the "We Are International" campaign, the Home Office is setting about undermining the UK's place in the highly competitive international education market. I am dismayed that the Labour party is supporting the Government's measures. Canada, Australia and the US must be rubbing their hands in glee at yet more chopping and changing, which makes the UK less attractive.

Research published by the Higher Education Policy Institute last week shows that, in 2021-22, the benefit to the UK of international students stood at £41.9 billion, with every single constituency on these islands seeing a benefit. When their dependants come with them, those husbands or wives are often working—they are not a burden to the state—and they have to pay the immigration health surcharge as well.

What is the evidence for the policy the Minister has brought forward? The written statement yesterday speaks of issues with agents and of enhanced enforcement and compliance, so what data does he have to suggest that people are abusing what is already an incredibly expensive system? What equality impact assessment has he carried out, because Universities UK International has said that restricting dependants will have a

"disproportionate impact on women…from certain countries"?

Incidentally, those are countries such as Nigeria and India, where the market is growing. Finally, what discussions has he had with the Minister for Higher and Further Education in Scotland ahead of this announcement, and what impact assessment has he carried out on how it will affect institutions in Scotland?

Robert Jenrick: We did think very carefully about this measure and had detailed conversations with colleagues across Government, including of course the Department for Education, and indeed with universities. In my experience, leaders of universities understand the issue we are grappling with here. They can see for themselves the significant increase in the number of dependants who have come to the UK in recent years, and why the Government would feel the need to take action.

The measures we are putting in place will ensure that there will still be a route for student dependants to come to the UK for research courses, such as PhDs, where people will be here for a sustained period of time, but there will not be that route when people are here for short courses. To give the hon. Lady an example, last year there were 315,000 foreign masters students in the UK. These are very large numbers of individuals, and if those people were to bring dependants at scale, it would put pressure on public services and on housing in the UK. I am surprised the hon. Lady does not appreciate that, particularly given the state of some public services in Scotland.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is obviously right, when we see emerging trends in the immigration system that cause concern, that action is taken. When discussing net migration, we need to be clear about the factors that contribute to it. For example, British citizens returning to the UK and potentially bringing children with them also count towards the net migration statistics, but that is clearly not related to immigration policy.

On the wider system and the rationale behind this move, I suspect the Minister may have wanted to announce something slightly more comprehensive, rather than just to focus on student dependants. Does he agree that we should make sure the immigration system has the appropriate impact on the labour market and look more widely at things such as the salary thresholds throughout the system, as well as making the change that has been announced today?

Robert Jenrick: I do think the package of measures that we have announced will make a tangible difference to net migration. Taken together with the easing of exceptional factors, such as Hong Kong BNO individuals coming to the UK over the next year or two, there is good reason to believe that net migration will fall and that we will be better placed to meet our important manifesto commitment.

However, my hon. Friend is right to say that it is critical that we do so, that we should consider further measures and that we have to think carefully about how migration interacts with the British labour market. It is quite wrong to perpetuate an economic model that is overly reliant on foreign labour, with people coming here and taking jobs from British workers, and not to tackle the core issue, which is the number of economically inactive people in our country.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Our higher education institutions operate in a global market, which is why universities such as Lancaster University attract students from over 100 different countries, many of whom come, study and then return. The Minister raised the issue of pressure on public services, which makes me wonder who he thinks has been in charge for the past 13 years, but my question to him is: what consultation has he had with universities such as Lancaster University about the implications for them in respect of things like the global league tables for universities?

Robert Jenrick: We have given careful thought to this announcement, as I have said, and we have worked closely with the Department for Education, which is of course the bridge to universities. It is important to stress that we have met the Government's target of 600,000 international students 10 years early and are likely to exceed it this year, so there is no suggestion that the number of international students is going to diminish rapidly.

What we are doing is tackling a particular issue—an unintended consequence of earlier liberalisations—which is the very significant increase in the number of dependants following international students. I would also say that it is not healthy for British universities to become overly reliant on international students. Just a few years ago, only 5% of the income of British universities came from international students. Today, it is 18% and growing. There are obviously benefits to having income from international students, but we should not be overly reliant on it.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): When these measures have their effect, surely we will then be able to treat foreign students as the booming export that they are, rather than as immigration.

Robert Jenrick: The education of international students is an important export industry. I believe that it is the UK's fourth or fifth-biggest export industry, and that is a good thing, and it is supported by the Government. That is why we created the international education strategy that has proven to be so successful. But what we are doing today is ensuring that we do not see unintended consequences and unnecessary pressure on public services as a result.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What impact will these changes have on the number of students from overseas coming to study in British universities, and what will be the financial consequences? Has the Home Office made that assessment?

Robert Jenrick: As I said, we have already met our target of 600,000 students coming to the UK from overseas. That is 10 years early; in fact, last year there were 605,000. We expect the numbers to increase this year beyond 600,000. There is no suggestion that universities will be short-changed as a result, but in the medium term it will obviously involve fewer dependants coming with those international students. For the reasons that I have set out, we think that is a good thing. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman does not.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): This measure is wholly to be welcomed, but the fact is that legal migration is out of control and the British people did not vote for Brexit to replace mass migration from Europe with mass migration from the rest of the world. May I therefore press the Minister on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) that we will never deal with legal migration until we solve the labour problem? Home-grown employers in Britain are paying too low wages and trying to attract people from all over the world. Why do we not raise the threshold so that those who want to come here and get a job need to earn average earnings?

Robert Jenrick: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his support. He is right that, having left the European Union and taken back control of our borders and migration policy, it is critical that we make good on our promise to bring net migration down, because it does put intolerable pressure on public services and housing, and it does strain community cohesion, particularly when it happens at a scale and speed that is too great for many people in British society.

My right hon. Friend makes an important point about the workings of the points-based system and the salary thresholds for the shortage occupation list and for general work visas. The Government keep that under review, because we do not want to see employers reaching for international labour rather than seeking to recruit and train domestic labour, reducing unemployment and reducing the number of people who are on benefits.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): The Home Secretary makes contradictory statements to different audiences and thinks that nobody notices her sleight of hand. Yesterday, she recommitted to bringing in 600,000 international students per year. Does the Minister now regret the fact that, having completely lost control of immigration figures, she actually expressed her desire to reduce student visas at last year's Conservative party conference?

Robert Jenrick: The Home Secretary and I are completely at one in our determination to reduce net migration. That is what our party stood on a manifesto to do and that is what we intend to achieve. The Home Secretary and I want to find ways in which we can tackle abuse and unintended consequences within the system, and the package of measures that we have set out this week will do so in this important area and, as Labour appears now to support it, in a clearly significant cross-party way.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. As the Minister considers work visas, which have exploded, displacing investment in domestic skills and investment in modern working practices fit for the future, will he also answer this question: why it is right and fair for people studying a research degree to be able to bring their family into the country but not for people who are not doing primary research? Surely if those studying for MAs that do not require research cannot bring their family, no one should be able to do so?

Robert Jenrick: We said in the announcement this week that, with the Department for Education, we will launch a consultation with the university sector to design a longer-term alternative to the system that previously operated, which could be a more nuanced approach. But I think that the determination that we have made this week is the right one, which is that those people coming into the UK to study will be able to bring in dependants only if they are doing those high-value, usually longer-term, research-based courses such as PhDs, and those coming for short courses will invariably not be able to do so. That will cut out some of the abuse that we have seen in the system and will focus universities on their primary responsibility, which is teaching and education, rather than in some cases being a back door to immigration and to work.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Later this afternoon, my much-valued international student Jacqueline will spend the last few hours of her time here before she completes her internship. She has been a massive asset to my office, as were the other London School of Economics interns and other interns I have had the privilege of working with over the last number of years. What should I say to her? Should I say, "Thank you—you have been a boon to this place and these islands" or, "You're a problem that has to be controlled"?

Robert Jenrick: It would be helpful if the hon. Gentleman did not spread misinformation to his researcher or indeed anyone else. It was the Government, through the international education strategy, who created this commitment, which has proven to be so successful that it has led to 600,000 international students coming to the UK—perhaps including the lady he referred to. We also created the graduate route, which has enabled people—potentially including his researcher—to move

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seamlessly into the workplace here in the UK after their studies rather than having to apply immediately for a work or family visa as used to happen. There is no suggestion of any diminution in our support for universities or international students, but it is right that we get a grip on abuses or unintended consequences. That is what Governments have to do when trying to control an immigration system. Perhaps he does not want controlled immigration. We do, and that is why we have to take these steps.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): International students studying high-quality courses at high-quality universities such as Keele in my constituency—the Minister knows it well—add a huge amount to our local economy. But is it not absolutely clear from the figures that the Minister quoted earlier showing the increase in dependant visas that some universities have, wittingly or otherwise, been selling immigration rather than education? Is it not vital that we get on top of that?

Robert Jenrick: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. Universities such as Keele—I do know that university well—have played a critical role in the economic development of local communities, and we want to encourage that. But it is important that universities primarily focus on education, not creating courses marketed overseas to individuals whose primary interest is in coming to the UK for immigration and work purposes, with those courses being a back door to that.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Is not the truth that, since Brexit, excellent universities such as mine in Exeter have sought to replace those thousands of EU students they have lost with students from other parts of the world who tend, for cultural and other reasons, to bring more family members, spouses and children with them? Are not the Government having to clear up another Brexit mess of their own making? Will the Minister be honest with the House and explain how he will avoid discriminating against countries such as Nigeria and India, from which students do tend to bring dependants, and making us even more reliant on students from China?

Robert Jenrick: The right hon. Gentleman makes a curious argument. Of course, it was as a result of leaving the European Union that we have created an entirely non-discriminatory immigration system that has enabled people to apply to come to the UK, whether for work purposes or as students, from anywhere in the world, rather than making it more difficult for those from outside the EU and having a large number of EU citizens come here. Today's proposals will tackle this particular unintended consequence of the opening up to international students. I do not see any evidence that it will harm particular nationalities. There are some glaring examples such as the Nigerian one that I mentioned previously, but this will apply to everyone. It is an entirely non-discriminatory policy.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): My right hon. Friend is completely right that we must choose who comes here and we must strike out abuse. Wimbledon has many English language schools and English language is a key part of the international education strategy. Given the specific and short-term nature of these students, and that they bring in no dependants and are not a cost on our public services, will he meet me and the leaders of the sector to discuss restoring work visas for this specific group of students?

Robert Jenrick: I would be pleased to meet my hon. Friend to discuss that. As I said earlier with respect to the announcement we made today, we will be carrying out a consultation with the Department for Education that will give universities the opportunity to set out their case and refine the policy if necessary. He highlights one of the other elements of the announcement we made this week, which is clamping down on abuse. There are a small number of unscrupulous education agents who may be supporting disingenuous applications that are selling immigration rather than education. One measure we are taking this week is to clamp down on those with much more targeted and effective enforcement activity.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): My constituents do not share the Tory and Labour obsession with net migration. They understand that Scotland benefits from inward migration. In fact, Universities UK research shows that my constituency's net economic benefit from international students is £170.8 million, which gives the lie to most of what the Minister has said. Continuing as a member of the United Kingdom is damaging Scotland's universities, including Edinburgh Napier University and Herriot-Watt University in my constituency. First Brexit, now this. The Union has to work for both partners, so why will the Minister not sit down with the Home Secretary and consider devolving immigration policies relating to student visas to the Scottish Parliament?

Robert Jenrick: As I said many times before, we have no intention of devolving immigration policy. On the broader questions, there is no material difference between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom in terms of unemployment or economic inactivity, so there is no compelling case for a bespoke immigration system for Scotland versus the rest of the United Kingdom. The sheer scale of the number of international students who have come into all parts of the UK, including Scotland, in recent years suggests that this Government's policies have increased the number of international students, not diminished them.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): Pressures in migration policy ultimately lead back to the efficient processing of everyone UK Visas and Immigration has to deal with. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that this change will help UKVI make more decisions more quickly?

Robert Jenrick: I am pleased to say that UKVI is today a very well-run organisation under the superb leadership of an official in the Home Office called Marc Owen. In every one of the visa categories, it is meeting its service standard or significantly exceeding them. *[Interruption.]* I know the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) always likes to deal in anecdote rather than statistics, but—I am afraid to disappoint her—it is.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I, for one, am very proud of the international students in my community. Oxford Brookes University and, of course, Oxford University pride themselves on being able to attract the best and brightest. This policy will make that harder. We value them because they bring value. They bring value of, on average, £400 million to the Oxfordshire economy. Why are the Government, and apparently the Labour party, intent on stifling our universities and our economy?

Robert Jenrick: I have affection for the hon. Lady, but she is probably the greatest nimby in the House of Commons today. She always opposes new homes, new development and new infrastructure in and around Oxford, so it is quite wrong for her to say that we should have an open door immigration policy, welcoming more and more people into her community and others, without meeting the demands that come with that in terms of housing and infrastructure.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): I am uncomfortable with net migration at current levels, as I believe are most of my constituents. I understand what the Government are doing about one-year taught masters; they seem to be about 95% of this issue. That absolutely makes sense. However, I have some concerns that some universities might try to game the system and re-label one-year taught masters as one-year research masters. I understand why PhDs are treated differently, but will the Minister assure me that that will not happen and we will clamp down on that? Will he also comment on the two-year period I believe that students get after they graduate, where they can stay here even if they do not necessarily have a job?

Robert Jenrick: We believe the changes we are setting out today will make a marked impact on net migration. We will, obviously, monitor them very closely for some of the unintended consequences my hon. Friend refers to. The consultation we will do with universities and the broader sector will help us to refine the policy, should that be necessary.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): The Minister has already acknowledged that the vast majority of students return home. In fact, the compliance rate for international student visas is 97.5%, the highest for any UK visa category. Does that not suggest there may be better targets for the Government's energies?

Robert Jenrick: There is no one single intervention that will solve this challenge, but this is a significant intervention that will make a material difference to net migration. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the overwhelming majority of international students historically have left at the end of their studies, or shortly thereafter. It is possible that the system that has evolved since 2019 will see different trends. In 2020, only 7,400 non-EU students stayed on post study and those numbers will be dramatically higher in the years ahead. It may be that the mix of individuals, the countries they come from and the fact that they are bringing dependants with them in many cases, will lead to a far higher number of individuals staying on post study, but I do not think we will see those trends clearly enough this year. We may see them in years to come.

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Ind): Many of my constituents continue to be deeply concerned about the levels of net migration, not just over the last few years but over the last few decades. They, along with myself, will welcome the measures outlined by the Minister today. Is he able to update the House on any measures his Department is taking to tackle bogus college placements from students who sometimes come to this country only to disappear into thin air?

Robert Jenrick: Alongside the package of measures today, we are, as I said earlier, taking further targeted enforcement activity against unscrupulous education agents who are selling entry to the United Kingdom, rather than education. We will also work closely with universities and the Department for Education to improve communication, to universities and their affiliates, of the immigration rules, so we can clamp down on the kind of poor practices my hon. Friend describes.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The Minister avoided this question when my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) asked it, so I will try again. What discussions were there between the UK Government and Scottish Ministers on this matter before the announcement was made?

Robert Jenrick: Immigration is a reserved matter. I would just add that I am seeking a meeting with the relevant Cabinet Secretary in the Scottish Government to discuss illegal migration, but her office has so far not offered a meeting.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The statement is right to celebrate the huge growth in international student numbers—I assume that is the bit the Department for Education and the Treasury insisted should go in—but within that there is a welcome diversification in that growth away from overdependence on China. That was a deliberate part of the international education strategy. The Minister talks about unintended consequences, but it was entirely predictable that those coming from other countries for masters courses would come from a different demographic from Chinese students, that they would have families and that, like us, they would not want to separated from them. Our competitors welcome students with families, so there is a real risk that a blanket ban on dependants will undermine the Government's own international education strategy. The statement commits to consulting with universities in developing the approach, so will the Minister confirm there will be no blanket ban on dependants of postgraduate taught students until that consultation has taken place?

Robert Jenrick: We will implement the policy we set out yesterday, but concurrently we will launch the consultation with universities and, if we need to refine the policy as a result of that, we will do so. To the hon. Gentleman's first point, I do not think there is any reason why a Chinese student would be less likely to bring dependants with them to the United Kingdom than a Nigerian, a Vietnamese or a Bangladeshi. I do not follow his logic there at all. We want an entirely non-discriminatory approach and that is what we have said to our international counterparts this week. That has always been our approach to this. We welcome international students from any part of the world.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): The vast majority of international students access their courses in the north of England through Manchester airport in my constituency. Will the Minister agree to an economic impact assessment on how the policy will impact jobs in my constituency and route development, and the cost to the wider northern economy?

Robert Jenrick: I was pleased to be at Manchester airport on Friday, meeting my Border Force officials and seeing the expansion currently under way. I do not foresee any serious loss of revenue for an airport such as Manchester. The number of international students coming to the UK has risen very significantly in recent years. To the extent that that provides income to airports, they will have benefited from our existing policy and I expect them to benefit in future.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question, even if only to expose that we could not put a cigarette paper between Labour and Tory policies on this issue. Scotland has a track record of welcoming international students to our internationally recognised universities. Scotland wants and needs the benefits that they bring. This Government's continuous refusal to devolve immigration powers to the Scottish Government shows their contempt for Scotland. Why do they not understand and recognise that things are different there? Continual refusal to do what Scotland needs and wants will come down heavy on them in the next election.

Robert Jenrick: At the risk of repeating myself, there is no material difference between unemployment or economic inactivity in Scotland and in the rest of the UK—the hon. Lady is incorrect in that regard. The UK benefits enormously from a single immigration policy and offer to international students in universities in all parts of the world.

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance): In Northern Ireland, our universities are very dependent on international students, particularly in the light of the budget crisis we are facing. Employers cannot access labour without migration, which I am sure is the same for the rest of the UK. Rather than being a burden, our public services depend upon migrants for their basic functioning. Why are the Government so insistent on acting against the core interests of our public services, the economy and our local universities?

Robert Jenrick: Nothing could be further from the truth. It is this Government who established the international education strategy that led to 600,000 international students coming to the UK every year. Indeed, that number is likely to grow next year. With respect to public services, we created the health and social care visa, which last year led to 76,000 applications. Their dependants were able to join them. That was 11% of all the visas issued to individuals wishing to come to the United Kingdom. We are doing everything we can to support public services, but we must address the fact that very high levels of net migration place intolerable pressure on housing, public services and integration.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): Our schools are in the midst of such a chronic teacher recruitment and retention crisis that the Department for Education currently offers £10,000 relocation payments to overseas applicants to come and train as language and physics teachers in the UK, on postgraduate taught courses. If they cannot bring their families, they will not want to settle here and use the training that we have provided in our schools, where they are desperately needed. Why are the Government cutting off their nose to spite their own face?

Robert Jenrick: If the hon. Lady is referring to pressure on school places, that would be a good argument for reducing the number of dependants coming to the UK, because the children of the students will be using primary schools in her constituency.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): The Minister still has not said what economic impact assessment the Government have carried out on this policy. Will he publish one?

Robert Jenrick: I said that we take a pragmatic approach to this issue. We are balancing our strong desire to bring down net migration with the needs of the economy. That is why we have taken the approach of standing behind the 600,000 target for international students, but making this important tweak to ensure that it is not abused.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Net migration figures also include the number people who leave this country. The Minister's hard Brexit has made it more difficult for students and others to travel overseas, and that is having an impact on net migration figures. Meanwhile, Glasgow North thrives culturally, socially and economically to the tune of £225.8 million thanks to our lively and diverse international student community. Why does the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office spend millions of pounds on overseas campaigns that say that Britain is great, when the message coming from the Home Office is that Britain is closed?

Robert Jenrick: I wonder what world the hon. Gentleman lives in if he thinks that net migration of half a million is too little and we should encourage more. Net migration levels in this country are very high. We want to bring those down, which is why we are taking measures such as this.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The University of Cumbria and Lancaster University are hugely successful institutions, and we are proud of them. They are important to our economy and are successful exporters. What is their export? High-quality education delivered in the United Kingdom. Why are the Government seeking to stifle our great exporters' ability to export? Why have they become suddenly anti-free market? Will the Minister recognise that, by earning money through international students, British universities can cross-subsidise services and places for British students? British students will be the ones who pay the price.

Robert Jenrick: As I said in answer to an earlier question, the economic benefit of international students is clear. We welcome that, but we do not want British universities to become totally reliant on income from international students. Just a few years ago, that accounted for 5% of their income; last year it was 18%, and without measures such as this, no doubt it would continue to rise. To the hon. Gentleman's broader point, of course we want to support universities such as his to

thrive and prosper and to market themselves internationally, but the business of universities is education, not immigration.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his answers. I welcome the announcement as it shows considerable effort in committing to the Government pledge to crack down on net migration. However, what assessment has the Minister made of the number of children who will be left behind while their parents come to the UK to study for a better life, and cannot bring their little ones with them on their journey and, crucially, maintain family life, which is really important?

Robert Jenrick: That is one of the reasons we have said that those coming here for longer-term research courses such as PhDs can continue to bring their dependants with them. If one were coming to the UK for a sustained period, it would be right for them to relocate in a more substantial way. But if individuals are making a choice to come here for a one-year masters course, it is perfectly appropriate for the UK to say that that is their decision and they should not bring their dependants with them.

Agricultural Tenancies

1.28 pm

The Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries (Mark Spencer): I draw the House's attention to my declaration of interests. With permission, Mr Speaker, in addition to the written ministerial statement that I tabled today, I would like to make a statement regarding today's publication of the Government's response to the Rock review of tenant farming in England. It is the next step to support farmers in all corners of the country, who are at the heart of our rural economy, following the UK farm to fork summit last week in Downing Street.

I thank Baroness Rock, who is in the Gallery observing our proceedings. Her tenacity, hard work and dedication alongside the Tenancy Working Group has resulted in this important review. I also thank the former food and farming Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), who is in his place, for initiating the review.

The House will be aware that my background is in dairy farming—four generations deep in Nottinghamshire, in rural Sherwood. We are a family business that is now diversified; it is focused on farm retail, with some beef, lamb, potatoes and a bit of arable. I know at first-hand how important farming is to our economy and to keeping the country fed. That is what farming is for.

One of the first actions taken by this Secretary of State was to announce detailed plans for the nation's farming sector, with our environmental land management schemes having something to offer every type of farmer. We are making it easier for farmers to apply, and this year we have improved the application process. We have also increased the rates and broadened the scope of countryside stewardship. The process for applying for the sustainable farming incentive is now much more efficient, and we want that to continue. We are going to upgrade the countryside stewardship service so that applications take a similar amount of time. By this time next year, we will be encouraging many more farmers to get involved.

The Government support tenant farmers because there is no better way to bring new people into the sector. From day one of the agricultural transition, we have worked with tenants, utilising their knowledge and experience through our programme of tests, trials and pilot programmes. Their input has helped us develop schemes that are as accessible as possible to all sorts of farmers. I will say to the House what I say to every farmer I meet: "Have a look at our schemes and get involved."

We commissioned the tenancy working group, chaired by Baroness Rock, to carry out a comprehensive review of tenanted farming in England. We did that because we recognised how crucial the tenanted sector is to a successful agricultural transition. Since then, we have been working with Baroness Rock and colleagues across Government to give full and considered attention to the review's insights and recommendations. Our response today builds on the considerable progress that we have made since the review was commissioned to implement its ongoing feedback, and sets out the further actions we are taking in response to the review.

For example, we have already made it easier for tenants to participate in the sustainable farming incentive, by offering three-year agreements. We have also made

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all our productivity grants accessible to tenant farmers, including the £168 million of investment we will launch across 2023. Furthermore, as a result of our continued commitment to tenants, around half of the 22 long-term, high-ambition landscape recovery projects selected in the first round involve tenants working with other farmers and land managers.

As the review recommends, we have launched a consultation on extending inheritance tax relief to include land in environmental land management schemes. We hope this will provide landlords and tenants with more flexibility to diversify their land. The tax consultation also explores an option to limit inheritance tax relief to land let out for a minimum of eight years. That could provide tenant farmers with greater certainty over the length of tenancy agreements.

Today we have set out further actions that we will take. We agree that tenant voices must be heard in the development of Government policies and that we must remove any remaining barriers to accessing our farming schemes. That is why we are today announcing a new farm tenancy forum, which will improve the way we communicate with the sector and help us make our schemes as accessible as possible to tenants. The new forum will put a more formal engagement and feedback structure in place between DEFRA and the tenanted sector. The forum will support the implementation of the Government response to the Rock review, feeding back real-world experiences and insights on progress.

In response to the review, we are pleased to announce that the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors has, within its public interest remit, come forward to lead the development of a code of practice, collaborating with industry bodies on expected standards of socially responsible behaviour for all parties involved in agricultural tenancy agreements.

The review also recommended examining the potential need for an independent tenant farming commissioner or ombudsman in England. In response, we will be launching a call for evidence this summer to explore the benefits and impacts of how this might work in practice and how such a role might fit within existing procedures and regulations.

We agree with the review that the tenanted sector has an essential role as a route into farming for new entrants. We will commit to assess how our new entrant support scheme pilot supports farmers to gain new tenancies, and we will present emerging findings to the new farm tenancy forum to embed the views of the tenanted sector in our schemes. The Government support tenant farmers because this is one of the best routes to bring new people into the sector.

As I have set out, we have already made progress on actioning this important review. Today, we are announcing a new forum to embed tenants further in policymaking. We will also publish a new industry-led code of practice and launch a call for evidence on the proposed tenant farming commissioner. We will deliver for tenant farmers and for all farmers. I commend this statement to the House.

1.34 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I thank the Minister for advance sight of his statement. I also thank Baroness Rock and all those involved in the tenancy working group, because theirs is an excellent report. The Government have clearly spent a long time—eight months—considering it. Although we are pleased to see the response at last, we are slightly disappointed that it takes a rather piecemeal approach. Perhaps the Minister could start by telling us how many of the 74 recommendations the Government have chosen to adopt.

This is a complex subject, and we probably need more time to debate it properly. However, let me start by restating why it matters: with half of England's farmland tenanted, we are not going to achieve the transition to a more sustainable form of food production and restore nature without getting this right. There is a problem—long acknowledged—that farm business tenancies now average just 3.2 years. Although constant renewals and negotiations might be good for land agents, that is too short-term, and it is often too difficult for tenants to get involved in the schemes the Government are bringing forward.

Although we welcome the fact that entry to the sustainable farming incentive has been made possible through three-year agreements, I note that the Minister said in his statement that we must "remove any remaining barriers to accessing our farming schemes." Of course, those schemes are much more than just the SFI. Will he therefore tell us why he has not accepted the proposals from the Rock review to make it easier for tenants to enter the tier 2 and tier 3 versions, since that is where the majority of these schemes, such as those for countryside stewardship and landscape recovery, are likely to lie? That really matters. With so much now being pushed out through the countryside stewardship scheme—a debate for another day, perhaps—it could be a problem.

The Minister may be able in passing to update us on the current uptake of the SFI, which I fear—I suspect he shares this view—is still disappointingly low. What assessment has he made of the number of tenants who are likely to enrol, particularly in the countryside stewardship scheme and in landscape recovery level 2? I am told that 70% of tenants routinely do not get consent from their landlords, and I wonder what his estimate is. The danger is that, for all the fine words, too many tenants will still not be able to access environmental land management schemes.

I welcome the comments from the Minister and in the Rock review about the potential benefits for new entrants. We are, of course, still waiting for more details on the new entrants scheme—interestingly, the Government produced the exit scheme a while ago. Will the Minister tell us where he has got to on the new entrants scheme?

The Minister may recall that, during the passage of the Agriculture Act 2020, a previous Secretary of State assured us that moving away from basic payments under the common agricultural policy would see rents fall. Will the Minister tell us what has happened so far, as we approach the halfway point in the agricultural transition?

In general, does the Minister agree that we need a structural change to move to long-term agreements? That was one of the key conclusions from the Rock review. I heard nothing in his statement to that effect, even though this was a fundamental point.

The review found that the constant renegotiation of tenancies is problematic in itself. As Baroness Rock told the Oxford farming conference—the Minister and I were both there:

> "Too often we found an overly short term, commercial and acerbic approach to the management of tenanted estates."

I wonder whether the Minister agrees with that comment. I also wonder whether anything in his statement this morning will remedy the increasingly common situation where tenanted land is lost as landlords seek to put land into woodland or other uses, thus reducing the scope for food production.

We welcome the establishment of the farm tenancy forum, but will the Minister clarify what its role will be? The danger is it will just be a rolled-over version of the long-running tenancy reform industry group. What will its task be? Who will serve on it? What will its terms of reference be?

We welcome further consideration of a tenant farming commissioner, but does the Minister not understand that the problems facing tenants are real and present now? What further information does he expect from yet another consultation? Is that in fact just an attempt to long-grass this recommendation? Is the Minister taking forward the recommendation that the Law Commission investigate this complicated area?

There are many detailed questions that should and will be asked—more than can be accommodated today—but let me conclude on a positive note by welcoming the involvement of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in developing a code of practice. This is a complicated and important area, and it is vital to everyone's interests that collaborative ways forward are established.

Mark Spencer: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that one little nugget of positivity. We have already adopted most of the recommendations in the Rock review. He characterised that action as piecemeal, perhaps because throughout this process we have been liaising with Baroness Rock and the tenancy working group, listening to their recommendations and ensuring that we take them into consideration as we design the new ELM schemes. We will naturally consider further items as we proceed, and the farm tenancy forum is being established so that we can continue to receive that good advice.

Of course we want tenants to be involved in the SFI. The hon. Gentleman knows that we ran pilot schemes which have been quite successful. He knows that we have listened to farmers who have engaged with those pilot schemes, and, in response, have adapted, changed and tweaked them. We will launch six more standards under the SFI this summer, and we will be saying to farmers, "Now is your moment to get involved, to take a look at these new schemes". We want them to think about how they embark on the journey of our transition away from bureaucratic EU systems such as the single farm payment and towards a new system that will enable us to support farmers' food production and to benefit the environment and increase biodiversity at the same time.

There are, of course, good landlords and good tenants, and some poor landlords and some poor tenants. We want to allow flexibility for good landlords and good tenants, and to hold to account those who are not adopting the right course of action. I noted that the hon. Gentleman's question contained no recommendations or policy from Labour. There is a gaping void in Labour's rural policy: it is an urban-based party that does not understand rural communities and does not understand the farming sector. The Conservative party is the party of rural communities, and we will always stand up for those communities and for farmers.

Sir Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): I, too, pay tribute to Baroness Rock and her working group. She has engaged with me and with my Committee, the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which launched its report on the tenanted sector this morning.

Does the Minister agree that as we move from direct payments to more environmentally linked payments, there will always be a limitation on which schemes tenants can participate in because of their long-term nature? Does he also share my concern about the possibility of perverse incentives for landlords to take land back from tenants for purposes such as the creation of solar farms, rewilding and forestry?

Mark Spencer: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend and his Committee for their work. We want to avoid any such perverse incentives. We do not want to motivate landlords to take land from tenants for the purpose of, for instance, rewilding, or to remove them from the sector for any reason. We want to encourage a positive working relationship.

There are, of course, some challenges. If, for example, a tenant applies for a grant under our new slurry scheme to introduce physical structures that will last well beyond the length of the tenancy, the landlord will need to have some engagement in the process and to support that tenant. We want to open up these grants to tenants as well as owner-occupiers, so that tenant farmers can invest in their productivity as well as their sustainability and their ability to make a profit.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I welcome and broadly agree with the review, and pay tribute to Baroness Rock and her team for their hard work. I am grateful for advance sight of the Minister's statement, which also included much encouraging information. However, the Government have dragged their feet in responding to the review, and many of the policies that will affect tenant farmers have already been set in train, which is one reason why a mere 27 of the more than 1,000 farms in my constituency, roughly half of which will be tenanted, have taken part in the SFI so far.

I think the Government should stand rebuked by two particular elements in the review, and I should like them to look at those again. First, does the review not remind them to ensure that landscape recovery includes tenant farmers, and that the landscape cannot be gobbled up by water companies and large estates, which is what is beginning to happen? Secondly, given that many tenant farmers in Cumbria and elsewhere are upland farmers, does the Minister recognise that the intention of funding environmental schemes via the system of income forgone discriminates against the uplands and will force many hard-working tenant farmers out of the industry altogether, to the detriment of our environment and of food production?

Mark Spencer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his warm welcome for the report and our response, but I think that some of his characterisations are a little misplaced. Let me say first that in designing the ELM schemes we took account of the feedback we were receiving from those conducting the review. We were in possession of it when it was published some time ago, and we worked with the group to ensure that we were taking it on board. Secondly, of course we want to

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support upland farmers. We want to support all tenants, to ensure that they have the best possible opportunity to make a living, and to protect the beautiful landscapes that we see not only in Cumbria but in the south-west and other places with landscapes that matter to the British people.

Let me say this, gently, to the hon. Gentleman. He will be aware that the Liberal Democrats entered into the political game of trying to keep our farmers tied to the bureaucratic EU land-based subsidies by tabling a motion in the other place. Under that system, far too much time was spent on burdening farmers with complex sets of rules, and on debating whether a cabbage was the same as a cauliflower for the purposes of the three-crop rule. We have to move on to a different place, and that is what we are doing. The hon. Gentleman can play his political games, but we will look after those farmers and ensure that the system works for them.

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): I commend the comprehensive piece of work done by Baroness Rock and I welcome the statement, but I want to make two points. First, probably the most powerful thing that the Government could do to improve the accessibility of the schemes to tenant farmers is to make agreements assignable from one tenant to the next. I wonder whether any progress has been made on that option. Secondly, if we want to help tenant farmers, we must make it as easy as possible for landowners to bring land to market for rent. Historically, under the Law of Property Act 1925 and the Agricultural Holdings Act 1948, landowners had a right to rent out their land, but following pernicious lobbying by the banking industry that was taken away through section 31 of the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995, and they now need permission from a bank. Will the Minister consider repealing section 31 as part of the ongoing review?

Mark Spencer: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend, who triggered the Rock review and set it up in the first place. His knowledge is evident to the whole House. I will look into his specific questions and get back to him, but many of these issues can now be reviewed by the farm tenancy forum, and I think that that will be an opportunity to get under the bonnet and inform ourselves much more directly than we have in the past.

Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con): I thank all the farmers in Stroud Valleys and Severn Vale for everything they do for food production. I also welcome the farming focus from Baroness Rock and, indeed, the Prime Minister—and Kaleb from "Clarkson's Farm", who is a firm favourite in our household. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must keep tenant farmers farming for generations, and look at how we are encouraging young farmers into the businesses that are so vital for our country?

Mark Spencer: My hon. Friend will be aware of my background. I think that if ever there was a moment in history when we needed the brightest and most inspired people to come into the sector and embrace food production, as well as solving the challenges of climate change, that moment is now. As for encouraging young people into the sector, we can all play our part in providing a positive image of food production and farmers to ensure that that next generation becomes involved.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call Simon Hoare.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am the first of two Simons to be called.

I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. Dorset Council runs a very successful network of county farms, which are becoming rarer but are still, in my view, important. Can my right hon. Friend say whether his statement will be of benefit to the tenants of those county farms?

Mark Spencer: I hope that it will be of benefit to all tenant farmers, whether they are on a county farm, have a private landlord or a non-governmental organisation as their landlord. We want to support all tenants, but I recognise the huge contribution that county council-owned units have made and Dorset has certainly been exemplary in showing how they can benefit tenants by establishing the stepping stone to getting into an agricultural business and getting on to the producing food ladder.

Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con): The creation of a new farming tenancy forum is a welcome move. Those voices are crucial and the next generation in East Devon will be vital. Does the Minister agree that the tenanted sector is vital for the future of agriculture and absolutely crucial for the food security of the United Kingdom?

Mark Spencer: I wholly agree with my hon. Friend. He will be aware that only last week I was in Devon talking to farmers in his constituency about the contribution they are making to keeping the country well fed and also protecting the beautiful landscapes that Devon has to offer. We want tenants in Devon and across the country to embrace and benefit from our new schemes and to continue to keep us well fed and look after the environment.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I welcome today's report and the Minister's statement. He will be aware of the rise in food prices and the pressure on land use, particularly in relation to rewilding and large-scale solar farms. What is he doing to ensure that we maintain food production and food security from tenants and non-tenant farmers alike?

Mark Spencer: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend. The farmers of Lincolnshire produce a huge amount of food for the nation. We need to invest in new technology and in productivity, to ensure that our farmers continue to become more productive. The good news is that we get about 1% more efficient every year as a sector—that is, we produce 1% more food from the same amount of land. We need to build on that productivity, which is why we are investing huge amounts in science, technology and innovation to make sure that farmers have the best access to new technology.

Points of Order

1.51 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) at Prime Minister's questions about the dealings at Teesworks, the Prime Minister said that

"the Levelling Up Secretary has already announced an investigation into this matter."

But the Secretary of State has not responded to the requests last week for a National Audit Office investigation from the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), and from the Chair of the Business and Trade Committee, so we are in the dark. Will you advise me on how we can seek clarity from the Prime Minister on when this investigation was ordered and on what terms?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for giving me notice of his intention to raise this matter. He knows that Minister's responses are not a matter for the Chair, but I understand that he is making a serious and apparently well-founded criticism that information has been given from the Dispatch Box that does not appear to accord with the facts as he understands them. Ministers on the Treasury Bench will have heard what he has said, and I hope that his concerns will be passed on to the appropriate Minister. There is no doubt that what is actually done should accord precisely with what is said to have been done. Of course, he has other recourse, through the Table Office, to finding other ways of raising this matter on the Floor of the House.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Leverhulme Estates wishes to build hundreds of homes on the green belt in Wirral West, and a series of planning appeals relating to this are currently being heard by the Planning Inspectorate at a public inquiry. On 12 April, Wirral Council wrote to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities requesting that consideration be given to the recovery of these appeals for determination by the Secretary of State himself. The Secretary of State did not respond to that letter or to a reminder sent by Wirral Council on 5 May. My constituents care passionately about protecting the green belt and I fully support them in that. Will you advise me on what I can do on behalf of local residents and Wirral Council to impress upon the Secretary of State the importance of his giving this matter his urgent attention?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order. Although this is not a matter for the Chair, I fully appreciate her desire and duty to defend and protect the green belt. But from the Chair I have no authority to take any action in respect of delays in Government replies to local authorities. She has very reasonably raised this matter, and as I said to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) a few moments ago, I trust that those on the Treasury Bench will have heard what she has said and noted her very reasonable concerns, and that they will hopefully take action on them. If not, the hon. Lady knows where to seek advice from the Table Office as to how she might take the matter further.

BILLS PRESENTED

British Nationality (Regularisation of Past Practice) Bill

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Suella Braverman, supported by the Prime Minister and Robert Jenrick, presented a Bill to make provision for immigration restrictions to be disregarded for the purposes of the British Nationality Act 1981 in historical cases in which such restrictions were in practice disregarded.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 313) with explanatory notes (Bill 313—EN).

Ministerial Conduct (Training) Bill

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Wendy Chamberlain presented a Bill to require Ministers of the Crown to undertake annual training in matters relating to propriety, ethics and standards; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November, and to be printed (Bill 315).

Aviation Banning Orders (Disruptive Passengers)

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

1.56 pm

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for court orders to prohibit disruptive passengers from flying, and for connected purposes.

This is my second attempt to bring in this Bill. The last time was just a week or so before lockdown and understandably the aviation industry and everyone else had their attention elsewhere, so I hope that due regard can be given to this Bill by the Government this time. I am grateful that we have a Minister at the Dispatch Box to hear this.

Violent incidents on aeroplanes are rare but the problem is increasing. The confined nature of an aeroplane makes an out-of-control individual on a plane far more concerning than on any other mode of transport. People cannot get away from them easily. It can be terrifying for nervous fliers and deeply concerning for everyone on a plane when just one person is acting in a violent manner. When it is a group of people, the situation is much worse. Cabin crew should not have to deal with such incidents and they should be protected by this place when carrying out their duties.

We currently ban people from driving if a criminal offence is committed in a car. We ban people from football matches if they take part in hooliganism. We even ban people from being directors of companies, but we happily allow people who assault airline staff to get back on a plane without any power from the courts to stop this. This Bill could be used by the courts in a similar way to drink-driving legislation by banning a disruptive person after conviction for a set period of time or, as in football banning orders, on an application by a police officer.

Airlines can ban people from using their own company again but they cannot share information about that person with other airlines, so letting the courts stop the worst offenders will not only help to protect cabin crew and passengers but act as a deterrent to anyone tempted to be violent on a plane. Right now, a person can be violent on a plane, be banned by that airline and then straight away get on another airline's plane and be violent again. That cannot be right.

Some say that the solution is to ban alcohol. I do not agree, because 99.9% of people who enjoy a glass of wine or a beer at an airport or on a plane do so without causing any problems. It is part of their holiday. It is the 0.1% of people we should target, not the 99.9%. Alcohol can be a factor, but not always, so banning it is not the answer.

People should know that, if they get on a plane and become violent, in addition to any other punishment they receive they will not fly again for a good period of time. That is what happens in some countries, and it should apply here. The aviation industry is sick and tired of these incidents. Not only do these incidents endanger their staff, but it costs an enormous amount of money and causes considerable inconvenience to divert a plane. Not surprisingly, the industry wants the opportunity to take every step it can to stop these incidents.

This Bill would provide a simple and easy way to deter those minded to cause problems on a plane while also preventing repeat incidents. I therefore commend this Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Gareth Johnson, Jim Shannon, Mrs Heather Wheeler, Michael Fabricant, Tim Loughton, Chris Grayling, Craig Mackinlay, Sir David Evennett and Henry Smith present the Bill.

Gareth Johnson accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 November, and to be printed (Bill 316).

RETAINED EU LAW (REVOCATION AND REFORM) BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 3)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Orders of 25 October (Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill: Programme) and 7 November 2022 (Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill: Programme (No. 2)):

Consideration of Lords Amendments

(1) Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion four hours after their commencement.

(2) The Lords Amendments shall be considered in the following order: 6, 1, 16, 15, 42, 2 to 5, 7 to 14, 17 to 41, 43.

Subsequent stages

(3) Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

(4) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—*(Fay Jones.)*

Question agreed to.

Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill

Consideration of Lords amendments

2.2 pm

The Solicitor General (Michael Tomlinson): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 6.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): With this it will be convenient to discuss:

Lords amendment 1, and Government amendment (a) to Lords amendment 1.

Lords amendment 16, and Government amendments (a) and (b) to Lords amendment 16.

Lords amendment 15, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 42, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendments 2 to 5, 7 to 14, 17 to 41 and 43.

The Solicitor General: It is a great pleasure to open this debate on their lordships' amendments to the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill, which is a vital part of the Government's agenda to regulate in a smarter, innovation-friendly way that will grow the UK economy. We have already taken advantage of many of the opportunities that leaving the European Union has created, and Brexit offers us the opportunity to rethink, from first principles, how and when we regulate. Of course, this includes ridding the statute book of unnecessary and burdensome retained EU laws through a process of revoke and reform, while always applying the same rigorous scrutiny to wider regulations that have accumulated over time, to ensure they are fit for purpose and of benefit to the UK.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Does the Solicitor General believe the Government's approach is not only sound but robust in ensuring that we examine each piece of EU legislation before discarding it? Secondly, does he agree that, through forthcoming legislation, we will have gotten rid of more than half of retained EU law by the end of the year?

The Solicitor General: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for intervening so early in this debate to make two very important points. He is absolutely right, and I will turn to the detail of his points but, on the substance, he is 100% correct. As I develop my points, I hope he will agree even more with our approach.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The Government are trying to get rid of Lords amendment 15, which reinstates the principle of non-regression. Can the Solicitor General explain what is so burdensome about agreeing to a non-regression clause, given that the Government keep saying they have no intention of weakening our environmental and food standards? If that really is the case, why on earth would he be against the principle of non-regression? Is it because, actually, the Government probably have ideas about weakening some of our standards?

The Solicitor General: The hon. Lady intervenes at a very early stage in the debate. I have not even concluded my preamble, let alone turned to the individual amendments, which I will, of course, address. She will not be surprised to hear that I disagree with her, and I hope she will bear with me and listen as a I develop my points in respect to Lords amendment 15.

This Bill is not specifically about cutting burdens to benefit business. We are doing this because ensuring that markets function properly will benefit each and every one of our constituents as consumers and citizens of this country. We must ask which regulations have worked, which require scrapping and which can be reformed. Smarter regulation leads to improved growth and a stronger economy.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I expressed my reservations about the sunset clause from the outset, as the practicalities of meeting such a tight deadline were always going to be difficult. I understand why the Government are where they are on this, but I hope my hon. and learned Friend will assure the House that, even with the removal of the deadline provided by the previous sunset clause, we will see the Government working hard to deliver the kind of regulatory review, reform and improvement of retained EU law that he talks about, because he is right that it is crucial to economic success.

The Solicitor General: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for her work in this area over a long number of years. I hope her work continues and that we can encourage her to suggest regulations that need scrapping or reforming and, frankly, those that have worked and that we need to hold on to. When I come to the Government amendments, I hope she will be reassured that our approach adopts exactly what she has envisaged.

I turn to the amendments. It is clear that we are fully taking back control of our laws and ending the supremacy and special status afforded to retained EU law by the end of 2023. We are ending the inappropriate entrenchment of EU law concepts in domestic statute. For centuries, our legal systems have developed through common law and case law principles. Indeed, the UK is home to perhaps the most respected legal jurisdictions in the world, not least thanks to our strong judiciary and, crucially, our world-renowned common-law legal system, which is clear, fair, predictable and based on precedent.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is great to see that so many Ministers have taken an interest in this Bill during its passage. The Government and this place were already supposed to have the power to do everything the Solicitor General outlines, by taking back control from Brussels. Everything he says could be done through primary legislation, without needing the sweeping powers the Bill grants, much as my Glasgow North constituents welcome the removal of the cliff edge, about which the Solicitor General's predecessors were repeatedly warned at previous stages.

The Solicitor General: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention, but the fact is that this framework Bill will end the supremacy and special status of retained EU law. The reason why so many Conservative Members are sitting on the Government Benches today is because

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we welcome the fact that the supremacy and special status afforded to retained EU law will end with the passage of this Bill.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

The Solicitor General: I will give way, and then I will make some progress.

John Redwood: The list of repeals will make life better and make us more prosperous, but why are we not making a big increase to the VAT threshold, now we are free to do so, so we can liberate and expand many more of our small businesses?

The Solicitor General: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his intervention. He has spent a lifetime working on these issues and I look forward to his continuing contribution to this debate. The fact is that by having a schedule, we can set out incredibly clearly what laws will be sunset and when—I will turn to that point in a moment—and we provide certainty. Importantly, it does not prevent our making further reforms in due course, and I will address that point in a few minutes.

Amendment 1 is an amended version of an initial Government amendment. The Government tabled that amendment on Report in the Lords to remove the automatic nature of the sunset clause, as we have heard. This approach will provide legal certainty on which EU laws will fall away at the end of the year and will ensure that Parliament, Ministers and officials are freed to focus on more reform of retained EU law and to do this faster. Let me respond further to my right hon. Friend by saying that that is the great advantage of this approach: we are not going to be upstairs in Delegated Legislation Committees between now and the end of the year. Instead, we will be able to focus important time looking at where we want to make real and proper reforms. The goal of this Bill—to enable revocation and reform, and to end the supremacy and special status of retained EU law—remains fully intact.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con) *rose—*

The Solicitor General: I will give way to the hon. Lady first and then of course I will give way to my hon. Friend.

Stella Creasy: I hope I may be defending the rights of the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) and the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) here. The Minister has just said how wonderful it will be that we will not be in these SI Committees. Is it not the case that Members of this House with strong feelings about any of this legislation will be reduced to pleading, through question sessions such as this, trying to catch a Minister in the Lobby or lobbying one of those backroom civil servants, to try to amend the SIs that are being put forward? This piece of legislation might set out what the Government plan to revoke at this point in time, but there will still not be any scrutiny in this Chamber or any opportunity for an MP to put forward proposals to challenge them. That is not taking back control—it is giving it away.

The Solicitor General: I disagree entirely with the hon. Lady. I know that she is an assiduous Member of this House; I have served on many Bill Committees with her and know how seriously she takes her work and this role. I know that she would not be unwilling, and indeed neither would I, to sit upstairs on SI Committees, but that should be only if it is necessary. If it is not necessary, and if all we are doing is, in effect, retaining the status quo, it is much better to free up parliamentary time, and the time of Ministers and officials, to look at where real reform can be made.

Sir William Cash: I simply ask the Solicitor General whether he would be good enough to give an assurance to the European Scrutiny Committee, in the light of recent events, on its interaction with the Bill and its outcome and operation.

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend pre-empts me, because I will be turning to the important role of the European Scrutiny Committee. I know he will forgive me, because it is important to take this in the proper order and so I will come to that point in due course.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con) *rose—*

The Solicitor General: I give way to my hon. Friend and neighbour.

Simon Hoare: I thank my hon. and learned Friend and neighbour for giving way. A lot of our constituents want to get behind the Government's strategy. They want to have the confidence that it is going to be done in a calm, measured and sensible way. In recent times, more radically siren voices have suggested the "Singaporisation" of life and everybody just getting on, with no regulations and bonfires of this, that and the other. This has slightly scared the horses. Will he therefore, from the Dispatch Box, give comfort to a large number of people in this country who understand the job that needs to be done but want the assurance that it will be done in the calm, timely and reflective way that he has set out? That message—that change of tone and approach—has not quite been articulated strongly enough by Ministers and therefore has not been understood clearly enough by constituents.

The Solicitor General: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention and, as ever, for his assiduous attention to these matters. He is right in what he says, so let me give an example and, I hope, the assurance that he is seeking. Importantly, the default approach of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will be to retain the substance of retained EU law unless there is good reason to either repeal or reform it. Such an approach not only allows us to keep protections in place, but provides certainty to businesses and stakeholders. He will know and appreciate that our high standards were never dependent solely on our membership of the EU. I will turn back to that theme in due course.

2.15 pm

The revocation schedule changes the way that the sunset operates, but it still ensures that we are removing and will continue to remove unnecessary and burdensome EU laws by the end of the year. I wish to reassure Members that the schedule is not a limit to our ambition for reform of EU law. We have the power to continue to

amend the EU laws so that more complex regulation can still be revoked or reformed as we require. Departments will still be required to continue to review retained EU laws not already reformed or planned for revocation this year. This will identify further opportunities for reform or revocation.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) drove vital change by ensuring that there was a catalogue of retained EU law on the dashboard. I will come back to that point later, but it is critical, because much of what is not clearly appropriate for the UK is listed and is publicly available for all to see. The schedule will thus allow us to remove legislation inherited from the EU that is either already redundant or that the UK no longer requires. It is simply an efficient and transparent way of dealing with this.

Caroline Lucas: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way on that point?

The Solicitor General: I will not give way at the moment. I am going to make some progress, because I am conscious that a number of people want to speak in the debate. As I was saying, all retained EU law in the schedule will be revoked on 31 December 2023.

There is a clear additional advantage to a schedule, and this was a point I made earlier to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy): rather than using precious parliamentary time passing SIs to save laws that no one would ever let sunset, it is right to be clear in a schedule what retained EU law will revoked, while letting the rest be reformed. Instead of our focusing on passing significant numbers of SIs just to preserve the status quo, the schedule will allow the Government to get on with reforming and revoking regulations that are not fit for purpose for the UK.

Sir Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): My hon. and learned Friend is bringing me a lot of déjà vu, as one of his predecessors who dealt with EU withdrawal and retained EU law. There will be more on that later, but I want to ask him about the point he has just made. Was there not a danger that, in confusing haste with speed, we were going to end up with a cut-and-paste operation, where civil servants were just going to replicate existing SIs and leave them on the statute book to be reformed at some undefined date in the future? Is his approach guaranteed to avoid that unhappy set of circumstances from coming about?

The Solicitor General: I am grateful to my predecessor, who has indeed spent many hours at this Dispatch Box debating legislation such as this over the past years. He is absolutely right in what he says; this approach allows the Government to get on with reforming and revoking, rather than having the cut-and-paste to which he referred.

We want to expand both the scrutiny and the breadth of experience that we are drawing on when it comes to revocation and reform. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) anticipated this point, and I thank him for the work done by him and his Committee, a number of whose members are in the Chamber today. Indeed, I used to be a member of that Committee and the Government look forward to engaging with it. I am pleased to give him a commitment that we will present a report to the European Scrutiny Committee on a six-monthly basis on the progress and plans the Government are making on the repeal of retained EU law. Any retained EU law not included in the schedule will be stripped of EU interpretative effects after 31 December 2023. I repeat that it is important to expand both the scrutiny and breadth of experience, as the Secretary of State for Business and Trade has said from this Dispatch Box and elsewhere. This is vital, and it means that we will still be removing the effects of general principles of EU law as an aid to interpretation, ceasing the application of supremacy and repealing directly effective EU rights so that they no longer have any effect in relation to those provisions.

Caroline Lucas: The Solicitor General keeps talking about getting rid of laws that are burdensome or unnecessary, but caught up in the revocation schedule, among many other things, are the National Emission Ceilings Regulations 2018, which require the Government to prepare and implement, review and—critically—consult on a programme to tackle air pollution at source. The Government say that they do not need to do that via that legislation, and that they will do it instead via environmental improvement plans, yet those plans are vague and do not include public consultation. Given all the regulations caught up in the 600 that he is trying to get rid of, how can he be sure that he will not throw the baby out with the bathwater? On air pollution, he absolutely is doing that. We are not even meeting our existing air pollution targets, yet we risk watering down or junking targets that we ought to be abiding by.

The Solicitor General: I think I am grateful to the hon. Lady. I will come back to this point in due course, but she will have seen that there is an explainer for each and every one of the 587 regulations in the revocation schedule, and it is clear that in the vast majority of cases they are simply redundant and not needed. It seems that she has already had a complete answer to her point from the Government. I will come back in due course to our Environment Act 2021 and develop further the point that I am making.

Turning back to Lords amendment 1, nothing on our domestic statute book will be considered retained EU law and have the special status of retained EU law; that will come to an end by the end of the year. In my respectful submission, the further amendment to Lords amendment 1 passed in the other place is unprecedented, unnecessary and unacceptable. We must be able to use this primary legislation to revoke unneeded and unwanted legislation; it is not necessary to invent a new procedure simply to review a revocation schedule.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I welcome my hon. and learned Friend's tone and approach, as I welcome the Government's getting rid of the sunset clause and putting in place the revocation schedule, which is so obviously the right thing to do.

My hon. and learned Friend says that the further amendment contained in Lords amendment 1 is unprecedented, unnecessary and undesirable, but was not the objective of that further amendment, which was tabled by Lord Hope, who is a very distinguished lawyer, along with Lords Hamilton of Epsom and Hodgson of Astley Abbotts, both of whom are friends who I know to have been lifelong Brexiteers, to ensure that the measure was not used to make substantial change to our law, rather than to get rid of redundant legislation

[Sir Robert Neill]

or make technical changes, which we all agree should not go to a Delegated Legislation Committee? What will be the Government's alternative mechanism to ensure that we do not get substantial change to the law without proper debate and scrutiny?

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend the Chair of the Justice Committee makes important points, and I hope that I can reassure him on some of them in my next two paragraphs. To answer his very last point, Members' presence here in the Chamber right now, raising the sorts of points that he has raised, is part of the scrutiny process. In my respectful submission, the further amendment to Lords amendment 1 made in the other place actually undermines legal certainty. I draw his attention to the fact that there is already a proportionate safeguard—namely, a limited preservation power—in the preferred clause.

My hon. Friend mentioned the noble Lord Hope. I agreed with at least this part of Lord Hope's speech:

"A quick reading of the schedule suggests that many of the items listed in it are things we can well do without."—[*Official Report, House of Lords,* 15 May 2023; Vol. 830, c. 19.]

In fact, a longer look confirms the position. I must therefore ask the House to return Lords amendment 1 to the other place, as amended by Government amendment (a).

I turn to Lords amendment 16 on the reporting duty, which was tabled by my noble Friend Baroness Noakes, supported by my noble Friends Lord Jackson of Peterborough, Lord Frost and Baroness Lawlor. We have of course listened to the concerns raised, and I assure the House that the Government have not moved one inch from their bold ambitions. We remain committed to securing swift and significant reform that brings tangible benefits to the UK economy.

That is why I ask the House not only to agree with the reporting amendment sent to us by the other place, but to improve it. Our amendment (b) would increase the frequency of reporting to every six months. We know that accountability to this House and the other place is the best way of ensuring that the Government keep progressing their priorities and that my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) and others are reassured.

I am delighted to support the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone, amendment (a) to Lords amendment 16, which will ensure that the Government report to both Houses not just on reform progress, but on what retained EU law will be reformed and what will be revoked. In the spirit of the amendment, I am pleased to say that the Government have already reformed and revoked more than 1,000 pieces of retained EU law—this comes back to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) made at the outset—including more than 450 pieces that we have repealed, replaced or let expire, and 650 more that we have amended. Again, we can follow all this thanks to my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset and his dashboard.

Upon our exit from the EU, a number of Departments proactively revoked or amended regulations that contained deficiencies as a result of the UK's exit from the EU. DEFRA has already reformed key areas of retained EU law through flagship legislation such as the Environment Act, the Agriculture Act 2020 and the Fisheries Act 2020.

The Attorney General (Victoria Prentis): Hear, hear!

The Solicitor General: I am delighted that the Attorney General says that so loudly from a sedentary position, because she took at least some of those measures through this House. I am grateful to her for that. The revocation schedule will build on that and facilitate reform in key sectors.

This is far from the limit of the Government's ambitions. Across Whitehall, Departments will continue to review the retained EU law not already revoked or reformed, and we are committed to reducing burdens on business and unlocking economic growth.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests: I chair the Regulatory Reform Group. The Solicitor General is making a very good case not just for the approach in this narrow area of EU law, but for the need to integrate that with a broader programme of improvement to the regulatory system. Will he give his view of the proposals by the Regulatory Reform Group on the importance of improving our regulatory system to improve accountability and responsiveness from regulators, as they have a lot of duties under primary legislation?

The Solicitor General: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for all his work in this area. He will have heard the Secretary of State's call for greater scrutiny and for a breadth of experience, which she is determined to draw upon. I am sure that she will draw upon my hon. Friend's experience too. He is right. We are committed to reducing burdens on business and unlocking economic growth. I ask all right hon. and hon. Members to support amendments (a) and (b) to Lords amendment 16.

Lords amendment 6 undermines a fundamental plank of the Bill—namely, ending the special status of retained EU law on our statute book by repealing section 4 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. The matters saved by section 4 consist largely of retained rights, obligations and remedies developed in the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union. The vast majority of those rights overlap with rights that we already have. Those overlaps can cause confusion and legal uncertainty. By not repealing section 4, and instead replacing it with unclear parliamentary procedures, the Lords amendment would create the very legal uncertainty that was previously criticised.

This is the point: the Bill should end the situation where, to understand and enforce their rights, citizens must decipher the implications of a high-level legal principle giving effect to an ill-defined right or set of rights. Lords amendment 6 does the exact opposite.

Patrick Grady *rose—*

The Solicitor General: The hon. Gentleman, I know, will forgive me because I have been a very long time and I must make some progress. It perpetuates a situation that is unacceptable to the Government and, I would hope, unacceptable to the House.

Sir Robert Neill: May I press the Solicitor General to give way on that point?

The Solicitor General: Of course I will give way to my hon. Friend.

2.30 pm

Sir Robert Neill: The Solicitor General says it is unacceptable to the Government, and I understand the points he makes, but can he help on one point that was raised in the upper House? Contrary to the Government's belief, there is a risk of legal uncertainty because, while the Government rightly have a revocation list of legislation, there is not a revocation list of rights that may be in another form. Therefore, the concern was raised about the risk of deleting almost unidentified law unintentionally. I am sure the Solicitor General has an answer to that and I would like to hear it, but at the moment I do not see why the Government are so exercised about this new clause—again, proposed by people who are both distinguished in the law and firm Brexiters.

The Solicitor General: As my hon. Friend knows, I pay enormous deference to those experienced in the law—not least to him, as long-standing Chairman of the Justice Committee—but he heard my response: the Government's concern is that Lords amendment 6 would replace clause 3 with unclear parliamentary procedures and, in my submission, create the very legal uncertainties that have been previously criticised. That is why I suggest that it is should be unacceptable not just to the Government, but to the House as well, and that the amendment proposed would actually muddy the waters.

Patrick Grady *rose—*

The Solicitor General: Having given way to my hon. Friend the Chair of the Select Committee, of course I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Patrick Grady: I think I can help the Minister out here, because from everything he has just described, it appears that what the Government are trying to achieve is that, instead of its being called "retained EU law", it will now just be called "the law".

The Solicitor General: I sort of agree—although that is a little bit of a facetious way to put it from the hon. Gentleman, but there it is. To deliver clarity, to remove the principle of supremacy in international law, the House must remove this amendment and restore the original clause to the Bill.

Sir William Cash: On the question of legal certainty, does my hon. and learned Friend not agree that it would be almost impossible to imagine how uncertain it would be if we had two sets of statute books, one of which was post Brexit and the other of which was the retained law as passed by the European Union over all those years? The method of interpretation—the difference between the purposive method and our own method—is absolutely crucial to this, does he not agree?

The Solicitor General: I do agree with my hon. Friend, who is absolutely right. That is the whole purpose of this Bill and the reason we are ending the supremacy of retained EU law.

I turn now to Lords amendment 15, which sets out a number of conditions relating to environmental protections and food standards that the Minister must meet when intending to use the powers of this Bill. That is unnecessary. Ministers have made it clear repeatedly at every stage of this Bill's passage in both Houses that we will not lower environmental protections or standards.

Equally, the delegated powers in the Bill are not intended to undermine the UK's already high standards on food, nor will they do so; indeed, this Government are committed to promoting robust food standards nationally and internationally. Rather, we can use these powers to simplify and improve regulation, making it simpler and administratively easier to comply with, without lowering standards. Those reforms, among others, are vital to allowing the UK to drive genuine reform and to seize the opportunities of Brexit.

Caroline Lucas: Will the Solicitor General give way on that point?

The Solicitor General: No, I will not. I have given way twice to the hon. Lady and I am going to make progress.

However, we recognise the need to protect environmental and food standards. Therefore, I would like to be clear once again in confirming, as many Ministers have done before me, that this Government are fully committed to upholding environmental standards and food protections. It is worth noting that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has already reformed retained EU law in key areas, through flagship legislation: I have already mentioned two pieces of that—the Fisheries Act 2020 and the Agriculture Act 2020. Our environmental standards are world leading. We have passed legislation designed for our own domestic environment and it is right that we have done so.

Simon Hoare: Will the Solicitor General give way?

Caroline Lucas: You have already given way to him.

The Solicitor General: I have given way to my hon. Friend once, but not twice, so I will give way to him again.

Simon Hoare: One can never give way too many times to a neighbour. My hon. and learned Friend is making an important point. My constituency is hugely agricultural, and so is much of his, so food standards and animal welfare are important to many of our constituents. We have put on the statute book the Agriculture Act, the Environment Act 2021 and other things. Does he agree that, while there has been suspicion on this issue, we should take great confidence from the announcement made by our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and others that, when it comes to trade deals, the lessons raised by our right hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) have been learned, and therefore issues of animal welfare and standards will be at the heart of future free trade agreements, rather than an optional extra?

The Solicitor General: I am grateful again to my hon. Friend; I am glad I gave way to him twice and did not leave him there, asking without receiving an answer. I can simply repeat the assurances that Ministers have given—ad nauseam, dare I say—that our environmental standards are world leading and will continue to be so.

[The Solicitor General]

In reviewing its retained EU law, DEFRA's aim is to ensure that environmental law is fit for purpose and is able to drive improved environmental outcomes. In light of that, I ask the House to reject amendment 15.

I turn now to Lords amendment 42—I think this is the last one, if I have counted correctly. This amendment inserted a new paragraph into schedule 4 and would require a novel procedure to apply to the use of the powers contained in the Bill. I repeat that the procedures are novel and untested. This Government do not accept the principle that Parliament should be able to amend statutory instruments.

In addition, the procedure would have significant implications for both parliamentary time and the ability of Government to deliver their business. It would bring significant delay to the clarification of our statute books through restatement, and delay much-needed regulatory reform. There is already provision for scrutiny measures within the Bill. All those powers will already be subject either to the affirmative procedure, meaning they must be debated in and approved by both Houses, or to the findings of a sifting Committee in each House. That is a sufficient safeguard.

Stella Creasy: Will the Solicitor General give way?

The Solicitor General: I will not. The sifting procedure will provide additional scrutiny of the powers, while retaining the flexibility of using the negative procedure when there are good reasons for doing so. I therefore ask the House to reject this amendment. I have set out the Government's position today—

Stella Creasy: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Solicitor General just suggested that amendable SIs was a novel procedure—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Stop. That is not a point of order. The hon. Lady has tried to intervene on the Minister. The Minister has already taken her intervention and he is not taking another. It is not a point of order for the Chair. The hon. Lady should not abuse the procedures of the House in this way. I call the Minister.

The Solicitor General: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I fear I have tried your patience for too long, so I will seek to conclude. I know a number of other right hon. and hon. Members want to catch your eye and I will allow them to do so.

I have set out the Government's position. It is one that prioritises a clear statute book, that ensures that we have regulation that is fit for purpose and that works for the United Kingdom. I invite all hon. Members to support the Government's motions today.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Well, now. From the outset the Opposition have made it clear that we believe this Bill to be unnecessary, unrealistic and undesirable, and everything that has happened in the other place since we last saw it here has only reaffirmed what was painfully obvious. This is an inherently flawed piece of legislation, from a fatally wounded Government unable to deal in reality.

I reiterate what I said on Second Reading: this Bill has nothing whatsoever to do with Brexit. We have left the European Union. That is a fact. This is about the good governance of the UK, and whether it is Parliament or Government that should have the power to control significant changes to the law. On the Opposition Benches, we recognise that there are undoubtedly areas where we as a country will choose to take a different regulatory approach now that we are no longer pooling some of those decisions across the other member states of the European Union. However, where we choose to do that, the correct approach is to bring to this place a set of positive proposals and have them accepted or rejected in the usual fashion. Not only is that the better approach, but it is the Government's approach to, for instance, financial regulation in the form of the Financial Services and Markets Bill, which the Labour party broadly supported. The Solicitor General gave additional examples of that approach in his opening remarks. Indeed, if any Member has a positive agenda to promote, let them bring that positive set of proposals to this place.

What the Government suggested initially was nothing short of legislative vandalism, taking a machete to the law in a way that risked our hard-won rights, when what was needed was a scalpel. For the Government to try to remove via a sunset clause vast swathes of law, which they themselves could not even adequately list or quantify, was always ridiculous. To create so much uncertainty—especially after the fiasco of the mini-Budget, when the Conservatives crashed the British economy—was bad enough, but also risking so many core rights and protections, in the form of employment law, the environment and consumer rights, was fundamentally unworkable. Britain's businesses, trade unions, civic society and campaigners united to oppose such a reckless and unnecessary approach, and I, for one, commend them for their work.

As all colleagues are now aware, the Government have finally reckoned with reality. Today, we are presented with the inevitable decision by the Secretary of State to completely abandon the Government's initial approach and accept how wrong they were. It appears to be a decision so humiliating that the Secretary of State is not prepared to face the Chamber. The Government's amendment, through which they seek to perform a U-turn so swift that it is more of more of a handbrake turn, will change the Bill fundamentally. I thought that the Solicitor General put a very brave face on it, but people will rightly ask why, if his statements are correct, this was not the Government's approach to begin with.

The change to the sunset clause is not the limit of the good work done in the House of Lords. In the other place, they have sought to protect the role of Parliament and of our constituents in deciding our future trajectory. They have correctly made it clear that no one voted to take back control only for decisions to be made in the back rooms of Whitehall. Lords amendment 1, which was tabled by Lord Hope of Craighead and the Conservative peers Lord Hamilton and Lord Hodgson, would ensure that a joint committee goes through the laws that the Government are proposing to drop, with any objections triggering a vote in Parliament. I urge all colleagues who wish for their constituents' voice to be strengthened in this process to support the amendment.

Lords amendment 6 would ensure that many of the rights secured by EU case law

decisions cannot be reversed without Parliament's say so. Crucially, the amendment also respects the role that the devolved Administrations should be playing in that process, allowing them to have the final decision on revoking any rights, powers or liabilities, where relevant.

British consumers and farmers rightly want our world-class standards to be strengthened, not weakened, as a result of leaving the EU. We will therefore support Lords amendment 15 to stop a regression on food and environmental regulations. I heard the Minister's defence of the Government's position in pushing back on the amendment, but, in light of the widespread concern of many constituents about, for instance, the huge increase in sewage in UK waterways under the Conservative Government, it is particularly important to support it.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman. Many of my constituents are also concerned about the rise in food prices. Does he agree that we need to be careful that our legislation does not push food prices up unnecessarily, and that, although we need to ensure that food standards are maintained, we should not add extra bureaucracy, because that comes out of our constituents' pockets when they pay at the supermarket?

2.45 pm

Jonathan Reynolds: I absolutely agree. If the right hon. Lady has positive proposals that she wishes to bring forward to amend the law, and if she is making the case that UK food standards are currently onerous to the point of adding expense to her constituents and mine, I will listen to that case—I might not agree with her, but I will listen to it. If that is the case that she is making, surely it is incumbent on her to bring forward such proposals, and reveal which regulations would be necessary to change that and where she thinks the law is going wrong. I accept, and I think the Government accept, that the major driver of food-price inflation has been the war in Ukraine. That is a reasonable point. *[Interruption.]* I can hear some chuntering on the Government Benches. Many of us recognise that point. When the Government see inflation rise, they claim—reasonably—that international factors are the drivers of that, but when some of that peaks, supply chains change and inflation comes down, the Government often seek to claim the credit for that, which, I think she will agree, is unreasonable. But I accept her point. I hope that that clarifies for her how I believe the law in that area should be approached.

Finally, rather than allowing future pieces of retained EU law that the Government wish to restate, revoke, replace or update to be slipped in by the back door via statutory instrument, Lords amendment 42 would give Parliament the proper role that it deserves in such matters.

Stella Creasy: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Minister may wish to use different wording or perhaps even correct the record? He suggested that such powers would be novel, but amendable SIs were in fact part of the Census Act 1920, which is over 100 years old, and were most notably present in section 27 of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The idea that we might actually involve those who were brought to this place to make legislation in amending it is not a new one. This law removes that idea. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Minister may do well to read his constitutional history before he dismisses it so easily?

Jonathan Reynolds: I welcome my hon. Friend's intervention. I will take her word for it on the Civil Contingencies Act, about which I fear she may have a level of expertise that exceeds mine. To be frank, I thought that the Minister's whole defence of that area was somewhat questionable. Much of what we are talking about is a relatively novel set of procedures that relate to the unique situation that we find ourselves in. Indeed, the Government's whole approach is based on the uniqueness of the need to have a position on retained EU law following the mechanisms that we chose to adopt as a country when we left the European Union. I thought that that was a somewhat weak defence. If my hon. Friend has information contrary to what the Minister said on the record, I am sure that he will seek to amend that and put forward the correct form of affairs—perhaps if he receives wisdom on the Front Bench at some point in the next four hours.

Our colleagues in the House of Lords have, through all their amendments, sought fundamentally and in good faith to make sense of what was an embarrassing set of proposals whose only aim appeared to be to pacify the hardliners on the Government Back Benches. I appreciate that those Members do not look happy today.

Sir William Cash *rose—*

Jonathan Reynolds: I imagine that that is because they feel that they are being led by the grand old Duke of York. He was happy to march them up to the top of the hill, promising in his leadership video a bonfire of all retained EU law, but of course, he has had to march them all back down again. Now, they are neither up nor down. On that point, I will give way to the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash).

Sir William Cash: It is a disappointment according to the hon. Gentleman, but I have to say that I am extremely glad that the supremacy of EU law is going, I am extremely glad that the deregulation is remaining, and I am also very glad that my amendment has been selected for discussion so that we can have a proper list and do the job properly.

Jonathan Reynolds: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman is happy. Maybe that means one fewer letter towards the 54 that the Prime Minister needs to think about for the duration of the day.

This Bill was always a farce designed to appease the constant, constant, constant Conservative melodrama. It has neither set forward a positive vision of a post-Brexit Britain, nor appeased most of the Government's Back Benchers, with the exception of the hon. Member for Stone. This country is desperately in need of a Government who can provide clarity, consistency and stability for businesses to invest and pull us out of the low-growth, high-tax quagmire of the last 13 years. Equally, the UK's workers deserve to see fulfilled the promise that the UK's post-Brexit employment framework would mean no reduction in rights and protections.

[Jonathan Reynolds]

The legislation revealed a Government with fundamentally the wrong approach—they could not even correctly diagnose the problem, let alone provide solutions. It would have been better for them simply to abandon the Bill altogether. However, by inserting the Government's amendment, and then supporting the excellent work of their lordships in the other place, we can get it to a substantially better place than the chaos that was proposed before. On behalf of Britain's businesses and workers, I urge all colleagues to do so.

Sir William Cash: I will speak to my very short amendment to the very short new clause in Lords amendment 16, on the retained EU law dashboard and report. The new clause requires the Government to report on their plan to revoke and reform, while my amendment seeks for that report to include a list of EU provisions to be revoked or reformed. In other words, it adds to the benefits of the new clause and to the Government's proposals. The new clause was adopted as a Government amendment in the House of Lords a couple of days ago.

I am very grateful to colleagues who signed my amendment, and I know that many more want to do so. I am also glad that the Secretary of State has agreed—no doubt having received some good advice from my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General and others, unnamed—to put her name to the amendment. That means, I am glad to say, that it is now Government amendment (a). Procedurally, that is a very great prize, because if the amendment had not received Government support it would almost certainly not have been selected for debate and we would not have been able to vote on it. I mention that as a matter of significance. I am deeply grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for attending meetings with me and for the dedicated way in which he goes about his job.

We need to make sure that this new structure actually works so that we can put the painful recent past behind us and get on with the job in hand of getting rid of EU supremacy and insisting on the freedom to deregulate. We also need to get to the bottom of which laws should be reformed or revoked. That process is in hand, but it is moving far too slowly and not being done with the degree of experience and skill that needs to be applied to it.

I am also very glad to report that, after a few refusals—but I do not want to dwell on that—the Secretary of State will appear before the European Scrutiny Committee in the week beginning 5 June. That is a very important step forward.

John Redwood: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for all the work he does, and I am glad that the Secretary of State will at last appear before Parliament on this crucial change of policy. Has he had any assurances that the many ideas that I and others have put to the Government on repeal and improvement of EU law will be not only read but implemented? What is the delay?

Sir William Cash: I agree very much with and share the sentiment expressed by my right hon. Friend. We need to move forward and have a proper list and the opportunity to examine the manner in which that list is prepared. The important matters to which he specifically refers include economic freedoms and the ability to reduce taxation where necessary. If they are not on that new list, there will be a lot of people asking for them to be included. That is the next step. It has unfortunately taken a long time to get to this point, but I think that we are now beginning to get there.

The new clause prescribes arrangements for Parliament to be properly informed as to the need for a full and hopefully, at last, accurate and relevant list of retained EU law along the lines of economic freedom and competitiveness and many other things. I and many colleagues, including those on the European Scrutiny Committee, have been severely pressing, for a long time, for a full and accurate list. We have invited the Secretary of State to come before our Committee many times without success, but she is now coming, and we are glad of it. We asked for progress in relation to all EU retained law. We did not get it, but we are now going to.

I also proposed to the Secretary of State that there needs to be an experienced tsar, or commander in chief, of the operations, because by the sound of it there has been something of a problem inside the civil service and it has led to difficulty in getting the job done. This person would need to know and understand the process of European scrutiny, what to do and how to go about it. I have written to other Ministers as well, and explained to them that there are archives in Kew that will be part of the list, not to mention individual Government departmental archives, parliamentary counsel office archives and, of course, our own very special European Scrutiny Committee archives, which date back to 1973 and are extremely comprehensive, including the explanatory notes that were produced to my Committee as individual regulations and laws were being negotiated. They also explained the Government's position on particular points, but I will come on to that in a moment.

When I hear people suggest that they have not had the time to do all this and get the job done properly, I despair at their lack of drive, energy, commitment and, perhaps, unawareness of the Conservative manifesto. The new clause will provide an obligatory framework for the completion of the task.

It was profoundly disturbing to look at the schedule attached to the new Bill. It restructures the Bill in radical ways, but this debate is not the time to go into the history of all that. We have had a lot of discussion about it, so I am not going to do so. This Bill, as it has come from the House of Lords, is a mixture of the good, the bad and the ugly. The good is the ending of the supremacy of EU law and methods of interpretation, and also the provisions relating to deregulation. The ugly lies in the reformed structure and the manner in which we only heard about that at very short notice on 10 May. But, as I have said, we now have to move on. The bad lies in the amendments by the House of Lords, which if passed would have profound consequences undermining our national interest. We also need a coherent statute book. We cannot have two statute books, with one dealing with laws passed during our time in the European Union, pre Brexit, and the other dealing with laws passed afterwards. That would be most peculiar, and it would not work. It would be incoherent and create great legal uncertainty.

The new clause that the Government have adopted requires the Secretary of State to update, within specified periods, the EU law dashboard and publish a report on

the revocation and reform of retained EU law. This report must provide a summary of the dashboard, set out progress already made in revoking and reforming, and set out the Government's plans to revoke and reform those laws. In effect, it sets obligations and a timetable.

It is always interesting to know what people's "plans" are, but having a plan does not mean that we know what is in it before we see it, and nor does it mean that it will ever happen. What does matter is that it is listed, and that is the point of my amendment. The list can be examined to see what modifications or revocations are required under clause 14. Only then can we decide their relevance in the national interest. It also makes the Secretary of State properly accountable to do the job properly within the framework of our parliamentary and scrutiny procedures, including my Committee; I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General for the assurance he has given on the Floor of the House to work with my Committee. It also creates a deadline and pressure to get on with the job.

I have written separately to the Government not only about the tsar but about the efficient delivery by external sources, in a comprehensive manner, by May next year. That is doable, but it requires political will, and diligence on the part of the civil service. That is why my amendment states that the plan must specifically include in a list those provisions of retained EU law that the Government intend to revoke or reform. On the face of it, this is a simple amendment, but it carries with it the need to do the job properly. I assure the House that the European Scrutiny Committee will examine the content of that list and its implications with an eagle eye. It is an enormous shame—in fact, I would almost call it a disgrace—that the current schedule to the Bill consists of what could politely be described as junk, with very few exceptions. I have been through the list; actually, I did so during the Eurovision song contest. I turned to my wife and said, "I really cannot tell which is worse: this schedule or the Eurovision song contest."

3 pm

Having been through the schedule, my research and that of others, including other experienced advisers—I do hope the House will take on board what I am about to say; this work has been done not just by me, but by really experienced people in the House of Commons whose job it is to examine the extent of the retained EU law—indicates that there are only five pieces of retained EU law in the schedule that are of any use or relevance to our national interest, and which were enacted at the time for substantive policy reasons. Only five pieces out of 687: that is the conclusion by the experts, and by myself, if I may say so. Our Committee goes through all European documents and has done for decades, and each Wednesday, we categorise the documents according to whether they are legally or politically important and publish that categorisation. Only those of importance would have gone to the European Scrutiny Committee for debate while we were in the European Union.

Of the remaining 99.15% of provisions in the schedule, one of the worst examples—just to inform the House of how bad they are—is the working hours regulations during the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak, which I believe is over now. Another is quota rules for the import of wheat bran in the French colony of Réunion. I could give many more examples, but my last one is roughly 200 rules on the allocation of fishing between the EU and countries such as São Tomé and Príncipe and the Cook Islands in the south Pacific, not to mention other such distant lands as Madagascar, Mauritania, Senegal and Gambia. Those rules are nothing to do with the UK: they are between the EU and those countries.

As such, the object of the amendment is to make as certain as possible a legal obligation that enables us to see that what is to be revoked and reformed is of real relevance and in our national interest; will improve our competitiveness and economic reform; and will make the statute book consistent with UK law—as my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General said so well—and its interpretation by the courts in line with our own unparalleled national common-law system.

Bim Afolami: I defer to my hon. Friend's knowledge and judgment on what he is speaking about, but may I press him on this particular aspect of the Bill? Of course, a lot of regulations may seem redundant or trivial, and he has named a couple, but part of an improved regulatory system is cleaning up regulations that may be redundant or trivial, in addition to doing the work properly of making sure that when we do get rid of things and reform them, we do so for the right reasons for the entire regulatory system. The Secretary of State has proposed that by the end of this year, we are likely to have removed roughly 2,000 of the total 5,000 regulations; the remaining 3,000 will be done in a proper way, looking strategically at our whole regulatory system. Does my hon. Friend not accept that that is a reasonable approach for the Government to take, bearing in mind the position that we are in at this time?

Sir William Cash: I think it is perfectly reasonable to do it now, because it has not been done before: that is where the problem lies. I would also slightly correct my hon. Friend regarding the relevance of, for example, fishery arrangements between the EU and the Government of the Cook Islands—they are administered by New Zealand, I believe. Such arrangements have nothing at all to do with us, and could not conceivably be included in a list that was intended to demonstrate relevant revocation and reform of these laws.

Expunging EU laws from our statute book frees our voters, our businesses, our Parliament, our sovereignty and our democracy from their subjugation to the EU for 50 years. Those laws were made and engineered by the European Union, the European Commission and the Council of Ministers behind closed doors by qualified majority voting—without even a transcript, as I have said so many times—but usually came about by way of consensus. The veto was promised and guaranteed in the 1971 White Paper, which hon. Members can look up for themselves, but it was whittled away. When EU laws came to be discussed behind those doors, we generally ended up with consensus; they certainly were not our own laws passed by our own Parliament. That operation has been described by a famous economist as "regulatory collusion".

The making of all those laws, as I said earlier, was accompanied by an explanatory memorandum, which is a useful reference point for determining what mattered at the time. Not one single piece of EU legislation was ever rejected or amended during the entire course of our membership. Interestingly, one of the five provisions

[Sir William Cash]

that I have mentioned that are relevant to this debate is the port services directive, which was opposed by every single one of the port employers, by every single one of the trade unions, and by the Government. What could they do about it? Nothing. That is the point, and that almost summarises the reasons for the exercise that has been conducted under the Bill.

John Redwood: Does my hon. Friend recall that—certainly when I was single market Minister some years ago—quite often we did not want the regulation or law at all, but the Government then decided that it did not look good because we did not have a veto to enforce our wish, and we ended up trying to negotiate the version that was least damaging? Why is it that collective memory has forgotten all this, and why do people only recall the laws they want to keep? Why can they not recall the laws we never wanted?

Sir William Cash: Fortunately, the collective memory includes me, because I was first put on the European Scrutiny Committee in 1985. I have been on it ever since, and I have been Chair for 10 years. However, I totally agree with my right hon. Friend. The question of whether these laws mattered and whether they were going to go by consensus was driven by the fact that the people sitting around the table knew beforehand whether there was going to be a majority vote, and whether they would lose. As it was a dead certainty that the UK was going to lose, they entered into that consensus.

The real objective of the European Union in all this was to harmonise laws across Europe, creating a fundamental shift to European integration. That is one of the reasons why I tabled a sovereignty clause to the Single European Act 1986, which eventually found its way on to the statute book in 2020. Essentially, all these laws lack the kind of democratic legitimacy that we would expect in our traditional, constitutional, common-law system. We must therefore judge the laws that are now in the list, as set out in my amendment. Where they are capable of being modified, let them be modified, but as I have said, many of them were passed by majority vote and were certainly not in the UK's national interest. Indeed, the chief negotiator for our entry to the EU under Edward Heath, Sir Con O'Neill, stated of his own failure to understand the system that

"I am sorry to say we probably also thought that it was not fundamentally important."

Tragically, it was important, and the thousands of laws that now need to be reformed and revoked were the product of his and the then Government's failure, and those who persisted in it until we left the European Union.

Sadly, for decades after our entry to the EU, the passing of laws in the European Council of Ministers continued to churn out thousands that did not have democratic legitimacy, and which we now have to modify or revoke. I am glad that the noble Lord, Lord Callanan, said on Monday that

"it is crucial that Parliament and the public are able to hold the Government's feet to the fire and ensure that our momentum continues".—[*Official Report, House of Lords,* 22 May 2023; Vol. 830, c. 609.]

It is also important that the Brexit Opportunities Unit has discussions with the European Scrutiny Committee about methods and co-ordination, including the tsar I have mentioned alongside a team of external experts. Resources will be needed, yes, but the need is absolutely vital. I am therefore glad that the Government and the Secretary of State have agreed to adopt the amendment that stands in my name and those of many colleagues. I believe that the clause, when amended by this and other amendments, will be one of the main levers for making a success of this entire operation.

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): It is a mixed pleasure to speak in this debate for the Scottish National party, it is safe to say, but it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash). Much as we disagree on some things, I did not realise we were both Eurovision fans; perhaps we can organise a viewing party next year, as I have an outfit he would look fabulous in. *[Interruption.]* It will not be a kilt, I assure the hon. Gentleman.

I will speak to amendments 6, 1, 15 and 42. I referred light-heartedly to the hon. Gentleman, and it is possible to have differences of opinion; indeed, I hope I have demonstrated that I respect differences of opinion, but this Bill goes to a matter of deep, fundamental difference of philosophy and worldview. I am very proud to be part of the most pro-European party in this Parliament. I am a committed European as much as I am a committed independence supporter for Scotland. I think Scotland's best future is back into the European Union. We did not view the EU as a prison to leave; we did not view EU legislation as an imposition to be fought against. I was a member of the European Parliament for 16 years; I passed many of these laws and the description we heard about unelected bureaucrats and things done behind closed doors is not my honest and true experience of how it works. However, I respect different views, much as I think they may be coming from entirely different philosophical points.

We do not like this Bill; I have been open about that. We think it is unnecessary and does not deliver what was promised. We have heard much about the need for a dynamic regulatory regime for the UK, and I agree, but there is plenty of redundant domestic law on the statute book as well. I will come on to the matter of retained EU law, but the deletion of redundant law is something Parliament should be doing on a daily basis and it is not that much of an achievement—and it does damn all to make the competitive position of the UK any better in any significant way at all.

The following point was made eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), who has had to go to a Committee, I believe: by virtue of leaving the EU, retained EU law does not have a meaningfully special place in our statute book. It is open to this Parliament to amend, repeal, revoke or change, or whatever else it wants to do, any piece of domestic legislation wherever derived from. So this Bill seems to be answering a question that has not been asked.

Sir William Cash: I think I heard the hon. Gentleman say that that was possible. While we were in the European Union, it was impossible because of section 2 of the European Communities Act 1972, which the hon. Gentleman, as a very good lawyer, might look at. It makes it absolutely clear that we would accept all European

law, however made, in the Council of Ministers, and also, for that matter, all European case law; it is there in section 3.

Alyn Smith: I will choose my words: the hon. Member is right in what he says, but he misses the point that we have left the EU and that did not apply from that point onwards. What he says was correct about two years ago, but what I am saying is correct now. It is open to this Parliament to revoke any piece of legislation wherever it came from. This Bill is borne of malice rather than being a constructive blueprint for the UK's future.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): The hon. Gentleman has just correctly said it is open to this Parliament to repeal any European law; that is exactly what this Bill does. It is not malice; it is just using the power we took back.

Alyn Smith: Can anybody explain to me what additional power, focus or agenda this Bill gives to the power that exists already by this Parliament being sovereign—that is not my worldview, but it is the worldview of many Members? I do not see this as necessary.

Stella Creasy: I thank the hon. Member for letting me take up his challenge about additional powers: the Bill gives the Government the ability to ignore the rather inconvenient matter of Members of Parliament and any views or concerns they might have by removing powers. Indeed, the Prime Minister himself talked about an elected Government taking decisions on law rather than this Chamber. Instead of removing powers, it adds them to Government to bypass this Chamber and our democracy. I hope that helps the hon. Gentleman.

Alyn Smith: It helps me get to the second page of my speech, as I was going to say that not only is the Bill unnecessary, but it is bad law. It is open in the normal way for Government to amend legislation, but that would be subject to the normal scrutiny. Another reason why we dislike the Bill is that it bypasses that scrutiny.

3.15 pm

Sir Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): I understand the hon. Gentleman's point that this House can repeal any legislation it wishes, but we are discussing amendments that have come to us from the other place, not the principles of the Bill. Those amendments, including some that he is speaking to, add friction to the process of this House doing its normal work of passing subsequent legislation that may change the reality of previous legislation. If the hon. Gentleman is in favour of the House going about its normal business, would it not be right to reject the amendments he is referring to?

Alyn Smith: Finally, we have a substantive point about the Bill. I want this House to give the normal legislative scrutiny to subsequent changes to the law, wherever they come from. This Bill hands considerable extra power to the Government to do that over retained EU law, without that scrutiny. We support the measures on the devolved Administrations and the future sifting committee not because they bring more friction to the process, but because they insert back into the system some safeguards that the Bill would otherwise bypass. I think that is a legitimate position.

I have said we do not like the Bill or what it does. We are concerned that vast swathes of rights that people have come to rely on—on environmental standards, labour standards and much else besides—are open to deletion without that scrutiny. We do not like the way it proposes to do it. Even with the amendments, the Bill hands far too much power to the Government to delete provisions we all rely on, particularly in relation to the devolved settlement.

If colleagues are not aware that the Scottish Parliament has in the last couple of hours withheld legislative consent to this Bill, they should be. It is not consenting to this legislation. The Parliament of Scotland has done that; it is not an SNP thing. That is not to say that it will not be ridden over, but I suggest that those who were concerned about the democratic deficit in Brussels need to turn their minds to the democratic deficit that exists in the UK, because it is utterly unsustainable and will cause us all problems.

The fact that Holyrood has in the last hour refused legislative consent to this Bill gives us our lead, so we will oppose the Bill. Having said that, we are dug in as a serious party of Government to try and make it better. I accept the arithmetical reality of this House, so we will try to make it better by supporting a number of amendments, including the Government's. We will support their amendment, Lords amendment 1, on the removal of the sunset clause; we think that is the acceptance of reality. We are not doing it with much praise for the Government, but we will support them in that aim.

Lords amendment 6 to clause 3 respects the devolution settlement. It makes it explicit that any legislative instrument scheduled for deletion in an area of devolved competence, whether in Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales, should be deleted only with the consent of the relevant domestic Minister in Edinburgh, Cardiff or Belfast.

Sir Jeremy Wright: I am genuinely just seeking to understand the hon. Gentleman's position on Lords amendment 6. The amendment does not define whether we are talking about devolved or retained competences. Is it his view that amendment 6 ought to apply to both?

Alyn Smith: That is a fair point. My interpretation of the amendment is that it should be in the devolved areas; otherwise, I do not think it makes any logical sense. I do not think members of the devolved Administrations should be able to withhold consent to other areas being passed. That is a reasonable position that I think we can agree on, and I invite colleagues to do so.

Simon Hoare: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's reading that the amendment leads to withholding consent only in devolved areas, but somebody else could argue perfectly legitimately that it would cover everything. Because it is opaque and open to interpretation, there is a risk of one opinion saying X and another saying Y. The point raised by the former Attorney General, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright), is key: because it is not clear—whether by accident or design, I am unsure—it does not merit support.

Alyn Smith: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. I have to say that I do not agree with him. The intention of the amendment is clearly about protecting

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the devolved settlement. It does do that, and that is certainly the SNP's interpretation of it. We do not have Members in the Lords, but if there was scope for redrafting that provision, we would be open to it. Our position, however, is that it defends the devolved settlement. I do not think there is any serious risk to any other provision.

Sir Robert Buckland: I am delighted to engage with the hon. Gentleman, and he is engaging closely on an important detail. The governing provision is section 4 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, which in effect deals with the generic issues under section 2(1) of the European Communities Act 1972. There is no specific reference in there to devolved matters. Does that not reinforce the point being made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright) about the danger of this Lords amendment 6 not being as precise or as clear as it ought to be?

Alyn Smith: In a spirit of intellectual honesty, I will take that point on board. I hope their lordships will, too, because I suspect that this is not the end of the discussion. For today, we will support the amendment to make it clear that we want to defend the devolved settlement from a power grab. I suspect we will come back to this matter, and I am genuinely grateful for those constructive points.

Lords amendment 15, on non-regression from existing environmental standards, takes the statements of UK Government Ministers and various members of the leave campaign at face value that we will not revoke or pull back from our very high environmental standards, some of which derive from EU law and some of which do not. If we are not going to dilute them and there is no intention from those on the Treasury Bench to do so, let us bang that into the Bill and make it explicit.

Lords amendment 42 is an attempt to improve scrutiny, and I come back to the thoughtful points that were made about the possibility that it might introduce friction into the Bill. I would counter that by saying that the Bill goes around the normal legislative scrutiny by which we would deal with these things. I accept that the amendment is an innovative idea, but it is merited, and those on the Treasury Bench should take it as showing the scale of disquiet about the potential for a power grab with the Bill. We will support that amendment.

I will close; I was hoping to be briefer than I have been. We do not like this Bill. We do not like what it is trying to do or how it is trying to do it. From our perspective, it is not in Scotland's interests, and it is not in Scotland's name either, with Holyrood having refused consent. I urge colleagues to match their talk of democratic deficits through their actions. If by their actions they prove my party right today, Scotland has a different path to choose if we are serious about democracy in these islands. My party has a clear vision of Scotland's best future; I do not see a clear vision of any future in this legislation. Scotland has a better choice to make.

Sir Jeremy Wright: I will focus on Lords amendment 1, Government amendment (a) to Lords amendment 1 and Lords amendment 42.

Before I do, I want to close the loop on Lords amendment 6. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith), who made an interesting set of observations. As he would expect, I do not agree with all of them, but if I may say so, he is engaging in this debate in exactly the way we ought to when considering matters this complex and important.

Just to finish the thought, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that their lordships may want to consider the matter further, as of course may we. I suspect that the noble Lord Hope, who I think drafted the clause in Lords amendment 6—that gives me considerable hesitation in criticising it in any way, because it is unlikely he has got much wrong—is intending a deal of weight to be put on the phrase

"as the case may be".

Subsections (2) and (3) refer to a

"responsible Minister of a relevant national authority"

and to

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

I suspect Lord Hope would say that that indicates that in the case of retained law, the body would be the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and in the case of devolved competencies, it would be the relevant devolved body. Before we sign up fully to the wording of the amendment as it stands, we should have clarity about that, because it is an important point in the hon. Gentleman's argument about the reinforcement of the devolution settlement.

We do not want to subtly change the devolution settlement by accident. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman would be quite happy to change the devolution settlement either by accident or by design, and perhaps not so subtly, but in the context of the Bill, we had better be clear what we are talking about. For that reason, I certainly will not support Lords amendment 6 at this stage, though I will listen carefully to what their lordships have to say when they clarify the point.

There seem to be similar points to make in relation to Lords amendment 1, Government amendment (a) to Lords amendment 1 and Lords amendment 42. Were we to support amendment (a), it would restate, because the Government have already made their position clear, their new approach that rather than repeal a whole swathe of EU-origin retained law in effect by default, it would be better to list specifically those things that it is intended should be repealed by a certain point, such as the end of this year, unless further action is taken before that point. That is a much more sensible approach, although I will say it was somewhat inevitable, as others have said.

It was always inconceivable that the Government would be able to manage the process of considering properly all the retained EU law in scope of the Bill before the deadline of the end of this year. Therefore, the Government have done the eminently sensible thing and should be congratulated on doing so. I will certainly support Government amendment (a) to Lords amendment 1, because it regularises the position in a much more reasonable way.

The irony is that I rather suspect proceeding in the way originally intended would have led to the retention of far more retained EU law than will be the case under the Government's revised approach. In fear of losing something vital, it is highly likely that the Government

would have had to roll over—by default and before the deadline—a good portion of legislation, just to be sure they had not missed something. This approach is much more sensible and will rather better support the intentions of those who supported our departure from the European Union than the approach originally intended.

If the rest of Lords amendment 1 were passed by this House—not just the part that amendment (a) retains—we would introduce exactly the friction that I mentioned earlier when intervening on the hon. Member for Stirling. It would introduce a Joint Committee process and then debates and votes on the Floor of both Houses. I appreciate that, depending on which side of the argument someone is, they may regard those as additional safeguards or additional procedural friction, but it appears to me that it is more the latter than the former. That process is far more than is likely to have been done in the consideration of any of these laws when they were originally brought into British law. When that happened—my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) is the world expert on this—we would have seen that, despite their EU origin, the level of scrutiny and attention those laws got from Parliament was far lower than the level proposed in the amendment.

Sir William Cash: To respond briefly to my right hon. and learned Friend on this issue, I am afraid that the idea of a Joint Committee is just not a workable proposition. This is not the kind of forum to deal with the issues at stake and, if I may say so, for that reason alone it is impossible to accept Lords amendment 1. It just would not work.

Sir Jeremy Wright: Well, I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I think this is probably not the appropriate mechanism, as he says, but it would also duplicate to a large extent what his Committee already does. So I do not think it is an attractive mechanism, as he says.

Of course, those who propose this amendment and those who speak for it today may say to me, "Look, it would only be in the case of substantial changes that some, at least, of these additional procedures would apply", but it seems to me there are two points to make about that. First, it would be the Joint Committee's assessment of what is a substantial change to the law, not anybody else's. Secondly, we would, would we not, have to get into what the word "substantial" means in that context. If we were to say that a Joint Committee should be established to determine initially whether there is a substantial change of the law in prospect, it would have to determine that and it would have to decide what substantial means. Does it mean, for example, that a large number of laws are consequentially affected when a change is made, or does it mean that a few laws would be affected but in a very significant way? I think it is important, if we want to do this, that we are very clear about the definitions that we apply, because just as other Members of this place are worried about the level of authority to be devolved to Ministers, there would be a significant level of authority to be devolved to a Joint Committee, and if we were not clear about the basis on which it was to exercise our authority, we may run into difficulty.

3.30 pm

Stella Creasy: Obviously, we already have Joint Committees and models of how a Joint Committee could work. We have the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, so we have a model for that way of working. However, is the right hon. and learned Member not making the argument that we in this Chamber need to signal our agreement about what is missing from this process? I notice he is making an argument about the lack of scrutiny from Europe, and we may disagree on that, but surely two wrongs do not make a right. The argument we are making today is that we need to improve this process, and that when there are changes—and we must set out more clearly what "substantial" means—this Chamber wishes to work with the other Chamber in bringing back parliamentary sovereignty to this process.

Sir Jeremy Wright: I understand the points the hon. Lady is making, and I will take them in reverse order. On the point I made about the difference in the scrutiny that these laws may have on the way out, as it were, compared with the scrutiny they would have on the way in, I accept that two wrongs do not make a right. However, it would be odd, if nothing else, to take the view that we should give the vast bulk of laws—some of which, as I think we have agreed across this Chamber, do not require a huge amount of scrutiny, because they are technical and somewhat inevitable changes as a result of leaving the European Union—a process involving greater scrutiny and greater friction, as I would choose to describe it, than the process that was used to bring them in in the first place.

On the hon. Lady's point about a Joint Committee, I accept that there are Joint Committees, but the role of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, for example, is very different from the role that Lords amendment 1 sets out for a Joint Committee in this context. If we set up Joint Committees as scrutiny bodies, that is one thing, but if we are devolving authority to a Joint Committee to make judgments about what is and is not a substantial change to UK law, it seems to me that we ought at the very least to understand what substantial means in that context. Again, I am afraid that we can only decide on the basis of the wording we have in front of us, but the wording we have in front of us seems to me to require some greater clarification before anyone ought to support it.

Sir Robert Neill: My right hon. and learned Friend is making a characteristically powerful and persuasive case. Taking on board his point about the—to use my inelegant criminal lawyer's phrase—rather clunky nature of the mechanism, or the friction that he rightly refers to, would he concede that something potentially needs to be done to fill the gap identified by the noble Lord Hope of Craighead in the other place, which is that simply setting out in the Bill a list of laws to be revoked does not of itself guarantee adequate scrutiny of those laws? Does he think there is some scope that the Government may wish to offer by way of assurance at some time as to the level of scrutiny that could be given, without resorting to the system currently set out in Lords amendment 1, which may cause that needless friction or, to use my term, be needlessly clunky, but may equally give this House a proper safeguard about its proper scrutiny role?

Sir Jeremy Wright: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and for his reassurance, I do not think that either he or criminal lawyers are in any way inelegant. However,

[Sir Jeremy Wright]

I think there is certainly something to be said for greater and better scrutiny, and we should always in this place be looking for ways to improve the scrutiny we offer. As he knows, my concern about Lords amendment 6 is that I do not think we yet have sufficient clarity about whether it achieves the objectives it sets out to achieve without also causing some fallout in other respects. I do not close my mind to the way in which it seeks to do its work, but I am concerned that we need extra clarity before we could conceivably support it.

I want to say something about the benefits as I see them of the Government's new approach and why they will help with some of the legitimate concerns expressed in the debate. The benefit of the Government setting out, as they have in the schedule, the measures they propose will lapse at the end of the year unless further intervention is taken is that that allows all Members of the House to pay attention to that list and reach their own conclusions—early—about whether they think there is anything troubling in it, exactly as my hon. Friend the Member for Stone described that he and his colleagues have done. That is a better and more conducive way to good scrutiny than the one previously seen. It helps to offer the necessary reassurance that we will not simply stumble into a position where we lose from our statute book good and valuable things that happen to have their origins in the European Union. Parliament will not be caught by surprise by anything that the Government seek to do in that way.

It is important to remember that if the Government seek to make a change to our law, they will have to do so through the normal routines of passing legislation. True, that may be through secondary legislation, but that is still a way in which Parliament scrutinises legislation and has done so for a long time under Governments of multiple colours. There is nothing particularly radical in the Government proposing to take a measure through Delegated Legislation Committees that it seeks to use to make a change in the law.

I return to friction. It seems to me that the friction that is sought to be added to the processes we use is undesirable. That is partly because it is unnecessary—the reassurance that the Government can offer by the new course they seek to take is adequate—and partly because we must see this specific discussion in the context of the broader discussion that has happened about our membership of the European Union. In the interests of full disclosure, I should make it clear to the House that in the 2016 referendum I did not vote to leave the European Union, and I urged my constituents not to do so, either—in some cases, they paid little attention—but I accept, and have accepted consistently since, that the decision was none the less taken that we should leave the European Union, and certain things flow inexorably from that. It must be right that if we leave the European Union, we also leave European Union law behind us. That should not be in a rush or in a flurry of activity that might cause us to throw the baby out with the bathwater, but inevitably that is what should happen.

Dame Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): I apologise to the House for being late to the debate; I was in a Select Committee meeting. I want to put on the record how, as somebody who did vote to leave the European Union and urged my constituents to do so, I entirely agree with my right hon. and learned Friend that we need clarity. What does he therefore think about Government amendment (b), to which I have put my name, which calls on the Government frequently—on a quarterly basis—to put forward further ideas for retained law that is unhelpful or unnecessary and could be revoked or reformed?

Sir Jeremy Wright: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend and support the amendment. It is sensible, because the public have an expectation here, and we should not forget that. They believe that, having had a vote some time ago—in 2016—to leave the European Union, we would do exactly that. For them, that includes European Union law no longer holding sway in this country. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone talked about the disadvantage of having two sets of law—pre-Brexit and post-Brexit—that the courts must look at separately forevermore, and that disadvantage is considerable. Despite the fact that I did not vote for Brexit, the consequence of it is that we absolutely must have a Bill of this nature, and we must have the measures that flow from it.

I fear that the public will spot that if that extra friction is unnecessary—I believe it is—it is a consequence only of seeking to delay the point at which Brexit has meaningful impact. I do not think it is good for our democracy or for the contract we made with the electorate, which is that if we offered them the chance to decide this question, the political classes would honour their judgment—and that is what we must do. From that, it follows—it seems to me, at least—that the Bill is necessary and that amendments that seek subtly to undo its effect are profoundly undesirable and should not be supported.

Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): I wish I could say I was happy to be called in this debate, but the truth is that I do not believe we should be having it at all. I am not sure that if I tried, I could design a worse way of withdrawing from a legal framework. Not content with crashing the economy, the world being literally on fire, and our food prices and energy bills being so high that people are no longer able to afford to eat or heat in many parts of the country, Ministers now want to waste our time and energy driving us off this regulatory cliff. I wonder how many civil servants have been drafted in and redeployed to deal with the legal consequences of the sunset clause—I am pleased the Government have now dropped it—which was ridiculous and absolutely unworkable. Despite the recent climbdown on what the Bill will cover, the truth is that it still hands power to Ministers to rewrite, revoke and replace hundreds of our vital laws on substantive issues.

Without the Lords amendments, the Bill places our rights at work, our environmental protections and hard-won equal rights on a cliff edge. From working with my constituents on the Hallam citizens' climate manifesto, our vision for climate action locally and nationally, I know the importance and appetite for democracy, especially around protecting our natural environment. Our response to the climate and nature emergency must be led by communities across the country who already feel the impacts of the climate crisis. That is why I have been working with campaigners to bring forward the Climate and Ecology Bill as a 10-minute rule Bill. It would enable us to reach the goals we need to protect us from a 1.5°C increase in global temperature. We need to

bring about a democratic transition. We urgently need to protect our precious natural environment and expand our democracy when talking about these issues, not curtail it.

The Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill will do the exact opposite, concentrating power even further into the hands of a few Ministers. That should concern everyone in the House who claims to represent their constituents. The truth is that the Government do not value our natural environment. Just look at the key pieces of environmental law that were missing from the dashboard, or the way it treats the people who work every day to protect it at the Environment Agency.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I do not mind you touching on the fact that you do not like the Bill at all, but you really should be speaking to some of the amendments. That would be really useful.

Olivia Blake: Lords amendment 15 stops regression on environmental standards and it is really important that it stands tonight. At the exact moment when we should be strengthening regulation to protect nature and biodiversity, the Bill does the complete opposite. I remember the debates on the Environment Bill and how we were repeatedly assured that there would be no regression on environmental standards. Without Lords amendment 15, the Bill will put all that at risk. The Government have refused to legislate to provide any guarantee that they will be protected.

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): The hon. Lady is right to mention the Environment Act 2021, but is it not the case that the Act, which came after leaving the European Union, actually gives us all the powers we need to improve our environment and sets a whole new framework of targets that makes the legacy EU ones redundant?

Olivia Blake: I am not sure I totally agree. When I asked officials about the number of laws affected without the sunset clause, they could not give me an answer on even the number that would be affected. There is a lot more that underpins all the regulatory frameworks we work under when we are protecting our environment. I accept that the Act passed after we left the EU, but I do not believe that we are protected at the moment and that is why Lords amendment 15 is so important. If we do not act tonight to ensure we have those safeguards in place for our environmental protections, we will be undoing a lot of the good work that may have been done by the Environment Act.

However, the nature emergency is not the only one that the Bill will potentially make worse. For over a decade we have seen a decline in workers' pay and conditions, and we have seen a cost of living crisis. People have rightly had enough, which is why we have seen rather a lot of strike action recently. Rather than address the root cause and improve pay and conditions in the workplace, the Bill puts basic workers' rights, equality rights and paternal leave rights in the firing line.

3.45 pm

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Bill spells potential disaster for the environment and for working people. It sets out exactly what is wrong with the way we write and pass laws. For that reason, I will vote against it. I support the Lords amendments to stop the power grab, and Lords amendments 15, 6 and 42 to protect our vital environmental regulations. The Bill should not condense power into the hands of Ministers. We should have a say in this place about what laws we want to throw on the scrapheap.

May I begin by congratulating my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) on the exceptional elegance with which he put forward the case this afternoon? I understand now why members of his profession take silk, because it was certainly a silken performance. I reiterate my thanks to and admiration for the Bill team, which I mentioned on Second Reading. I think my hon. and learned Friend would agree that he has worked with one of the finest Bill teams with which Parliament has had the pleasure of bringing forward legislation in recent years. The team was completely on top of a difficult subject from a very early stage.

Those are not all the nice things I will say at this stage, but I will say how much I regret the Government's amendment in the House of Lords to reverse the whole basis of what the Bill is trying to achieve. The Bill aimed to achieve a balance whereby EU law would go rather than stay. Now, the balance is that EU law will stay rather than go. There are 587 laws in the new schedule that are going. There is no way that my hon. and learned Friend can think that they are serious—they are trivialities of remaining EU law that have been dusted off and found to make a reasonable number.

When the Secretary of State told people she was thinking of taking this approach, she indicated that there might be some important repeals in that list. There is virtually nothing of any importance in that list. Fishing, as far as countries with which we do not have particular relations is concerned, is utterly trivial, with details on anchovies—all sorts of things that do not matter have been put in the schedule. That is a failure by His Majesty's Government. They ought to have been looking at which things we could put in it that people already know need to be repealed.

I would elucidate that point by saying that over the last couple of days, we have heard that the Government have come to the conclusion that things can be done to help the wine industry. Dare I say, those were known a year ago? They are not novel. DEFRA has been sitting on them for that year. It could have brought them forward and included them in the revocations in the Bill to give us something solid and practical that would have been beneficial in the next few weeks, rather than something that merely deals with old hat, the passé, the gone and the mainly forgotten.

Simon Hoare: May I begin by wishing my right hon. Friend a very happy birthday?

I have a huge amount of sympathy, as I think most Members do, with the argument that a lot of that stuff could have been done. But last year, post covid, we had Ukraine and a huge amount of political instability in this place, with changes of Ministers more often than most people change their socks—sometimes within a couple of weeks. The idea of trying to get the job done in that atmosphere and environment of huge change, instability and uncertainty, undermines his point that it was a wasted year.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am rather worried about the air fresheners that my hon. Friend must need in his household if he changes his socks only once a fortnight. I am afraid that the Government's argument that "We cannot do it because we have not put the effort into it" is particularly weak. With ministerial drive—and it has to be said, with some very good civil servants in some of these areas—it is possible to get things done. A £4 million contract has been given to a law firm to help take the Bill further and faster. I think that "We can't do it, it's all far too difficult" is a worse argument than saying "We do not want to do it" in the first place, which may be closer to the truth.

Simon Hoare: Either I was not clear or my right hon. Friend is deliberately misinterpreting my point, because that was not the point I was making. It is not that it could not be done, but that there was a reason why it was not done, and that was the chaos and confusion of last year. Those are two entirely different things.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The point my hon. Friend misses is that there is still some time between now and the end of the year. This work could be pushed through if there were the desire to do it.

This Bill is a tremendous missed opportunity. It is a missed opportunity not because of Brexit per se. It is not a missed opportunity because those of us who voted for Brexit expected the will of the British people—expressed in 2016 and 2019—to be pushed forward, although that is important. It is not a missed opportunity because the unelected House has decided to try and block a Brexit-related reform, as it has consistently done. Interestingly, the amendments passed in the unelected House are all designed to frustrate the progress of the Bill and its operation, and are, by and large, although not exclusively, supported—lo and behold—by people who never wanted Brexit in the first place. It is noticeable that the overwhelming majority of people in this House who do not want the full revocation of EU laws always opposed Brexit. However, it is not about that. The missed opportunity is in not achieving supply-side reforms that would get growth for the UK economy.

We had the Prime Minister at the Dispatch Box this morning—the Leader of the Opposition missed a trick here—saying how marvellous it was that the IMF had said the UK economy would grow by 0.4%. Now, I happen to think that the IMF is absolutely useless and that its forecasts are valueless—it gets them wrong the whole time—but the idea that 0.4% economic growth is a success, when inflation has only just come out of double digits, is not factually accurate. This Bill was the opportunity to get growth, but instead we are changing laws on anchovies. That seems to me to be pretty fishy, because there are other things that we could have done. That is the point.

The challenge that has been put down—it was put down by the Secretary of State herself—is what people like me would do instead. Well, there are a whole swathe of laws that it would be a good idea to remove. If we look at the EU's basis for regulating, it takes a process approach rather than an outcome approach. This Bill was an opportunity, even with a cut-and-paste scheme, to move from a process approach to an outcome approach.

What am I talking about? I am talking about product specification regulations, of which there are dozens. No country does that; only the EU specifies products in that way. We are now keeping all those regulations, whereas we should have been getting rid of them and saying that what we want are safe products, which encourages competition and innovation and encourages us to import goods at lower cost from places other than the EU.

We should have been looking at the absolutely lunatic emissions trading scheme that we have. We heard from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake), and Sheffield is famous for its steel. However, we have made life for steel producers in this country completely impossible. Why have we done this? Because we have very high energy costs and a mad ETS that then tries to wind round some subsidy to help lower producers' costs. If we just had lower energy costs in the first place and got rid of the ETS, which came out of the European Union, we would do better. Where could we have done that? We were going to do it in the Bill until a Lords amendment was so unwisely brought forward.

There are also the working time regulations. It might be possible to say that some people in this Chamber, when dozing off while listening to speeches that are intolerably dull, are in fact working—it seems heroic that our Doorkeepers never doze off, considering some of the things they have to listen to. However, under the working time directive, hours when people are asleep count as work. That is an enormous burden on the NHS; it has been calculated that the working time directive costs the NHS £3 billion. We could have dealt with that in the revocations under this Bill, had the Government not lost their nerve.

What about new opportunities in food and the regulations that stop us having novel foods? You may not wish to eat novel foods, Mr Deputy Speaker. I do not wish to eat novel foods. However, if there is a market for them, surely the UK should be regulating in a way that opens it up. We had a Bill in front of us that, unamended, would have allowed us to deal with novel foods swiftly by getting rid of EU regulations.

George Eustice *rose—*

Mr Rees-Mogg: Of course I will give way to the expert on foods.

George Eustice: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, because he has made many references to the Department in which I was once Secretary of State. I have a great deal of sympathy for the argument he is advancing, and I do understand that he wanted to ensure that the concrete did not set around these EU regulations so that they just stayed in place. However, as he will know, I was a bit more sceptical than he was about the idea of a sunset clause.

In a Department such as DEFRA where 80% of the legislation is legacy EU law, there would be three broad categories. The first would be the trivial regulations involving olive oil labelling and so on, whose removal would require considerable effort but would not help business. The second category would be regulations that were a bit contentious; we would probably not want to do anything about them. The third would be the big things such as the habitats directive, which ought to be addressed, but everyone would say, "It is too difficult to do it just now." I think it right to prioritise the bad law that needs attention, rather than getting bogged down

in some of the more trivial laws when it would probably cost businesses more to remove them than to leave them in place.

Mr Rees-Mogg: It must be said that my right hon. Friend was an excellent Secretary of State who was enormously co-operative with me, when I was in the relevant role, in trying to get DEFRA to be positive about this at a time when, as he rightly says, it was carrying a huge burden of work.

The problem is that we cannot shy away from the difficult decisions. That is what government is about, as in the old cliché "To govern is to choose." Nature Britain, or Natural Britain, or whatever it is called, has prevented 160,000 houses from being built because of the nutrients rules resulting from a decision made by the European Court of Justice in 2018. It is all very well for Opposition Members to say that we should keep every environmental rule we have ever had, but I want my constituents to have houses, and I want other people's constituents to have houses. We should be making those choices and putting the case to govern. That, I am afraid, is at the heart of this: a lack of decisiveness, of drive, of backbone to get things done.

I agree with my right hon. Friend that there would have been some things that were difficult. That is why the Bill contained provisions to roll things over and to say, "If you can make a good case for why this must stay, it will stay", but the default was that it would be removed. I have mentioned the nutrients problem, and the habitats regulations are another example of rules that stop us doing things that are environmentally friendly and would benefit the environment because there may be some habitat nearby. I had to delay a decision on using waste to provide energy because of the common seal. Well, the very name of the common seal demonstrates that it is common, and that we should not be worrying about it too much when we could do something that would be enormously environmentally beneficial. The habitats directive is too dirigiste, too continental in its approach to regulating how we operate and how our economy runs.

I have already mentioned novel foods, but what about the other advantages for a modern, knowledge-based economy? What about clinical trials? I cannot tell you, Mr Deputy Speaker, how pleased I am to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) lurking by the Chair, because he produced a brilliant report explaining how some of these things could be done. Why have they not been done? Did the Bill not offer a perfect opportunity for us to do them? Instead, people are appealing against rules relating to anchovies, and that really seems to me not to be the Gentleman's Relish that we would desire. This is a loss of opportunities—an opportunity for economic growth, and also an opportunity to move away from the civil code approach to law to the common-law approach, which is fundamental.

We see this in other emerging legislation. I hope you will forgive me, Mr Deputy Speaker, for a brief digression. The monstrous Energy Bill is all about regulating rather than allowing. What the repeal would have done, had it gone through, was to allow rather than regulate. This is based on the principle that wise bureaucrats—I praised civil servants earlier—really understand how business can best operate, if only people will follow the rules of those bureaucrats. What we want, according to our tradition, is an approach that says it is legal to do something unless it is specifically dangerous.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): The taskforce on innovation, growth and regulatory reform report produced over 100 recommendations for the Government, but the big case it made was for moving regulation making from what is essentially a coded base and returning it to a common law basis, which—exactly as my right hon. Friend was about to say—is, "It's okay unless it turns out that it is damaging." That is how our courts work, and it is the best practice in the world. That is why we should have made that progress.

4 pm

Mr Rees-Mogg: My right hon. Friend is right. That is what the Bill did until it was gutted and the key part of it was removed so that the basis is now to retain a law unless it is specifically removed, rather than removing it unless it is specifically retained.

Unfortunately that approach is getting worse. In October we will apply rules on goods coming into this country from the EU that are safe, adding costs to consumers in an inflationary era, which is what these regulations continually do. The fundamental problem—the suspicion that we can see people beginning to think about—is that of the 587 rules that are being repealed, hardly a single one changes alignment with the European Union. Is there, hidden away in the bowels of Government, some decision that we will in fact remain aligned with the European Union, possibly because of the Windsor protocol? Otherwise, why are we not repealing all those strange and unimportant things? Apparently we cannot get a dog bone from a butcher because of EU rules. Why has that not gone? Why have we not been allowed to bring back imperial measures, which have been promised for years? They are not the biggest reward of Brexit, but why are we doing these little bits and pieces in the 587 that are there? Why are we not making the changes that would have made our wine industry more successful and economic?

Unfortunately, the Bill is a great lost opportunity. The reason—the excuse—given is not that it is impossible or that we do not want supply-side reforms but the inertia of officialdom. Whether that is ministerial inertia or other inertia, it is ultimately the politicians who must take the responsibility. I am afraid that a lot of responsibility has been abdicated in these amendments.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg). We agree on nothing but he makes his points very well. It is a help as I will be able to tell my constituents that, in front of the architect of the Bill, I made the case for why the approach was entirely wrong, and I shall do so. His speech reminds us that it was the plan all along to make food standards poorer, to attack the environment—not only to build houses, as in his case, but for other reasons too. At the time, the Government said, "Oh no, we'll never make standards poorer". Released from his ministerial role, however, the right hon. Gentleman is clear about the things that he wanted to do. Why on earth, he asks, do we not want to change alignment? The reason is that it is bad for the economy, and I will focus on that in my response to the amendments.

[Layla Moran]

I disagree with the motion to dismiss Lords amendments 15 and 42. I agree with the statements made on Lords amendments 1 and 6. There was a useful exchange earlier in which Members clarified the specifics of the amendment tabled by Lord Hope. On the principle of taking back control, the Minister said that we had taken back control, but that begs the question: who does "we" refer to? That is still one of the biggest reasons why a huge number of my constituents care about the Bill.

It is worth reminding ourselves that Second Reading fell on the first day of the current Prime Minister's premiership, the day when he promised to govern with "integrity, professionalism and accountability." It is fair to say that promise has been utterly broken, especially given the behaviour of some of his Cabinet colleagues. He also promised to review and repeal all EU law within his first 100 days and, with the completely gutted Bill before us, we see that promise has been broken, too. It is a completely different Bill and a different proposition from how it began. Some of us are happy about that, and some are not, but I am pleased that it is a different approach.

When the Bill was first introduced, I and others felt it was ideologically driven, particularly the cliff-edge provisions that would have ended up in chaos. I said at the time that the provisions were "corrosive" and "unnecessary". What we need now, above all else—post-pandemic and amid the war in Ukraine and the cost of living crisis—is calm. Members have spoken about throwing the baby out with the bathwater, which is exactly what this Bill would have done. It would have been a chaotic slash-and-burn approach, and I am pleased the Government have come to their senses.

I thank my Liberal Democrat colleagues in the other place for their work. Their exposure of the Bill's potential damage through the reams of amendments they tabled has effected change. In particular, the Government have rightly made an amendment to eliminate the cliff edge for thousands of laws, to many of which we did not know whether the Bill would apply, which I have always found hugely bizarre.

I would hope that every Member in the Chamber believes in securing vital standards on, for example, sewage, although I find myself questioning whether every Member, indeed, does. It beggars belief that those standards were ever under threat, not least because of the result of the local elections, which were fought on such issues.

In introducing this Bill, what exactly was the Government's problem with the Bathing Water Regulations 2013 and the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) (England and Wales) Regulations 2017, which never went far enough—we would have gone much further—but would have protected our hard-fought bathing water status in Oxford. The fact there had to be a fight, taking up so much parliamentary time, is one reason why we felt the Bill took entirely the wrong approach.

More than 400 constituents have written to me about the Bill, and they are rightly concerned about what it might still do—I will come to the "still" point in a moment—to workers' rights and environmental protections. One constituent said:

> "I don't understand how the government can promise to improve our environment at the same time as setting out a law that could lead to basic protections getting weaker."

I could not agree more.

The Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust wrote to me about the Bill just this week and, although it welcomes, as we all do, some of the concessions that have been made, it is still concerned:

> "We are in a nature and climate emergency. It is essential that the current level of legal protection is upheld and not weakened."

There is still more work to do, and these Lords amendments, which the Liberal Democrats support, go some way to achieve that. Although many crucial standards and safeguards have been saved, thanks to the Government's U-turn, the truth is that the Bill will hand Ministers, not Parliament, the power to meddle with them at a later date via secondary legislation, which means we need to remain vigilant on workers' rights, sewage and the natural environment.

Should the next election result in anywhere near what the polls suggest, with the shoe ending up on the other foot, would Conservative Members trust the next Government always to get it right? Casting no aspersions, I do not, because I believe in parliamentary democracy. Even ideas with which I might agree benefit from scrutiny, a bit of prodding and other people's experience, not least the experience of our constituents. That is why we support Lords amendment 42, which would ensure that if Ministers want to make changes to law in the future, a Joint Committee would be involved. I have heard those who have said that that is not the right mechanism, but do they disagree with the principle I have just put forward? If that is not the right mechanism, what is? I ask them to find one. We need a mechanism by which this House can bring our experience and scrutiny to bear, and, unfortunately, if it is not just a Joint Committee, it simply does not exist.

The Liberal Democrats also support Lords amendment 15, which provides a double lock on regulations that protect the environment or ensure our food is safe. It was put forward by my constituent Lord Krebs of Wytham, an eminent Cross Bencher who was the first chairman of the British Food Standards Agency. He will have constructed this provision thoughtfully and knowledgeably. For those regulations that will not be scrapped by the Bill, the amendment will ensure that Ministers cannot meddle with them in any way to lower standards. At the Dispatch Box, they consistently say—

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I served on the Bill Committee. The hon. Lady referred to the Bathing Water Regulations, a set of environmental regulations from which the right hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss), then a DEFRA Minister, tried to get an exemption for the UK. The talk from Conservative Members about these things being a "floor" needs to be carefully scrutinised. I agree that we need to legislate. In the Bill Committee, there was a refusal to accept our proposals, which is why we need to ensure that the amendment is in place, especially with the sunset provision moved.

Layla Moran: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention and I entirely agree with the point he makes. I understand the point that some of the regulations need to fall away as they are technocratic, but the ones

I am referring to are not those and yet they are getting caught up in the approach that the Bill takes. This is just not good law, so I urge Government Members to stand up for our environment and food standards, and reject the Government's attempts to remove the amendment. Without it, the mechanism for us, as Back Benchers, to be able to influence a Government—it could be a Labour Government or something else, but it does not matter—is not there. We need to have it. Some 600 laws are still scheduled for revocation at the end of the year, without any specific deliberation or input from Parliament. The Bill still grants significant powers to Ministers to rewrite any item of retained EU law, including those now exempt from the sunset. Provisions that would create considerable legal uncertainty also remain.

Even though the total number of laws being revoked has fallen significantly, I continue to put forward the idea that this Bill remains a gross abuse of Executive power. Parliament is the seat of our democracy. Parliament should have its say, and I urge the Government, through these amendments, to consider their entire approach and put Parliament in charge. When they said they would take back control, I am sorry but I do not think they meant themselves.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We have 10 people left and if everybody does about 10 minutes, as Layla did, we should get everybody in.

Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con): On Lords amendment 1, as a strong supporter of Brexit, I am pleased that the Government have already revoked or reformed more than 1,000 EU laws since our exit from the EU. In addition to the list of 587 laws the Government propose to revoke directly through the Bill, the Financial Services and Markets Bill and the Procurement Bill will revoke about a further 500 pieces of retained EU law. That means that more than 2,000 revocations and reforms are already completed or under way.

Overall, the Government are committed to lightening the regulatory burden on businesses and helping to spur economic growth, and the Edinburgh reforms of UK financial services include more than 30 regulatory reforms to unlock investment and boost growth in towns and cities across the UK. It is important, however, that the Government make sure that the process of revocation is done in a way that maximises our competitive advantage. We need to remove any unnecessary regulations we inherited from Brussels over the last 50 years, and to do so as soon as possible. The Bill gives us the unique opportunity to look again at regulations and decide whether they are right for our economy, whether we can remove them, or whether we can reform and improve them to help spur economic growth.

4.15 pm

The Bill will still enable us to revoke, replace or reform any retained EU law that remains on our statute book until 2026. This new approach will provide the space for longer-term and more ambitious reforms, and the Government intend to do just that. In practice, they will revoke about the same number of laws as they were on course to do under the original sunset provision.

It is important to bear in mind that we do not want to repeal everything. For instance, the Government will preserve around 650 retained EU laws that are necessary for us to comply with our international obligations, such as the Chicago convention on international civil aviation, which allows airlines to operate safely around the world. Those are regulations we would have in UK law irrespective of our EU membership.

The Bill will end the special status of retained EU law. It will ensure that by the end of this year, for the first time in a generation, the UK statute book will not recognise the supremacy of EU law or EU legal principles. However, as the Bill was drafted, almost all retained EU law would be automatically revoked at the end of 2023 unless a statutory instrument was passed to preserve it under the sunset provision.

I therefore support the measure in Lords amendment 1 that replaces the sunset provision with a list of all the EU laws that the Government intend to revoke under the Bill at the end of 2023. The remainder will continue in force without the need to pass extra legislation. By making it clear which regulations will be removed from our statute book at this stage, we will give certainty to businesses and all those affected by these laws, and we will create transparency and legal clarity. The Government will retain the vital powers in the Bill that allow them to continue to amend retained EU law, so that more complex regulations can still be revoked or reformed after further assessment and consultation.

I listened with great interest to the speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), who is no longer in his place. I have the very highest respect for him. It is incumbent on the Government, having achieved support for the measure in Lords amendment 1, to ensure that there is no slippage in abolishing retained EU law after the Bill has been passed. It is vital that a sense of inertia does not become part of the process.

I turn, as a Welsh Member of Parliament for the wonderful constituency of Clwyd South, to Lords amendment 6. The purpose of the amendment is to enable Parliament and the devolved legislatures, and not the Executive, to take the final decision about whether rights, powers and liabilities retained by section 4 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act should be revoked at the end of 2023. The Government are right not to support the amendment.

Where the UK and devolved Governments consider that there is a need to codify any specific rights that may otherwise cease to apply, that can be done under the powers in the Bill. Such codified rights will be placed on a sustainable UK footing, providing certainty and therefore safeguarding and enhancing them in domestic statute. The Bill will end the situation whereby citizens must rely in some cases on an unclear category of law and complex legal glosses to enforce their rights.

Lords amendment 16, and the Government amendments to it, concern transparency on the Government's progress in dealing with retained EU law. The Bill now revokes only a portion of that law, but it will remain an important task for the Government to decide what to do with the rest of the laws on our statute book and ensure that they support the needs of the UK economy and the public. It represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to achieve significant regulatory reform.

Lords amendment 16 builds on the retained EU law dashboard, which pulls together all retained EU law and shows progress in reforming that law. The core information it contains, including visual representation of progress, has been a great achievement. Subsection (1) of the proposed new clause places an obligation on the Secretary of State to update the dashboard. It also requires the Secretary of State to

"publish and lay before Parliament a report on the revocation and reform of retained EU law."

Those reports are intended to do three things. They will summarise the dashboard, they will set out progress made in revoking and reforming retained EU law and, importantly, they will set out the Government's plans for revocation or reform. Information on the Government's plans is not currently reported in a comprehensive way, so this will be a valuable data source both for parliamentarians and for those outside Parliament. The first report will cover the period up to 23 December this year. There will be three more reports, the first two covering the years to 23 December 2024 and to 3 December 2025 respectively, and the final one for the six months to 23 June 2026.

In conclusion, I will support the Government in the votes on the Lords amendments this evening. I welcome the Bill, which will end the supremacy of EU law in UK statute and ensure that the courts no longer have to interpret legislation using EU case law after December 2023. It will also lighten the regulatory burden and spur economic growth across the length and breadth of the UK.

Stella Creasy: This piece of legislation and the Government's approach to these amendments are a masterclass in misdirection. Members across the House have been talking about the sunset clauses, but the honest truth is that if they are going to burn somebody's house down, it does not matter whether they do it at the end of this year or give themselves the matches to be able to do it next year; they are still going to burn down the house. This legislation, as it is still currently drafted, gives Ministers those powers. It does not take back control from Brussels, but gives it to No. 10 and the Executive.

I am sorry that the right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright) is not in his seat, because in responding to the amendments, I want to set out a few very clear issues that I am sure Conservative Members will be thinking about having heard my initial comments. While I might be the chair of the Labour Movement for Europe, I know that Brexit has happened and I know we need this piece of legislation. However, I am a democrat as well as an internationalist, and my concern is the way this legislation drives a sledgehammer through this place and through British democracy.

Let us not look at these amendments through the prism of whether we voted in a particular way in 2016, or even how we voted in the various long-drawn-out Lobby nights we had up until 2019. Let us look at what is before us: the question of how to deal with retained EU law. I am sorry the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) is not in his place, because I like to think that in his mind it is like Japanese knotweed and must be rooted out at every opportunity. Whether we agree with that or not, if we are democrats, we believe that the final decision on those changes that affect our constituents should be made in this Chamber, by us, the people who were elected by our constituents to represent them in those decisions. This Bill removes that basic principle.

If the hon. Member for Stone wishes to argue that this piece of legislation somehow promotes Brexit, I have a timeshare to sell him, because it is not taking back control; it is doing the reverse. I listened to the argument he made about Lords amendment 16, that somehow bringing a list to his Committee as opposed to the Committee that will actually be looking at the legislation is somehow a win for him. I wanted gently to ask him what he will do if a law he believes should be deleted is not on that list. Will he complain bitterly? He tried that with the Secretary of State, and look where that got us.

There is a basic rule in life, "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me again, shame on me." I wish the hon. Gentleman would listen to that. Everyone in this country has been fooled by Brexit. The British economy has been fooled by Brexit. Oddly enough, Brexit has not brought the benefits that we were told it would. We have seen exports collapsing, food prices increasing, our children sitting in coaches at the border for hours on end and businesses saying that trade with Europe is now almost impossible because of the amount of paperwork that they have to deal with.

This Bill kills the idea that Brexit was somehow about taking back control and kills the claims that were made—claims that the Government, under the last but one Prime Minister, were still making in 2022—that somehow Brexit was

"returning democratic accountability to our own institutions",

and that it had restored

"democratic control over our lawmaking",

and given

"the power to make and scrutinise the laws that apply to us back to our Parliament."

The Bill does the opposite.

The Government have already shown in their approach to this piece of legislation why it would be so dangerous to pass it without the amendments. Ministers have refused to appear before Committees; they have failed to respond to questions; they have been evasive about how they might use the powers—but they have already decided how they will use them. We have already seen in this place what has happened to the use of statutory instruments, which is why our colleagues in the other place are so concerned—colleagues who are passionate defenders of Brexit. The Government have used statutory instruments to push through unpopular changes on student loan charges and welfare reform, and the entirety of the covid regulations that many in this place objected to. This Bill is that process on acid. It will apply to 5,000 areas of regulation.

George Eustice: Is the hon. Lady not missing an important point? The tertiary legislation that came down from the European Union was largely put in place using section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972, and that provision could even, with no scrutiny at all, amend domestic legislation—Acts of Parliament; primary legislation—made in this House. The bulk would be either implementing Acts that came from the European Union or delegated Acts, about which there was no real democratic process—not even within the

European Union. Where was her voice when section 2(2) of the European Communities Act was running riot with the laws made in this House?

Stella Creasy: I was lobbying our elected representatives in the European Union—our Members of the European Parliament—to challenge that. I am sad that the right hon. Gentleman was not in his place when I had this very discussion with the right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam. Two wrongs do not make a right. Those who claimed that they wanted to wrest back control from Brussels cannot then give it away to "the blob" in Downing Street, but that is exactly what will happen.

Anybody who has sat on a statutory instrument Committee knows full well that they are the Henry Ford of democracy. MPs are chosen by Whips to sit on those Committees, like it or lump it. A Member may have concerns about the statutory instrument before the Committee, and although the Minister nods approvingly and talks about writing to them afterwards, the legislation still goes through. The most a Member might be able to do is rail against the dying of the light. The Bill will extend that process.

The right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) talks about what it will apply to: not just to EU delegated legislation, but to all legislation that gives effect to it. That is a massive power grab by the Government. The amendment tabled by colleagues across the Commons and the Lords represent not anger about the outcome of Brexit but concern for the future of democracy. That is why I urge colleagues, no matter what side they were on in that debate, to proceed with caution and look at what the House of Lords is trying to do in this process. In the light of how willingly the Government have used SIs to bypass this Chamber when they have had such powers—as with covid, for example—it is not unreasonable to be concerned about how much more that process could happen.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): In the unfortunate event that the hon. Lady's party wins the next election, would Ministers from her party be prepared to hand all those powers back to Parliament, or would they exercise them in the way intended in the Bill?

Stella Creasy: As a Back Bencher who expects to continue being a Back-Bencher under whatever Government, I want power to be in this place—I believe that that is good. Giving Ministers unfettered power without appropriate checks and balances is a bit like giving a 17-year-old the keys to a Porsche and asking them just to polish it: it always ends in a democratic car crash. That is what we see before us.

The right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), who is also no longer in his place, was at least honest about how he would like the Government to use those powers: to bring back chlorinated chicken, remove paid holidays and destroy the habitat directive. I do not know what he has against seals, but clearly he believes that we should be able to build houses on them. Wherever we stand on those debates, surely it is right that, if our constituents come to us about those issues, we have levers that allow us to represent their concerns, beyond trying desperately to grab a Minister during votes— there might only be one or two left if the legislation goes through—to ask them to think again.

The democratic powers that each of us was elected to exercise were our ability to table amendments, to scrutinise and to hold Governments of any colour to account. That is what the amendments would do. After all, we have already seen in how Ministers are proceeding with the powers that they believe the Bill will give them how little respect they have for their colleagues.

George Eustice: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Stella Creasy: I am very conscious of time, so I will give way briefly, but I hope the right hon. Gentleman understands that I want to make progress.

George Eustice: Another point that the hon. Lady is missing is that there is already a lot of domestic legislation in these areas. Seals have been mentioned twice, but the Conservation of Seals Act 1970 is what gives seals protection in this country, not any legacy EU directive.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Stella Creasy is the last Opposition speaker, so I will give her a little latitude.

Stella Creasy: Perhaps the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth will tell the right hon. Member for North East Somerset that his ambitions to build on top of seal habitats may have to wait a little longer.

4.30 pm

The point that the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth raises is apposite. We have a whole range of legislation. One of the challenges is that the proposal is so vague and broad, we are not clear what it covers. He mentioned DEFRA, but its officials have had a nightmare in trying to understand the direct impact of this legislation. We have already seen how Ministers have responded to the powers it gives them—they have agreed to make decisions without recourse to their colleagues. Whether we agree or not, Ministers have already decided the level of compensation our constituents will be able to claim if their trains are delayed. They have already made a decision on the compensation that people might get if their pension pot goes bust—usually, people are guaranteed 50%, but that is being removed. It is Government Ministers who have agreed, as the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Simon Baynes) mentioned, to retain the regulations on civil aviation. Many of those decisions might be sensible, but we might be desperately concerned about others.

The right hon. Member for North East Somerset let the cat out of the bag when he said that he wants to bring back chlorinated chicken and get rid of paid holidays. The important thing about democracy is that we are able to have a say and represent our constituents. This legislation strips that from the body politic, and the amendments try to restore it. They do not frustrate the legislation or sensible parliamentary process.

I am sorry that the right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam is not in his place. He said that he was concerned that setting up a Joint Committee would be unwieldy, but we already have Joint Committees with the Lords that look at legislation, make decisions,

scrutinise and sift. The Bill already gives a non-binding role to a Committee to recommend an upgrade to the statutory instrument process. Surely that power should be given to us, because we are the ones who will have to explain to our constituents why their rights have been removed and changed and that we could not do anything about it because we were not even picked by the Whips to be on that particular Statutory Instrument Committee to nod through the legislation or to perhaps make disapproving noises so that there was something in *Hansard*.

When it comes to changing regulations, the processes in the Bill are deficient. As colleagues have pointed out, we are not talking about EU laws any more; we are talking about laws that are on our statute book. It does not matter where we stand on them; I believe that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) should be able to make his case for changes to VAT not by pleading with civil servants in a back room, but on the Floor of the House. He needs to be accountable for his proposals, and those of us who might disagree with him can have that debate. We can table amendments to legislation, as I have done. We might win or we might lose, but that is democracy.

In Lords amendment 1, the Government are finally conceding that we ought to know at least what is in scope of a Bill. Surely it is good business practice to defend that as a parliamentary principle. I am worried that the Solicitor General has said that the vast majority of the rules might seem redundant. I am not particularly worried about a lot of them—I agree with him on that—but I am worried that Government Ministers did not seem to know what should and should not have been in there. For example, the first EC regulation listed, Regulation (EEC) No 706/73, is not on the dashboard. That applies to EU agricultural rules in Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. It might be fine to cut it, but we in Parliament have had only a week to ask people and check whether that is the right thing to do.

Lords amendment 1 helps us by giving clarity on what is in scope. The Government's attempts to weaken it should be resisted, because at the very least we should know what is up for grabs. I say to colleagues who believe passionately that all EU law is like Japanese knotweed that they should have a right to know what the Government are not going to remove and have absolutely no intention of removing.

On Lords amendment 6, I am sorry that the hon. Member from south London, whose constituency I cannot remember but who is Chair of the Justice Committee—

Simon Hoare: Bromley and Chislehurst.

Stella Creasy: That's it—apologies. The hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) talked about unintentional deletions. Again, that is absolutely right. The Bill is not just about direct EU regulations; it is also about direct effect cases. It is a piece of case law that protects our constituents' right to 50% of their pension pot that is being deleted without any parliamentary scrutiny of the process. That is the challenge.

According to the dashboard, those pieces of direct effect law that Lords amendment 6 would require the Government to set out, in the same way they have set out the EU regulations that they are going to delete, make up just 0.5% of retained EU law. It should not be difficult to at least tell us what case law is going to be deleted. For example, they are going to delete the direct comparator law that protects people in discrimination cases, so when our constituents come to us because they have been victims of discrimination in the workplace, basic protections that we might encourage them to look at and talk to their lawyers about will no longer exist. Again, they will ask us, "What did you do to make sure that this piece of law, whether or not it was a good idea, was scrutinised properly?" Amendment 6 would at least allow us to point to the place where it was deleted.

Lords amendment 15 is about Ministers who keep telling us that they do not want to water down any environmental regulations, whatever their colleagues who clearly have a vendetta against seals may think. It is simply a way of holding them to account, and this goes to the broader issue: whether or not Members agree with the habitats directive—whether or not they think there is room for change—surely it should be this place that deals with it, through a clear process.

I would wager that across the House, we would probably want to retain many of these pieces of legislation—again, I go back to airline safety and seatbelt rules. I am pleased that the Government have already said that they are going to retain those rules. Lords amendment 42 and other Lords amendments would pull together a Committee of both Houses that would do the sifting. It could simply say, "Yes, fine. Press on with using an SI Committee, those 15 people who have been hand-picked by the Whips, to nod it through and crack on with it." However, where there is change—where Ministers are doing something for which we will be held to account by our constituents—it would bring in amendable SIs. It worries me that Ministers do not know that amendable SIs already exist in our constitution. The Hansard Society has supported that proposal. No statutory instrument has been voted down in this place since 1979, so it is simply not the case that using an SI Committee, whether under the negative or the affirmative procedure, would be democracy.

Brexiteers and remainers alike have supported the Lords amendments, because they recognise that taking back control ought to be about us doing our job. If Ministers and MPs vote down the amendments tonight, we will be voting ourselves out of a role. It may not take effect yet, but our constituents will not forgive us for removing their voices from this place. I urge Government Members, wherever they were on that debate, to at least abstain and indicate to Members in the House of Lords that there is a willingness to look at these processes and get them right. All of us who value democracy will be the stronger for it.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I wish to speak about the Government amendments and amendment 15. As colleagues will know, I spent many years as a British Member of the European Parliament, representing UK constituents. During that time, I served on the industry, research and energy committee, the economic affairs committee and the environment committee, and I chaired the single market committee. As such, I have had the opportunity to see how EU legislation can play an important role, especially in areas such as food safety, workers' rights, consumer protection and the environment.

However, when I spoke on Third Reading, I also reminded people that I am very aware that EU legislation is not always perfect in all regards. The UK did play a

key part in negotiating much EU law, but not every single element of EU law fitted perfectly to the needs of the UK. Indeed, due to the need to get a consensus across the 28 member states, we sometimes needed to have a one-size-fits-all and lowest common denominator approach. Therefore, I have always agreed with the principle of the Bill: that all of Whitehall needs to look again at EU retained law and ensure that it fits our needs.

On Third Reading, I also made the point that businesses and others need certainty, and I asked for businesses to get advance notice of which laws will drop away by the end of the year. I also urged Ministers to not be fearful of taking the time that was needed to get this right, so I am very glad that the Government have tabled the amendments that they have, which will set out a schedule of exactly which laws are to drop away by the end of this year and remove the sunset clause.

I also pointed out on Third Reading that unnecessary regulation can produce additional costs, which are often passed on to consumers. Amendment 15 deals with important issues such as food safety and the environment, but I have listened carefully to what has been said by Ministers in the other place and Government Members: that the way in which the amendment is drafted would add bureaucracy and delay in the making of new laws, and create legal uncertainty. That would add costs to the process, which would be borne by either the taxpayer or the consumer. At a time when our constituents are particularly concerned about the cost of their food bills, we need to be aware of that.

By voting against amendment 15 tonight, it is not the fact that I and others on the Conservative Benches do not care about the environment or food safety. I am very proud to be a founder member of the Conservative Environment Network, a caucus that brings together over 150 Members on these Benches and in the other place, and I am very proud to have stood on a Conservative manifesto that promised to introduce the most ambitious environmental programme of any country in the world. I am thankful to Ministers for saying throughout the passage of the Bill that the Government will not weaken environmental protection. None the less, some of our constituents have concerns.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) just said this Bill will destroy the habitats directive. She has no evidence for that. The habitats directive has been a very important piece of legislation for many decades in trying to protect species. It was introduced in Europe by a Conservative MEP, who happens to be the father of a recent Conservative Prime Minister. However, species decline has continued across Europe despite that directive. We now have the opportunity to have a more outcome-focused, tailored approach to UK needs, and I gently say to Ministers that to reassure our constituents who care about biodiversity, it would be helpful for them as soon as possible to give more clarity about how they intend to reform the EU habitats directive—I know that a DEFRA consultation is going on at present.

The UK Government have gone much further than the EU in protecting habitats. In particular, we have been the first country in the world to commit to a legal deadline to halt species decline, and we have said we will do that by 2030. The landmark Environment Act 2021 also includes a new biodiversity net gain obligation for all new developments.

In my constituency, there is a new development of 342 dwellings. It is near the river in an area of wet grassland with hedges and copses. It is important habitat for many species including migrant birds, dragonflies, aquatic mammals and amphibians, and areas of higher ground in the undeveloped land are key refuges for small mammals and reptiles to escape to when the river floods. Because of the net biodiversity gain obligation, the planners and developers had worked with ecologists to introduce plans for new reedbeds, native trees and ponds, reinforcing hedges, increasing the woodland cover and making provision for bird and bat boxes and so forth. I did not think that was enough, because I was contacted by a constituent who is an ornithologist who has been watching this land for a long time. Because of the net gain initiative, the developers and their ecologists met my local ornithologist, and as a result the grass strip is going to be enhanced along the corridor where the barn owls hunt; the cycle path will be moved away to create a buffer from the trees where the nightingales nest; and the watercourse corridor will include scrapes for the water voles. All these are very important species: the nightingale and the water vole are red-listed species in the UK.

None of that action would have been taken if we had just relied on the habitats directive. This much more focused, devil-in-the-detail approach that we need to protect our nature and biodiversity is happening because of what this Conservative Government have introduced by putting that net gain responsibility on our developers.

I have a funny feeling that when we on this side of the House walk through the Lobby tonight to vote against amendment 15, those opposite will try to say that the Conservatives do not care about nature, species and the environment, but the actions of this Government show that that could not be further from the truth.

Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con): I rise to speak about this critically important Bill and the merits of the Government amendments, supported by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, to Lords amendments 1 and 16. I will touch later on amendments 6 and 15.

4.45 pm

I campaigned to leave the European Union. Like many other long-standing and staunch Brexiteers, I want to see our country charting its own course, having voted to do so almost seven years ago. Like the majority of the British people who voted to leave, I want our laws to reflect the interests of our nation, rather than those of an overseas bureaucracy. It is important to acknowledge that the Bill received overwhelming support from those on the Government Benches before it went to the other place, where these amendments were made, and that is no small matter. It is therefore a disappointment that the Bill will not deliver a full revocation of every piece of retained EU law.

I fully understand that the amendments passed in the other place and accepted by the Government will, if passed, result in a substantial change to the Bill and will differ considerably from the Government's original approach. However, although I empathise with the strong feelings that many of my colleagues have expressed

previously and today, if further consideration and perhaps changes are needed to prevent further delays or this Bill from failing to progress on time, it is important that we do not make perfect the enemy of the good. The Bill as originally planned would have revoked almost all EU-derived legislation by the end of 2023 via sunset provisions. If we push through the original Bill, repealing at pace for the sake of being seen to repeal by the end of 2023, implementing the aims of the Brexit process could backfire and we might inadvertently harm our own statute book.

Dean Russell (Watford) (Con): On that point, would my hon. Friend agree with amendment (b) to Lords amendment 16, which I have supported, which will have regular reporting—more regular than those in the other place wanted? That is essential to making sure that we see the momentum and the change as it is coming and ultimately that we are holding the Government's feet to the fire to deliver on what we promised the nation when they voted for Brexit?

Gareth Bacon: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend on that point. That amendment is critical, because anything else would give ammunition to those who have never truly accepted the result of the 2016 referendum and have fought against it thereafter.

We have to be honest. Given the timescales, there was a danger that certain laws we might have wished to keep might have been unintentionally revoked. I was a member of the Public Bill Committee, and that was certainly the centrepiece of the Opposition's attack on the Bill. Claims were made by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) that the Bill would end bank holidays and rip up maternity rights and protections for children. The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), who is not in his place, suggested that employment rights would be scrapped. Clearly that was never the Government's intention, but some have pointed out that that sort of thinking created a perverse incentive and resulted in a race in Whitehall to focus on retaining laws before the December deadline, rather than identifying which we should remove.

The changes made by the Secretary of State are intended to avoid that situation, and we should fully support her now. The amended Bill will still abolish the principle of the supremacy of EU law, fulfilling a manifesto commitment. It removes the principles of EU law from the UK's domestic law and gives courts the power to diverge from EU case law. As a result of the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Watford, which has been accepted by the Government, the Government will publish the future provisions that they aim to revoke or reform in the subsequent reporting period. All of that is hugely important, because it means we will be able to continue our work to ensure that the laws on our statute book are best suited to our national interest, having kick-started the process immediately and avoided further delay. That is exactly what Brexit was about: making those elected to represent British people, who sit on these Benches, and not in some grey building in Brussels, accountable for their decisions.

Some of the other amendments passed by the other place, such as amendments 6 and 15, are not really aimed at increasing scrutiny or protecting environmental standards, as has been claimed. Instead they are of a piece with much of the gameplaying that took place in Parliament after the referendum and prior to the 2019 election. They are intended simply to delay and obfuscate, and the Government are right to reject them. Taking all of this into account, I think the Secretary of State is correct to say that it would have been impossible to push ahead with the promise to revoke retained EU laws as originally planned. With these changes, I believe that she has pre-empted attempts to derail the Bill and ensured that we are back on the right track.

This revised Bill not only ends the supremacy of EU law, but sets up further progress to continue the Brexit project without imperilling it. That is why I will be voting to support the Government today, and I hope that all Brexiteers, and indeed all Members, will as well.

Simon Hoare: It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Gareth Bacon), who made a characteristically calm and thoughtful speech. I will endeavour to follow his example, although I do not make that a pledge.

In my opening remarks, I want to respond to two points. One of them was made by my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), who is a long-standing friend. The decision by this country to leave the European Union—I voted to remain—has been taken and is now accepted politically, and I do wish that he would not, as one or two others do, stir the pot with suspicions that, somewhere deep in the bowels of Whitehall, some malicious Minister or somebody in the civil service, in some think-tank or whatever is plotting to steal the prize of leaving the European Union from the hands of those who campaigned for it. I think that is totally specious as an argument. It alarms some people, introduces distrust into the motivations of those in this place, whether they are on the Back Benches or the Front Bench, and is entirely unhelpful.

I also want to make a point to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), who argued her case with the characteristic passion that she brings to all these things. The point I would make is that she believes—and I will come on to the belief in a moment—that the Government, and I paraphrase, want a sort of race to the bottom or some sort of democratic sleight of hand. I just politely say to the hon. Lady, for whom I have a huge amount of personal regard, that if that is case, the Government would not have ditched the sunset clause, but would just have carried on with the arbitrary date of the end of this year. I suggest that we should all take comfort from the fact that the foolishness of the sunset clause has been ditched, which indicates in very clear, transparent terms the way the Government wish to go about this process.

Sammy Wilson: Regardless of the process of how these laws will be changed, does the hon. Member not accept that any Government who wanted to tear up all the protections of the environment and all the protections of employment rights would be out of their minds, because they have to face the electorate at some stage, and that is the ultimate democratic test of these issues?

Simon Hoare: I do not know who is going to sit down first out of shock, but I fundamentally agree with the right hon. Gentleman, and I have to say that that is

possibly a first. He is absolutely right that that would be political suicide. On any casual analysis or audit of our inboxes or mailbags, or of people coming to our surgeries or stopping us in the street, he is absolutely right. People are not pressing for a race to the bottom, and they are not talking about a degradation of environmental standards. He is absolutely right, and any party that advocated that would quite rightly be consigned to the electoral dustbin. There would be no recycling of that party; it would be totally incinerated, and rightly so. He is right to make that point.

Stella Creasy: Does the hon. Member recognise that the way the Bill is currently drafted, with or without the sunset clause, still transfers a direct power to Ministers to use statutory instruments to make legislative changes to those 5,000 laws? Doing so might be electoral suicide, but it is possible, and the sunset clause is not what would stop it; it is just the date at which it would happen. That is the distinction we are making. Nobody is saying what might or might not happen; the point is the democratic deficit this will create.

Simon Hoare: There is more that unites the hon. Lady with my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset, because they are both tilting at windmills that do not exist. Any Government might do something—of course they might. I will come to the main thrust of what I want to say, but me deal with "anybody might." Anybody who passes a driving test and owns a car might lose control of the vehicle and might run somebody down. Anybody who buys rat poison might give it to their cat and kill the cat, so do we not sell rat poison? Surely the hon. Lady is not suggesting that because, reductio ad absurdum, people might do something, we should not allow things. With the usual checks and balances of this place, in a bicameral system and with a transparent free media and an independent court system, surely to goodness we have not reached that nadir of political trust in this place between Back Benchers—whether on the governing side or on the Opposition Benches—and the intentions of His Majesty's Government, from whichever party that might happen to be made up.

Dean Russell: Not only is there an absence of evidence; there is actually proof that the Government are on the side of workers. In the past year, we have brought in extensions on flexible working, maternity rights and carers' rights. Even my own Employment (Allocation of Tips) Act 2023 ensures that workers keep 100% of their tips. There is an absurdity on the extremes of the argument that somehow the Government are not on the side of workers and want to rip up rules when they are actually strengthening them. As has been alluded to, the Government are trying to cut through the red tape and not put bureaucracy in the way so that business and workers' rights are better suited for the workplace. We are making sure that we are on their side.

Simon Hoare: My hon. Friend—*[Interruption.]*. Yes, I will give him a tip. He makes a similar point to the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson). That is, in essence, which party worth its salt, seeking some form of re-election, will knock on doors and attend church and parish meetings to say, "The great thing that we've achieved—the great jewel in our crown—is that we've removed your holiday entitlement and your statutory sick pay. Please vote for us, because that's just the start. You wait until we've finished—we are going to have boys up chimneys and limbs lying on the factory floor because we will repeal the Factories Act"? Where does that end? It is utter nonsense.

The direction of travel in the mindset of this country, like, I would suggest, in most advanced civilised democracies, is for a more protective system for the individual, a safer working environment and a cleaner, greener environment. The idea that any party with a sensible prospectus for government would try to fly in the face of that and buck the trend in the interests that it might be quite interesting to see a four-year-old shoved up a chimney with a brush, is for the birds. But, unfortunately, there are one or two people out in the country who will believe that, and this place does no service to our constituents by setting those entirely spurious, false, bogus and misleading ideas in the public mind. It might make a Facebook click, and it might make some sort of Twitter advert with somebody saying something or another, but it is not serious politics, and it demeans this place.

But—*[Interruption.]* This is a but, because I want to deal with this seriously.

Stella Creasy: That's rude.

Simon Hoare: It is not rude at all.

Stella Creasy: No. That is what your colleagues are doing.

Simon Hoare: It might be hyperbolic, but it is not rude. I say to the hon. Lady and others—this is a point that Government Members must face up to—that, as I said in an intervention on my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset, I have, as many do, huge sympathy with the idea that this great canon of work should have been far more progressed than it has been, but for reasons that we do not need to dwell upon, I am afraid that last year, in terms of delivering political process, was a wasted year. We all know, understand and have some frustration with that, but we are where we are. The decision that the Government bravely and sensibly took was to say that the arbitrary date that previously—but still, I suggest, theoretically and unrealistically—we thought was in grasp for this huge and important piece of work, now is not. When the facts change the circumstances must change. This is not a U-turn: this is the Government saying that the important work of reviewing to check on appropriateness—whether something is appropriate or inappropriate, or should be upgraded or changed to bring it into a UK arena—will still be done, but it will be done in a more sensible timeframe to ensure that we get it right.

5 pm

Where I do have sympathy with the hon. Member for Walthamstow and others is regarding the perpetual—though now deceased—narrative of the Singaporisation of the UK. Some on the Government Benches, both here and elsewhere, have the idea that, somehow or other, we will grow into a miraculous sunlit upland of economic activity by deregulating everything. That allowed the naysayers to take an extreme view, the abolition of all regulations—a minority view, I would suggest, within Conservative thinking, because most Conservatives believe

in order. We conserve things and we order things, rather than tearing up the rulebook and racing to the bottom in some mad Trumpian, Tea party, laissez-faire approach.

The approach in the Bill is right. The Government's perfectly normal facing into the undeliverability of the timetable is the right approach. I will be voting with Ministers in all Divisions tonight, because I think the Government's approach is right. I hope that for all the good intentions of the other place, and I understand those good intentions, it listens to this place. This is another cog in the machinery of delivering Brexit, which was itself a democratic act. We are the democratically accountable House. The intentions of the Government are clear, benign and sensible. This House should now get behind them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): The Minister will be called no later than 5.52 pm for a 10-minute wind up.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): It is such a pleasure to follow a wonderful speech from my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare). I was roused to get up when he mentioned Trumpian Singaporisation liberalising, and I thought, "That sounds like me and I must now rise!"

It is clear that we are not, at this moment, where we would have loved to have been a couple of years ago. My hon. Friend mentioned, and it has been alluded to by many others, that due to various political events over the last 12 months or so, we have not made as much progress on this agenda as we would have liked. I say to some Members on my own side that of course it would have been better if this process had moved faster, but we are where we are.

When faced with such a scenario, the Government have a choice. They could either say that political machismo demands we keep going down a route, even if we fear that that route, by 31 December, may lead to some or a lot of negative outcomes, or they could take a grown-up approach—the sort of approach that in a sensible debate Opposition Members would much more readily accept and highlight explicitly—which is that we will do what we can now, remove the sunset clause and, in an orderly way, make sure that we get this right. I remember the advert from when I was a child that said a dog is for life, not just for Christmas. The laws passed in this House are for life. We intend to get this right for the long term. That is why, fundamentally, the Government's approach of repealing roughly about 2,000 laws by the end of this year, with a further 3,000 to be done in a sensible, structured and strategic way, will improve our regulatory system. Mr Deputy Speaker, I should have mentioned, as the chair of the Regulatory Reform Group, my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Sammy Wilson: Although there may be arguments for removing the sunset clause, there is a real fear that without it the Government could have, for various reasons, fallen back on the promises that they made to review all the laws. That is why the amendment is so important, because there will be a continuous review and picture of where the Government are going, and people can ensure that the foot is not lifted off the pedal.

Bim Afolami: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. It is a good example of our parliamentary democracy working well that there has been dialogue, both open and private, between Members of this House and the Government to get to a right point on amendments; to say that we will support the Government in broad terms, but that there is a need and a desire for more reporting and explicit signalling of where the Government are going. We must ensure that Whitehall as a whole continues with this agenda and does not feel that it has got the Bill done and will just leave it all for years to come. I understand exactly what he says.

Let me remark on the Lords amendments. I would say that I am impatient. I do not know if that is common to all politicians, but I am a very impatient person.

Simon Hoare: You are.

Bim Afolami: I thank my hon. Friend for confirming that to the House. I have talked a lot in the last few months about strengthening and improving our regulatory system, and getting more scrutiny for our regulators when they take decisions, and more ability for the House to scrutinise the decisions taken in our name. I am impatient that we are not doing more of that, faster. But I also recognise that we need to do that in a way that looks not just at the EU law—my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) talked earlier about the danger of having one set of EU regulations and the rest of law in another set. It is so important that, as we deal with European-derived law, we incorporate it into our full body of law in a strategically sensible way that improves our regulatory system—not just a cut and paste job, as may have happened.

I fear that a lot of the Lords amendments are about finding ways to delay the process that the Government have rightly strategically and politically committed to. My hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Gareth Bacon) made that point very well and I will not repeat it.

I would like to talk a little about Lords amendment 15, which relates to various environmental issues. I have many problems with it—first, the notion that it is always clear whether one is reducing or increasing what the amendment claims to be the "level of environmental protection" or level of "protection of consumers". That is very hard to do. It deliberately adds a huge amount of delay and bureaucracy to the entire process and it elevates the Office of Environmental Protection, which, if I remember rightly—I am sure that someone will correct me if not—is meant to be an advisory body, not a body to impose regulations on this House or anywhere else. It is elevating the Office for Environmental Protection to do a job that it was not designed to do. That is a good example of the sort of regulatory creep that we continually see and that I campaign and fight against in this House. The amendment is very dangerous for that reason.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) and my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset spoke accurately and amusingly about the political insanity of weakening things that the public want and that are completely contrary to the broad direction of our policy. Biodiversity net gain, the Environment Act 2021, the Agriculture Act 2020 and the Fisheries Act 2020 are all the things that we have done as a Government over the last few years. It would be insane to go back on

all the things that we have done in relation to particular regulations. The Bill is not a clear and present danger to our environment.

Let me finish by saying that I have a feeling, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford, that the amendment is not really about what it says on the tin. It is really about trying to create wedge points that can be used to generate emails by 38 Degrees, or to create Facebook ads or clips to somehow suggest that Conservative Members are not in favour of environmental protection. That is dangerous, and the House should not be used in that way. I have seen this practice grow in my time in Parliament, particularly among Labour and the Liberal Democrats. We should not allow the House to be a place where people put down motions to—incorrectly—embarrass Members by suggesting they are not in favour of something they are in favour of. I make that point before I sit down, and I will support the Government in all the Divisions today.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the King has signified his Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Protection from Redundancy (Pregnancy and Family Leave) Act 2023

Carer's Leave Act 2023

Electricity Transmission (Compensation) Act 2023

Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) Act 2023

Northern Ireland (Interim Arrangements) Act 2023.

Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill

Debate resumed.

5.11 pm

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami), who spoke very wisely. I apologise to the House for not having been here throughout. I have been attending the Speaker's Conference, and the Speaker gave give me permission to leave the Chamber for part of the debate.

I would like to focus on just one aspect of the Bill, which has attracted much comment, and that is democratic oversight. There has been some comment that, under the Bill, Ministers will be able to make changes to legislation without any form of scrutiny. That is not the case, but that misinformation seems to have been widely distributed.

There has been significant scrutiny of legislative changes post Brexit, and that scrutiny will continue with this Bill. One part of that scrutiny has been delivered by the European Statutory Instruments Committee. I am most familiar with the working of that Committee, because for the last few years I have chaired it. Our work is not widely known, so I thought it would be helpful if I quickly mentioned the procedure we have used. Obviously, I am not detailing it for colleagues, who will all know it, but for those following the debate, for whom it might be slightly less familiar.

Sammy Wilson: Does the hon. Gentleman not think that it is rather ironic—given that some people have argued against Ministers being given these powers, because they could, without scrutiny, reduce the standards of environmental, employee and consumer protection—that the Deputy Speaker has just announced that Royal Assent has been given to three Acts that were designed to protect workers' rights? Does that not give the lie to the idea that this Bill is all about reducing standards?

Andrew Jones: In that insight, the right hon. Gentleman is as wise as ever. There is no intention whatever of rolling back environmental protection or rights that have been hard won. The Government are building on those and seeking to leave a much better nation in environmental terms than the one we found. The right hon. Gentleman is clearly right, and he echoes comments made by other colleagues in the debate.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point about workers' rights, but these were private Members' Bills, one of which was brought forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) in the absence of a Bill from the UK Government on workers' rights. Does the hon. Gentleman not therefore agree that the Government could be doing a lot more to give a sense of trust about this process?

Andrew Jones: The obvious point is that private Members' Bills cannot proceed unless the Government support them. If the hon. Lady thinks that she is the arbiter of all that is true and righteous, she might be wrong—much of that is on the Government Benches.

[Andrew Jones]

When Ministers wish to make legislative changes, they choose whether to use the negative or the affirmative procedure. If it is the affirmative procedure, that automatically requires parliamentary scrutiny through a Committee of this House, which will consider the measure and, if necessary, vote on it. If the negative procedure is chosen, however, the legislation comes to us in the European Statutory Instruments Committee, and we consider which of the two procedures is appropriate. We have determined criteria which we apply when making that judgment. We consider whether the legislation is very technical in nature, the extent and the scope, and any legal concerns. We assess whether there is any political importance, and if so, how much political importance there is.

5.15 pm

I recognise that this is obscure and perhaps a little dry, but the key point I am making is that a Committee of MPs reviews every proposal. That means there is democratic and parliamentary oversight, and it will continue. May I quantify this briefly? So far we have considered 317 instruments since the Committee was established, and we have upgraded 18% of them from the proposed negative procedure to the affirmative. Our Committee has received a letter from the Leader of the House proposing that

"your Committee take on the role of making these 'sifting' recommendations in the House of Commons, as it has in the recent past for SIs".

Every member of the Committee has received a copy of that letter.

I recognise that there are further points to be considered about the extent to which we will need to debate SIs in the future and whether they could be made amendable, but those are longer-term considerations for the House as a whole. We must be careful to ensure that people do not use a broader debate about our procedures to try to delay the Bill and any of its potential consequences. My point is really about democratic oversight. It has existed and it is continuing to exist, and we know which Committee will be carrying it out, which is a positive development.

I want to say a few words, very gently, to the right hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds), who is sitting on the Opposition Front Bench.

Jonathan Reynolds: Not right honourable yet.

Andrew Jones: I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon.

As our Committee is gearing up for the consideration, may I point out that the Labour party has not taken up its places? We regularly meet when there is no Labour representation. We publish our attendance records, and I have just been looking at one of them. I see "zero attendance, zero attendance, zero attendance". I fully recognise that it is not easy for colleagues to get to every event, and there are many reasons why Labour members of the Committee cannot always join us. I am not criticising those who have been nominated, because they have other things to do, and indeed we have gone out of our way to highlight that in the attendance records. We have gone as far as to say that

"committee members have other duties in the House…They may have commitments"

and so on. However, if colleagues cannot join us for a prolonged period, it may be wiser for the Labour party to nominate others who can attend, and could have attended over the several years for which we have been sitting. I do not think it reasonable for Labour Members to complain about a lack of scrutiny and then not take up the scrutiny places that are theirs.

We expect the Committee to be busy. We have been given an indication that the instruments will start to flow through to us very shortly after the Bill has completed its democratic journey here, and I look forward to continuing the work that we have done in ensuring that the correct scrutiny is provided.

Sir Robert Buckland: It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones). He speaks with authority about the important detail and minutiae of procedure, which forms much of the subject matter in the Lords amendments.

I am also delighted to welcome the Solicitor General, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson), to his place. He follows in a very honourable tradition. We have mentioned the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, which is, of course, very germane to this debate, but let us not forget the European Communities Act 1972 itself, which another Solicitor General, the late Lord Howe, took through this place when he was—in his own words, to me—in the happiest job of his political career. So I say to my hon. and learned Friend, "Enjoy it while it lasts." I hope that it lasts a long time, because I think he brings a real quality to the job. He understands the role of a Law Officer, and I am delighted that the Government have chosen to deploy him at this stage of the debate, because although this might be seen as a rather arid area of the law, passions are running high.

I am sorry that I was not here to hear the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), but I was extremely grateful to him when, as Brexit Minister, he was good enough to consult me about his ambition for this Bill when I was on one of my furloughs from Government last year. It was an ambition that I understood and, frankly, shared. There is a strong, respectable argument to be made for those with the political will to show a sense of direction and give a steer to civil servants on what we want to achieve. There is no doubt that the aims of the Bill, which I continue to support, are entirely laudable. My right hon. Friend needs no criticism at all for seeking to continue to apply the collective feet of the machinery of government to the fire of regulatory reform.

That is what we are talking about here. Let us strip away the B-word, the Brexit word. Everyone knows what my position was on that: I was a remainer. I campaigned for it, fought for it and believed in it, but I accepted the vote of the British people. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright) said in his excellent speech, this really is another chapter in the delivery of the verdict by the British people that we were enjoined to carry out. That is why I think the mechanism is necessary.

I note the arguments about the otiose nature of this legislation due to the fact that various regulations can be amended or removed through the normal proceedings of the House, but it was right to come back to the issue of retained EU law after a moment of reflection. That was

precisely the Government's intention in 2017. I remember when I was in my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General's place making the argument that this was a freezing of the law and a sweeping-up clause designed to put this category of law into an understandable compartment, so that we could return to the issues once we had got through not just Brexit but the transition period and once we knew the shape of the future relationship. We are now in that position, and my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset was therefore timely with his intentions and his wish to get things moving.

However, as with all honourable and great plans, events sometimes intervene. There were plenty of examples of officials across the civil service doing their best to identify which regulations and statutory instruments needed to go, but the National Archives kept cropping up again and again. There was also a question mark about the efficacy of the Government dashboard and whether it was too unreflective of all the regulations that existed pursuant to retained EU law. I have to say that that caused me to lose confidence that we could, in due time, identify all the regulations that needed to be looked at, swept up or removed. My fear was that we would have ended up in the position of repeal by accident, whereby perfectly decent regulations that still have an application today and that underpin business transactions or other relationships between the individual and the state would have been repealed. That would not have been good for the law or for certainty—the rule of law depends on certainty—and that worried me.

It therefore came as no surprise when the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, my right hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Kemi Badenoch), came to the conclusion that she did. Hence the replacement of that ambitious sunset at the end of this year with what I will call the 600. This is resonant of Tennyson in many ways, and I hope that the end for this 600 will be as clear as the end was for the noble Light Brigade. As I think all Conservative Members would agree, we want to see that as the beginning, not the end, of regulatory reform.

Bim Afolami: Seeing as my right hon. and learned Friend is half a league onward, does he agree that this is a very good example of grown-up policymaking?

Sir Robert Buckland: In a word, yes. I am a voluntary member of the Regulatory Reform Group, which my hon. Friend so ably chairs. As we look at the context of these amendments, it is important to strip away the B-word and remind ourselves of the purpose of regulation. Hastily proposed regulation, without a clear policy objective and without sufficient consideration for the costs involved, is without doubt a bad thing, but hastily repealed regulation, without proper evidence-based decisions, can also be a very bad thing.

When we talk about the burden of regulation, looking at the mere number is, by no means, the whole picture. Indeed, it can be very misleading, because it is the type of regulation that is most important. That is why the way in which we undertake cost-benefit analysis of regulatory burdens is so important and, in some ways, deficient—it is not dynamic enough, and it does not deal with the developing or cumulative effects of regulation on competition. We might end up in a situation in which the opposite of a policy objective is obtained. We have seen examples where a monopoly might be entrenched or competition undermined, which is neither good lawmaking nor good regulation.

The Government have tried a number of initiatives: one in, one out; one in, two out; and business impact targets in the mid-2010s. The 2015 Parliament saw a downturn in the cost of regulation but, of themselves, such initiatives do not achieve their purpose, for which, to invoke my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset again, political will is needed.

Looking at the Government's business impact targets for 2020-21, the biggest saving in direct costs to customers and businesses was the £3.6 billion reduction achieved by the Ministry of Justice, which I then led, through the whiplash civil law reforms that resulted in savings for insurers and consumers. It is a successful example of how a well-targeted regulatory and legislative change can make a difference. We can do it, and we must do it. I think all Conservative Members would vigorously agree with that approach.

I would say this Bill has been improved. I take no issue with Government amendment (a) to Lords amendment 16. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) very much supports that Government amendment, which seems eminently sensible.

I also adopt the observations of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam on the detail of Lords amendments 6 and 42. I am all for proper scrutiny, and I am all for this place and, indeed, the other place, where appropriate, being able to have their say on the passage or removal of delegated legislation, which we all know that we do not do as well as we ought to.

I yield to no one in my admiration for the noble Lord Hope of Craighead, who works extremely hard on these issues. I do not think the amendments, as currently structured, are there. That is why, like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam, I draw back from supporting them, although I would press the Solicitor General and his colleagues in the other place if this were to continue, which it might—we can never say never to these things—to look again at the issue.

There may be another, more elegant solution. Dare I say it, there may be potential to amend the Standing Orders of this place and the other place to deal with some of these points. The Standing Orders of the House of Commons are the closest thing we have to a written constitution and, in my mind, they are the most important document we have as a democratic House, but we can amend them, and we do amend them. There were times during the Brexit years when we did just that. In fact, we legislated in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 to create a sifting Committee, but that related to deficiencies at the top end of the process of Brexit, of which this is yet another chapter. Although we have some precedents, I am not sure that we are quite there with the form of these amendments.

5.30 pm

To sum up, reality has had to, for the time being, trump the scale of the ambition that we should have. What brings us all together as Conservatives is that sense of ambition; we know we can do this. We need Ministers with the political will to do it. I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset

is disappointed, to say the least, that his noble ambitions were not achieved in the way he wanted. I believe there is a collective will here for us to do more, to do it better and to come back to the true aim of regulation, which is the effective advance of a policy objective in the clearest of ways. That is why the Regulatory Reform Group has been set up: because we do not think that Government and regulators do that as well as they should. The way has been lost. Let us together re-find that way. Together, with this Bill as the beginning, we can achieve the noble objectives of effective regulation.

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con) *rose—*

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Perfectly, that leaves you with 10 minutes each. I call Brendan Clarke-Smith.

Brendan Clarke-Smith: I was going to speak about amendment 15. I am sure that, as usually happens, we will see social media graphics saying that all Conservative Members are trying to trash the environment, but our case was made eloquently and entertainingly by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) and my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare).

I shall certainly support the Government proposals today, and I will outline why. Of course, this all comes back to taking back control, which was very important for Brexiteers such as myself. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Gareth Bacon), I campaigned for Brexit, and more than 68% of people in Bassetlaw voted for it. Of course, whether someone voted for it or for remain—we know that for many people it was a marginal decision—there is a need for us to accept the result and work together to make the best of the situation, because we want this country to be successful. It is in that spirit, which I feel across the House, that we are moving forward together today.

Brexit is not something where we simply flip a switch. Of course, we got Brexit done, but Brexit is a process and an evolution. That is very much what we are looking at today on retained EU law; we have a process and it will continue. We would like to have a deadline on it, but we realise that the practicalities are not necessarily in line with that. There is a delivery issue and we have to be realistic; we are fast approaching 31 December 2023.

I have a lot of sympathy with the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), and I hope that the drive, ambition and spirit that he has shown will be taken forward in the way we address this legislation in the future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Simon Baynes) made an excellent point when he talked about aviation regulations and so on being things that we would not necessarily change. Not all of these laws are things that we will look to get rid of. We want to make a good job of this and do it properly. That is the main thing we need to focus on.

I know that some people were worried about whether we are in this position because of some underlying reason to do with the Windsor framework. Again, the Minister and the Secretary of State have given us an excellent explanation from the Dispatch Box as to why that is absolutely not the case.

As we have heard, the Bill ends the supremacy of EU law and we no longer have to interpret legislation using EU case law as our only basis. I was genuinely worried about the unintended consequences of getting rid of legislation without having the time to get all the SIs through, so I fully understand why the Government have taken the approach they have. The regular updates will help us match the ambition suggested by my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset, and I look forward to that. This shows the public how the Government are making this work and making a success of the legislation.

I will support the Government tonight—this is a challenge, but it is one that I am sure we are up for—and I encourage colleagues to do the same.

Danny Kruger: It is an honour to wind up for the Back Benchers in this tremendous debate. It has been good natured, but it has also revealed, in a constructive way, some of the profound differences that have divided the country and the House in recent years. The Bill represents the great unfinished business of Brexit. It is, in a sense, the fulfilment of the great promise of Brexit: to bring back control over our laws.

There are two visions of Brexit among those of us who supported it. On the one hand, there are those who believe in deregulation, innovation and free trade. They believe not in the fantasy of slashing protections and regulations, but in cheap food, even in free movement, and in the vision of John Bright, the ancestor of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), who believed so passionately in free trade. On the other hand, there are those of us who believe more in the protection of domestic industry, in reducing migration and in workers' rights—more Disraeli than Bright.

With that tension in the Tory tribe, we have been battling in recent years about the fulfilment and implementation of the Brexit dream. The fact is that whichever side of the tension we are on, we believe that it should be this Parliament that sets the direction for our country and delivers the sort of country we want to be, post our membership of the European Union. We should determine policy in these areas. That is why the Bill is so good and so right.

I recognise that some hon. Members and parliamentarians in the other place object to the process for the revocation of EU law, particularly the use of statutory instruments, that the Bill introduces. I respect the spirit of the amendments championed by Lord Hamilton in the other place and by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) here, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones) just explained so well, these are profound questions about parliamentary process that are not appropriate for this Bill or this place. Although the spirit of the amendments may be valid, I do not think it is appropriate to tamper with the process through this Bill.

The fact is that the elected Government are responsible for scheduling the measures that will be revoked or reformed—there will be that democratic oversight, unlike there was in the process by which those measures were brought into this place. My right hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) explained clearly how this House had no opportunity to challenge EU law as it was introduced. The laws came into

Parliament by sneaky means, rather like the rats coming up through the drains, but they will go out in the proper way: briskly and fairly.

I am pleased that we are doing this and, crucially, that we are making the profound change given effect by the Bill, which is to restore the supremacy of UK law. I honour the Government for their efforts to get the process of extirpation, or revocation, right, and to remove the problem that there are two systems of law in operation in this country. We should have one system of law, made in this place.

I approved of the sunset clause. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) about the value of having the stimulus of a deadline. I recognise and respect the point made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) about the danger of having sent the Light Brigade of valiant EU laws into the valley of death, but it would be dangerous to send in the heavy brigade after them. Nevertheless, I think we had the right approach. I accept the Secretary of State's argument that those in Whitehall rather over-interpreted their instruction to find laws to retain and found that they needed to retain them all. They must have worked very hard—they probably even came into the office to do that work.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): My hon. Friend will know that there are other countries that may themselves want to leave the European Union in the future and will be watching us closely. Our ability to implement our own laws will be instrumental in whether they decide to join us in freedom.

Danny Kruger: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention; I hope we can inspire the countries of Europe, as we have so often in our history.

We have changed from a default assumption of removal of EU laws to a default assumption of retention. I understand the rationale for that change, even if I regret it. I also regret, but do not understand, why the decision to change the basis of the law was made when the Bill had passed its stages in this House and was in the House of Lords. It passed the Commons with a big majority and the whole Conservative party behind it; I think it was the SNP spokesperson who said it was rather like a handbrake turn in the House of Lords. I agree with that and I regret it.

Nevertheless, since then the Government have engaged constructively with Members. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Stone, who is not in his place. I think every Bill needs an hon. Member for Stone stage, and if that was not done through the European Scrutiny Committee, it was done behind the scenes and it was very effective—*[Interruption.]* I see my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon agreeing with me about the value of that stage of legislation.

I respect the Government's intention and I accept their assurances that they intend to revoke at scale, because we need to recognise that the new schedule as it stands is very weak. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone said that only five of the measures in the schedule reflect significant laws. He said he was watching Eurovision while doing that work, so it must have been a very painful exercise—gloriously awful. Britain did very badly in Eurovision, and I am afraid Britain has not done brilliantly in this exercise either. It reflects poorly on Whitehall that we have only managed to identify those five substantial measures for revocation.

There is so much that can be done, whether people are free traders, like my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset—who is back in his place—or protectionists like some of us.

Sir Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend says he is a protectionist, and I think that might need a bit of amplification. I do not think he means it in the traditional sense of the word, but I am genuinely intrigued.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Yes, he does!

Danny Kruger: I think my right hon. and learned Friend is trying to rescue me from some sort of political blunder, which I am perfectly capable of making. I am grateful to him for that. This is not the moment for that great debate, although I mentioned the tension in our philosophy between the free trading and protectionist impulses. I want to look after our Wiltshire farmers and I want to see the industry of this country rise again and Britain become a great exporting nation.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I wonder if it is fair to say that my hon. Friend is the Lord George Bentinck of the modern era?

Danny Kruger: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend, the Peel of our era.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I will not try the patience of the House any longer. My point is that, whether people are free traders or protectionists, surely they want to see VAT reformed. That was the great Brexit freedom opportunity, and we should be using our new freedoms to do it.

We need more ambition. I recognise that the Government intend to report every six months. I am pleased with amendment (b) to Lords amendment 16, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Dean Russell) with the support of the Government, and I particularly support amendment (a) to Lords amendment 16 in the name of the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Stone, which will require the Government to specify at every reporting stage the laws that are going to be reformed or revoked. I support the case my hon. Friend made for having some kind of tsar or commander-in-chief to oversee the process of identifying the laws for reform or revocation. We need a good process here, but we have the right Bill with the right principles in it, and we can now fight out the proper vision for the future of our country.

The Solicitor General: What a great pleasure it is to follow the winding-up speech from the Back Benches by my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger). I agree with him entirely. This has been a good-natured debate, both detailed and robust where it needed to be. I also agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami) that this debate is Parliament doing what it does best—as it often does, and often unseen. This has been a robust but grown-up debate, worthy of the subject matter.

[The Solicitor General]

I fear that I will not be able to go into detail for every Member who has spoken, but it is right and proper that I mention the speeches that have been made. I am very grateful to my right hon. and learned Friends the Members for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright) and for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland). There is always a risk in such debates of a sort of lawyers' love-in, but I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon for his kind remarks and for reminding us of the history of Solicitors General appearing at the Dispatch Box for other tricky bits of legislation—not to mention litigation.

I will come back to some of the detail, but in no particular order, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones) for what he does in his Committee. He is right that, in many ways, his Committee and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) do similar things: detailed, painstaking and incredibly valuable work that is done unseen, upstairs in the Committee corridors. I am grateful to my Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough for his elucidation of that work.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Gareth Bacon), who served throughout the Bill Committee. He has been here from the beginning through to the end, and I am grateful for his dedication and persistence, and for his speech. I have mentioned my hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden, but I will come back to him in a few moments.

I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Devizes and for Clwyd South (Simon Baynes), and my neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), who I will, of course, come back to in due course. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Brendan Clarke-Smith) for his remarks as a dedicated Brexiteer. I will, as I must, come back to my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) and try to engage with the points that he made.

Let me mention some of the interventions that were made. I thought that my right hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice)—a former Secretary of State—made some pertinent and detailed interventions at the right moment. I thank him for his work as Secretary of State and for the continued work and thoughts that he feeds into His Majesty's Government.

I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Dean Russell) for his interventions. When preparing for this debate, I re-read his Second Reading speech, which was rightly credited by both sides of the House as a simply magnificent speech in the circumstances. The former Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset, quite rightly paid tribute to him at the time, and I am sure that he would echo my comments.

I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) for serving on the Bill Committee. I mentioned that she and I have served on Bill Committees before, and I know that she undertakes her work diligently. Indeed, when she mentioned Bill Committees and Whips, I wondered whether she was putting in a bid to be a shadow—

Stella Creasy *indicated dissent.*

The Solicitor General: She is shaking her head. Well, she is missing out, because she would enjoy it and do it well. She made an impassioned speech on why she believes that we should have remained in the EU. I want to pick her up on one point: she said that she wanted to know what laws were going to be revoked. Well, I invite her to join us in the Division Lobby, with the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Stone, who tabled an amendment to insert:

"including specifying in a list such provisions of retained EU law as is intended to be revoked or reformed."

The hon. Lady can join us in the Division Lobby this evening.

Stella Creasy: I am so sorry, but the Minister was not in the Chamber, so perhaps he misunderstood or something was lost in translation, as if often can be in this place. What I wanted to know was the direct effect cases, which is what amendment 6 would provide for. I agree with him—although I think that the list has little impact on any changes—but might he join me in voting for Lords amendment 6 to ensure that we know about everything affected by the legislation?

The Solicitor General: I can reassure the hon. Lady that I was in the Chamber for the entirety of her speech —from beginning to end. Indeed, even before she stood up and after she sat down, I was in the Chamber. The only speech that I missed was that of the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), who was representing the Liberal Democrats. I heard the first few words and the end, and I apologise to her for that. Other than that, I was in the Chamber for the entire debate.

My point remains that the hon. Member for Walthamstow said that she wanted to know what the Government's intentions were for revocation. If she does, I invite her to support my hon. Friend the Member for Stone in the Aye Lobby later this evening. That would be quite a coupling, and I very much look forward to that moment.

Let me turn from my introductory remarks to some more of the substance. It is crucial that we continue to progress this Bill over the final hurdles to Royal Assent. The Bill is a key part of the Government's ambition to reform our economy and to support growth. We must capitalise on the competitive advantages that the UK has, now that we are no longer restrained by membership of the EU. We must ask ourselves which regulations have worked, which further regulations can be scrapped, and which could be reformed.

May I turn to the criticisms levelled at the schedule? I enjoyed listening to the shadow Secretary of State's speech—I always enjoy listening to him speak. I almost thought that he welcomed the schedule. Perhaps he will join the hon. Member for Walthamstow in the Government Division Lobby, but perhaps not because it was an almost welcome that he gave it. I take what I can from his speech and that was certainly a positive, if nothing else. I am grateful to him for his contribution to the debate. I assure colleagues that this is only part of our reform programme.

I will address some of the points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset. He said that this was the perfect opportunity for reform,

and it still is, not least thanks to him, his hard work and drive, and the dashboard that he has championed throughout. Thanks to that, it is not only Members in this House but people throughout the country and, if they are interested, across the world who will be able to look at regular updates on our retained EU law.

There has been some criticism and some mention of inertia and delay. My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes mentioned Whitehall. The Attorney General has arrived at absolutely the right moment, because I would like to pay tribute to the Government Legal Department, to Government lawyers who have been poring over retained EU law. When my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset introduced the Bill, the explanatory notes estimated that there were some 2,400 pieces of retained EU law. But that was not so. Thanks to the diligence of civil servants, the Bill team and Government lawyers, more than double that number have been identified. The 600—the Light Brigade—are not the limit of the Government's ambitions.

More reforms are planned. I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam that this approach has the potential to lead to greater reform than might otherwise have been the case. Others have asked if this is a change in direction. No, it is not. It is a different way of doing the same thing, potentially with better and faster results. I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend was right, and I am grateful to him for his engagement in this debate.

Sammy Wilson: For those of us who supported Brexit, it is important that we are able to tailor our own laws to suit the circumstances of our own country. Can the Solicitor General tell me, however, how this situation is better for people in Northern Ireland? Given that we have been left in the position of being an annex to the EU, many of these changes do not apply.

The Solicitor General: I am very grateful indeed to the right hon. Gentleman for his engagement throughout the debate, not only today but previously. He and I have engaged on certain related, like-minded campaigns, and I pay tribute to him for the work he does in his constituency. I reassure him that the Bill's provisions apply equally to all parts of the United Kingdom and that Northern Ireland Ministers will benefit from the same powers as Ministers of the Crown, not least thanks to amendments tabled in the other place.

As for the criticisms of the mechanisms of the statutory instruments that are being used, I wish those concerns about lack of scrutiny had been raised during our membership of the EU. Where were they? Where were the cries? Where were the complaints? They were simply absent.

Sir William Cash: Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

The Solicitor General: I will, but it will be the last intervention that I take.

Sir William Cash: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that under section 2, they all came in almost entirely? There was some primary legislation, but it was almost entirely done through statutory instrument, and against the background of the undemocratic process that took place at the Council of Ministers.

The Solicitor General: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend, the Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee, for that point. I believe he has been a member of the Committee since 1985 and has chaired it for almost as long, but not quite. I served on his Committee, and he has seen thousands of regulations pass through, unseen apart from his work and that of his Committee. Once again, I pay tribute to him for that work.

In terms of environmental protections, I remind the House of the repeated commitments made by Ministers at all stages of the Bill's passage. I pay tribute again to the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) for his very clear interventions, amplifying so well the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset and made so powerfully by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford early on in her speech, with which I agree in its entirety. I will just touch on that point, and amplify it briefly: since leaving the European Union, this Government have passed the landmark Environment Act 2021. We have produced our 2023 environment implementation plan, our storm overflows discharge reduction plan, and our plan for water. There are other plans, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I will not try your patience by reading out each and every one of them. [Hon. Members: "Go on!"] Well, only because I am being encouraged to, I will mention the Agriculture Act 2020 and—because the Attorney General is here—the Fisheries Act 2020. That will gladden her heart.

There it is: any accusation that Government Members are any less concerned about environmental protections than Opposition Members is totally false. Under the Environment Act, we are committed to deliver a legally binding target to halt nature's decline by 2030. In reviewing its retained EU law, DEFRA's aim is to ensure that environmental law is fit for purpose, able to drive improved environmental outcomes while ensuring regulators can deliver efficiently. That will ensure that the UK regulatory framework is appropriate and tailored for our needs in our country—in the United Kingdom. The Government have clear environmental and climate goals, which have been repeatedly set out. I could say the same in relation to workers' rights, for which my hon. Friend the Member for Watford made the case so powerfully in his earlier intervention.

I will mention two more points before I close, the first of which relates to page 16 of the Bill. The port services regulations have been mentioned: that legislation has never been appropriate in the context of the United Kingdom's decentralised and competitive ports sector. Removing the port services regulations from our statute book will reduce the bureaucracy in our ports sector, doing away with unnecessary reporting burdens.

Sir William Cash: Hear, hear!

The Solicitor General: I am delighted that my hon. Friend is "Hear, hear"-ing so loudly from the Back Benches.

I will now turn to interpretive effects and Lords amendment 6, and some of the concerns that have been raised. I take this opportunity to again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stone, who has ceaselessly campaigned to end what he calls the shadow statute book. The fact is that the amendment replaces the section of the Bill developed by my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset—who introduced

[The Solicitor General]

the Bill—whereby section 4 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act will be repealed after 31 December this year. The matters saved by section 4 consist largely of retained rights, obligations and remedies developed in the case law, no less, of the Court of Justice of the European Union, and the vast majority of those overlap with rights that we already have. Those overlaps can cause confusion and legal uncertainty, and I invite right hon. and hon. Members to join us in the Government Lobbies this evening.

I once again thank all Members for their contributions to the debate. This schedule is by no means the limit to our ambition for reforms of EU law: we have the power and we will continue to amend EU laws. It is imperative that we ensure this Bill reaches Royal Assent promptly; and as to the Government amendments, I commend them to the House.

Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 6.

The House divided: Ayes 296, Noes 215.

Division No. 241] [5.59 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
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
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, rh Michelle *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Garnier, Mark
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Grundy, James
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, rh James
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, rh Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kearns, Alicia
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Lopez, Julia *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Lopresti, Jack
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morrissey, Joy
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Patel, rh Priti
Pawsey, Mark
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, Mr Rob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, rh Sir Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Simmonds, David
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, rh Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, rh Kelly
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trott, Laura
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Webb, Suzanne
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, rh Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Julie Marson and Steve Double

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane *Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy)*
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Tahir
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Bonnar, Steven
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Sir Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy *(Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara)*
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clark, Feryal *(Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore)*
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Daby, Janet
Dalton, Ashley
Davey, rh Ed
Day, Martyn
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dixon, Samantha
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Dorans, Allan *(Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara)*
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, rh Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Evans, Chris
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Flynn, Stephen
Foord, Richard
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Furniss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Dame Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanna, Claire
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Law, Chris
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Linden, David
Lloyd, Tony *(Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore)*
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, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McLaughlin, Anne *(Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara)*
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John *(Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara)*
O'Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owen, Sarah
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Powell, Lucy
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reynolds, Jonathan
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheppard, Tommy
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Alyn
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Trickett, Jon

Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Vaz, rh Valerie
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Liz Twist and Mary Glindon

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 6 disagreed to.

6.13 pm

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

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

Clause 1

SUNSET OF EU-DERIVED SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION AND RETAINED DIRECT EU LEGISLATION

Amendment (a) proposed to Lords amendment 1.—(The Solicitor General.)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 298, Noes 216.

Division No. 242] [6.13 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
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
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, rh Michelle (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Garnier, Mark
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Grundy, James
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, rh James
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, rh Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kearns, Alicia
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Lopresti, Jack
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morrissey, Joy
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Nici, Lia

Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Patel, rh Priti
Pawsey, Mark
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, Mr Rob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, rh Sir Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Simmonds, David
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, rh Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, rh Kelly
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trott, Laura
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Webb, Suzanne
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, rh Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Julie Marson and Steve Double

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane *(Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy)*
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Tahir
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Bonnar, Steven
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Sir Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy *(Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara)*
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clark, Feryal *(Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore)*
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Daby, Janet
Dalton, Ashley
Davey, rh Ed
Day, Martyn
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dixon, Samantha
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan *(Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara)*
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, rh Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Evans, Chris
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Flynn, Stephen
Foord, Richard
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Furniss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Dame Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanna, Claire
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Law, Chris
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Linden, David
Lloyd, Tony *(Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore)*
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, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McLaughlin, Anne *(Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara)*
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John *(Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara)*
O'Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owen, Sarah
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Powell, Lucy
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reynolds, Jonathan
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheppard, Tommy
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Alyn

Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Vaz, rh Valerie
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Liz Twist and Mary Glindon

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment (a) made to Lords amendment 1.

Lords amendment 1, as amended, agreed to.

Government amendments (a) and (b) made to Lords amendment 16.

Lords amendment 16, as amended, agreed to.

After Clause 16

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND FOOD STANDARDS

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 15.—*(The Solicitor General.)*

The House divided: Ayes 294, Noes 217.

Division No. 243] [6.27 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, rh Karen
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
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, rh Michelle *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Garnier, Mark
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Grundy, James
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, rh James
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, rh Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kearns, Alicia
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Lopez, Julia *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Lopresti, Jack
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morrissey, Joy
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran

Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Patel, rh Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, rh Victoria
Quin, rh Jeremy
Quince, Will
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Roberts, Mr Rob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, rh Sir Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Simmonds, David
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, rh Kelly
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trott, Laura
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Webb, Suzanne
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, rh Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Julie Marson and Steve Double

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane *(Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy)*
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Tahir
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Bonnar, Steven
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Sir Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy *(Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara)*
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clark, Feryal *(Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore)*
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Daby, Janet
Dalton, Ashley
Davey, rh Ed
Day, Martyn
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dixon, Samantha
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan *(Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara)*
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, rh Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Evans, Chris
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Flynn, Stephen
Foord, Richard
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Furniss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Dame Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanna, Claire
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Law, Chris
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Linden, David
Lloyd, Tony *(Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore)*
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, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McLaughlin, Anne *(Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara)*
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John *(Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara)*
O'Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owen, Sarah
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Powell, Lucy
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reynolds, Jonathan
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz

Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheppard, Tommy
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Alyn
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Vaz, rh Valerie
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Liz Twist and Mary Glindon

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 15 disagreed to.

Schedule 4

REGULATIONS: PROCEDURE

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 42.—*(The Solicitor General.)*

The House divided: Ayes 294, Noes 217.

Division No. 244] [6.39 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
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
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, rh Michelle *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Garnier, Mark
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Grundy, James
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, rh James
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, rh Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kearns, Alicia
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Lopez, Julia *(Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones)*
Lopresti, Jack
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morrissey, Joy
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll

Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Patel, rh Priti
Pawsey, Mark
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, Mr Rob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, rh Sir Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Simmonds, David
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, rh Kelly
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trott, Laura
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Webb, Suzanne
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, rh Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Julie Marson and Steve Double

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane *(Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy)*
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Tahir
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Bonnar, Steven
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Sir Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy *(Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara)*
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clark, Feryal *(Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore)*
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Daby, Janet
Dalton, Ashley
Davey, rh Ed
Day, Martyn
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dixon, Samantha
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan *(Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara)*
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, rh Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Evans, Chris
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Flynn, Stephen
Foord, Richard
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Furniss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Dame Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanna, Claire
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Law, Chris
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Linden, David
Lloyd, Tony *(Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore)*
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, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McLaughlin, Anne *(Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara)*
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John *(Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara)*
O'Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owen, Sarah
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Powell, Lucy
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reynolds, Jonathan
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheppard, Tommy
Siddiq, Tulip

Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Alyn
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Vaz, rh Valerie
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Liz Twist and Mary Glindon

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 42 disagreed to.

Lords amendments 2 to 5, 7 to 14, 17 to 41 and 43 agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83H(2)), That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing with their amendments 6, 15 and 42;

That Michael Tomlinson, Mike Wood, Alexander Stafford, Shaun Bailey, Jonathan Reynolds, Taiwo Owatemi and Alyn Smith be members of the Committee;

That Michael Tomlinson be the Chair of the Committee;

That three be the quorum of the Committee.

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—*(Ruth Edwards.)*

Question agreed to.

Committee to withdraw immediately; reasons to be reported and communicated to the Lords.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 4 to 6 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

That the draft Packaging Waste (Data Reporting) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2023, which were laid before this House on 20 April, be approved.

ROAD TRAFFIC

That the draft Road Vehicles (Authorised Weight) (Amendment) Regulations 2023, which were laid before this House on 26 April, be approved.

CRIMINAL LAW

That the draft Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 (Extension of Duration of Non-jury Trial Provisions) Order 2023, which was laid before this House on 24 April, be approved.—*(Ruth Edwards.)*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Pavement parking

6.51 pm

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I rise to present this petition about pavement parking in Manchester, Gorton, which disrupts my constituents daily, particularly those who have mobility impairments, those who are blind or partially sighted, and those who are neurodiverse.

The petition states:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to respond to the consultation 'pavement parking: options for change' and begin the process of instituting a default ban on pavement parking across England.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of councillors representing wards in the Manchester, Gorton constituency

Declares that parking on the pavement has a significant negative impact on people who are mobility impaired, blind or partially sighted, are neurodivergent, and parents and children.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to respond to the consultation 'pavement parking: options for change' and begin the process of instituting a default ban on pavement parking across England.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002834]

Dental Care: Durham

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Ruth Edwards.)*

6.53 pm

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab): Vast areas of our country are increasingly described as "dental deserts", places where not a single dental practice is accepting new NHS patients, and County Durham is one such place. We in Durham have witnessed dental services decay at an alarming rate. In my constituency today, there will be children sat in classrooms struggling to concentrate because of something as preventable as toothache. So it is hardly surprising that tooth decay is now the leading reason for children being admitted to accident and emergency in our country.

This scandal is not unique to Durham or the north-east; it is a problem everywhere. In 2023, dentistry is available on the NHS on paper but not in practice. The British Dental Association has described NHS dentistry as entering its final act. The horrifying experiences of my constituents, which I will outline, will certainly strengthen that claim, but before I turn to my constituents, let me state a chilling fact: Britain has poorer oral health than any other developed economy.

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): The hon. Lady raises an important point about children's dentistry. Does she agree that prevention is better than cure? Would she welcome a return to dentistry in schools?

Mary Kelly Foy: Of course, prevention is better than cure, and that is one of the reasons why so many children have to go to A&E. If problems were identified and prevented in young children, there would not be the cost implication for services further down the line. In an ideal world, we would have dentists in schools.

As I said, Britain has the poorest oral healthcare among developed countries. Can the Minister honestly say that we have genuine preventive oral healthcare in our country? Over the past 13 years, dentistry has become unaffordable and unavailable for many of my constituents. Nearly 400 have contacted me in dismay at their recent experiences. I thank them for their contributions and I hope the Minister can give them some reassurance today.

My constituents know that the problem is not with the dentists themselves. They know that dentists are trying their best for their patients. The problem lies at the Government's door. In the time that I have, I can share only a portion of the pain and suffering that my constituents have had to endure. One moved to Durham over four and a half years ago but still cannot find an NHS dentist, despite being told after a kidney transplant that it was vital that they had regular dental check-ups to monitor their health. Now they have a broken tooth and simply cannot afford to fix it.

Another constituent told me how she had to borrow money to afford a private appointment. She is now 30 weeks pregnant and exempt from dental charges, but her exemption is worthless as there are no appointments available for her. A young girl in my constituency tripped over and shattered her teeth. Her family contacted me because they could not find a dentist to help her. Luckily, after I reported the case on social media, a local dentist was kind enough to help her out, but our health system should not be based on charity. Constituents have also contacted me about do-it-yourself dentistry. In case the Minister is unaware, that is when people fit their own fillings and extract their own teeth without anaesthetic or any professional training.

I have raised the alarming experience of my constituent Ray in the Chamber before, but I do so again because his case underlines why access to dentistry should be not a luxury, but an integral part of our health system. Ray was unable to find an NHS dental appointment, so, out of utter frustration, he decided to go private. Following his appointment, Ray was diagnosed with oral cancer, for which he is now receiving treatment. As there is a cost of living crisis, we have a duty to ask, what if Ray had not been able to pay for private treatment? What if the cancer had continued to go undetected? Frankly, Ray might not be here today. It is morally wrong that Ray was put in that position. No one in my constituency —or anywhere, for that matter—should be put in that position.

Why is this happening? My visit to a dental practice in Gilesgate this week provided some of the answers. The practice has just one dentist working two days a week seeing NHS patients, and it has 10,000 patients on its books. It does not take a genius to work out why my constituents cannot see a dentist. It is clear why dentists are closing their doors to NHS patients, and it is certainly not because of a lack of demand. The problem, which the BDA has identified, is that the unreformed NHS dental contract means that dentists are pushed into the private sector to keep their practices afloat financially. As one dentist said to me:

> "Every day I'm providing some treatment for nothing or at a loss—working the best I can, caring for NHS patients the best I can within the dental contract."

He also went on to say that the Government are clearly winding down NHS dentistry in the hope that the public will accuse dentists of being greedy.

The exodus of dentists is clear for all to see—except, it seems, the Government, who continue to deny there is a crisis in NHS dentistry.

7 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Ruth Jones.)*

Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. Given that dentists are so hard pressed and are trying their best to fit in NHS patients, in light of all the problems they are facing, does she agree that they deserve our greatest respect, admiration and thanks? I am very fortunate that I have been at my dentist's practice for 52 years, but they are struggling.

Mary Kelly Foy: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. The dentists that I have spoken to recently all want to help NHS patients, but the way the contracts are designed, it is not worth their while, and of course they have to make a living.

I mentioned that I made a point of order yesterday regarding the Prime Minister, who has repeatedly claimed that there are "500 more dentists" in the NHS. However,

[Mary Kelly Foy]

following a freedom of information request, we now know that the number of dentists in the NHS fell by nearly 700 last year. The number of dentists has also fallen since the pandemic and is at its lowest level in a decade.

Diagnosing the causes of the problem is not complicated. As I mentioned at the beginning, Britain has poorer oral health than any other developed economy. The system is also dysfunctional, and practices have handed back a record £400 million-worth of funding back to the Government because they do not have the capacity to meet the required targets.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend and neighbour agree that we have to see what the need is in each area? I contrast the current approach with when Labour were in power in Durham: we brought in new capacity where we knew that areas did not have access to NHS dentistry.

Mary Kelly Foy: I thank my right hon. Friend for the intervention. We all know that there is huge demand and such a lack of NHS dentists out there that it is, I guess, a question of political will whether this problem is solved or not.

The absence of oral healthcare from our national debate about the future of the NHS is alarming. Dentistry is integral to our national health and therefore must be key to the NHS. Without proper investment in preventive healthcare such as dental check-ups, we cannot quickly treat oral cancers, nor can we stem the flow of people with dental problems into our already overcrowded accident and emergency departments.

I would be grateful if the Minister responded to the following questions. First, will he ensure that dentistry is properly represented in the governance structures of the NHS? Dentistry must be at the centre of the policy-making process, not an afterthought. Secondly, will the Government publish a comprehensive national dental strategy, one that is focused on prevention and tackling health inequalities? Thirdly, will he undertake meaningful reform of the NHS dental contract, which would stem the flow of dentists out of the system? Fourthly, will he work with the BDA on the previous points?

Finally, as I have said, I raised a point of order yesterday on the Prime Minister's claim that there are 500 extra dentists in the NHS. There are in fact 700 fewer dentists, not more. Unless I have missed something today, the Prime Minister has not corrected the record, as he is obliged to. Will the Minister finally correct the record on behalf of the Prime Minister?

I could have spoken for hours this evening, reading out the correspondence I have received from constituents. Each constituent's experience reflects a serious failure by this Government, so I implore the Minister not to insult the intelligence of the people of Durham, but to take this opportunity to accept that there is a crisis in NHS dentistry and to commit finally to meaningful reform.

7.4 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Neil O'Brien): Let me come directly to the questions asked by the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy). She called for a comprehensive dental reform plan. Yes, we will do that, and we will do it soon. She called for an overhaul of the 2006 contract. Yes, we will do that. Will we work with those at the BDA? Yes. In fact, I met them yesterday. We are keen to draw on their expertise.

I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the time for this important debate. It is absolutely my top priority right now to work at pace to try to address the significant problems in dentistry. I am not here to say that there is no problem; I am here to try to fix the problem as quickly as possible. We could debate the figure on dental activity all day, but the bottom line is that it is not high enough and we need to get it higher. To come directly to her point about correcting the record and so on, the latest published figures show that there are 1,473 more dentists than there were in 2010—about 6.5% more.

Mary Kelly Foy: NHS dentists?

Neil O'Brien: NHS dentists, yes. Activity is definitely going up—about a fifth more patients were seen in the year ending March than in the year before that—but it is still too low. That is a point on which we absolutely agree.

We have started—only started—to reform the contract. We have introduced more bands for units of dental activity to better reflect the fair cost of work so that there is fairness for dentists, and to incentivise more NHS work. We introduced the first ever minimum UDA value to help sustain practices where UDA values are low. That has implications for under-delivery in some bits of the country.

We are for the first time allowing dentists to do 110% delivery of their UDAs so that those who want to do more NHS dentistry can do more, with a requirement to update their availability on the NHS website. We have also started the process of making it easier for dentists to come to work in the UK. Last month, we brought into force legislation enabling the General Dental Council to increase the capacity of the overseas registration exam. We are also working with local partners around the country who have various ideas about creating new centres for dental development so that, in areas that do not have a dental school, we can get more people to train and remain, and dentists flow to the bits of the country where there the need is most acute.

Some of those reforms are starting to have effects. It is good that the reforms to split band 2 have been reasonably well received, as has the 110% option. The splitting of band 2 is being used and the proportion of band 2bs is going up. As I say, activity is going up, which is encouraging, but it is not high enough and needs to be higher still. The reforms that we have talked about so far have just been a start. I am under no illusions about the significant challenges to address, not just in Durham but across the whole country.

The forthcoming dental plan will build on those initial steps to go further on improving the payment model and those initial banding changes, especially focusing on improving access for new patients, which is a particular problem. We want to consider how we address historical UDA valuations—they are stuck in time in 2006 and are, in some cases, unfair—and look fundamentally at how we make NHS work more attractive.

Peter Gibson: I thank the Minister for his engagement with me on dentistry in my constituency, and I welcome the reforms that he is talking about, but as he has just mentioned UDAs, could he say something about the disparity of UDA rates across a region? That disparity means that a large practice can concentrate its efforts in areas with higher UDA rates rather than in areas with lower UDA rates.

Neil O'Brien: My hon. Friend is quite right. Some of those disparities, which can occur from one end of the street to the other, are extremely hard to justify, hence the introduction of the minimum UDA rate and why we are looking at going further. He is completely correct. Funnily enough, as well as coming to improving access to treatment, I was just about to respond to his earlier point about prevention and his rather brilliant idea about what more we could do in schools. We are, following the conversations we have had, actively considering that.

I thank the hon. Member for City of Durham for her important work in securing this important debate.

Mary Kelly Foy: It feels as if the Minister is coming to the end of his speech, but I would really like him to correct the record. In my point of order yesterday, I said that the Prime Minister has on seven occasions said that there are 500 more NHS dentists, when there are in fact 700 fewer dentists. If the Minister has met the British Dental Association, it will have pointed that fact out to him. Could he please correct the record, or may I ask you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for advice on how we can encourage the Prime Minister to correct the record before the House rises tomorrow?

Neil O'Brien: I have already read out the statistics. I will not read them out again, and I do not think there is a need to correct the record. The statistics that the hon. Lady is drawing on are incomplete, because there is effectively a two-month lag between activity and the need to report that activity. Drawing on such incomplete information does not give the full picture, so I caution her against doing so.

First, I encourage the hon. Lady to wait for the official data in the usual way. Secondly, we are looking to improve that official data by, indeed, working with and responding to concerns raised by the BDA. I do not think that headcount is a sensible measure with the workforce. There are more people doing NHS work than there were in 2010. What we are really interested in is the total amount of activity, which is best measured by the total number of UDAs being delivered. As I have said, that total amount of activity is going up. In the last month for which we have data, it had gone up from 85% in March 2022 to about 101% in March 2023, but it is still not high enough. Although the trend is positive and dentists are doing more NHS work, the point of agreement here is that that needs to improve further.

Mr Kevan Jones: I am sorry, but the Minister cannot have it both ways. First, the population of this country has increased since 2010 and we need to measure the number of dentists against the size of the population. The other thing is that he can talk about UDAs, but if people are in an NHS dentist desert, as is the case in Durham, it does not matter if the number has gone up elsewhere. If people do not have access to a dentist, they do not have access to a dentist and therefore cannot be treated.

Neil O'Brien: That point is clearly correct, but that is not to disagree with anything that I have just said.

Rather than getting into the weeds—I have already read out the official statistics—let me try to end on a note of agreement. We absolutely want to take further steps to ensure that we increase access to NHS dentistry where it is lowest and, as well as improving the service for patients right across the country and improving preventive activity, we want to see particularly rapid improvement in those areas, perhaps including that of the hon. Member for City of Durham, that have not had the level of access that we would want over recent times.

Question put and agreed to.

7.13 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 24 May 2023

[PHILIP DAVIES *in the Chair*]

Private Rented Sector: Regulation

9.30 am

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered regulation of the private rented sector.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I am grateful to have secured time for a debate on this matter, which continues to directly affect all our constituents. I pay tribute to my constituents in Liverpool, Walton who continue to be the innocent victims of the UK's broken housing system, and I commend stakeholders including the Merseyside Law Centre, the Vauxhall Community Law and Information Centre, ACORN Liverpool at the local level, and the excellent Renters Reform Coalition at the national level.

The private rented sector continues to be dominated by insecure tenure, increasingly unaffordable rents, poor housing quality and the ever-present threat of homelessness. No one in this House should underestimate the dislocating and exhausting experience of being removed from one's home.

I am unsure whether anyone in this House has received a section 21 notice, or has felt unable to complain about damp, mould or other poor conditions for fear of a retaliatory eviction. I am unsure whether anyone in this House has had to endure the stress of having only two months to find a new property in a chaotic and punishing market—or to search for a new school for their children, a new doctor, dental surgery or other basic services that we take for granted—following the receipt of a section 21 notice. What I am sure of is that the Government were absolutely right to ban section 21 evictions, alongside taking other measures in the Renters (Reform) Bill, to correct the power imbalance between landlords and tenants; but we must not forget what the cost of delay and inaction has been. To illustrate that, I will discuss just one of my constituents.

My constituent received a section 21 notice through the post, which gave her two months to vacate the property. The landlord gave two reasons for the eviction: he was looking at increasing rental income and was also looking to sell the property. My constituent has two children, a daughter aged seven and a son aged four, who has a severe learning disability and is non-verbal. Despite that, at the start of June, she and her family will become homeless. I invite the Minister to hear directly from my constituent about the impact of that eviction on her and her family's mental and physical health. I would be happy for my office to make contact with her office to facilitate that.

The measures in the Renters (Reform) Bill will come too late for that constituent, but we can now work to ensure that no other constituent faces the same crushing uncertainty. Thankfully, after a four-year delay following the announcement of the Renters (Reform) Bill, the Government have finally found time to introduce that important piece of legislation. I stand ready and willing to work with colleagues from across the House to ensure that the Bill makes the private rented sector as fair as possible and gives local authorities resources to enable them to regulate the sector effectively for the benefit of all our constituents.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this really important debate; he is making a powerful case. My Brighton constituency is one of the most expensive places to rent outside London, and my constituents are being ripped off daily. Does he agree that there is a big gap in the Renters (Reform) Bill—which is very welcome, if very late—when it comes to more enforcement powers for local authorities to target rogue landlords, and also this outrageous discrimination whereby blanket bans on renting to people with children or those who rely on benefits are still allowed? Those loopholes absolutely must be closed now. It is not good enough for the Minister to say, "We're going to do it sometime in the future."

Dan Carden: I am grateful for my colleague's intervention. I will touch on both those points in some detail, and I hope the Minister will respond and that we can work together to see the Bill strengthened over time.

I will use the rest of the time I have available today to cover actions that could be taken to ensure that the reforms were robust enough to provide renters with real security in their homes. I aim to do that in the spirit of genuine co-operation, and there is considerable appetite across the House to make the legislation as effective as possible. I want to cover three primary areas in which policy could be improved: in the Bill itself, on action related to enforcement, and addressing the crisis around affordability.

As I have outlined, the abolition of section 21 evictions is a much welcome step, but the Government must go further to guarantee that private housing providers do not use other routes to subject renters to unfair eviction. Landlords can continue to reclaim possession of their properties in the case of a sale, or if they or a family member wishes to move into a property. However, under the Bill, following an eviction on those grounds, landlords can re-let their properties after three months. That period is too short, and it will not act as a proper deterrent to landlords who seek to exploit the abolition of section 21 evictions. Therefore, the Government must extend the no re-letting period to a minimum of 12 months. If they do not, renters will not feel the assurance and safety that are intended to be at the heart of the reforms.

Further, will the Minister explain what recourse tenants will have if they are evicted unlawfully on those grounds? Can tenants apply for a rent repayment order, for example? If not, what other forms of compensation are available? The proposed two-month notice period and six-month initial protected period leave those evicted on legitimate no-fault grounds in the same position as they are under section 21. The notice period should be extended to four months at an absolute minimum.

Such a proposal is not new to the Government, because in the midst of the covid pandemic, the section 21 notice was extended to four months. I can tell the Minister that the situation in the housing market has deteriorated, not improved, so it is only logical that the Government look at that proposal and seriously consider

[Dan Carden]

extending the period again. The benefits are obvious: if tenants were given more time to find somewhere to live, that would spare the taxpayer and tenants the cost of homelessness, which is devastating both financially and mentally.

Organisations including Shelter have expressed concern about the amendments that the Renters (Reform) Bill will make to homelessness legislation. Private renters who receive a possession notice will no longer have the right to immediate help from the council to avoid homelessness. That is because the law will no longer specify when help to prevent homelessness should be available to private renters. Instead, it will leave that to the discretion of local authorities, and that despite the Government knowing that early intervention is paramount in protecting tenants and preventing homelessness. Will the Government move urgently to address that weakness in the Bill, which directly undermines the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the rough sleeping strategy? We should be boosting and improving protections related to homelessness prevention, not weakening them.

I want to speak about enforcement. The property portal and the ombudsman are positive elements of the Bill, but they will help to drive up standards only if the Government arm local authorities with the means to properly investigate and enforce. There is a postcode lottery in the sector, and enforcement action depends on how diligent and well resourced local authorities are. In my local authority area, Liverpool, we have a selective licensing scheme that aims to proactively regulate the private rented sector.

Despite the Government shrinking the area to which the licensing scheme applied in 2020, the team at Liverpool City Council has reported that, out of 2,308 inspections, 917 disrepair matters have been identified, as well as 1,053 breaches of licensing conditions. This is despite the National Residential Landlords Association previously describing the scheme as a "waste of time". The local authority looks to work in co-operation with licence holders where possible, but unfortunately some enforcement action will always be inevitable. The council describes the number of referrals to the service as "substantial". It says that resourcing and recruitment remain a challenge. Will the Minister commit to ringfencing resources to ensure that new regulations can be properly enforced through the property portal and ombudsman?

There is a crisis of affordability in the private rented sector, and yet calls continue to be ignored by Government. Research by Rightmove has shown that, in the past year alone, rents have risen at their fastest rate in 16 years, increasing by an average of 11% across Great Britain, yet I have never heard anyone on the Government Benches express concern that rent increases have contributed to inflation. That argument is often made when it comes to pay restraint or welfare payments, but why are landlords never asked to heed the same advice? These price increases represent an emergency, and the Government are moving too slowly to combat these rises.

There have been five housing Ministers in the past year. It seems that private renters are the losers from years of indifference and delay by the Government. Housing generally is already the biggest expense for renters. According to Crisis, private tenants on the lowest 10% of incomes are facing combined rents, food and utility costs that exceed their total incomes by 43%. The impact of further rent increases will be deep. According to Government figures, between January and March 2023, the number of section 21 claims increased by a huge 52%, and there was a 16% rise in non-section 21 evictions, the highest since the data began in 2009. The rent tribunal still continues to allow rents to go higher than the landlord may initially request, which acts as a major disincentive to using it. Will the Minister work with me to increase constituents' means to challenge rent increases and improve the utility of the rent tribunal? If action is not taken to combat rent increases, landlords will simply evict tenants by pricing them out of staying in the property.

Caroline Lucas: It is generous of the hon. Gentleman to give way again; he is making a powerful case. Does he agree that we also need to look at rent controls, which are used in many other countries without a problem? We simply cannot allow rents to spiral out of all control. People will never be able to earn enough to have a mortgage, and they cannot even earn enough now to pay their own bills, so we need something far stronger even that what he is describing.

Dan Carden: Absolutely; I would back the hon. Lady's calls for the Government to look at rent controls and the best international comparisons, because this is an issue not just for our constituents, but for the economy and inflation, and in the end it hurts all of us.

The Minister could also move to increase the local housing allowance. LHA rates have been frozen since 2019. Following the huge increase in inflation and house prices, this freezing means that private tenants face an ever-increasing gap between housing benefit and their actual rent. What discussions are taking place within Government to modify that? Inaction is prolonging and deepening homelessness. Further, there are White Paper commitments missing from the version of the Bill that was recently published. Where are the measures to outlaw blanket bans on renting to those in receipt of housing benefit? The Government have recognised that this discrimination is wrong, but measures to address it are missing from the Bill. I would appreciate some guidance from the Minister on that point in her response.

I will conclude by discussing an important amendment that I intend to table to the Renters (Reform) Bill. Awaab Ishak was a two-year-old boy killed by mould in a social housing flat. Unfortunately, Awaab's story echoes much of the casework that comes through my office—and, I am sure, the offices of many Members across the House. It followed Awaab's social landlord repeatedly failing to fix the mould problem in his family's flat, blaming the problems on his family's lifestyle.

In response, the Secretary of State moved quickly to table amendments to the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill to impose timeframes on landlords to investigate hazards and make repairs. That was absolutely the right move, and the Government must now put the same protections in place for private renters. As the Citizens Advice report, "Damp, cold and full of mould", has shown, 2.7 million renting households in this country, including 1.6 million children, are living in damp, cold or mouldy homes. These conditions have a disastrous effect on people's physical and mental health.

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab) *rose—*

Philip Davies (in the Chair): Marsha De Cordova.

Abena Oppong-Asare: Abena. I thank my hon. Friend for putting forward this important debate. I have a huge number of housing cases that involve constituents of mine who live in damp and mouldy properties, and I have had responses from housing associations saying that that is down to their lifestyle, which is factually incorrect. Constituents are also facing soaring rents. Like my hon. Friend, I want to see a proper ombudsman in place for constituents living in private rented accommodation. Does he agree that the private renters charter will make things a lot fairer for individuals up and down the country?

Dan Carden: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention. I agree with her, and I hope that this Bill is an opportunity for us to ensure that the Government can put more protections in place for our constituents.

The conditions in which people live can have a disastrous effect on their physical and mental health, but tenants are left with little choice than to stay in homes that make them ill, and even kill them. Will the Minister meet with me to discuss how we can bring the private sector in line with the social sector and ensure that landlords deal with serious hazards in privately rented homes in a timely manner? Sadly, as we have witnessed, the cost of failing to do so can be fatal. I will leave the Minister with that, and I look forward to working with her and colleagues on this hugely important area of policy.

9.48 am

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden) on securing this debate. On a more negative note, housing is a constituency issue on which I receive a vast amount of correspondence. I am grateful to several local organisations, including Citizens Advice Stockport, Stockport Tenants Union and Stockport Homes, which do a lot to support tenants who might be struggling and homeless people in our constituency and town. They do a really important job, but the bottom line is that those organisations are a last resort. The Government have failed, and they continue to fail.

It also happens to be the case that when issues arise in the private sector it is always the social housing sector that must pick up the pieces, at a considerable cost in terms of emergency and temporary accommodation. I have cases in my inbox about landlords who are serving section 21 notices because they know they can get more rent from a new tenant. I have cases in which the housing standards are very poor, with damp and mould—my hon. Friend mentioned a couple of such cases in his inbox. People have come to my office who have an informal agreement with their landlord with regard to their tenancy, which offers them zero security and has a negative impact on their physical and mental health.

Members on both sides of the Chamber will be aware of people in their constituency who cannot afford deposits for a tenancy and who can forget about saving up for a deposit for a mortgage because their wages are so low. Rents keep going up, and they keep getting priced out of tenancies, mortgages and secure housing, which I believe is a fundamental human right—I am sure many Members will agree that secure, safe, clean housing is a fundamental human right. People with pets are often disadvantaged when looking for tenancies; I have had several cases on that issue. The local housing allowance simply is not adequate in my borough. The median rent value in Stockport is much higher than the local housing allowance in the two broad rental market areas, so it simply is not good enough.

I would like to mention a couple of cases. One constituent said that his son had to enter a bidding war to get his apartment in Stockport—not a house, an apartment—which was advertised at £850 per calendar month. At the end of the bidding war, the agreement was made at £880 per calendar month. I appreciate that £30 a month might not be a lot for some people, but for a lot of people struggling in the current cost of living crisis it is a large amount of money. If we multiply that by 12, it is a significant amount for many people on low wages. Another constituent had his rent increased by a huge £300 per calendar month, and the landlord still refused to undertake essential repairs to the property. That sort of behaviour is simply shameful. I do not see much action from the Government, and I do not see a credible plan to tackle these issues.

I would like to mention one more case, which is that of a single person earning less than £30,000 a year who does not qualify for any help and has lived in a tiny one-bedroom flat of 42 square metres for many years. The property has not been updated in many years. It has dated storage heaters, which are very expensive to run during the daytime, and rent increases annually by 3%. However, the constituent has been told that this year it will increase by 5%. She feels that she has no security and stability. In addition to the rent going up by 5%, she was issued an affordability assessment by the landlord's estate agent, which implied that if she was not able to meet the threshold, she would be asked to leave. When questioned, the landlord's agent said that they are

"employed by Landlords to protect their assets and to minimise their risks".

That sort of behaviour has to be labelled as shameful. Protecting an asset should not be more important than someone having the opportunity to live in safe, clean and secure housing. This person told me that she cannot find alternative affordable accommodation, and she has a cat, which many landlords will not accept. That goes back to my point that many people who have pets are simply excluded from the market.

The average rent in Stockport is £850 per calendar month, which is almost a 9% increase since 2021. Most people in England have not seen their wages go up by 9% since 2021. Increasing rents and the cost of living crisis are adding up. Last year, Citizens Advice reported that rent growth was at its fastest in five years, and one in five expect their rent to rise this year. Additionally, it estimated that 425,000 renters are in arrears, owing an average of £937 each. That is almost £1,000, which is a significant amount of money for anyone.

A point has to be made about the demographics. Young people and people from working-class backgrounds are now losing at least 30% of their monthly income to rent. The Government's Renters (Reform) Bill is a positive step, but there are lots of loopholes, and there have to be assurances on a number of factors in the Bill.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does the hon. Member agree that one factor that should be taken into account is Government support for greater availability of good-quality social housing, which would help to suppress the increase in rents? Allied with that, the Bill and the tax regime should pursue bad landlords, support good landlords and protect tenants at the same time.

Navendu Mishra: I agree, although my experience is that Stockport Homes, one of the major local social housing providers, has been struggling to secure properties because their cost has risen significantly. Recent census data shows that Stockport has seen a 48% increase in property values in the past five years, whereas the average in England is 20%. For social housing providers, securing or building new properties, particularly with the rising cost of building materials, is a significant financial commitment that many of them are not able to make. I agree that bad landlords need to be pursued. I do not think the enforcement regime is good enough. Of course, there are good landlords out there—I am not going to dispute that—but they often get tarred with the same brush that bad landlords leave us with.

The Renters (Reform) Bill is a positive step, but there are many loopholes. The rules around section 21, on landlords evicting tenants by claiming to move families in, need to be looked at. There is no provision on rising rents. It is unclear what the penalties will be for landlords who break the rules. There are so many loopholes that we need a serious discussion about how to deliver for people across England.

I have already mentioned the statistics on the average rent values in my constituency. I would like to conclude by making two further points. Owner-occupiers spend 18% of their household income on mortgage payments, while private renters spend 31% of their household income on rent. That is simply unfair, and it is also unsustainable. It is evident from the data for constituencies across England that many—not all—private landlords are making large amounts of money out of the cost of living crisis.

Yesterday, Labour MPs, along with those of several opposition parties, voted to end the unfair leasehold system. Labour is serious about reforming the housing sector; it is not just warm words. I am sorry to say that the Government have failed and continue to let down renters consistently, year after year. In 13-plus years of this Government, we have not seen serious action. I hope the Minister will address these points.

9.57 am

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden) on securing this debate and setting the scene so powerfully. May I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests?

My Bath constituency is a special place to live, but that comes at a very high cost. Soaring rents have forced out many who consider Bath home. The average monthly rent in Bath and North East Somerset has risen by more than £200 in the past three years. The Government have consistently failed to stand up for the fifth of UK households who privately rent. Legislation has not kept up with demand.

There are many responsible landlords, but there are also those who are unfit to be part of the sector. They provide a public service and we must regulate them as such. The ban on section 21 evictions was first promised four years ago. Since then, more than 54,000 households in England have been threatened with a no-fault eviction, and almost 17,000 households have been evicted by bailiffs. Research by Shelter and YouGov has found that private renters who complained to their landlords, letting agent or local council were two and half times more likely to be handed an eviction notice in the past three years.

Although I welcome the Government's decision to introduce a ban on no-fault evictions, I am appalled that it has taken so long. Even now, we do not have a date for the Second Reading of the Renters (Reform) Bill. In passing that Bill, we must not enable no-fault evictions through the back door. I am concerned that the Government will allow evictions for anything that is "capable" of causing nuisance or annoyance. That is clearly open to abuse, and needs further clarification. Tenants will continue to be victimised if robust regulation is not in place.

Liberal Democrats have long fought hard to ban revenge evictions, where rogue landlords evict tenants who make complaints. I ask the Minister to implement provision on the specific set of circumstances in which a landlord can evict a tenant. The law on illegal eviction must be reformed alongside section 21. Court backlogs mean that landlords must wait for a court order and may be tempted to break the law. Landlords have been known to get rid of tenants' possessions or cut off utilities such as water and heating. That is an awful practice that reflects the contempt in which some landlords hold their tenants.

We have talked quite a lot about the relationship between landlords and tenants. I have drawn attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests because I am a landlord. I believe that the best way to solve the problem is to create an atmosphere in which landlords and tenants treat each other with respect. That scene has to be set by the landlord, who must respect the tenants living in their property rather than holding them in contempt, as many landlords do, and using them for money. Homes that are rented out must be seen as homes for people who live in them, rather than as just a way of making money.

The current illegal eviction law is complex and rarely enforced. Police officers are unaware of their powers to stop illegal evictions and often do not intervene. If section 21 is abolished, we risk some rogue landlords evading the courts and taking matters into their own hands. I hope the Minister will confirm that the Government intend to reform the law on illegal eviction to make it modern, effective and easy to understand. I have met the Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the hon. Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan), and a group of lawyers who have raised concerns about the matter. I hope to hear about some of the Government's progress in looking at reforming the Bill on illegal eviction at the same time.

Irresponsible landlords cannot be allowed to use rent rises to force out tenants. Many of my constituents have faced rent increases that left them with no choice but to leave their homes. An average couple spend 21% of their income on private rent. A survey by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities shows

that 31% of people in my region of the south-west are already struggling to pay rent. When will the Government address unaffordable rent? People simply cannot cope with arbitrary rent increases, which can be as high as 60%.

We Liberal Democrats would change the default rental period from one year to three years. Rents would only rise with inflation in that period. I accept that more discussions are needed on the student housing market, in which rental periods typically last only a year or two, but the overall policy would give many tenants the thing they are missing the most, which is certainty.

It is not just the price of rent that concerns my constituents. We have already heard about the terrible conditions in many private rental properties. That is an appalling open secret. The UK has some of the oldest and coldest houses in Europe. More than half of tenants had issues with damp or mould last year. It is the same in my Bath constituency: 31% had problems with hot water or heating and 21% of privately rented homes do not meet the decent homes standard. People are trapped in uninhabitable homes. We need tougher inspection and much higher standards.

We Liberal Democrats would introduce a new regulator for all private renters and require all private landlords with more than 25 homes to register with it. The regulator would have the power to subject landlords to regular inspections, and to inspect properties at shorter notice. Everyone should have the right to a safe and secure place to live. It is a national scandal that people are trapped in insecure and uninhabitable homes. The Government must not delay action any more.

10.3 am

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Davies. Before I start, I would like to put on record my disappointment and anger at the misnaming of my wonderful colleague and dear friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare). The frequent misnaming of particularly my black women colleagues in this place is not okay and needs to stop.

Philip Davies (in the Chair): As the Chairman in this debate, I apologise profusely to the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare). I hope that she will accept that genuine apology. It is no one else's responsibility other than mine. The shadow Minister is quite right to draw attention to that.

Sarah Owen: Thank you, Mr Davies. I will move on.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden) on securing this incredibly important debate. He has put forward compelling points that the Minister needs to hear, and I hope she will take them back to the Secretary of State, because we will not stop pushing until justice is granted for renters.

Labour believes that housing is a human right. Everyone, regardless of whether they are a homeowner, a leaseholder or a tenant, is entitled to a decent, safe and secure affordable home. Housing that is fit for habitation should never be a bank account-emptying privilege, but under 13 years of Tory rule that is exactly what it has become.

We have all been let down by negligent housing policy, from the persistent inability to end the feudal farce of the leasehold system to the abandonment of housing targets altogether, and from the economic experiment of the former Prime Minister and Chancellor, which sent mortgages soaring, to the shattered promise to end rough sleeping. Whole towns are taken up by second homes for the privileged few, while families are holed up in B&B bedrooms.

Our housing crisis is not that complicated. It is not an issue that only specialists in Whitehall can understand or that Ministers can gatekeep. It is quite plain to see for all of us that our Government do not prioritise building homes, and that the homes that we have built are not up to a decent enough standard. That is a failure of production and regulation. The Renters (Reform) Bill does not come close to meeting the scale of the problem. We need boldness, creativity and backbone if we are to fix the rotten and decrepit private rented sector.

Poor housing is directly linked to poor physical and mental health. Mould and damp can aggravate or even create chest issues, and overcrowding can cause anxiety and depression, which can lead to the breakdown of relationships. One in five privately rented homes do not meet the decent homes standard, and one in 10 have a category 1 hazard that poses a risk of serious harm. That is a shameful statistic. The knock-on impact on school attendance, workplace absence and NHS resources cannot be overstated. Surely the Minister agrees that providing decent affordable housing would provide an economic boost in a variety of ways, so why is that reality not reflected in Government policy?

Wera Hobhouse: Students often do not have a good reputation, but they often have to live in appalling conditions and they never really have a way of addressing the issue. In Bath, that is a particular issue. Does the hon. Lady agree that we should also look at the appalling conditions in which some students are forced to live?

Sarah Owen: It behoves all of us to represent everybody who lives in rented accommodation, whether they are students, pensioners, workers, people who are not working at all or families. I will talk more about that.

Only last week, more than three and a half years after it was first promised, did we finally see the Secretary of State's Renters (Reform) Bill. We welcome that long-overdue legislation and look forward to engaging constructively on its development, but it is clear that in improving it we will have our work cut out for us. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton was right to highlight the loopholes in the Bill. He mentioned unfair evictions and spoke powerfully and movingly about the heartache and uncertainty caused by section 21 notices, which are a leading cause of homelessness in England. The Government's delay since first committing to ending them in April 2019, more than four years ago, has resulted in 60,000 households being threatened with homelessness by section 21 notices.

Labour and our stakeholders welcome the Bill's steps towards scrapping section 21 evictions, but there remain ways for ill-intentioned landlords to remove tenants unjustly. The Government must take steps swiftly to amend that flaw in their legislation. In the short term, we call on them to extend notice periods to a legal minimum of four months, with firm, punitive measures for landlords who do not abide by the law.

[Sarah Owen]

We are not naive about the fact that some evictions are warranted. Landlords who are dealing with antisocial behaviour or even criminal activity from their tenants must be supported in reclaiming their properties. We recognise that robust and effective grounds such as those cannot be diminished. However, the Government have yet to assure us that grounds could not be exploited by bad-faith landlords to continue their unjust evictions. Will the Minister provide any detail on how the Government will defend against that?

The Bill also lacks support for local authorities to act on injustices in their local private rented sector, as has been mentioned throughout the debate. We expect measures that would strengthen enforcement powers, require councils to report on enforcement activity and allow them to cap the advance rent that local landlords can ask for. The Government owe local authorities an explanation of why they have neglected to give them the muscle to ensure that the new legislation is successfully enacted.

It is also incredibly troubling that the Bill does not include a ban on landlords refusing to rent to benefit claimants or those with children. That allows discriminatory "no DSS" practices to continue. No children? This is hardly a family-friendly policy, is it? I would be grateful if the Minister assured us today that this oversight will be reviewed and amended.

Navendu Mishra: I receive a lot of correspondence from people who have pets and are not able to get a secure tenancy. Often, they are people who live on their own with their pet, and they do not have a family member or are housebound. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government need to strengthen the legislation in relation not only to people on benefits but to people who have pets? There is a whole other debate to be had about people who have no recourse to public funds.

Sarah Owen: I thank my hon. Friend for that really important intervention, and he is absolutely right. What we should see from this legislation is the removal of barriers to good housing for all renters, but what we are actually seeing is, unfortunately, opportunities being missed. I sincerely hope that the Minister takes on board some of the suggestions that have been made today.

When it comes to affordability—or, in reality, unaffordability—the freezing of local housing allowance has only exacerbated the problem, as my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton explained. In many parts of the country—including, as we have heard, in the constituencies of the hon. Members for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) and for Bath (Wera Hobhouse); in the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Stockport (Navendu Mishra), for Erith and Thamesmead and for Liverpool, Walton; and in my own constituency in Luton—rents in the private rented sector are surging and the costs involved with moving are soaring. By making the shameful decision to freeze LHA yet again, the Government have pushed millions of hard-pressed tenants to breaking point, with the risk of mass arrears and evictions that that entails—more evictions, more temporary accommodation and more people sleeping on the streets.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport highlighted the situation when it comes to affordability. It is becoming harder for our constituents not only to find an affordable place to rent but to stay for the long term. Some of our lowest-paid workers face rent rises of 30% to 40% within their tenancy. Labour is exploring options to address this, starting with consulting landlord and tenant groups on how best to stabilise rent increases within tenancies. I would be grateful to hear from the Minister what discussions she has had on the issue. We do not want to see people continually having to jump from place to place, finding somewhere affordable that turns out to be overcome with mould or somewhere decent that then has its rent doubled. That is no way to live.

It does not have to be this way: Labour has other ideas. Our housing White Paper, to be produced within our first 100 days if we are elected to government, will set out how longer-term tenancies will become the norm, because we know that tenancy security is key for a settled life and that home must be a place where we can relax, knowing that another catastrophe is not around the corner.

We are ambitious about revolutionising what "home" means in Britain. We stand for building new homes. That is why the Shadow Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), proudly has the mantra of "council housing, council housing, council housing", and it is why Labour-led councils, such as my own in Luton, are building homes. They are building eco-friendly council homes, fit for the future.

We will help more first-time buyers to get on the housing ladder; we will abolish the scandalous leasehold scheme; and we will introduce a national register of landlords and licensing for letting agents, as well as a legally binding decent homes standard, updated for the next decade. We will afford new rights and protections to tenants, including the right to have pets, the right to make reasonable alterations, the right to request speedy repairs and, as has been mentioned, mandatory longer notice periods from landlords.

Labour will tilt the balance of power back towards renters by introducing a powerful new private renters charter, to make renting fairer, more secure and more affordable. We will achieve this by finally bringing forward an effectively regulated private rented sector. This is what our constituents need and it is certainly what they deserve.

10.14 am

The Minister of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Rachel Maclean): It is a great pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Davies, and to have the opportunity to make my remarks. Of course, I thank the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden) for securing this debate. I also thank the other Members who have spoken, who I will turn to in just a moment. They have spoken passionately about the need for greater security for tenants and improved standards in the private rented sector.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for bringing his considerable experience to this debate. He has a long history of campaigning and speaking on this issue in Parliament, and I say to him and to any Member that of course the Government will listen to constructive dialogue from all parties in the House. That is the right thing to do as we go forward and get this legislation right.

I thank the other Members who have spoken—the hon. Members for Stockport (Navendu Mishra), for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell), for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) and for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare)—who all made useful contributions. We all agree there is a considerable amount of consensus that we need to provide a better deal for renters, which is exactly what we are doing through the Renters (Reform) Bill. Members have brought to the House's attention, again, the very good reasons why we need to act and are acting.

The private rented sector is the most expensive, least secure and lowest quality of all housing tenures. A fifth of renters pay a third of their income to live in substandard accommodation. That is the reality and it is unacceptable. We are determined to crack down on irresponsible and criminal landlords and to make the private rented sector a better place to live and work. That is why I am delighted to talk about the vital measures we are bringing forward to meet the needs of renters and good landlords.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton brought to my attention, as did other Members, the experiences of constituents. I assure him and the House that I have spoken to many tenants who have faced situations similar to the ones he described. I visited tenants in Leeds last week and saw for myself some of the conditions and why we need to act. It is worth reminding the House that the reforms are the biggest in a generation and the biggest in the sector for many years. They have been welcomed by tenants' groups, people who represent tenants, Shelter and many others that have been referenced by Members. They have also been welcomed by groups who represent landlords. It is important to get that balance right.

I know that feeling safe and secure in a home is vital to a person's wellbeing and so that they are able to put down roots in a community. The threat of a section 21 no-fault eviction with just two months' notice hangs over many renters and prevents them from complaining about poor standards. The Renters (Reform) Bill will deliver our manifesto commitment to end section 21 no-fault evictions. Tenants will be able to challenge poor standards without fear of retaliatory eviction. We will abolish fixed terms and move to periodic tenancies that allow either party to end the tenancy when they need to.

As Members have highlighted, there are legitimate reasons why landlords could or would need to regain their properties, which is why we are reforming the grounds so that they are fair, comprehensive and efficient. In future, landlords will be able to regain possession only if one of the grounds for possession defined in law applies. We will introduce a new ground for use when the landlord intends to sell the property and extend the existing moving-in ground so that it can also be used if close family members of the landlord intend to live in the property.

We have changed the rent arrears grounds so that they are fair and proportionate, striking a balance between protecting tenants' security and supporting landlords who face undue financial burdens. We have retained the existing mandatory rent arrears ground that allows a landlord to serve notice once a tenant is in two months' rent arrears, and introduced a new ground for repeated rent arrears.

To ensure that landlords can swiftly gain possession when a tenant's antisocial behaviour is causing problems for their neighbours and communities, we are allowing landlords to make a possession claim to the courts immediately, and we have lowered the discretionary ground to include behaviour capable of causing nuisance or annoyance. We are considering further changes to the way the courts handle antisocial behaviour possession cases, including in respect of prioritisation and the matters that judges must consider when deciding whether to award possession under the discretionary ground. There are other grounds, and I encourage Members to look at the information that the Government have published.

We understand that rent is likely to be a tenant's biggest monthly expense. It is important that tenants have notice of any rent rises so that they are able to plan effectively. Our reforms will simplify the system for tenants and landlords. All rent increases will take place via one mechanism. We will retain existing legislation that allows rent increases once per year in periodic tenancies, and increase the notice that landlords must give to two months, thereby giving tenants more time to plan and seek advice.

Our reforms will also prevent revenge or forced evictions by the small minority of landlords who may look to use rent hikes to force a tenant out once section 21 can no longer be used. That will create a fairer system that allows both parties to negotiate rents effectively, while protecting security of tenure. Where the landlord has served notice on the tenant to increase their rent, the tenant may refer the notice to the tribunal. The tribunal will assess what the landlord could expect to receive if re-letting the property on the open market and will determine the rent. That will help to avoid the large rent increases used by a minority of landlords as a back-door method of eviction. We will update the guidance to ensure that tribunal users have the confidence and information they need to engage with it effectively. That includes helping parties to understand how they can provide evidence of comparable rents.

The Conservative party does not support rent controls. Evidence suggests that they would discourage investment in the sector, lead to declining property standards, and be negative for both tenants and landlords. We are absolutely committed to outlawing the unacceptable discrimination against families with children and people in receipt of benefits through blanket bans, but we want to ensure that landlords retain the final say over who they rent to. Members have asked for more clarity on that, and we are carefully considering how we get it right. We will introduce legislation at the earliest opportunity.

Members raised local authority enforcement. We expect local councils to take a proactive approach to enforcement and make it a priority. Substantial civil penalties will be available if landlords fail to comply with our reforms. Local councils are able to keep the revenue they receive from civil penalties; it is ringfenced for further enforcement activity. In accordance with the new burdens doctrine, we will ensure that, where necessary, the net additional costs that fall on local councils as a result of our reforms are fully funded, and we will continue to explore how best to create a sustainable self-funding system over the long term, including through fees.

Members will be interested to hear that we are providing £14 million to 10 pathfinder projects that have been designed to build capacity and team capabilities and to

[Rachel Maclean]

test and disseminate innovative enforcement approaches. I am pleased that one of those pathfinder projects is being led by Liverpool City Council, which covers the constituency of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton. It is working with a number of other key players locally to create a multi-agency, intelligence-led model for proactive enforcement in the PRS. That will ensure that enforcement is streamlined more effectively, particularly against landlords engaged in serious criminality. I have seen for myself the effectiveness of the selective licensing scheme in Leeds, to which Members referred, and how effectively the housing teams work to deal with issues.

Navendu Mishra: The Minister is generous to give way. Will she address the point that, over the past 13 years, local authorities have lost hundreds of millions of pounds in central Government funding? My local authority in Stockport has lost a significant amount of money since 2010, when the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition came in.

The Government do not seem to have a sense of urgency in addressing the loopholes in the Renters (Reform) Bill and the crisis in the private rented sector. There are no Conservative Back Benchers in this debate; they must have either local authorities that are financially secure or tenancies that are long-term and reasonably priced.

Rachel Maclean: I gave way to the hon. Gentleman because I thought he was going to ask a question about the issues in front of me. I am happy to address them. I will continue my remarks, which will address the substantive issues of this debate.

Information is key when it comes to regulating effectively and efficiently. That is why the Bill will legislate for a new private rented sector database that will support the new privately rented property portal digital service. That service will support the Government's aim of reducing the number of non-decent rented homes by 50% by 2030, and will give local councils tools to drive criminal landlords out of the private rented sector. It will help landlords to understand their obligations and give tenants the information they need to make informed choices.

My team is working hard to develop the portal, which recently passed its Government Digital Service assessment. It was assessed against standards to ensure that it meets clear user needs, is simple to use, is designed securely to protect privacy, and uses tools and technology that are fit for purpose. We will take forward the development of that service and continue to engage with end users to ensure we get it right.

Abena Oppong-Asare: I welcome some of the proposals, particularly the private rented database, but one of my concerns is that some of my constituents in private rented accommodation are living in poor-quality housing, and there is nowhere for them to go that will advocate for them and take that further. It is particularly important to have some sort of ombudsman for the private rented sector so that constituents can take their cases further and hold private landlords to account.

Rachel Maclean: I hope the hon. Lady will listen carefully to what I am about to say: we will introduce a new PRS ombudsman to enable all private tenants to escalate complaints when their landlord has failed to resolve a legitimate complaint, which is exactly what the hon. Lady talked about. That complaint may relate to property standards, repairs, maintenance, and poor landlord practice or behaviour. That will give all tenants free access to justice, so that they have control over the standards and service they are paying for.

All private landlords who rent out property in England, including those who use a managing agent, will be required to join the ombudsman scheme. Landlords committed to providing a decent home and a good service to their tenants will benefit from a swift and impartial decision maker having the final say on their tenants' issues, maintaining tenant-landlord relationships and, ultimately, sustaining tenancies.

As we all know, pets can bring a huge amount of joy to their owners. That is why our reforms will ensure that private landlords do not unreasonably withhold consent when a tenant requests to have a pet in their home. We will give tenants the right to challenge unreasonable refusals. We know that some landlords are concerned about the potential of pets to cause damage; therefore, landlords will be able to require insurance covering pets, which will provide them with reassurance that any damage caused by a pet will be taken care of by the tenant, on whom responsibility for damage will fall. Alternatively, landlords could deduct damage costs from deposits, as is already possible.

Let me conclude—

Wera Hobhouse: Will the Minister give way?

Dan Carden: Will the Minister give way?

Rachel Maclean: I will not give way. Can I ask for your guidance, Mr Davies, because I believe the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton will have time to sum up at the end?

Dan Carden: I have a question for the Minister.

Rachel Maclean: I give way briefly.

Dan Carden: I am grateful to the Minister and I recognise that she has given a full response but, as she said she was concluding, I wanted to pick up on two points that I do not think she covered. I apologise if I am incorrect. The first point was on the ability of landlords to repossess properties if they declare they are going to sell them or if they or a family member are going to move in. They currently need to give only three months' notice; will the Department consider extending that to 12 months?

Secondly, I mentioned the Secretary of State's amendments to the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill to impose timeframes on landlords to investigate hazards and make repairs. I will table an amendment to the Renters (Reform) Bill; I would appreciate time with the Minister to discuss how we can use the Bill to ensure those protections in the private rented sector.

Rachel Maclean: I thank the hon. Gentleman. On his first point, we believe that we currently have the right balance. Of course, the Bill will proceed through the House. On his intention to table an amendment, I am of course happy to meet him to discuss that.

A number of Members referenced housing issues more generally. The Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson, the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen), referred to the affordable eco-homes being built by her local council. The House must be made aware—I am sure it is already—that those affordable homes are being built with support from the Conservative Government through the affordable homes programme. We are delivering homes all across the country.

Sarah Owen: Will the Minister give way?

Rachel Maclean: No. I need to wind up. This Conservative Government have made the provision of affordable housing part of our plan to build more homes across the country, including in Luton, so that we can provide aspiring homeowners with a step on to the housing ladder. The affordable homes programme is worth £11.5 billion and will deliver thousands of affordable homes to rent or buy.

The Government are committed to increasing the supply of social rented homes. A large number of the new homes delivered through the affordable homes programme will be for social rent. We have a strong record of building homes all over the country since we have been in Government. We intend to continue that.

I thank all Members for their contributions and look forward to working with colleagues from all parties as we take the Renters (Reform) Bill through Parliament.

10.28 am

Dan Carden: I thank the Minister for her response to the debate, and I thank all colleagues who contributed. Although there is a welcome for the legislation, which the Minister says is the biggest reform of the sector in a generation, there is a danger that it is a missed opportunity. The test will be the impact that it has on our constituents. Does it give them security in their homes? Does it rebalance the power inequality between landlords and tenants? Does it tackle the affordability crisis that exists across the sector? Does it deal with the millions of people, including children, who live in damp, squalid, unsafe houses across the country?

I look forward to following the legislation through the House and to seeking to amend and improve it. I am grateful for the time we have had for today's debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered regulation of the private rented sector.

10.30 am

Sitting suspended.

Network Rail: Doubledykes Crossing

11 am

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Doubledykes crossing and Network Rail.

Doubledykes Road is an ancient right of way in my constituency, linking the communities of Coaltown and Milton of Balgonie to the north, and Coaltown of Wemyss, East Wemyss and West Wemyss to the south. It crosses an area of farmland, other open land and some woodland that has been well used for centuries by walkers and cyclists. The road is known locally as Queen Mary's Road, in reference to it having been used by Mary Queen of Scots. While that story might be difficult to verify, it indicates how ancient the route is and the fact that for centuries the people of central Fife have regarded it as their public right to travel along the road any time they want to.

Doubledykes Road is certainly centuries older than the original Leven to Thornton railway, which opened in 1854. It was closed to passengers in 1969 and has not carried a train of any kind since 2001. The date 2001 is important, and I will explain why later. Throughout the time the railway operated, walkers and cyclists used Doubledykes level crossing to cross the line in safety, and I can personally testify to how well used the right of way and the crossing were on a number of occasions when I was walking or cycling through the area.

All that changed last year when Network Rail stunned local communities by announcing that, as part of the welcome, and indeed overdue, reinstatement of the Levenmouth rail link, all public accesses across the line in the area would be closed. Between Windygates to the east of the railway and Thornton to the west is a stretch of several miles of well used footpaths, all of which now run the risk of being permanently severed.

It is illegal in Scotland to block a public right of way without first going through the legal process of having it extinguished. Network Rail has closed that right of way just now, arguably for good reason, because it is a building site. Network Rail is building a railway there, so it would not be safe to have unrestricted public access. As a temporary measure, closure is acceptable, but if Network Rail is seeking to have the right of way permanently blocked, it has not yet gone through the proper legal process of having the right of way officially extinguished.

As long as Network Rail insists on looking to the law and fighting about it, we are left in this position: unless we can make Network Rail see sense, the only way the public and I, as well as their other representatives, can remedy the situation is either individually or through Fife Council embarking on probably lengthy and costly legal action, which, among other things, would cause severe delay to the reopening of the railway and could jeopardise the railway project in its entirety. None of us wants to consider that.

Like others, I have been making representations directly to Network Rail, and to the Scottish Government, whose support and money have been vital in reinstating the Levenmouth rail link. We have made representations to Fife Council, which has a responsibility, among others, to maintain public access to the countryside.

[Peter Grant]

I am raising the matter here because, while there is a memorandum of understanding between the UK Government and the Scottish Government that gives the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament some powers over Network Rail in Scotland, the company is still legally controlled by the UK Government.

Network Rail Ltd is a company limited by guarantee. It does not have shareholders, but Companies House records show that the Secretary of State for Transport is a person with significant control. He is the only person, or corporate body, registered in such a way for Network Rail. The Secretary of State for Transport owns at least 75% of voting rights and has the power to appoint and remove directors. I am hoping the Secretary of State will not have to use the power to remove directors in order to resolve the problems at Doubledykes, but owing to the way Network Rail has been treating my constituents, a lot of them would sack the board tomorrow if they got the chance.

When I have met representatives of Network Rail face to face, they have always been keen to co-operate and have always come across as wanting to find a solution to a problem that I think has been caused by an oversight at the planning stage—nothing more than that—but as soon as they put pen to paper, or as soon as they put fingertips to keyboard to send an email, they start to give a clear message that they will not do anything that cannot be legally forced on them. Their position is that the right of way does not exist and, therefore, nobody has any legal power to force any action on them. That is not a co-operative and constructive position for any public body to take.

The law of right of way in Scotland is different from that in England in a number of important regards. First, there is no such thing as a statutory register of rights of way. A right of way just is. It does not need to be declared, registered or recorded on a map. There is no doubt that Doubledykes Road meets the four tests to have been established as a right of way. It must join two public places—yes. It must follow a more or less defined route—yes. It must have been used openly and peaceably by the general public, as a matter of right—yes. It must have been used without substantial interruption for at least 20 years—yes.

The 2001 date is so important because in 2001, the Levenmouth rail branch line ceased to be a railway. It was then open for a public right of way to be re-established over that crossing. That is what I am convinced has happened since 2001 and up to 2021. Let us remember that in in Scots law, there is no need for the right of way to be recorded or declared in order for it to be brought into existence and to be enforceable. There is no doubt that Queen Mary's Road meets all those tests.

My constituents asked Network Rail what it was doing and how it could justify closing off a right of way without first applying to have it extinguished. The person who sent the initial reply said that the crossing could not legally constitute a right of way. They put "right of way" in inverted commas just to cover themselves. In their words:

> "It is private in status with no authorised users."

That is mince. The whole point of a public right of way is that it does cross private land, and that users are not authorised. They do not need authorisation or anybody's permission. The public use a public right of way as a matter of right.

When I emailed Network Rail to explain that, and to say, "I think your position is completely wrong", the same person who had definitively told my constituents that it could not possibly be a right of way replied to me and said that they could not

> "personally offer an opinion on the legal status of the crossings".

They then suggested that Network Rail's position might not have been accurately represented to me. That was a strange idea, since the position had been represented to me by an email from the self-same person.

The person then discovered, or remembered, an old Act of this place: the British Railways Order Confirmation Act 1984, no less. Sure enough, when we look at the detail of that, we see that the Doubledykes level crossing was extinguished in 1984. I put on record, however, that some of my constituents have doubts about whether that Act was ever properly and legally brought into force. There may be a doubt as to whether the Act is enforceable even now.

Network Rail pointed out that a new right of way cannot be established over an existing railway, which is fair enough, but let us remember that it has not been a railway since 2001. Something cannot be defined as a railway if it does not have tracks or trains. There is a very strong argument that the right of way had become established by 2022.

Network Rail seemed to be hedging its bets and to have identified that possibility, because it then claimed that, even if the public had continued to use the crossing over the period of 21 years since the railway ceased to be a railway, the public were doing that

> "at the invitation, even the tacit or implied invitation, of Network Rail."

There have been disputes about how well used the crossing was until the point that Network Rail closed it. Network Rail thinks it was hardly ever used; everybody else says it has been very well used. For example, a lot of cyclists use apps that not only show where they are, but enable them to compare speeds round the route with other cyclists who sign up to the same app. Those apps show that there has been a lot of cycle traffic along Doubledykes Road and across the crossing since the apps were invented.

Network Rail was very cagey about what surveys, counts or other measures it has undertaken to establish how well used the crossing was. At one point, Network Rail even said that that had been done by a local organisation, which told us in no uncertain terms that it could not have done it, because, geographically, it did not have a remit in that area. It is worth noting that Network Rail's suggestion that users were using the crossing at the invitation of Network Rail completely contradicts its claim that nobody, or hardly anybody, ever used it.

The towns of Levenmouth—Methil, Methilhill, Buckhaven, Leven, Kennoway and several nearby villages—represent about 40% of my constituency. Leven is partly in North East Fife. The area still has the unenviable distinction of being the largest centre of population anywhere in Scotland without a passenger rail service. I pay tribute to the Levenmouth Rail Campaign and other local activists, who have fought doggedly for

years to get the rail line re-established. I will be forever proud that I was the leader of Fife Council who got agreement that opening the Levenmouth rail link was the single biggest public transport priority in Fife. We were the first administration to put its money where its mouth is and allow the first feasibility studies to be carried out.

I still think that took too long, and there were setbacks and annoyances along the way. In 2019, however, when the then Scottish Transport Minister announced that the Scottish Government would reopen and fund the Levenmouth rail link, there was absolute delight in Levenmouth and in many other parts of Fife. People still desperately want the railway to reopen. I can feel the excitement when I go to exhibitions to update the public about what is happening. They can see the new stations getting built and the rail tracks being re-laid. We hope that the first trains will run on the railway in 2024, just over a year from now.

It would be unacceptable for anything to be done at this stage to prevent that from happening. It is also unacceptable for any public body to hide behind its version of the law and fail to communicate and engage properly with the communities that are being affected by its decisions. Those communities want the rail link reopened, and they are delighted that that will happen. They are, however, becoming increasingly angry, not at the fact that a mistake was made in the early planning stages—mistakes happen—but at the attitude of Network Rail, one of the key players. Network Rail sometimes appears to be very co-operative, but as soon as it comes to sitting down and looking for a solution, it passes the whole thing over to somebody else.

For example, a couple of weeks ago, Network Rail emailed me and other local representatives suggesting that only a minority of locals are concerned about this issue. That is deeply offensive, and not to me—people can be offensive to me if they want; that is part of the job of being a Member of Parliament. Every single statutory community council with an area of operation that goes anywhere near Doubledykes has unanimously expressed the view that they want the crossing to be kept open. They have the legal responsibility to represent the views of their local communities. It is not acceptable for any public body to seek to dismiss their views as being only a minority. For the record, all constituency MPs, MSPs and councillors with a ward interest anywhere near Doubledykes Road, as well as Fife Council and the Fife Council Glenrothes area committee, have come out clearly as saying they want a solution to be found to this issue.

There are questions about what kind of crossing to use. I am not convinced about this, but a lot of people locally think a pedestrian level crossing could be operated safely. Network Rail have had none of that. A footbridge or tunnel is possible, but is clearly more expensive. In the bigger scheme of things, however, when we can spend at least £2 billion on a single railway station in London, surely we can find £1 million to £1.5 million to maintain one of the most ancient rights of way in our land. There is a question of who pays, but it would cost £1 million, not a huge amount of money. I am not asking the UK Government to fund it, by the way; I hope we can find a way to fund it entirely in Scotland.

There are questions to be answered, but I am convinced that a solution is possible if all those involved simply sit down and agree that there is answer to be found and try to find it. Everyone needs to agree to share the responsibility —and not to palm it off on everybody else—to ensure that as soon as is feasible after the rail line is opened, the ancient public right to travel along Queen Mary's way will be re-established.

I will finish by commending the efforts of the Levenmouth Rail Campaign. The reason why we were able to persuade Fife Council to be so supportive, as soon as we came into administration in 2007, was that it was very clear from day one that the degree of public support in Levenmouth was huge. Levenmouth Rail Campaign has co-ordinated and brought together that public support and made it into a very effective public campaign. That has been led not by politicians, but by the people, and the politicians have supported it along the way. Thanks to the Levenmouth Rail Campaign and the dogged determination by local MSPs—initially Tricia Marwick and later Jenny Gilruth, with David Torrance on the south side of the line—the Scottish Government agreed to go through what can be quite a difficult process in the Scottish Parliament of getting approval for a significant capital investment to get the rail link open.

Everybody living anywhere near this rail link wants to see it opened. I believe that practically everybody wants to see it opened, with a safe pedestrian access maintained across a route that might not have been used by Mary, Queen of Scots herself, but which has been used by generations, decades and centuries of people in Fife going about their ordinary, day-to-day business. I want to see it reopened. I know that this is not entirely a decision for this Transport Minister to undertake. I appreciate that most of the persuasion has to be done in Scotland, but right now, the people need all the support they can get. If the Minister is able to commit to joining communities and elected representatives in Fife to persuade Network Rail to see sense and behave like a body that is accountable to the public, that is all we ask.

11.15 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Richard Holden): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I thank the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) for securing this debate, which concerns the closure of the Doubledykes level crossing in his constituency. I want to acknowledge the strength of feeling on the issue and thank the local community for presenting the petition, which has received over 1,100 signatures. Before I go into the specifics, I will talk briefly about railways, the role of Network Rail and level crossing safety more generally.

Rail is an important engine of economic growth. It serves several functions: it offers commuters a safe and reliable route to work, it facilitates business and leisure travel, it connects communities with their public services, workplaces and other economic opportunities, and it transports millions of tonnes of freight around the country, relieving congestion on roads and bringing huge environmental benefits. We want to build on the success in UK rail since the mid-1990s by improving and extending services where viable.

We are well aware of the positive impacts that improved, more frequent and direct rail services can have on communities. That includes the reopening of the Levenmouth rail link, which was approved by the Scottish

[Mr Richard Holden]

Government in August 2019 and which will result in passenger services between Leven and Thornton for the first time in over 50 years. That project is scheduled to be completed by spring 2024 and will bring considerable benefits to the area and the surrounding region, in the hon. Member's constituency and beyond.

For all its benefits, the creation of a new service does create safety risks that have to be managed effectively, not least on sections of railway track that have not seen high levels of traffic for several decades. That creates difficult choices for rail operators and for Network Rail, the operator of the mainline rail network, as it seeks to deliver faster and more frequent services safely. There are no easy solutions, and I recognise the huge responsibility that organisations such as Network Rail bear. Operational decisions such as these are rightly a matter for Network Rail, the safety duty holder for Britain's railway infrastructure, which has the expertise needed to look at decisions in depth.

Network Rail's responsibilities include user safety at over 6,000 level crossings on the mainline rail network. Level crossings now represent the single greatest source of risk for fatal rail accidents; there were seven fatalities at level crossings in the last year alone. In most accidents or incidents at level crossings, actions by the user, intended or unintended, have been a contributory factor.

Peter Grant: Any serious injury or fatality is a tragedy, but can the Minister clarify how many of those incidents took place on mainline railways and how many took place on low-volume, low-usage branch lines, where trains have a much slower speed than on the main line?

Mr Holden: I will happily write to the hon. Member about all the incidents in the past few years. It is probably quite helpful for him to have that specific knowledge about, let us say, the past 10 years, so I will get my officials to write to him on that. Incidents have taken place on branch lines and on the main line; I will provide a breakdown and write to him in detail about those fatalities.

Network Rail is putting significant effort into improving safety at level crossings. It is focusing on several things: first, improving the operation and maintenance of level crossings; secondly, a programme of risk assessment to identify priorities for further action; thirdly, measures to promote the safe use of crossings by pedestrians and drivers; and fourthly, where necessary, closing crossings altogether where they continue to present an unacceptable safety risk. No decision to close a level crossing is taken lightly, because level crossings often provide a really important means of access to local communities. None the less, although the safety record of level crossings in this country is among the best in the world, we cannot afford to be complacent, and we want to seek to reduce the risk of incidents wherever we can.

I turn to the Doubledykes level crossing, which is obviously of particular interest to the hon. Member and is the subject of this debate. It is one of several level crossings on the Levenmouth rail link, which on reopening will connect Leven with Thornton and join the Fife circle line at Thornton North junction.

As the hon. Member will doubtless know, Doubledykes level crossing was established in 1863 during a period of huge expansion of the rail network, both locally in Fife and right across the country. The level crossing has been used by the local community to access both sides of the railway and the surrounding area.

Since the end of passenger services on the Levenmouth rail link in 1969, services have ceased on this part of the network and people have become accustomed to using the level crossing without any risk. The reopening of the link will see, for the first time in a generation, services returning to this part of the rail network. Trains are expected to pass through Doubledykes level crossing about twice an hour. This will bring much-needed benefits to the wider community by connecting the towns of Leven and Thornton. It will also create additional risks, including at Doubledykes level crossing. Although the level crossing currently remains open, Network Rail has confirmed that it plans to close it when the new link is in operation, to protect the safety of the local community and rail users.

My Department has not been involved in the project to reopen the rail link or in the decision to close the level crossing. That decision quite properly rests with Network Rail in exercising its duty as infrastructure manager to ensure the safety of the travelling public. I understand that the decision was made in consultation with Transport Scotland, the South East of Scotland Transport Partnership and Fife Council, which are the joint project sponsors of the rail line. For that reason, it would not be appropriate for me to comment in detail on the decisions taken in this case, which are more properly a matter for the Scottish Government and the project sponsors.

I appreciate, however, that the closing of any level crossing can be inconvenient and very upsetting for local communities. That will be particularly true in the case of Doubledykes, which has not had rail traffic stopping people crossing since the late 1960s; it is evident from the large number of people who signed the petition. I cannot speak on behalf of the sponsors of the Levenmouth rail link, but I am sure that that will have been an important part of their considerations during the planning stages.

Peter Grant: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again; he is being very generous with his time. May I remind the House that I am not particularly pushing for a level crossing? It is not the only possible answer.

The Minister mentioned risk assessments of level crossings. Does he understand the local puzzlement as to how Network Rail could possibly have done a risk assessment of this crossing if it has no idea how many people are using it just now?

Mr Holden: As I have said to the hon. Gentleman, it is obviously for Network Rail, alongside the other sponsors of the project in Scotland, to justify the assessments that it has made. They will have made the assessments as part of their planning processes; it might well be best if the hon. Gentleman directed his specific questions about how decisions are arrived at to the relevant sponsoring authorities.

Ultimately, any decision on whether to close a level crossing must ensure the safety of level crossing users and rail users. In a case such as Doubledykes, I am confident that Network Rail will have looked at the risk profile, the frequency of services and the number of people using the crossing and will have worked with

others in the region to look at this. However, I understand the concerns of the hon. Gentleman and his constituents about this matter.

I have spoken to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), who is the Minister with responsibility for rail. He would be happy to have further meetings with the hon. Gentleman in person, to look further at the issues and see what can be done, if the hon. Gentleman would like to do so and if that would be useful to him. I will also happily write to Transport Scotland in response to the concerns that the hon. Gentleman has raised today, to push this issue further.

It was particularly good to hear that the hon. Gentleman is considering multiple different solutions in this space. I hope that his call has been heard by the decision makers and the local sponsors of this project so that they can also think about the other potential options to maintain connectivity, but, as I have said, the funding and the options are really a matter for those sponsors.

Once again, I thank the hon. Member and his local residents for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. I am sure that the Rail Minister will look forward to meeting him at the earliest opportunity to see what more we can do to work with him on the issue. I also look forward to writing to Transport Scotland to express the concerns of the hon. Member and his constituents about this important local issue.

Question put and agreed to.

11.25 am

Sitting suspended.

NHS Dentists: South-West England

[Julie Elliott *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Chris Loder (West Dorset) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the provision of NHS dentists in the South West.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Elliott. I am grateful to colleagues from across the House for attending this very important debate. If someone living in Dorset rings their nearest NHS dentist looking for an appointment, there is a 22% chance that they will be told the practice has gone private. If someone living in Dorset rings their nearest NHS dentist, there is also a 42% chance that they will be told the practice is not taking new patients with special or additional needs. There is a 50% chance that they will be added to a waiting list that is over 12 months, so half the constituents calling today could be waiting until May or June 2024 before they are seen. Finally, if someone living in Dorset is calling to book a dental appointment for their child, there is a 77% chance that they will be told the practice is not accepting new child patients.

The reason for these unacceptable statistics is because access to NHS dentistry in the south-west has been on an alarming downward trajectory for some time. Today, rural parts of Dorset, many of which can be found in West Dorset, experience worryingly low access to vital and sometimes life-saving dental treatment on the NHS. This is no doubt a widespread issue across the country, which is plain for all to see in the recent flurry of debates and questions on this subject in the House. Following this debate, there is an Adjournment debate in the House this evening examining dental care in the north-east, which shows how this issue is affecting constituents across the country.

According to recent reports, a quarter of the adult population in England have unmet dental needs, despite there being 24,272 active NHS dentists. That is enough for one for every 539 people, but these statistics can be misleading, because, importantly, even though there has been a 2.3% increase in the number of NHS dentists this year compared with last year, productivity has slowed. As many as half of these 24,000 dentists have cut back on their NHS work, according to the British Dental Association, forcing more people to either choose to go private and shoulder the burden of these additional costs themselves, or to go without and face the risks of poor dental hygiene that that can bring, such as tooth decay and gum disease.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Gentleman and his team of MPs who come along to support one another on these issues. I am really impressed by how well they do their job. They did it yesterday, and they are doing it today; well done to them.

Across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, there are issues. The hon. Gentleman referred to the figures in his constituency; in my constituency, 100% of people cannot get an NHS dentist. Paying online for a whole year's subscription to a dentist is not possible for many, including people who are elderly. Does he agree that the Minister should liaise

[Jim Shannon]

with the devolved Administrations, in Northern Ireland in particular and in Scotland and Wales, on how we can better do this together? Clearly, it does not matter where we are in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—dentist appointments cannot be got for those who need them most.

Chris Loder: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his short and succinct intervention, as ever. He is absolutely right and confirms that this issue needs to be addressed across the United Kingdom, not just in the south-west. I am delighted that he has attended this debate on dentistry in south-west England.

The south-west region was recently rated fifth out of seven for adult NHS dental coverage, with only 35% of adults covered by access to essential dental services, which is below the national average. Dorset fares slightly better, but adults in my constituency and those immediately neighbouring it also experience below the national average coverage for an NHS dentist.

The inequality is also affecting children, whom I am particularly concerned about. Although they are faring better than adults, with a coverage rate of 46% in both Dorset and the south-west, that is still below the national average for access to NHS dental services. Without those services, almost one third of five-year-olds are suffering from tooth decay, which is the most common reason why children aged between five and nine are admitted to hospital. Tooth decay is mostly preventable, so its effects serve to demonstrate what a lack of access to NHS dentistry is doing to our children.

Why are we faced with this difficulty? Why is dentistry in England, and particularly the south-west, under such pressure? Although the answer is multifaceted, I believe the reason is primarily threefold: first, the National Health Service Act 2006 and the subsequent dental contract; secondly, the lack of institutional services and the knock-on effects; and finally, the NHS backlog following the covid-19 pandemic.

The National Health Service Act 2006 set out the provisions for agreement between NHS England and dental practices in relation to services that would be provided and the renumeration for those services. Before the Act became law, the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee both produced reports to the then Government on reforming NHS dentistry, which raised concerns about the 2006 changes. Those concerns included the urgent need to change the incentive mechanism for dentists to increase their commitments to NHS dentistry, the difficulty for patients in better-off areas in accessing public health services, and the difficulty for those in more deprived areas in accessing any services at all.

The reports also raised concerns that there would be a shortage of NHS dentists, a glut of people who would be left without access to NHS dentistry, and no guarantees that the reformed contract would be enough to commit dentists to the NHS rather than private practice.

Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con): My constituents in East Devon regularly contact me about difficulties getting NHS dentist appointments in places such as Sidmouth, Budleigh Salterton and Exmouth. Problems with recruitment and contracts have been compounded by the pandemic, but that excuse will not wash forever. Does my hon. Friend agree that additional reforms of the NHS dental system cannot come soon enough for the south-west?

Chris Loder: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I wholly agree with him that reforms are needed urgently, which is the main point I will be sharing with the Minister towards the end of my contribution. It is clear that some of the measures from the 2006 Act do not go far enough. In many cases, they actually deter NHS dentistry provision.

Many of these issues are evident up and down the country today. Discussions with my own integrated care board in West Dorset—which, as of 1 April this year, has taken delegated responsibility for commissioning dental services from NHS England—have confirmed to me that the dental contract signed in 2006 is simply not fit for purpose. It actually restricts the ability of the board to respond to the current situation. That is because the terms and structure of the contract make it incredibly difficult for the integrated care board to attract new dentists to work in Dorset. I am sure that other integrated care boards across the south-west share that problem. The ability to attract new dental talent, especially those who are working on NHS contracts, is further hindered by our specific circumstances in Dorset. We do not have adequate training infrastructure.

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that this problem is particularly exacerbated for those of us in very rural parts of the south-west? Would the Minister consider putting dentists on a bus and bringing the dental service to us, so that our young people can see a dentist? Realistically, we will not be able to attract the new dentists we need in some of the remote locations that we love to live in.

Chris Loder: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind intervention, and I wholly agree. Her constituency of North Devon is not dissimilar to mine; we share many challenges and many wonderful things. I am sure the Minister has heard what she has to say, and I look forward to his contribution.

Without a dental school in Dorset, recruitment continues to be a real problem, as staff often leave the county, and indeed the region, after receiving their training. That leaves Dorset residents short-changed, especially given that our council tax is among the highest in the country.

The third impacting factor is the backlog following the covid-19 pandemic. We are all well versed in that, but I wonder whether we fully appreciate the pressure on dental services since then. It is estimated that as many as 40 million NHS dental appointments have been lost since the start of the pandemic, and that is exacerbated by the fact that 45% of dentists in England have reduced their NHS commitments since the start of the pandemic, which puts more pressure on an already strained system. A reported 75% of dentists say that they are thinking of reducing their NHS commitment this year, so it is important to look at what needs to be done to help the dentists still committed to NHS work and the people up and down the country—particularly in the south-west—who rely on those services. To my mind, there are two primary actions: contract reform and quick investment.

There are clearly a number of issues with the NHS dental contract, as we have said. I recently wrote to all 17 dental practices in my constituency, and I am in regular dialogue with the local integrated care board, and they all tell me that the dental contract needs urgent reform. It seems that the current terms of the contract make it incredibly difficult for local boards to recruit new dentists to meet local demand. I worry that the situation for our integrated care boards is not sustainable and could become worse.

The contract also seems to include irregular and sometimes near-nonsensical patterns of remuneration, which are undoubtedly playing on the minds of dentists considering their commitment to NHS work. For instance, dental practices are often remunerated for one filling only, regardless of the number of fillings needed for a given patient, which reduces the incentives for dentists to stay working with the NHS. That cannot be right.

Behind-the-scenes work is often missed when the work that a practice has carried out is calculated. For example, if a patient were to require one X-ray examination, two fillings, one extraction and two appointments for root treatment, that would total more than four hours of clinical time and would be counted as five units of dental activity or UDAs, which is the way that the NHS measures practice activity. Not included are the cost of materials, the nurses' time setting up the procedures or the receptionists' time booking the appointments and chasing patients should they not attend, all of which are hidden from the current contract. Transparency is key. As part of a wider reform of the NHS dental contract, West Dorset constituents who have got in touch with me would appreciate greater transparency in the requirements for such treatment.

One of my constituents recently had an abscess in their jaw. Like many in that situation, they called the nearest dental practice. As I said earlier, there was a 22% chance that they would be told that the practice had gone private, a 42% chance that they would be told that it was closed to new patients, and a 50% chance that they would be added to a 12-month waiting list, leaving them with an abscess until this time next year. Fortunately, those things did not happen. My constituent got through and made an appointment, although the dentist informed them that they did not regard the situation as an emergency, so my constituent was forced to go elsewhere, which reset the clock on their waiting list.

The dental practices that have contacted me have also shared stories of the abuse that their staff receive on a daily basis due to the lack of capacity, of how 111 continues to tell people to call their dental practices despite them not holding emergency contracts with the NHS, and of how the unfair UDA system acts as a direct negative contributing factor to the current situation faced by NHS dentistry.

Reformation of the service is clearly vital. When we previously debated the Health and Care Act 2022, I said that simply throwing money at the problem will not make it go away. Yet funding is, of course, the other vital area of improvement in this equation. Between 2010-11 and 2021-22, total funding for dental services in England fell by 8% in real terms, from £3.36 billion to £3.1 billion. Further, where practices have underperformed in the past, NHS England have not released the funding, resulting in an underspend of the national dental budget. I therefore urge the Minister to maintain his commitment to reforming the unpopular 2006 dental contract, to make vital and necessary changes to unfair remuneration, and to act before the situation gets any worse and more dentists are lost. That is very important.

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend's concluding remarks. Does he agree that it is also worth considering whether we can improve the role of dental therapists so they can take on some of the roles, whether the £50 million underspend in the south-west should be delegated across the whole area to deal with that issue, and whether those graduating from the Peninsula Dental School—something we are proud to have in the south-west—should be encouraged to stay in the area, given that the demand there is greatest? Above all, given my hon. Friend's excellent speech and the points he has made, does he agree that the dental recovery plan, which we have been promised and for which we have been waiting for too long, must be brought forward immediately?

Chris Loder: My hon. Friend gives me no chance to do anything other than agree. He is right. I hope the Minister is hearing loud and clear from the south-west that we cannot go on with this situation. There is no need, especially when we have dental underspends, for us not to take advantage of those opportunities as they arise. I also agree with him that we need to find more new and innovative ways of solving the issue and help a broadly willing dental team across the south-west.

To conclude, I urge the Minister to take note of all that I have said and what all my hon. Friends and hon. Members will have to say. I will also leave the Minister with a clear idea of what we need in West Dorset. First, I understand that there are plans for a substantial dental school in Dorset. I am pleased to hear that and am eager to lend my support. Can the Minister share more details? Secondly, NHS 111 needs to understand the situation of our dental practices and stop directing frustrated patients to those practices' already swamped telephone systems, causing busy staff to receive unnecessary abuse for problems that are not necessarily within their power to fix. Finally, the contract and the amount of compliance within it, as my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) pointed out a moment ago, needs an immediate review and immediate reform. Otherwise, we will continue to lose NHS dentists and the situation will worsen dramatically. I look forward to hearing from my hon. Friends and hon. Members in this debate and, indeed, the Minister at the end.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Julie Elliott (in the Chair): Order. A lot of people want to take part in the debate so, to try to avoid a formal time limit, I ask Members to keep to an informal five-minute limit.

2.49 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Elliot. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) on securing the debate; the turnout shows why he felt compelled to do so.

[Kerry McCarthy]

Let me quickly outline the key problems that I see in my constituency. People who are not registered with an NHS dentist cannot get treatment now because almost all practices in the area are not accepting new patients. There are patients who are registered with a surgery but cannot get an appointment because there is no longer an NHS dentist working there. In my case, I left my NHS dentist because every time I had an appointment it was cancelled, because the practice was moving dentists around other surgeries in the chain where there was higher demand.

Practices are deregistering NHS patients—that is, removing them from the active patients record—if they have not seen the dentist within a set period of time, to make room for patients on the NHS waiting list. They are legally allowed to do that. Some practices are closing down, including the Bupa surgery in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire), which is used by a lot of my constituents and is about to close.

There is also an issue for pregnant women, who are entitled to free dentistry on the NHS yet cannot see a dentist at all. I have asked a number of parliamentary questions about that. Pregnant women are more likely to suffer particular dental issues and there is an increased risk of certain health complications if the dental problems worsen. An estimated 1 million pregnant dental care patients in England missed out on dental care between March 2020 and March 2022, and they are still finding it very difficult.

On the underlying issue of the shortage of dentists, they say they are not incentivised to work for the NHS. They intend to leave for better pay and working conditions in the private sector, or are considering going overseas. An estimated 2,000 dentists—10% of the workforce—left the NHS last year. As a consequence, patients in pain are being forced to seek private treatment because they cannot see a dentist. They have to wait for tooth problems to become emergencies before they can get urgent treatment at the University of Bristol Dental Hospital, which can offer only a certain number of emergency appointments per day.

Those who cannot afford a tooth extraction with a private dentist and cannot get an emergency NHS appointment are pulling out their own teeth in agony. Constituents have told me that that is a fact. Dentists are seeing more people with higher levels of dental need, because the wait for an NHS appointment means that a minor problem drastically worsens over time so that, in the end, they find they need to have their teeth removed. Some patients say that because they have not been able to get an appointment since lockdown, they have been kicked off the dentist's records for not attending.

I would like to quote a few constituents. John says he was due a check-up in January 2023. It was cancelled and he was offered a new appointment for April 2023. That, too, was cancelled, and he has been told to phone again in November to make a new appointment. He has a refugee from Ukraine staying with him who managed to go back to Lviv for Christmas. She says she was almost as pleased about getting a dental appointment in Lviv as she was to see her family. John says:

"Dental care in a war zone is functioning better than"

it is in Bristol.

Another constituent, from St George, has not been able to register since she moved to Bristol a year and a half ago. A colleague of hers tripped and knocked out her front tooth. She had not been able to register with an NHS dentist and had to spend her entire £4,000 of savings on a visit to a private dentist.

Katy, another constituent, is halfway through her pregnancy and entitled to free dental care. She spent hours scrolling through lists of dentists, phoning all the ones that might take on NHS patients. She says:

"I cannot find a single dental practice which is accepting NHS patients."

The final constituent I want to quote is a dental practice manager who says their practice is a little better able to attract and retain dentists because it holds a contract with a UDA—units of dental activity—rate of £30.92, which is well above the area average, which is £25.98. Even then, the practice has been able to fill only half of it NHS dentist vacancies. She says:

"Without long-term workforce planning and meaningful reform of the NHS General Dental Service contract, the system and those who rely on it most will continue to suffer."

I have taken this issue up with the Government, NHS England and the local integrated care board. Generally, the Government recommend that people visit the NHS "Find a dentist" website. Local NHS services have been working hard to commission more urgent dental care appointments. They are also offering stabilisation sessions for those who do not have an NHS dentist, cannot afford to go private and need an urgent fix to a problem like a broken tooth or a damaged filling. But clearly this is not good enough.

I reiterate the point the hon. Member for West Dorset made. We need to work on retaining as well as recruiting NHS dentists and we need to reform the dental contract which, as he said, is simply not fit for purpose. Given the time, I will leave it to others to raise some of the other questions. I could talk for a very long time about the problems my constituents are suffering from.

2.55 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Elliot. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) on securing this debate on a vital issue for our region.

The issues with getting a new NHS dentist in the south-west are, sadly, all too well known. I have regularly been contacted by constituents who, when their current NHS dentist has retired, or in one case converted to a fully private practice, are unable to find a new practice accepting NHS patients. Last night, when I checked the NHS website for Torquay, there were no practices listed as accepting new NHS patients. Although many were listed as not having recently given an update, their position is easy to work out from the feedback I receive. As has already been set out, the issue is not limited to Torbay.

For me, there are two key areas of focus for tackling this issue: ensuring that more of the existing dental workforce and practices offer NHS services, including by accepting new patients for registration; and expanding the future dental capacity in the south-west through training and recruitment. On the first point, the key will be to ensure that contract arrangements are attractive and provide a viable proposition to those who will provide the services.

I am aware that NHS England is holding further discussions with the British Dental Association and other stakeholders for contract reforms that are planned to take place this year. The Government talk about aiming to reduce barriers to patients trying to access dentists by changing the arrangements for treatments such as root canals, improving patient communication and recruiting overseas dentists—although we should not always assume there is a pot of skilled labour available over an immigration bridge—so it would be good to hear more about the progress being made. Where it is not possible in some areas to secure new contracts with providers, will the Government consider looking at more direct provision? We simply cannot allow deserts of treatment to exist.

On expanding future capacity, the Association of Dental Groups has said that the key to easing the burden of the unmet need for dental services is simply going to be more dentists, which includes creating more training spaces. I am aware that in England the Government fund the training of around 800 dental students per year. In the past, the Government have said that places are capped to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment standards are maintained, as well as to ensure that there are enough high-quality placements for each student.

It is clear that the current level of supply is not going to meet future demand. There does, though, appear to be more capacity for training. In 2020, the cap on the number of dentistry school places in England was lifted, to accommodate the higher number of students meeting their university offers following changes to exam arrangements prompted by the covid-19 pandemic. Similarly, in 2021 the cap was adjusted again. That suggests that capacity is available.

In 2022, the Dental Schools Council called for an increase in the number of dental school places. The DSC presented three proposals agreed by the deans of UK dental schools to safeguard dental training and secure and improve the supply of future dentists by increasing dental school places. Again, that suggests that there is capacity to expand good-quality training here in the UK, ideally in the south-west.

John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is essential that dentistry, along with other medical disciplines, is included in the upcoming NHS staffing plan, which we all hope will involve a substantial increase in the number of people being trained at all grades of medical discipline, including dentistry?

Kevin Foster: Yes.

I look forward to the Minister's response, and have two specific questions for him, in addition to those already raised. First, what progress is being made with renegotiating the contract, and what results is he expecting to see in the south-west this year from those renegotiations in terms of the increased accessibility of NHS dental services? Secondly, what plans does he have to create additional training spaces in the south-west, given that we know that where people train is where they are likely to stay and practise?

For too many in the south-west, NHS dentistry has become a service that is difficult to access and hard to register for. I hope that in his response the Minister will set out clearly the action we will see to get more dental practices to provide NHS services, and more dentists providing NHS services across the south-west region.

3 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Ms Elliott.

In Bath and North East Somerset, more than 105,000 adults have not been seen by a dentist for two years. That is 44% higher than the number in 2018. Children are not faring any better: nearly 15,000 were not seen by an NHS dentist last year, which is an increase of 90% since 2018. Routine dental check-ups are a vital first line of defence against more serious problems such as oral cancer, which is one of the fastest rising types of cancer and claims more lives than car accidents in the UK. Meanwhile, tooth decay is now the most common reason for hospital admissions for young children.

The British Dental Association has said that NHS dentistry is facing an existential threat that long predates the pandemic. The shortage of NHS dentists means that it is now nearly impossible to get a dentist appointment in Bath. Last year's NHS statistics for England show that my Bath constituency is one of the worst places for NHS dentistry in the country. There were just 44 NHS dentists per 100,000 people living in the area. The Association of Dental Groups described my constituency as a "dental desert". It stated that this already dire situation will worsen unless the Government take urgent action.

Staff are leaving NHS dentistry at an alarming rate. One in eight are approaching retirement and 14% are close to leaving the profession. Nearly 15% of dentists have been lost from Bath's clinical commissioning group since 2016. Committed dentists are being forced out of the NHS. The Prime Minister boasted that 500 new dentists are practising in the NHS because of a Government reform; in reality, more than 500 dentists do just one NHS check-up a year.

The British Dental Association described official data on NHS dentistry as a work of pure fiction. Recent polls indicate that more than half of dentists in England have reduced their NHS commitments since the start of the pandemic. That is not tracked in official workplace data: dentists doing one NHS check-up a year are weighted the same as an NHS full-timer. The British Dental Association says the Government have never attempted to collect data on the workload of NHS dentists, or on how much time they spend seeing private or NHS patients. I would like a commitment from the Minister that such data will be collected. We need it urgently to understand the extent of the crisis.

However, we need more than just data: we need urgent reform. We Liberal Democrats are calling for an NHS dental healthcare plan to ensure that everyone can access affordable dental care when they need to. To start, we must immediately invest the money set aside for NHS dentistry and focus it on boosting the numbers of NHS appointments. The *Health Service Journal* reported that the national dentistry budget is set to be underspent by a record £400 million this year. How can that be when we are facing such a crisis?

The current NHS dentistry contract does not encourage dentists to take on NHS patients. Many dentists simply earn more in the private sector, but frankly many dentists tell me that they can afford to stay open and take on NHS patients only because they are cross-financing NHS and private patients. How can that be? We Liberal Democrats would carry out wholesale reform of the

[Wera Hobhouse]

dental contract so that dentists are incentivised to work as NHS dentists without the fear of having to close their doors.

The Government must also encourage those who are ready and able to be dentists to enter the profession. The cap on the number of dental school places available in the UK has remained static since 2013, despite increased demand for dentists. We cannot let this crisis escalate any further. We Liberal Democrats would put into law a proper workforce plan, which would include protections for dentists and dental staff. Dental care is a right that everyone in Bath and beyond should be entitled to. It is time the Government's response matched the scale of the crisis.

3.4 pm

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Elliott. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) on securing this excellent debate. He, like me, has been concerned about this issue for some time. As he said, NHS dentistry left NHS England on 1 April, so dentistry in our area has now been delegated to NHS Dorset integrated care board, with which we have close connections and work a lot. It has been in place for only a short time and is already looking carefully at this major issue. I hope my hon. Friend and I can get the desired result.

At risk of spouting too many statistics, I think it is worth noting that in my seat of South Dorset there are only 10 dental practices, in Swanage, Weymouth and Portland. None of them is NHS, one is now private, and none was accepting new NHS patients when contacted by Healthwatch six months ago. There are only two surgeries in Swanage. My constituents write to me regularly on this issue, and I am ashamed to say that I did not realise how shocking the situation was until we started to look into it. The figures are shocking, and I hope the Minister will respond today not least on the contract issue, which every Member has mentioned, because this has to change. It simply is not working.

Let me share what four of constituents wrote to me. One said:

> "It's impossible to find a dentist in Weymouth".

Another wrote:

> "I haven't had a dental checkup in person for two years due to covid".

A third said:

> "Our appointment has been cancelled again and now, our dentist is retiring early".

And another wrote:

> "After telephoning 14 practices ranging from Portland to Poole, Blandford, Sherborne and Wareham in Dorset through to Castle Cary in Somerset, I was met with 12 straight negative replies and 2 offers of being placed on very slow moving waiting lists or private treatment offers".

That is completely unacceptable.

The hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) mentioned that children are being affected, and how right she is. I heard in a telephone call today that 300 children in Dorset have been waiting for months not for dental treatment but to go to Dorset County Hospital to be knocked out by general anaesthetic because their problems are so severe. Because of the pandemic and the backlog, they are waiting in pain. These are children. That is really, really shocking.

Healthwatch also looked at the situation in wider Dorset. I hope Members will forgive me for giving more statistics, but they are quite interesting. Of the 95 practices in Dorset, two have gone out of business, 13 did not reply and 78 responded. Of those, no dentists are taking on new adult patients; two have closed since last year; 17 are now entirely private; 18 accepted new child NHS patients; seven accepted patients with additional needs; 23 have waiting lists, although some did not know how long; 50% have waiting lists longer than 12 months; Purbeck is particularly short of dentists; 75% of registered patients are still receiving routine check-ups, which is good; and most private practices would accept urgent referrals from NHS 111.

The British Dental Association has said—and I agree, from what I am learning—that NHS dentistry is facing an "existential threat". It shocked me to discover that before the pandemic there were only sufficient funds for dentistry to look after 50% of the population—even before the pandemic, only half the population had their teeth looked after. That is extraordinary. Some 11 million—almost one in four—adults are not having their needs met, and 10% of the £3 billion budget is set to be returned to the NHS this year, not because of lack of demand but because practices are unable to fulfil contractual commitments. Burnout and issues with retention and recruitment are causing a lack of dentists.

As I understand it, the contract, which has been touched on, is based—I hope I have this right—on a quota system, and dentists are penalised if they overperform. They are penalised if they underperform, and their funds are taken away. They are penalised if they take on patients with high needs, because they get paid the same for treating patients with fewer needs. This really is a serious issue, and I very much hope that the Minister can respond, not least on the issue with the contract.

3.10 pm

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): I am grateful to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Elliott, and to follow the hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), who made some excellent points that get to the heart of why the Government are failing us on NHS dentistry. I will follow him by using some examples and giving a voice to some of the constituents in my part of Devon who have written to me to appeal for help.

Chrissy Evans from Seaton wrote:

> "I don't understand why there has been no effort to address the problem of thousands of British children without free access to a dentist…We have tried all the dentists in our area and none are taking on new patients unless they are private."

John Mason from Branscombe received an email advising him that his check-up was booked, only to be telephoned by the practice in Sidmouth a few weeks later. He wrote:

> "I had been an NHS patient in Sidmouth for many years. I was telephoned by the practice",

which told him that his options were to become a private patient, to try to find another dentist, or to call NHS Devon if he needed emergency treatment.

A woman from Honiton, who I do not have permission to name, has had dental issues since 2011. She wrote to me:

> "I have been trying to sort this since 2011, I believe now I am considered too old to matter. I cannot eat, I don't wish to be seen trying. I hide my face when possible. I don't smile, I avoid friends and family, my speech is affected, this has ruined my life for the past 12 years and consumes my every thought."

Finally, Edward Roberts from Tiverton puts it very plainly:

"The situation which prevails is unacceptable but no one in Government seems to be concerned about it."

People are living in pain. The examples I have just given are a small snapshot of the heart-rending emails that I have received about people's dental misery. As we have heard already, many in the west country do not have access to an NHS dentist. A survey by the British Dental Association in March laid bare the challenges we face. It found that across the south-west, nearly three in five dentists reported having reduced their NHS commitment by an average of 30%, but a staggering 75% also reported their intention to further reduce the amount of NHS work they undertake this year.

Why is this happening? Because the NHS work that dentists take on simply does not pay enough to be viable. Many NHS dentists are simply overwhelmed by the soaring costs of their work and, on this trajectory, the problem is only going to get worse. The BDA reports that 49% of south-west dentists say that they are likely to go fully private, with 41% likely to change career or seek early retirement. Fifteen per cent say that they will move abroad. Unless the Government take swift action now to start to address the situation, we could see NHS dentistry effectively disappear within a decade.

It is pretty infuriating to see the Government's lack of recognition of the issue. Ministers at the Dispatch Box should not hide behind the outrageous claim, which I and others will have heard, that the Government have reformed the NHS contract. They have not. In July 2022, they simply paid dentists for a few more units of dental activity—for example, a dentist who is treating a mouth full of teeth that need repair will get paid the same as somebody who is treating a mouth that needs three teeth worked on. Instead, the Government should engage constructively with dentists and overhaul the NHS contract to compensate sufficiently for dental work carried out on the people who need it. Unless those steps are taken, people will continue to suffer in pain. Dentistry should not be only for those fortunate enough to win the postcode lottery.

I hope to hear from the Minister some unequivocal plans to reform the NHS dental contract, and I am curious to know what steps the Government will take to address the crumbling state of NHS dental services—I hope that they will include some measures that my Liberal Democrat colleagues and I have been calling for over many years. Above all else, I want some honesty from this Conservative Government: either reform the NHS dental contract properly, or simply admit that an NHS dental service for our constituents in the west country is a thing of the past that this Government are not willing to prioritise.

3.15 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): Healthy teeth are a critical part of a healthy body; we cannot really separate one from the other. It has always surprised me that when the NHS was established, the concept of free at the point of delivery excluded dentistry, for which there has always been a charge. There is something about dentistry, because it is either too complex or too expensive, that has led it to be somewhat second class.

As the decades have gone by, Governments have recognised how important teeth are, and I am pleased to say that there is a much more enlightened view as to their inclusion. There has also been a recognition over the years of the importance of healthy teeth for children particularly, hence the free care for the under-18s. That is why it is particularly worrying that colleagues say—I have heard exactly the same comment—that although children need to be prioritised, they are not being prioritised as things stand. Indeed, on one of my more recent visits to one of my local practices, I came to understand that dentists cannot take on private patients and only child NHS patients; if they go for NHS, they have to do everybody. That is a fundamental piece that ought to be changed.

As colleagues have already said, covid has effectively exposed a pre-existing weakness in the system. There is a shortage of dentists. We have heard a lot—it is absolutely true—about the cap on training numbers and the challenge to which that has given rise. We have heard about how, year on year, more dentists are moving away from the NHS into private. Across the country, the NHS has lost 10% of its dental coverage.

In Devon, in my constituency, there are no NHS dental appointments. The situation is at least as bad in Devon as it is in Dorset. Indeed, on that same visit to the dental practice, I asked how long people would have to wait to get on the patient list—the answer was seven years. That strikes me as even worse than the position in Dorset. Our proportion of dentists, which appears to be accepted, is extraordinarily low. In Devon, there are 51 dentists for every 100,000 patients. That seems very low, but, believe me, it is actually quite good—many places are worse than that. If that is the starting point, it is the wrong starting point and needs to change.

Dental health is absolutely fundamental to the whole body. Reference has already been made to hospital admissions for children. As I understand it, certainly in my part of the country, most admissions for children between six and 10 are caused by the health of their teeth. It is not just that they happen to have a problem with their teeth that is spotted when they are in hospital.

What has to change? Clearly we need more recruitment. The cap has to go. I know that it costs £230,000 to train a dentist, but, frankly, that is good value for each dentist. We need better retention, and the contract, which has been referred to, is clearly one of the biggest reasons why we do not have the retention that we need. We need to broaden the profession. The Government have taken steps, such as the "Advancing Dental Care" review in 2017 and a dental education reform programme. But that is too slow. The ambition is right—more flexible entry, more apprenticeship, new centres of development and putting the training together as dentists get to the secondary stage of their training—but it is not enough. My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) suggested that dental therapists should be better used, which is absolutely right.

The trouble with the contract is, as we have heard, the challenge of how it is constructed. Dentists are not paid per patient, nor for all the work done; they are paid for the most complex work, and that decides the amount paid, which generally does not cover the value of the work they have done. The second problem is that when someone enters into the contract, if they do more work, they do not get paid for the extra, but if they do less

[Anne Marie Morris]

they have to give a refund. Effectively, the challenge for dental practices—certainly, for the one I recently visited—is that they cannot use all their contracted hours because they cannot get the dentists to fulfil them.

There is work to be done. The Government absolutely need to deal with the backlog, the contract and the payments. They need to deal with the children issue and to allow individuals to treat children in the NHS, even if they cannot treat adults.

3.20 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Elliot. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) on securing an important debate and opening it very well. Access to NHS dentistry is becoming harder across the country, but, as we can sense from the contributions we have heard, especially so in rural communities such as those in Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, and Dorset, as well as in areas such as my own, in Cumbria.

Rural communities struggle more than others with access to dentistry because of pressures such as high housing costs and lower working-age populations, which mean there is a smaller dental workforce. Access to dental care in rural communities is also worse because we are dealing with sparsely populated areas and fewer economies of scale are available for the surgeries in question. There is the additional and crucial matter of the physical distances that people have to travel to receive treatment. Last week, I did a quick search and found that for a family in Coniston in my community the nearest available NHS dental place was in Hexham in Northumberland, which is a 160-mile round trip.

Every month it seems that we lose another NHS dental practice. I am sure that is the case for Members in every part of the country—from the contributions so far, especially in the south-west. I have recently lost a surgery in my community that saw 5,800 patients lose their NHS status overnight. The private plan that those patients were offered to replace those places would have cost a family of four £1,000 a year just to stay registered and on the books. With increasing prices, such as the rise in mortgage costs, rental costs, fuel duty and food—the cost of just living in any respect—how is that acceptable or affordable, given that that family, like everybody here, have already paid for their NHS dentistry through taxes?

People across our country have paid for a service, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord) said, that the Government have not delivered. It is about not just the financial costs to families if they have to go private when an NHS dental service is no longer available but the physical pain, the anxiety and the sense of guilt, for parents, that their child is not seeing a dentist because they cannot afford to send them because NHS dentistry is not available. My hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) talked about oral cancers and the fact that many dentists are the first to spot them and provide life-saving treatment.

For what it is worth, I do not blame the dentists, because I speak to so many of them. They are as angry as the rest of us, for many reasons. First, the Government take the public's money but do not pass it on to the dentists. There is not enough money in the system, as the hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) wisely pointed out. That is true nationally, but it is also true surgery by surgery. Dentists tell me that it is often the case that the Government's funding per unit of dental activity may be less than what a patient paid over the counter for their treatment. Dentists and patients, then, are both being ripped off.

A unit of dental activity payment, at the most basic level, could net perhaps £20 or £30 for a single examination. Diligent dentists seeking to do a good job might do three of those in an hour. Let us do the maths—that funding is not enough to pay to keep the lights and heating on, pay the rent and pay for staff salaries and materials. Many dentists feel that treating patients at a good standard therefore costs them and their practice more money, and that they have to subsidise the NHS. There are incentives to cut corners, to be on a treadmill, to rush through more patients and to do a job that the dentists themselves feel professionally dissatisfied with. As we have heard, good dentists who are committed to the NHS find that they cannot afford to stay, so they leave and it breaks their heart. That leaves thousands of our constituents without access to adequate, affordable dental care, which leads to more expensive, painful and damaging emergency hospital dental care further down the line.

There are many things that we can do as local MPs. I have written to my local surgeries to encourage them to take advantage of things that the integrated care system has offered to bring some back to the NHS, but unless there is radical reform of the system, good dentists will leave the NHS and thousands on thousands of our constituents will not be able to access the dental care that they have already paid for through their taxes for themselves and their children.

3.25 pm

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder), who set out not only the problems but some of the solutions to the crisis in NHS dentistry, and my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) reinforced his arguments.

If one is honest, there has never been an ideal NHS system. Before covid, people still needed a degree of luck and persistence to find an NHS dentist, but one of the main impacts of covid was to create a crisis in dentistry that was not there before. There is a massive backlog and a lot of people are leaving the profession. It is certainly one of those issues that needs to be higher on the political agenda.

The Government have already done one or two things to help. The changes to the annual allowance and lifetime allowance for professionals, particularly those in dentistry, will keep more people in the profession. We need a short-term and a longer-term plan to increase the number of people in the profession. Most of my hon. Friends have come up with solutions. My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) said that we need to train more people, not just generally in the national health service but in dentistry.

We have a common problem. Parents find it difficult to find NHS dentists for their children. I get a lot of emails from pregnant women in Poole and those with special care needs who tell me that, because a number of NHS practices have packed up, they are shuttling around trying to find treatment that is not there.

Like my colleagues, I think the Government need to speed up the dental recovery plan to give those who at the moment are not getting treatment some hope of better times ahead. That is the short-term solution. In the long term, we will simply have to spend more to train people in the dental profession and raise the cap on dental schools. About 20 years ago—not too long after I was first elected—there was a proposal for Southampton to have a dental school, and the rationale for that was that dentists tend to stay in the area they train. That did not go through because the Blair Government decided not to go ahead, but I am interested in the proposals for a dental school in Dorset. We need more in the south-west of England so that people come in, train, like the communities they are living in and stay.

In our inboxes, we get a sense of our constituents' urgency. There are people in need of treatment, so we need fundamental reforms and possibly some additional money from the Government. I know the Government and local health authorities are looking at this issue seriously. There is no magic bullet, but the sooner we get proposals from the Government to start to recover the situation, the better it will be for my constituents who are struggling to get the services they thought they would be provided with.

3.29 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): It is rare for every single party in the south-west to agree, but we do all agree on this: NHS dentistry in the region is broken, and it is getting worse. There is a huge crisis facing NHS dentistry in Plymouth, and everyone who has tried to access a dentist in my city knows it. After 13 years of Tory government, it is getting harder and harder to see an NHS dentist. Many children in Plymouth are in pain at home, having never visited a dentist.

Hundreds of our kids are having their teeth removed under general anaesthetic at Derriford Hospital every year. Some patients, unable to afford private dental care, are resorting to pulling out their own teeth. NHS dentistry in Plymouth is an endangered species. For many, an NHS dentist appointment is already a mythical beast, spoken about only when prefaced with, "Do you remember when you could get one?" Ministers have broken NHS dentistry over the past 13 years. If they do not do something serious soon, we are not far away from the extinction of NHS dentistry in Plymouth.

I thank all the people who work in NHS dental surgeries and practices, from dentists, to hygienists, to receptionists—who often get the brunt of angry people unable to access an appointment—to trainees and students. Our NHS dental waiting list in Plymouth is now over seven years long. It has an estimated 22,000 people on it, and it is growing each and every day. That is 10% of our population. The Dental Access Centre at Seven Trees Court in Plymouth—the only emergency dental service in the city—handles demand that far exceeds the supply of appointments. It takes over 300 calls a day, but it has only 20 available slots.

We need a proper plan, not more half measures and sticking-plaster solutions. Last year, the Government announced a £50 million dentistry treatment blitz, which all hon. Members present will remember. Of the £4.76 million allocated to the south-west, the Department of Health and Social Care has clawed back £4 million. Our system is so deeply in crisis that we are unable to fulfil the contracts we already have, let alone the extra funding, because we are so short of staff to deliver them. Our NHS dental system is utterly broken.

Ministers have also failed to address the recruitment and retention crisis facing NHS dentistry nationwide, but especially in the south-west. As mentioned by the hon. Members for West Dorset (Chris Loder) and for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord), the British Dental Association estimates that over half of all NHS dentists in the west country are likely to go fully private, and 75% say they are likely to reduce, or further reduce, the amount of NHS work taken this year. It is going to get worse. That is what I am hearing from the dentists.

A professional working in the sector wrote to me with an upsetting account of what it is really like to be in NHS dentistry. She said:

> "As with many of my other colleagues, the state of NHS dentistry in Plymouth has broken my spirit. Our service is constantly slated by the public for not doing enough, and my colleagues are subjected to abuse via email and over the phone daily - despite us often going above and beyond what we are commissioned to do. It is not our service that is letting the people of Plymouth down but those in government."

What on earth would incentivise someone to go to work and stay in NHS dentistry if that is their lived experience every single day?

The last Labour Government opened a new dental school in Plymouth, which is outstanding and superbly led. It is focused on social outcomes and excellent teaching, and it is rated as the best dental school in England. That is a Labour legacy that we can be proud of. However, NHS dentistry in our city is on its knees today, and responsibility for that lies firmly with the Government. Despite the heroic efforts of staff, if NHS dentistry were a hospital, it would be in special measures. That is why we need an emergency rescue plan.

There are ways out of this crisis. First, we need to reform the NHS contract. The changes announced to date are inadequate to address the systemic problems. We know what the solutions are. Let us get on with it. Secondly, we need a national plan for recruitment and retention. At the moment, there is no national plan to address that crisis. Thirdly, I want Ministers to increase the number of dental students in training, reversing the 10% cut from a few years ago. We do not have enough dentists in training to replace those who are leaving practice. The Minister could take an immediate step. The Peninsula Dental School in Plymouth wants to take on an additional dozen students for the next academic year. Please could he help it to do so by granting the funding?

Fourthly—this will be a game changer—we need to properly fund dental therapists. Dental therapists can do 80% of what a dentist can do, but they take only three years, not five, to train. Funding them could have a profound impact on rural and coastal areas across the west country. Finally, we need our fair share of funding. Per capita, the south-west receives less funding for dentistry than nearly every other region in the country. It is not fair. There is a solution to this crisis. Let us just get on with it.

3.34 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) for introducing this debate. Nearly a year ago, I introduced

[Derek Thomas]

a debate in this place on the same subject. The then Minister said it was a priority to increase the number of dentists in specific parts of the country, and she mentioned our loved area, the south-west. At the same time and soon after, contract changes were announced. I would not say that they were completely hopeless, as has just been suggested, but people in the south-west are still struggling to get a dentist, as we have heard. I still get emails from constituents who are not getting the treatment they need or spending their time and money travelling to London, Manchester or even abroad to access dentistry.

Since my debate, I have witnessed dental practices giving up NHS contracts or vastly reducing NHS treatment, forcing people to fund themselves fully, while others who cannot afford that go without treatment; I raised that issue with the Health Secretary in the main Chamber only recently. This week, a lady told me that she had filled her own tooth, using a kit she bought online and the torch on her mobile phone. She was frustrated, and so was the dental practice. It has a contract with the NHS to provide thousands of units of dental activity—UDAs—but that funding allocation is clawed back by the NHS if it cannot deliver those units. It cannot deliver those units because the value is too low to attract the staff it needs.

This year, that practice alone will pay back £132,000 in clawback—enough funding to treat roughly 1,600 patients in west Cornwall. I have asked NHS regional commissioners where those funds go and whether they can be made available for additional dentists; I have not received a reply. In fact, although I previously appreciated a very healthy and helpful dialogue with NHS England commissioners, their engagement and response rate with me and my office this year has been woeful.

Nationally, the underspend in the NHS dental budget could reach half a billion pounds. If I could get just one commitment from the Minister today, it would be to ensure that that money is spent on the dental care we need. For example, it could be used to raise the UDA value to £30. That would be a small step, within existing budgets, that could help dental practices in my constituency afford to treat more patients.

In the longer term, we know that the NHS dental contract needs reform. It does not work for dentists, and it certainly does not work for our constituents—the patients. We look forward to integrated care boards, but we also look forward to their taking ownership of dentistry and driving the delivery of dental care for their regions. In Cornwall, we have an integrated care board just for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. It is really helpful now to know exactly where to go to talk about dentistry. As we heard earlier from my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset, we must work together to really have local accountability and delivery solutions to address people's oral health.

We need better workforce data on dentistry as part of the forthcoming NHS workforce plan. We heard yesterday that the British Dental Association reported that the numbers of NHS dentists had fallen. The Minister's Department says that not all NHS dentists have submitted their data for the year. Whatever the truth is, that shows that we do not have credible data; without data, we do not have a plan. The workforce plan needs to ensure not just the number of dentists, dental nurses and other dental professionals, but where they are located. We have a brilliant dental suite in Truro, but graduates rarely stay in Cornwall once they have been trained. We are seeing a slight improvement, with dental practices offering foundation placements for those graduates in Cornwall—something that traditionally we have not done—including in St Ives, but the potential is far greater.

Finally, I recognise that the Minister is as keen as I am to empower the entire dental team to work to their full potential for NHS patients. However, some barriers remain to fully implementing direct access in NHS-funded dental care. In dental care, a system exists that enables the administration of medicines by dental care professionals when they provide care to patients paying privately. That does not apply for NHS dental patients.

On Friday, I visited a new dental practice. Did you hear that—a new dental practice? It is not all dreadful and miserable. The owner is providing five new treatment rooms. He has two dentists and a hygienist, and he will take on more UDAs and dentists—he will have the dentists if he has the UDAs—but he explained the impact of the disparity that I just raised:

> "We have therapists in most locations in the Southwest ready to increase NHS access, especially for young children as most of the work for this cohort of patients is within their scope of practice, and it is disappointing we cannot use them fully. Dentists are very reluctant to sign off prescriptions because of time issues and not understanding the process. Our therapists are only doing Hygiene, and some of them are leaving because of the lack of work."

My understanding is that a statutory instrument in this place is required. That simple piece of legislation would provide the opportunity for NHS dental practices to use the full skillset and competencies of their dental staff to increase the delivery of desperately needed dental care. I know that the Minister is aware of that and keen to drive that forwards. Will he indicate whether that SI will be forthcoming in the near future?

3.39 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Elliott. I thank the hon. Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) for securing this really important debate and for the work that he does locally and here in Westminster to raise awareness of the issue. We have had a good, full debate. I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) and for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) for their contributions, as well as the hon. Members for Torbay (Kevin Foster), for South Dorset (Richard Drax), for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris), for Poole (Sir Robert Syms), for St Ives (Derek Thomas), for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord), and for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron). That stretches the geography to the limits, but the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale has raised some very important points on behalf of his constituents and rural communities across England, not just in Cumbria.

Last week I responded to a debate on behalf of the shadow Health and Social Care team on dental services, but it was about the east of England. A couple of weeks before that I responded to a Backbench Business debate on NHS dentistry in the main Chamber. I do not raise those debates today to fill you in on my diary commitments

over the past few weeks, Ms Elliott, but to highlight the strength of feeling across the House about the crisis we are currently experiencing in dental care.

We are all hearing from constituents who cannot access care, about parents trying to get their children seen and, in the most extreme cases, as we have heard today, patients attempting to perform dental treatments on themselves or on loved ones. So-called dentistry deserts are not being eradicated. Instead, they are multiplying, not least of all in the south-west, as we have heard today.

Last summer it was reported that out of 465 dentists across the south-west, just seven were accepting new patients. Indeed, we have heard more up-to-date statistics from Members during this debate. The number of NHS dentists practising across the south-west has fallen by more than 200, and in areas such as Exeter the current wait to get an NHS dentist is now two years. Behind the statistics are human beings who just want to be seen and to be treated, and we owe it to them to act. So my points to the Minister today will be familiar to him, and I fear that I will keep having to make them time and again until we see the Government's dental plan.

My first point relates to the dental contract. As I have said before, it was the Labour Government who introduced the dental contract, but by the 2010 general election they had recognised that the contract needed to be substantially reformed. That was in our manifesto. The then Conservative Opposition agreed and it was in their election manifesto, too. The Government have been in power now for 13 years and change has moved at a glacial pace. In his response to the debate last week, the Minister said that he was under

"no illusion that there are significant challenges to address",—[*Official Report,* 16 May 2023; Vol. 732, c. 353WH.]

but that those would be tackled in a forthcoming dental plan. Given the urgency of the situation, can the Minister provide an update on the development of the plan and when we can expect publication?

The hon. Member for West Dorset highlighted issues with unit costs being disincentives, and that was followed by other Members during this debate. It is true that dental costs have to be looked at on a per-unit basis because there are perverse incentives, but it would also be wrong to pretend that before the dental contract was introduced, there was a golden age of NHS dentistry. As I said last week, there is a reason why I have a mouthful of fillings and my children do not. It is not because I ate more sweets and did not brush my teeth as well as my children, but because of the then even more perverse incentives for dentists to drill and fill. They were paid for every filling that they put in so that people ended up with a mouthful of fillings whether they were needed or not. We need to strike a balance so that we get the public health needs and patients' needs as well as a financial package that works for dentists to make a living.

On a similar note, can the Minister update us on the workforce plan? We have heard about that from hon. Members across the House today. We know that it has been produced and that it is on the Secretary of State's desk. It is particularly pertinent, given that it was revealed earlier this week that the number of active NHS dentists in England is now at its lowest level in a decade, in spite of rising demand and in direct contradiction to claims made by the Prime Minister in Parliament.

Given that net Government spend on general dental practices in England has been cut by more than a third in the past decade and the number of NHS dental practices in England has fallen by more than 1,200, it is of little comfort to patients waiting in abject pain and misery to hear the Government say that a plan is coming. We urgently need to see the workforce plan published and implemented and reforms put in place that work for both patients and staff.

Labour knows we need to change if we are to secure the future of NHS dentistry. We want the NHS to become as much of a neighbourhood health service as it is a national health service. To do that, we will encourage joined-up services in the community that include dentistry. We want to see health professionals such as dentists working with family doctors as part of a neighbourhood team. That will not only help people get access to more care on their doorstep but prevent oral health problems before they become acute. It will also dismantle the two-tier system that has been allowed to develop, where those who can afford to pay receive treatment and those who cannot are left languishing. That is being further compounded by the way the cost of living crisis means some families are unable to afford even basic hygiene products. We are witnessing health inequalities widen in real time as a result, and that must not be allowed to continue.

What does the Minister plan to do to tackle oral health disparities and prioritise prevention? Will that work be part of his dental plan? I am sure this will not be the last dental debate I take part in on behalf of the shadow Health and Social Care team, but I sincerely hope that the next time I am face to face with the Minister in Westminster Hall or the main Chamber, we will have seen some long overdue progress.

It has been demonstrated during today's debate that this need not be a partisan issue. It is in all our constituents' interests that the Government crack on now and get improvements to dental care. We all want better dental care for our constituents and, as I said in the last debate and probably the one before that, addressing this crisis cannot wait until we have had a general election. In that vein and in closing, I urge the Minister to recognise that fact and get on with the job.

3.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Neil O'Brien): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Elliott. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) on securing this incredibly important debate. Dentistry is the No. 1 issue that I am working on, and I reassure hon. Members that we are doing so at pace. We know that there are serious challenges across the country; hon. Friends and hon. Members are quite right about the scale of those challenges, which are particularly acute in the south-west.

I met the commissioners for dentistry in the south-west earlier this week. I met the professions separately, and I had further meetings about our dental plan earlier today. This is absolutely top-priority. I have been talking for some time to hon. Friends present and to south-west Members and others to generate the ideas that will go into the plan. They are the first in my mind when I think about those who are contributing important ideas to our dentistry plan, not just in their speeches today but in our conversations.

[Neil O'Brien]

We have already started the process of reform, but it is only a start. We have created more UDA bands to reflect the fair cost of work and to incentivise NHS work. We introduced the first ever minimum UDA value to help to sustain practices where they are low, and—to address the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax)—we have allowed dentists, for the first time, to deliver 110% of their UDAs, to encourage more activity from those who want to do more NHS dentistry. We have also started the process of making it easier for dentists to come and work in the UK. Just last month, legislation came into force that enables the General Dental Council to increase capacity for the overseas registration exam. I have also met the council to discuss how we can bust the backlog that built up during covid.

Plans for the centres for dental development are emerging around the country, which is very exciting and will address the issue that colleagues have mentioned about how to encourage dentists to train and then remain in the south-west and in other areas that find it more difficult to attract dentists. We have started to empower hygienists and therapists as well, exactly as my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) proposes. We stand ready to go further. The reforms to split band 2 and the 110% option have been well received by the profession. They are being used: the proportion of the new band 2b that is being used is going up, which is already having some effect on delivery, although of course that effect is not high enough.

In data published by NHS England this week, the proportion of contracted units of dental activity delivered went up from 85% last March to 101% this March, and the number of NHS patients seen has gone up by about a fifth over the last year, so there is progress, but there is much more to do. We will go further in the forthcoming dental plan, which I hope will be out relatively shortly.

The reforms that I have talked about and the forthcoming dental plan draw on the ideas that Members across the House have put forward today. They will build on those initial banding changes, further improve that payment model and start to take us away from the 2006 contract, which everyone agrees is broken. Exactly as my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset pointed out, that is the core of what we need to do.

We will also ensure further measures to improve access, particularly for new patients, look at how we address historical UDA variations that are not justified, improve transparency—I think my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) made that point—and take further steps to grow the workforce, not least through the workforce plan, which we will publish very shortly. Fundamentally, we will do everything we can to make doing work for the NHS and NHS patients more attractive to dentists. At the same time—to answer the question that the Opposition Front Bencher, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), quite rightly asked—we will do more to encourage prevention as well.

The devolution of dentistry from the NHS regions to the individual integrated care boards at a more local level is an important improvement that we want to build on. It provides an opportunity for much closer integration with other local care services and much more accountability about what is being commissioned and delivered at the local level. People and MPs can go and see the person responsible for delivery in their area much more easily, and our dentistry plan will build on just that.

Chris Loder: I very much appreciate what the Minister is saying about the plan for dentistry going forward. The last time I brought up the issue was in July 2022, almost a year ago. We had these problems then, and we have them much worse now. Will the Minister share with us how some of these great initiatives, which I am pleased to hear about, will be expedited so that they can have the maximum effect as soon as possible for those who are most affected in the south-west?

Neil O'Brien: I feel the exact same sense of burning urgency that my hon. Friend feels. I hope our plan will be out very shortly.

Richard Drax: The Minister may be coming to this point, but can I ask him about the disincentives—the cap beyond which dentists do not get paid, and the money that is taken off them if they underspend? Is that issue going to be resolved?

Neil O'Brien: Absolutely. I mentioned that in the last financial year we brought in the 110% flexibility so that those who do want to go further and deliver more NHS care were able to do so. We are looking at continuing that and also making some further changes to make the system more flexible and give local commissioners more power, so we do not have these rigidities in the system leading to the absurd situation where there is both under-delivery and underspend, which is completely maddening to everyone.

Once again, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset for raising this hugely important subject. I am sure all hon. Members will want to see the dentistry plan out as shortly as possible.

Luke Pollard: Could the Minister return to the question I raised about additional training places for dentists? We have a really good dental school in Plymouth that wants to take on more dental students. That could deliver a big impact for our region. Is that something that he is minded to look favourably on?

Neil O'Brien: We will set out our plans extremely shortly on the future of the workforce and on growing training places. I am sure we will look closely and with great interest at individual proposals such as the one that the hon. Member has just made.

Not just in the south-west, but in the entirety of England, we are looking to improve and build on the NHS service that is so vital to all of our constituents. It is a personal passion of mine, and we are working at pace on it. We know it needs to improve. We have had good ideas coming from Members across the House this afternoon, and we will try to put them in place as soon as we can.

3.55 pm

Chris Loder: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his kind response, not just to my contribution but to that of every Member here today. I reiterate that we are in a position of quiet desperation in Dorset. I appreciate

a lot of the initiatives the Minister has shared with us today, but I must impress on him, on behalf of all those present, the urgency with which they must be expedited. We look forward to seeing some of the initiatives becoming a reality in due course.

I remind the Minister that my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) and I see the dental training college in Dorset as an important component of resolving some of the difficulties. I was hoping to hear a little more about that. Maybe the Minister could share that with us, and write afterwards to tell us a little more. That would be much appreciated.

I am delighted that hon. Members from across the United Kingdom came to my debate about dentistry in the south-west. I was particularly pleased to see the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who I was not expecting—he is not in his place now. As for the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), I was getting a bit worried that he might be on a chicken run to the south-west in the next general election. We will see. I know some—anyway, there we go.

I am very grateful to you, Ms Elliott, for chairing the debate, to all right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed, and to the Minister for his response.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the provision of NHS dentists in the South West.

Social Housing: Furniture Affordability

3.58 pm

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of furniture affordability and social housing.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Elliott. I am surprised to be starting the debate early—I was taken unawares, but strike while the iron is hot, I always say. I am delighted to be here, partly because this has been a very tricky debate to secure. Every time I go to the Table Office, they rewrite the topic. To get pulled out of the hat, I re-submit it with that same title and it gets rejected, so I have to rewrite the title again. That causes confusion.

Then we had no idea which Department should reply to the debate. Was it the Department for Work and Pensions? Was it the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities? Even the Minister did not know, but I am delighted that she has made it here today. Maybe she will enjoy the experience—who knows?

On hearing mention of the term "furniture poverty", many people say, "What do you mean?" Some Members did so when I walked in the door. Many take it for granted that they have a chair to sit on, a fridge or freezer in which to keep food and a cooker with which to cook it. Far too many people in this country lack such basics. Some 26% of those in social housing lack one or more of the major pieces of furniture in the average household, compared with just 3% of homeowners.

Take something as basic as flooring. In social housing, more than 700,000 people—9% of those in social housing—do not have any flooring. The situation is worsening because of the cost of living crisis. Furniture inflation is running at 35%, which is even higher than food inflation. Appliance inflation is running at 21%. The answer is not to just go down to IKEA to get something cheap, because inflation at IKEA is at 80%.

The problem is not just the cost of furniture. There are some underlying problems. The first is the lack of a savings culture in this country. The average savings of people in my constituency are just £95, and most people in my constituency could not cope with an unexpected bill of even £500. That puts them in a very vulnerable position in the first place. We could have a whole debate just on the lack of a savings culture.

The second reason is the disappearance of cheap and readily available credit for the most deprived in my constituency. The usual financial service providers have withdrawn from that market entirely, leaving people with nowhere to go for credit other than to those who charge very high costs. That causes further financial problems for them.

The final reason is the lack of microinsurance products. The insurance sector has pulled out of allowing people to pay a very small amount to insure a fridge, cooker or any other piece of furniture. People are therefore flooded with large unexpected bills to replace significant items. When faced with that financial impact, they are often tipped over to the more dangerous forms of lending. I can spare the Minister a debate on illegal moneylending, but only because I recently had an Adjournment debate on the subject. Those unexpected bills push many in my

[Paul Maynard]

constituency into risky doorstep lending. Often they borrow from illegal moneylenders, but sometimes they borrow from friends or family members. That is a type of illegal moneylending that is quite disguised, and it is a real problem.

Furniture poverty is not just about lacking items, but about the associated costs. The charity Turn2us calculates that not having a cooker can add more than £2,000 to the annual expenses that an average family of four face, because it means that they must rely on takeaways, which are becoming increasingly expensive. People who do not have a fridge cannot buy in bulk, store food for the future or plan meals. That leads to further costs, as they must rely on local convenience stores—again, we could have a separate debate on the difference between food prices in convenience stores and in supermarkets. Lacking a washing machine adds about £1,000 to the average bills of a family of four, because they have to go to the launderette to wash their clothes, which they often require for work. Launderettes are a rapidly disappearing phenomenon anyway, and significant energy costs mean that the prices they charge are going up.

There is a vicious, vicious cycle here. Let us take two examples. People may think that a dining table is almost luxury item and not necessary for a household at all—that it is something someone might go to John Lewis for, perhaps. I would argue that if we are talking about social mobility and life chances in my constituency, nothing is more important than the dining table. In smaller houses, that is where children do homework. If they have nowhere to do their homework, their educational performance will decline. There are 2.4 million people in this country who do not have a dining table, so when I hear about social mobility and everyone fretting over how to get more working-class people into Oxford and Cambridge, that is not "life chances" to my constituents. To my constituents, "life chances" means having a dining table as a space to do homework—something as simple as that.

I mentioned flooring earlier. I would love to have an hour-and-a-half debate on flooring. I put the Minister on warning: that is on the way.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): Flooring?

Paul Maynard: Flooring, yes—I am about to talk about it. You will learn something. End Furniture Poverty, the charity that has helped me on this topic, is doing a separate piece of work on the issue of flooring, which I will come on to.

Let me share a quote from one individual in social housing. He says:

> "It's cement downstairs and upstairs it's wood with a lot of nails sticking out. It is a hazard…I have a young child."

The lack of flooring is perhaps one of the great unknown scandals of 21st-century Britain. When someone enters into a new social housing tenancy and moves into a new flat or property, in all likelihood the social housing provider has ripped out the flooring in advance, often when it is in perfectly good condition. They do so because they believe that that is what they should do with void tenancies, and it means the person moving in is faced with a great bill to replace the flooring. Often it is simply beyond their means and capacity to afford it.

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

Paul Maynard: I was waiting for the moment. I was looking eagerly at the hon. Gentleman, and he has finally taken the bait.

Jim Shannon: I commend the hon. Gentleman for bringing this issue forward. Covid had a medical effect on everybody, but it also brought about many broken relationships. What I have found in my constituency over the last three years is that families are parting because of domestic abuse, and the ladies are moving with their children into houses that are not furnished. In my area, I am fortunate that we have churches and charity groups that can help to furnish houses, but there are so many domestic abuse cases that not everybody can be helped. I support what the hon. Gentleman is putting forward. At this stage, maybe the Government, and particularly the Minister, should be looking to see what can be done to help people who have had to move out of their property because of domestic abuse and who find themselves with nothing but the clothes on their back, and certainly not the furniture that they need for their house.

Paul Maynard: I agree entirely. The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point, and he anticipates my 13th point, which I will come to, about why that does indeed matter.

The Minister might have thought that I was acting as a Labour Member of Parliament for the past few minutes, as I have been bemoaning the state of affairs and demanding that more be done. Of course the Government are doing something, but the challenge is that local government is not quite doing its part as well. The Minister will be more than aware of the local welfare assistance scheme. It is worth £167 million, which has been passported over to local councils to disburse as they see fit. Unfortunately, not every council uses that money to its fullest extent.

It is a wonderful pot of money, because it allows so many options: for example, that is where those fleeing domestic violence ought to go for help and support. The whole point of the local welfare assistance scheme is to meet that sort of need, but unfortunately, as End Furniture Poverty has discovered, 35 councils have now scrapped their local welfare assistance scheme, despite getting funding from the Department for Work and Pensions. Many more are spending less than 10% of what they have been allocated, which means that the burden is falling on a wider range of groups. Many charities, benevolent organisations and even churches are filling the gap that councils ought to be filling, including, sadly, Blackpool Council, which I gently chastise. I do not normally do that, but in this case I do, because it has shrunk its LWAS budget. The local welfare assistance scheme is there, but it is not being used by councils.

I urge the Minister not to overlook the existence of the local welfare assistance scheme, because since I started banging on about local welfare assistance about three years ago, the pandemic has come along, as has the household support fund, which dwarfs the LWAS in budget. The Minister now has a choice to make, and I am keen to hear her views. The household support

fund is being put to so many different uses by so many different councils that it is marginalising the local welfare assistance scheme, but that means that there is now a focus on targeted pots of money for grants given to particular groups in society, which is how the household support fund has been devised, defined and decided on. That means less focus on the situation-specific support that is needed, such as for those fleeing domestic violence —as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said—who get squeezed out of the household support fund. If local welfare assistance schemes are not maintained, people cannot access the emergency support that they need to replace their furniture and white goods.

I urge the Minister to review the Welfare Reform Act 2012. Every time we have these debates, Labour Members say they want that Act to be reviewed. Even I am calling for it to be reviewed, not because I want to reverse much of what was in it, but because I want to look at the evolution of Government decision making, which I feel has been a bit patchwork. We make one change and then another, and then another, without considering the golden thread that ought to run through them, which is whether we are preventing people from falling into destitution. That is why the household support fund and local welfare assistance schemes are so important. I hope that the Minister will agree to meet me and End Furniture Poverty to discuss its ideas about how both schemes can be strengthened.

Of course, this should not just be down to the Department for Work and Pensions. One of my frustrations is that so many Departments are doing so many different things. It is often the Treasury. One of my great frustrations has been the slow gestation, and almost the non-birth, of the no-interest loan scheme, which would have enabled people to borrow money at no interest to purchase the white goods that they lack. I think the Minister needs to look at what other Departments are doing in support of that.

The private sector is doing stuff, too. Iceland—the supermarket, not the country—has a superb arrangement with a social housing provider called Clarion Housing Group to fund freezers for people who do not have one so that they can manage their food requirements more prudently and get more for their money. There are many, many ideas out there.

Another aspect of furniture poverty, particularly in social housing, is partly flooring and also the wider issue of furnished tenancies. Hon. Members might think that furnished tenancies are quite common. People often look for furnished flats and apartments in the private rented sector—Members of Parliament who are down in London for long periods of time certainly do that—but in social housing, they are vanishingly rare. A great deal of effort is being put in to encourage social housing providers to consider at least making 10% of their tenancies available on a furnished basis. I am pleased to say that Blackpool Coastal Housing does just that. It has recently approved a business case to do so, and it makes a lot of effort to improve furniture reuse, but that is by no means common across the social housing sector as a whole.

This is not about putting greater burdens on social housing landlords. A social housing provider in Yorkshire and Humberside called the Thirteen Group has gone down the path of improving its offer of furnished tenancies. It has seen its arrears fall from £7 million to £4.8 million, and the cost of a void tenancy has plummeted by £500 as those moving in can sustain their tenancies far better, because they are not lacking the essential ingredients of a household. Even the number of unstable tenancies that the social housing provider is carrying at any one time has reduced by more than half. It makes the point that it is not spending more money doing that; it is actually spending its money much better.

The Minister might wonder what in heaven's name this has to do with the Department for Work and Pensions. This is about social housing, so it is for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Actually, the funding for a lot of that capital investment comes through the services charges that are permitted through the universal credit system. I urge her—once again, we can discuss this if and when she meets End Furniture Poverty—to ensure that the mechanisms within universal credit that allow these services charges to be made are slightly easier to understand for the tenant and the social housing provider to boost the demand for at least 10% of tenancies to be furnished.

It is clear that we do not speak about furniture poverty enough in this country. The Government are trying to do a lot to put in place a safety net beneath the safety net, but the problem is perhaps the fondness of Government Members not to ringfence things in local government, and to allow councils to spend as they see fit. That means that when we pull a lever here in Westminster, we find that it is not attached to anything out in the community.

Furniture poverty needs to be part of the national conversation. It does not get debated here enough and I am not sure that it is properly understood by many Members of Parliament, yet if they went out to the more deprived parts of our constituencies, they would see it in house after house. I hope that the Minister will agree to have the meeting so that we can all learn a bit more, not least about flooring, about which I could have a separate debate. I also hope that the Department for Work and Pensions, in particular, can look again at how local welfare assistance schemes and the household support fund interact, and how universal credit can support the introduction of more furnished tenancies in the social housing sector.

4.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) for his tenacity in securing this debate. I also thank you, Ms Elliott; it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. It is a pleasure, too, to respond to my hon. Friend. I thank him for his typical care and great regard for the most vulnerable in his community and our society, and for his focus on basic life chances, which are incredibly important. I hope to provide a multitude of responses for him this afternoon.

I am keen to touch on launderettes. The cost of those small businesses—particularly for those in work, those caring, those who need suitable drying facilities and small businesses that want to support people in the community—has been a great concern to me as a constituency MP. We should all be very mindful of that. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke about domestic abuse, and I am keen to pick up on that point shortly.

[Mims Davies]

I reassure the House that we are committed to a strong welfare system that, most importantly, supports those who are most in need, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys pointed out. In 2023-24, we are spending around £276 billion through the welfare system of Great Britain and around £124 billion on people of working age and their children. For 2023-24, we have increased benefit rates and state pensions by 10.1%.

The decisive action that we have taken over the past year and during the pandemic reflects our commitment to protecting the most vulnerable in these changing economic conditions. I am proud to be the Minister who is taking forward the next stage of the cost of living payments, made up of £650 to more than 8 million low-income households. This year, a similar number of eligible households are receiving their first payments of up to £900. I am pleased to confirm that we have made 8.3 million payments of £301—the first cost of living payment this year—to people on means-tested benefits. I was also pleased to sign the regulations that will provide more than 6 million people across the UK on eligible "extra costs" disability benefits with a further £150 disability cost of living payment this summer, to help with additional costs. Included in our cost of living support package is the energy price guarantee, which continues at the same rate until the end of June.

My hon. Friend mentioned the household support fund, which is on top of everything that I have just described. We have extended the fund by another year until March 2024. That enables local authorities in England to continue to provide discretionary support to those most in need. The fund can help with the cost of energy, food and, as my hon. Friend said, other household essentials, including furniture and white goods. I reassure him that in drawing up the fund, I looked at the particular issues, families and circumstances that he talked about. In fact, I recently visited Wolverhampton to see this being put into action in relation to bed poverty, whether that means the type of beds, sheets or bed clothes needed to keep people warm and snug at night.

I am empowering local authorities to do the right thing, look at their need and ensure that their household support fund supports their communities. I have been grateful for the feedback, engagement and consistent conversation with local authorities. We are empowering them to spend as they see fit in their communities. Devolved Administrations will receive those consequential funding pots as usual, also to spend at their discretion. Blackpool's allocation of the extended household support fund comes to almost £3.5 million. That will make a difference.

Before I deal with some of my hon. Friend's points, let me turn to the point that the hon. Member for Strangford made about domestic abuse. On the need to provide support on the basics, I assure him and the House that we are working with the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and with the employers domestic abuse covenant at DWP to make sure that we support people to stay in and get into work and through any changes in their household situation. Indeed, I was working on that with my team yesterday. The Home Office is also working with Women's Aid to provide £300,000 for one-off payments to support victims and survivors of domestic abuse. The funding will provide payments of £250 and £500 to support families in exactly that situation. I am keeping a keen eye on that sort of thing.

Jim Shannon: I thank the Minister for that; it is helpful and encouraging. My understanding is that, during covid, there was a phenomenal number of relationship breakdowns and that domestic abuse was part of the reason in many of those cases. That means that a wife or partner and the children move out and they have nothing. When it comes to the large number of people who need that service, is there enough and adequate money to assist them when they need it?

Mims Davies: I reassure the hon. Member that I am looking at every area—including policy, universal credit, work across Government, work with the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and work across the violence against women and girls piece with the Home Office—to make sure that that is exactly the case. There is work to support people to get, stay and declare in work, as well as the Ask for ANI and J9 programmes in our jobcentres, so that nobody coming forward feels that their finances need to keep them in an unsafe place. I remind the House: this is criminality in the home and it needs to be stopped and declared, and those who are impacted should be roundly supported. I hope that helps the hon. Member.

On the local welfare funding assistance, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys mentioned part of the unringfenced local government finance settlement. Councils do not have to provide local welfare assistance, but HSF is a form of that, and I understand his points. Many councils provide upstream support to stop people falling into destitution, and some of the things that he said about that are concerning. I am concerned about how this works and interacts with the household support fund, so I undertake to look closely at what he said. Blackpool Council, for example, provides its own discretionary support scheme, which can provide the essentials that he mentioned. Some local authorities operate local welfare schemes beyond the household support fund for essential costs. However, his point was incredibly well made.

On helping people with funding to manage the cost of living challenges, I point the House to the work of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which recently announced a new allocation of £76 million of dormant assets funding. That includes £45 million for financial inclusion programmes delivered by Fair4All Finance. Beneficiaries include 69,000 individuals struggling with their personal finance, who will have access to a no-interest loan to help them to get out of problem debt. As my hon. Friend said, it is so important that we unlock every way of helping people to make good choices.

The latest allocation is part of nearly £900 million unlocked through the UK dormant assets scheme. This is about financial inclusion initiatives to support people in vulnerable financial circumstances, particularly in the country's most deprived areas. Through my previous ministerial role, I know that sometimes people come forward with problems because perhaps behavioural or SEND issues mean that furniture has not been looked after or is not safe—bunk beds are a particular issue—and needs to be replaced regularly. That puts a huge strain on those with the least resources.

Through the Fair4All Finance scale-up programme, £5 million of dormant assets funding has been invested in support of the Coventry-based company Fair for You, which creates affordable loans to tackle furniture poverty. I will undertake to write to my hon. Friend and other Members on this subject.

Let me turn to the issue of adequate flooring and the basic needs of housing tenants. I continue to listen with interest to the recent discussions on the letting of social housing without adequate flooring. I understand that the practice varies across the sector. Some landlords will remove flooring in between tenancies because of the poor condition, and in most cases, that is done for health and safety reasons. Floor coverings are not currently covered in the decent homes standard. It is vital, however, that adequate flooring is seen as an integral part of the physical condition of the property. We will undertake to look at that as part of the decent homes standard review.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, the DWP has a big say in this issue. We support social housing and we support those providers, and it is absolutely right that we make sure that people in need have the basics and can be supported when it comes to decent homes. I will take away and look at that point. I thank End Furniture Poverty for its report. It has highlighted, along with my hon. Friend, the points around social landlords and the issue of redistributing furniture between incoming tenants. The report shines a light on that issue and the experience that people have.

While we are tackling poverty by ensuring that people are working and supported through really tough economic times, it continues to be our firm belief that the financial circumstances of all households improve through work, hence our in-work progression focus and our focus on matching people with vacancies that could be just down their road. It is vital that we understand the issues that hold people back—the barriers and extra worries that keep people awake at night.

It is important to reiterate that the Government are fully committed to providing opportunities for people across the UK to succeed, and to understanding what their barriers may be and what may be holding them back. As my hon. Friend said, it is important to have a cross-Government focus on tackling poverty—I point out our focus on food security; the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is another area I am looking at, as well as housing costs and needs—so that we can be clear, as every constituency MP would want, that we are targeting our support to the most vulnerable families, and ensuring that they have additional support in changing times.

I say to anybody worried: there is a benefits calculator on gov.uk and a household support fund link. If you feel as though you should have had a cost of living payment, there is a link there to make sure that you let people know about it. Please tell us, and remember that in a Jobcentre Plus, we can do very much more for you than perhaps you realise.

Question put and agreed to.

Heathrow Airport Expansion

4.29 pm

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of Heathrow Airport expansion.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Elliott, and to speak in this important debate. I thank colleagues for taking the time to participate and am glad to see so many present. This issue affects the day-to-day lives of constituents in Putney, and across south-west London and the whole of the country, given the climate change issues. I am sure that constituents in Putney will be watching with interest.

There is strong opposition to the expansion of Heathrow from residents across the region; the Mayor of London; local councils, including Wandsworth Council; environmental groups; a cross-party group of MPs, many of whom are here today, along with many more; and even two former Prime Ministers. Virgin Airlines, which does not want the extra costs that expansion would bring, has not said it supports expansion. Heathrow is already the most expensive airport in the world for airlines and for customers.

Heathrow's expansion plans were put on hold during the pandemic, but the Government are now talking about reviving them. That will result in an additional 260,000 flights a year; an increased site of 950 acres, which is twice the size of the City of London; the biggest car park in the world, with 43,000 spaces; and increased carbon emissions of 9 megatonnes. That is more than the carbon emissions for the whole of Luxembourg.

The plans were drawn up before the Government agreed to their climate targets. The promise of economic growth and new jobs, which I am sure the Minister will talk about, does not seem to stack up under scrutiny. Investing more in Heathrow will come at the cost of undermining regional jobs and regional growth. The cost to the quality of life of Putney residents cannot be underestimated. The noise is constant. It affects sleep, and physical and mental health. We cannot have it any more. I am here to ask the Government to rethink the plans and say a definitive no to Heathrow expansion.

On growth, the figures cited by the Government seem to be very misleading. The final national policy statement claims that the benefits of an expanded Heathrow would be £73 billion to £74 billion. However, that measurement does not include the actual economic and financial costs of the proposal. Buried in the Department for Transport's own updated appraisal report is evidence that shows that the net present value ranges from an increase of £3.3 billion to a decrease of £2.2 billion.

Then there are the claims on jobs. Job-creation figures used by Heathrow are based on estimates made by the Airports Commission report in 2015. They have been revised twice since then by the Department for Transport, and are now at least 50% lower and could fall even further. Analysis of the Department's own jobs data by the New Economics Foundation found that jobs would be drawn away from regional airports, which would see a reduction in passengers. A staggering 27,000 people could lose their jobs from cities including Bristol, Solihull and Manchester. That is hardly levelling up. Any claims on jobs or economic growth made by Heathrow should be at best only half believed.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing today's important debate on Heathrow airport expansion. No talk of expansion can be complete without first addressing the surface access requirements to decongest the roads around Heathrow and to improve the environment. More than a decade ago, the Government committed to building the western rail link to Heathrow. The successful business case was predicated on a two-runway scenario. A third runway, if it was built, would make the scheme critical; however, not a single spade has been dug into the ground. Does my hon. Friend agree that this No. 1 infrastructure priority for the Thames valley region, which has the support of the Welsh Government and others in the south and west—including in my Slough constituency—must finally be built without further procrastination by the Government?

Fleur Anderson: I thank my hon. Friend for his helpful intervention. An expanded Heathrow would see an additional 175,000 trips every day. That is more than the daily rail arrivals to the whole of Birmingham, yet the proposal does not have a plan for how to deal with it. I shall say more on that later. My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

What about green aviation? We are told that green aviation and green tech will catch up. Are we close to the breakthrough in alternative fuels, carbon capture or battery-powered planes that would make an expanded Heathrow sustainable and viable? No, we are not. In 2010, the aviation industry pledged to source 10% of its fuels from sustainable sources by 2020. We are in 2023; how is that going? Only 0.05% are sustainable fuels. There are no electric aircraft currently in development that could be commercially viable for long-haul flights. The green aviation revolution that could make the Heathrow expansion environmentally viable is a long way from taking off.

So what is the case against? I will talk about climate change, air quality, noise and transport. First, on climate change, the expansion is fundamentally incompatible with the Government's own net zero target. Heathrow is the largest single polluter in the UK. Its emissions account for half of all UK aviation emissions. Its expansion proposals of 260,000 additional flights a year, on top of the existing 480,000, will increase carbon dioxide emissions from air travel by a staggering 9 million tonnes a year. As I said, that is more than the entire carbon emissions of Luxembourg.

The Government recently published their jet zero strategy; is that the answer? No. The strategy makes no attempt to set out what share of the transport carbon budget the aviation sector should be allocated or how that would be divided between airports, and it fails to articulate circumstances in which airport expansions could be compatible with climate change targets. Heathrow is just one of many airports across the UK with ambitions to expand, yet the Government has no overarching framework to guide airport expansion plans throughout the country.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): The hon. Lady is making an important speech. I also have an airport in my constituency, and it is investigating sustainable fuels. The French Government have announced that they will ban short flights when a train is an alternative; does the hon. Lady agree that such ideas should be part of the strategy we hear about from the Government? Part of the net zero strategy should be to reduce the number of ridiculously short flights in this country. I do not mean island-hopping; I mean flights between cities that are unnecessary and no one would even think about taking if we had better train routes and train services.

Fleur Anderson: I thank the hon. Member for that useful intervention. The need for investment in other areas instead of this expansion is the whole argument.

If we are really going to meet the net zero target, we cannot rely on the increasing long-haul flights that we are talking about at Heathrow. Can the Minister be clear about the trade-offs? If a third runway is built, does that mean that growth must be curbed at all other UK airports in order for the UK not to breach its carbon targets?

Air quality is also a major issue for my constituents in Putney. The additional 9 million tonnes of carbon dioxide that an expanded Heathrow will produce must end up somewhere. Unfortunately for residents in Putney, it will be dumped on our high street, school playgrounds and green spaces such as Putney heath.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. My constituents in Battersea will be hugely negatively impacted if the expansion goes ahead. Heathrow is already one of the biggest polluters, and the assessments that it previously carried out—on air quality, noise and so on—are all now outdated. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government need to revisit those assessments before Heathrow begins revisiting the issue of expansion? My constituents and I believe that Heathrow should not be expanded.

Fleur Anderson: I thank my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for outlining what residents across south-west London are saying together. This is an outdated plan, it needs to be updated and it does not account for what we now know about the need to reduce air pollution and the damage it is doing to our children's lungs and our health.

Putney has suffered—and continues to suffer—from some of the worst levels of air pollution in the UK, so my constituents will be devastated if Heathrow gets the green light to expand. The Government themselves accept that it would have a significant negative effect on air quality, but have provided no evidence to show how Heathrow can both expand and comply with legal limits on air quality simultaneously. It just does not seem to add up. I therefore ask the Minister: what safeguards on air quality can he offer to Putney residents today?

The constant noise, often from very early in the morning, is a serious health issue for Putney residents. The current level is already too much, and I know people who have moved away from the area because of it. We cannot take any more. According to the European Environment Agency, noise pollution is the second largest environmental threat to health, causing 12,000 premature deaths a year. It is not just an inconvenience. It is not just Putney residents who are suffering, either. The No 3rd Runway Coalition has calculated that an expanded Heathrow could see more than 650,000 people fall within the Department for Transport's "significantly affected" noise pollution category. That is very serious.

The Government's night-time noise abatement objective for noise-designated airports is simply not good enough. It could provide some answers, but the objective downplays the serious negative health impacts caused by aircraft noise at night. The negative health impacts should have been made the central tenet of the objective, to reduce the harm caused, but there is no definition of the objective

"to limit and where possible reduce…noise".

The objective is far too vague; it should have much clearer commitment to noise-reduction targets, with measurable outcomes, so that successive interventions by airports and airlines can be determined, and enforcement action against noise can be taken. Otherwise, Heathrow can do what it likes. I urge the Minister to put himself in the shoes of my constituents and offer more than just vague promises that will not be kept.

Finally, on transport, an expanded Heathrow will see an increase in daily trips of 175,000 people, as I said before, and an additional 43,000 car park spaces. The biggest car park in the world is now about 20,000 spaces; this will be 43,000 spaces. Who is going to meet the extra demand of the cost of this extra transport, congestion and pollution? The cost is estimated to be £5 billion to £15 billion; to date, Heathrow has committed to contributing only £1 billion. I ask the Minister: who is going to pay for the additional transport needs? Will it be taxpayers, such as my constituents, who will be the ones losing sleep, losing out by breathing more polluted air as a result of the expansion, and losing out because of the transport costs?

I shall end with an unequivocal message for the incoming new chief executive of Heathrow. There is no version of an expanded Heathrow that is compatible with climate targets. There is no version of an expanded Heathrow that does not reduce the quality of the lives of the 650,000 people in my constituency and beyond who live under the flightpath. There is no version of an expanded Heathrow that does not make the air that our children breathe even more polluted. I implore them to put the quality of life and the planet first, and the pockets of shareholders second. The new chief executive can expect any future plans to be met with the fiercest opposition from me and colleagues present.

I look forward to the rest of the debate and the Minister's response. When he responds, I would like answers to the following questions. Will he commit to reviewing and amending the airport's national policy statement, to ensure that it is compatible with the UK's climate targets? Will he commit to publishing an overall strategy setting out how greenhouse gas emissions from aviation are to be managed and reduced over the coming decades? I urge the Minister: listen to the Government's own climate targets, listen to the experts, listen to residents and listen to MPs. It is high time that the prospect of an expanded Heathrow took flight.

Julie Elliott (in the Chair): I remind Members to bob so that we have an indication of who wants to speak. I suggest an informal four-minute limit. We should get everybody in if we stick to that.

4.43 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Elliott. I congratulate the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) on securing this vital debate. We MPs across south-west London, along with councillors and thousands of our residents, are absolutely united on this issue. Liberal Democrats across south-west London have a saying that we want a better Heathrow, not a bigger Heathrow. We are not on a crusade against the airport. We recognise the importance that it brings to our communities, capital city and country, in terms of trade, tourism and employment, but we are unequivocally opposed to a third runway at Heathrow. The project is dead in the water on every possible front.

The hon. Member for Putney made a powerful environmental case against expansion, and the economic outlook is also bleak for airport expansion. The project is not financially viable for Heathrow itself, which is already in £15 billion of debt, and it is about time that the Conservative Government actually come out, unequivocally recognise that the economic, environmental and health case is absolutely clearcut, and take it off the table. We have had broken promises from this Conservative Government in the past, and we need them to come out and oppose a third runway at Heathrow.

We know that, according to the Department for Transport's own calculations, the economic benefits are modest at best. At worst, the project would have a net-present value of minus £2.2 billion. The environmental argument against Heathrow expansion is simple: the more planes in the sky and idling on the runway, the more damaging emissions we pump into our atmosphere. As the hon. Member for Putney said, Heathrow is the biggest source of carbon emissions in the UK. If a third runway goes ahead, growth at all other UK airports would have to be halted to keep within our carbon targets, which sinks the Government's levelling-up agenda.

With the World Meteorological Organisation recently warning that we will breach the 1.5° temperature increase in the next few years, now is the time to invest in a cleaner aviation industry and develop green technologies to cut back on emissions. One resident went as far as saying to me that building a third runway at Heathrow would be a bit like opening a brand-new coal mine slap bang in the middle of south-west London. Based on their voting record in recent months, perhaps that is why the Conservatives are so supportive of it.

At a local level, increased capacity at the airport would bring much more congestion on to our roads. That would mean more air pollution and dirty air, which my constituents and their children would breathe.

Another important consideration, which has already been referenced, is the level of constant noise from the airport experienced by residents day and night. There is a real sense in the community, and among local action groups such as Teddington Action Group, that the noise pollution is just not taken seriously by this Government. It is not monitored properly; its effects on public health have not been thoroughly investigated or reviewed; and adequate protections have not been put in place. That is despite plenty of evidence in respect of both the mental and physical health impacts of noise pollution and our children's ability to concentrate and learn. The Liberal Democrats want to see an independent noise ombudsman reinstated and far more robust regulations on night flights, especially during the summer months, and to look at making noise a statutory nuisance.

[Munira Wilson]

A third runway would only intensify disruption, particularly with the prospect of airspace modernisation, whereby we could see a significant redrawing of flightpaths over London, with fewer planes over some parts of the capital but increased flights and much more intense noise in other areas. The term "noise sewers" has been used in other countries that have implemented airspace modernisation.

Christine Jardine: My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech and some powerful points. She mentioned airspace modernisation; I wonder, listening to what she has to say, whether if she shares my concern that any attempt to expand Heathrow at this stage might undermine airspace modernisation and delay any improvements we have been hoping for over the past few years.

Munira Wilson: The problem with airspace modernisation, and the feedback I get from some of my community groups, is that the process is not transparent at all. We have no idea whether there will be benefits or a worsening of noise impacts on the local communities around Heathrow airport. That, combined with a third runway, spells a lot of trouble for our local communities.

Since the last general election, we have gone from one Prime Minister who threatened to lay down in front of the bulldozers at Heathrow—but who was tellingly missing for a critical vote in the House of Commons on Heathrow expansion—to another who actively supported expansion, although luckily her tenure was short lived. Our current Prime Minister has taken a leaf out of their book, talking tough on climate change and net zero while instructing his Chancellor to slash air passenger duty on domestic flights. I hope the Minister will clarify the Prime Minister's position on the third runway project. In particular, as the hon. Member for Putney said, we need a review of the airports national policy statement; it is five years old, and the analysis is completely out of date, especially given the pandemic. We need a commitment to a national aviation strategy that addresses the sector as a whole, not just Heathrow.

To conclude, I speak on behalf of thousands of residents across Twickenham and south-west London, as well as London Liberal Democrat MPs, Richmond Council and members of the Greater London Assembly, when I say that we wholeheartedly and vehemently oppose a third runway at Heathrow airport. We will mobilise against any further plans. It is bad for the environment, bad for local communities, bad for our net zero targets and even potentially bad for our economy. It is time that the Government woke up, smelt the kerosene and opposed Heathrow expansion.

Julie Elliott (in the Chair): That was more than six minutes. I did say four, informally; the limit will have to come down if people carry on like that. I call Jim Shannon.

4.50 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Ms Elliott; I will keep to my four minutes. I thank the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson). We are good friends, but this is an issue that we are going to disagree on. I will give the other side of the story, because it is important to do so. I do so with respect for the hon. Lady, as she knows, and it will not stop us being friends. We just have to disagree on this issue.

I have put on the record before and will do so again that I am a vocal supporter of Heathrow expansion, as are my colleagues. It is an incredible opportunity to improve connectivity between Northern Ireland and Great Britain in relation to tourism, trade and air passenger duty. I travel every week. I come over on a Monday and go back on a Thursday. Aer Lingus was my mode of transport up until November last year, when they stopped running the flights. British Airways filled the gap, but I miss the fantastic Aer Lingus staff, four of whom lived in my constituency. I got to know them on a first-name basis.

The expansion is all about getting these services and more up and running, not only to Belfast City airport but to Belfast International airport. It is about having a broad range of flights, times and airlines and true connectivity opportunities that benefit all four regions of this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Air fares have increased in the last couple of months—that is understandable, because of the coronation and so on—but people who travel frequently, like me and other Members of this House, need greater services but at a reduced cost. That is what my constituents want, and I will reflect that.

I look to the Minister for a helpful response because the aviation industry cannot afford to suffer, especially after the impacts of covid, from which the economy and industry are still recovering. Heathrow is the UK's only hub airport, and it is economically important for the whole United Kingdom. The combination of cargo demand helped businesses to transport £133 billion-worth of freight goods via Heathrow in 2013, making it the UK's busiest airport. That example is from a few years ago, but it shows the situation at the time. By comparison, most airlines at point-to-point airports, such as Gatwick and Stansted—the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) mentioned short internal flights within the United Kingdom—do not transfer freight because they have smaller aircraft, short-haul routes and tighter turnaround times. Freight travel is so important to us at Belfast City airport, as the Minister knows; I have no doubt he will refer to that.

We want to be part of the expansion of a third runway at Heathrow. I believe it will boost us all across the United Kingdom, and opportunities for travel will increase. My constituents want to travel, and they want to go on holidays. I may not travel very far on holiday, but they do.

There is no doubt that the hon. Member for Putney makes some fair and accurate comments in relation to jet zero targets and the opportunities for the UK to lead the way in sustainable aviation, and others have made similar points. I, for one, must speak for my constituents, who want equal and fair opportunities and an interconnection with Northern Irish airports, with better connectivity, more options, fairer prices and more opportunities for trade. There is surely a way that we can eventually do both. I very much look forward to the Minister's response.

We must not forget the possibilities that the expansion will bring, and not only for those of us from Northern Ireland who wish to see it happen, but for everybody across this great United Kingdom. We could all benefit

from the economic benefits that will come from it. With that, I put my case; it may be different from everybody else's, but it is my case.

4.54 pm

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Elliott. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) on securing the debate and on her tireless campaign against the expansion of Heathrow airport on behalf of her constituents, supported by many of my colleagues. I fully support those efforts, but as a north-east MP I approach the issue from a different perspective. Our north-east economy suffers from serious imbalances compared with London, which experiences constant demands for improved infrastructure and upgrades. Although I welcome economic growth, the expansion of Heathrow makes me question the Government's key policy of levelling up.

A recent debate in Westminster Hall highlighted the potential to use the tax structure to implement long-term policies that bridge the economic divide, rather than relying on unfair short-term gimmicks such as the levelling-up fund. The Government rejected a proportional property tax and continue to endorse an unfair council tax system that penalises the poorest communities and regional economies. Today I want the Minister to consider another potential progressive tax change, namely replacing air passenger duty with an airport congestion charge.

It was recommended in 2015 that Heathrow airport—the most slot-constrained major international global airport, as we have heard—should have an additional runway to increase its capacity by more than 50%. I fully understand the concerns of residents living under the flight path and in the surrounding areas, because increased flights result in more noise and more pollution in the air and on the ground. I appreciate how a third runway could make life intolerable for those communities.

Before proceeding with plans to exacerbate congestion at Heathrow, it is essential that the Minister consider alternatives and explore measures, including utilising the existing available capacity in regional airports. Although I appreciate the desire of Heathrow airport's owners to expand and maximise their profits and returns on investment, the Government have a different responsibility to consider the broader public interest and policy objectives. Instead of assessing airport expansion on an individual basis, the Government should evaluate the overall capacity of UK airports and incentivise the use of spare capacity in regional airports, such as those in the north-east, rather than increasing pressure on a congested Heathrow.

Currently, cost incentives work against that goal, pushing more traffic towards already congested airports such as Heathrow. London airports benefit from substantial cost advantages because of their immense size, the competition, carrier availability and global connectivity. I urge the Government to rebalance that advantage and support regional airports through the implementation of an airport congestion charge. Passengers opting for congested airports such as Heathrow would continue to have that option but would pay a small premium, while those utilising regional airports with available capacity would be encouraged and rewarded.

The strength of Newcastle airport is linked to the vitality of our regional economy. Newcastle International airport's contribution to the regional economy was £1.16 billion, with an ambition to grow that to £1.91 billion by 2030 and potentially by more than £2 billion by 2035. There would be an additional 1,325 jobs on site and more than 9,000 across the region. I urge the Government to consider that as a viable option.

4.58 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Elliott. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) for securing the debate. I agree with everything that she said, including about the toxic effects of Heathrow, which apply equally, if not more so, to my constituency of Hammersmith and Shepherd's Bush and across west London.

We know the arguments against Heathrow: congestion on the roads and on public transport, noise pollution, air pollution, safety and the threat to whole communities. Those arguments have not changed. What has changed is that the aviation sector does not support Heathrow. We have expansion plans from London airports—Stansted, Luton and Heathrow—that will take up the carbon allocation. Regional airports, as we have just heard, are severely underused. Manchester is at about 50% capacity, and Birmingham airport, which will be about half an hour from Old Oak station in my constituency by High Speed 2 when it is constructed, is an alternative and is running at 40% capacity. We have heard that the airlines have withdrawn their support and some, such as Virgin, actively oppose the expansion.

What has changed since covid and the pause is that climate targets have got harder to meet, and the cost of doing so has become greater. Construction costs have gone through the roof. Heathrow has lost about £4.5 billion. It has also lost its chief executive and not yet recruited a new one. It is not in a good state.

Like the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson), I believe in a better rather than a bigger Heathrow. We understand the advantages of Heathrow to the economy—across the whole Thames valley, as well as to London, and west London in particular—but it is obscene to think of increasing its capacity by 50%, given its location. Transport policy has moved on.

We have heard that the airports national policy statement is five years old, and the airports commission is eight years old. Transport policy has moved on and history has moved on, but Heathrow has not; it is stuck trying to talk in the language of one or two decades ago and, unfortunately, the Government are listening. Well, the Minister is clearly not listening, because he is texting away, but I hope that when he responds, he will show a shift in Government policy on the issue. It is long overdue. Other Opposition parties have thought about this and changed their policy over time. In the Labour party, we welcome that. I hope that we see a realistic appraisal by the Government—a genuine review of the situation—because from any impartial or unbiased view of Heathrow, it should not expand. There are many alternatives.

5.2 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I did not think that we would ever be here again, but this is like the Monty Python dead parrot sketch—it is dead; it is not going to happen. My hon. Friends the Members

[John McDonnell]

for Putney (Fleur Anderson) and for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) and the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) put the matter forensically, defeating the whole argument that we should expand Heathrow.

I want to talk about the blight that the Heathrow expansion proposal has caused my constituents. It has been 40 years or longer. I have been there so long that I was present at the inquiry into the fourth terminal, which we all supported, by the way—we thought that it accommodated Heathrow well, and it was the size we wanted it then. At the fifth terminal inquiry, we opposed expansion. The inspector gave an indication that there should be no further expansion, because he was worried about the two issues that we presented him with: noise and respiratory conditions. What was happening to the lungs of children in our area was at virtually epidemic proportions.

At that stage, Heathrow said, "If we get a fifth terminal, we do not need and will not seek a third runway." Can we remember that promise? The directors at Heathrow wrote to every one of my constituents and appeared on public platforms with me to read the letter out, to loud applause. Within six months, they were lobbying for a third runway. It was a scandalous betrayal of my community.

For the next 10 years, we put the case about the respiratory and health conditions, and we discovered more about cancers, coronary conditions and the mental health effects of being disturbed during a night's sleep, and so on. Then the world changed and we all discovered something that others had told us about, but that we had not really believed in: climate change. We came together and, all of a sudden, what had been described as a nimbyist campaign became a global campaign. I joined a climate camp in my constituency. We had seminars at which local community members met climate campers, and we talked about the implications of climate change. We were so convincing that David Cameron went into the 2010 campaign—remember this one—with, "no ifs, no buts", no third runway. We did not realise that once he got elected, he meant it for only one Parliament.

We then had the Davies commission, which came out in favour of an expansion and a third runway. Interestingly, in that commission, it was argued for the first time that the whole concept of the hub might be outdated, and that point-to-point and the development of regional airports was probably the future. That is where we are, and that is where we are going to go. There is no way that any Government that want to be re-elected will promote a third runway while trying to convince people that they will tackle climate change. It is not going to happen. Let us put Heathrow out of its misery and say that no Government will ever approve this, and no investor will ever speculate by investing in a project that will barely take off—pardon the pun. Why not just kill it off here, so that my constituents can enjoy the comfort of their homes?

I remind the Minister that the threat of a third runway means 4,000 properties in my constituency being demolished or rendered unliveable by noise or air pollution; that is 10,000 people being forced out of their homes. A third runway means the demolition of three schools, churches and the gurdwara, a number of community centres and our open spaces—the demolition of a whole community. If the Minister thinks that there is any chance that the community will not rise up against it, I tell him that that will happen right the way across London. If this Government or any Government try to move ahead with a third runway, it will be the most iconic climate change battleground in Europe.

Let us say to Heathrow that it is over, and that it must concentrate on improving the passenger experience and looking after its workers. It was this company that started fire and rehire. It needs to start paying decent wages, restore pensions and provide decent working conditions for all workers.

5.6 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Elliott. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) for securing the debate.

As many people here know, my constituency is a long, thin constituency that lies between central London and Heathrow airport. It does not touch the airport, but we have a large amount of the impact. For most of my political life, since before the terminal 5 inquiry, I have opposed not Heathrow's existence but its expansion, and particularly a third runway. Many of the people working in and around Heathrow in the 70,000 direct jobs, and the many more in associated businesses and services, are my constituents, so Heathrow is a massive driver of the local economy. But my constituency also has all the negative impact: the noise day in, day out; the air pollution; the congestion on our roads; and the airport's distorting impact on our local economy.

In 2018, Labour's then Front-Bench spokesperson, my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald), said:

> "Heathrow expansion is incompatible with our environmental and climate change obligations and cannot be achieved without unacceptable impacts on local residents. The improved connectivity to the regions of the UK cannot be guaranteed and there are unanswered questions on the costs to the public purse and the deliverability of the project."

That case is even stronger five years later. My fear around expansion is not about runway 3, however. As others have said today, that is getting increasingly unlikely. My concern is that there could be pressure for more flights on the existing two runways. We are told that that is technically possible and could generate 60,000 more flights per annum—the current cap is 240,000. The main barrier to that expansion is the planning condition on terminal 5. It would require the ending of runway alternation, which gives our constituents at least an element of certainty about peaceful periods. That would give way to mixed-mode landing or taking off from both runways simultaneously.

Rather than seeking to be bigger, Heathrow should seek to be better—specifically, a better neighbour to the 2 million-plus residents in London and beyond who are impacted by the UK's premier airport. I welcome the simplified residential noise insulation schemes, which make life at least marginally more bearable for those nearby and which are funded by the airport, but I still have some questions about them for the airport. Historically, it has been slow and awkward about giving away or spending any money to make life bearable.

Apart from insulation, much more needs to be done to make Heathrow better. We need better public transport. For those who do not know, Heathrow tried to delay or even stop what we now call the Elizabeth line, because it would have had an impact on its company Heathrow Express. We have long had concerns about Heathrow's lack of support for decent public transport to and from the airport for workers, passengers and so on, and our constituents want a better passenger experience. Heathrow is the entrance to the UK for many people from around the world. We must remove polluting vehicles from airside because our constituents—Heathrow workers—are inhaling those emissions every day.

Heathrow must become a better employer. On things such as the living wage and fire and rehire, it has consistently been a bad exemplar of what should be one of our best products.

5.10 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) on securing the debate and on putting across her constituents' position against expansion so passionately, as many others have done. Looking at all the factors involved, it is a finely balanced decision. Many wrongly demonise those opposed to Heathrow expansion as anti-progress or the like. I understand the concerns and objections of those who feel that this is an expansion too far.

Fortunately, I can look at the expansion from a distance—literally. I am not involved in any difficult changes or the upheaval that will happen across a large swathe of the local community around Heathrow and across London. Equally, it is also madness to have umpteen aircraft circling the south-east of England waiting for a slot and burning fuel pointlessly due to a lack of capacity on the ground. Continuous ascent and descent is crucial to making CO_2 savings that will eventually be fully realised by the implementation of airspace modernisation. Incidentally, that is another strand of transport decarbonisation on which, despite the excellent work of the Airspace Change Organising Group and NATS, the Government have shown no urgency whatsoever.

Clearly, covid had a huge impact. We can still see the impact on passenger numbers across the sector, not just at Heathrow. If—or, more likely, when—numbers bounce back to 2019 figures, 80 million passengers will use Heathrow annually and there will be nearly half a million aircraft movements.

At the moment, there is no extra capacity in the London area. The concept of Boris island as a way to increase capacity has sunk to the bottom of the deep blue sea—rather like his bridge to Northern Ireland. Whatever connectivity benefits HS2 might bring to central London have been postponed until who knows when, after the Government's decision to delay work on the Euston leg. If any Heathrow expansion goes ahead, regional connectivity must be at the heart of plans for how to use the extra capacity and resource. It would be ludicrous if a new asset of national importance was dominated by intercontinental A380s, Dreamliners and a new terminal packed with lucrative first-class passengers, rather than being used to transform and turbo-boost connectivity to other parts of these isles, particularly in the light of the utter shambles of HS2.

At the moment, Loganair is forced to lease Heathrow slots from British Airways to provide connectivity with Scotland, rather than being able to access Heathrow on its own terms and in its own right. The two Members representing Dundee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) and my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West (Chris Law), will be well aware of the issues involved in ensuring a viable long-term future for the air link between that city and London. Loganair now serves the Dundee-London route from Heathrow, following the switch from London City airport earlier this month. It has managed to keep the London route on track, and passenger numbers from Dundee are at their highest for years. It also provides Orkney and Shetland with connectivity, showing the value of Heathrow slots to airports in Scotland and across these isles.

Heathrow used to be a public asset that was owned by the public and responsible to the public. It is unlikely that it will return to public hands any time soon, but it still has a duty and an obligation to the public to provide a public service—a service for everyone in these isles. Of course, it would be far better to have direct links from Scotland—particularly Glasgow, considering that Glasgow airport is in my constituency—to the rest of Europe and the world, so that we can cut out the middle man in the south-east and travel straight to our destination, and indeed transport our high-value exports directly to the customer, rather than shipping them through London.

But in the meantime, while Scotland continues the process of achieving full self-government and full membership of the EU, Heathrow must act in the best interests of us all, and that means supporting connectivity to and from the rest of these isles to London. It would be ignoring reality to deny the expansion of Heathrow without appropriate countermeasures to move aviation towards a net zero state. Developing sustainable aviation fuels can mitigate the impact of air travel. It is disappointing, to say the least, that we lag so far behind the rest of the world in investing in SAFs and putting them at the heart of the UK aviation sector. I understand that the consultation on the SAF mandate is ongoing and is scheduled to end next month. After that will be months of cogitation by the UK Government. If we are lucky, there might be an outcome ahead of the next general election, although I would not bet the house on it. This should have been done years ago, when the UK could have had taken a lead in developing SAFs and pioneering the technology required to produce them.

Inverness airport, which is owned by the Scottish Government, has recently introduced SAFs for all customers at the facility. That will surely help to reduce its carbon footprint as it aims to become the first zero-emission aviation region by 2040, but we need a sea change across the sector if we are serious about cutting emissions and mitigating the undoubted impact that the Heathrow expansion will have. I hope that sea change happens sooner rather than later.

5.15 pm

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Elliott. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) on securing the debate and on her passionate plea on behalf of her constituents, who have to suffer under the Heathrow flightpath day in, day out.

[Mike Kane]

My parliamentary assistant reminded me that Westminster bridge was opened on this day in 1862, so it seems a good day to discuss connectivity in the south-east—although for my hon. Friend, bridges in London might be quite a controversial subject.

I come from the perspective of growing up in a council flat under the flightpath to Manchester airport, so as well as speaking as the shadow Minister for aviation, I shall also have a few personal things to say. Heathrow is an enormous employer in the south-east of England and contributes billions of pounds to our economy, as has been pointed out. We welcome that contribution and have been consistent in our support for the wider aviation sector, calling repeatedly during the pandemic for a meaningful, sector-specific deal, which would have protected workers' rights and environmental standards, and allowed us to build back better from a position of power, not weakness. On expansion, Labour has consistently said for a number of years that a third runway at Heathrow must meet our long-established tests. It must meet the criteria on air quality, noise and climate change, and it must be affordable and delivered in the best interests of consumers.

On a personal level, I represent Wythenshawe and Sale East, which contains Manchester airport and the M56 motorway to Manchester city centre. My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury), who co-chairs the all-party parliamentary group for airport communities, and the Minister will be interested to hear that I was told in a meeting last week that the council will not invest in active travel along that corridor because the nitrogen oxide levels are too high. The council will write to me in the next week or two to explain why it will not invest. These are open sewers of the modern-day era that we have going through our community.

Any future bids for Heathrow must meet the criteria that we have set out, but let us be clear that there are also significant wider challenges that must be met. The Government have set themselves a target of 2050 for net zero aviation emissions, and we know that there is no silver bullet when it comes to decarbonising aviation. We know there has been significant progress in developing potential solutions to the environmental impacts of aviation, but we are just not there yet. Aircraft have become quieter. I grew up under the BA111s, Tridents and Concordes. We know that aircraft are quieter; what people find disruptive is the increasing number of flights.

We have much further to go to decarbonise the sector. Potential solutions to aviation's air pollution impacts are beginning to be developed. They include sustainable aviation fuel, as the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) pointed out, and the prospect of some flights being powered by batteries or green hydrogen. However, while the US and EU steam ahead, the Government's inaction is putting the development of emerging green technologies at risk. We know that green technologies produce well-paid, good jobs, which are often trade unionised as well. We need Government action to secure the necessary investment for those emerging technologies.

It is vital that the sector takes measures to continually support the development of innovations to decarbonise, such as electric planes and sustainable aviation fuel, which was mentioned previously. I meet business after business, week after week, which beat a path to my door, and are trying to innovate in this sector. That technological development is a critical part of net zero and must be done in partnership between industry and Government, so that the industry can help to meets its climate obligations and seize the opportunities for the British economy, investing in technologies that will tackle the climate crisis, encouraging world-leading innovation here in Britain, and supporting good, well-paid jobs. That is the future we want to see. Through our green prosperity fund, Labour will deliver that. It will be the centrepiece of a future Labour Government—one that links prosperity, social justice and climate justice.

Given the imperative of decarbonising aviation, I ask again about airspace modernisation. It has been referred to today; I hope the Minister can explain the lack of progress. It is a critical piece of national infrastructure that needs bringing up to date, but the process seems to be enormously complex. We know that airspace modernisation would reduce emissions, allowing cleaner and greener point-to-point flights, but it has been held up by a lack of ambition and urgency from this Government.

EasyJet told me last week that its flight from Jersey to Gatwick burns 24% of its fuel unnecessarily because of the congestion in the skies of the south-east, because we have an airspace modernisation system that is stuck in an analogue age when we exist in a digital age. It was developed closer to the time of Yuri Gagarin going into space. We have to change that.

It is crucial that the benefits of any future expansion are enjoyed by the whole country. My hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) made a point about overall capacity. We have too much capacity in this country, but we do not have an airport capacity plan. Airports still compete with each other. That is why airspace modernisation is not being rolled out as fast it should be. Airports are competing in the south-west and in the south-east.

The sticking point for me is that the airport in my constituency is a brilliant economic driver that offers plenty of jobs. While no announcement has been made by the airport, I close by reiterating our commitment to the tests and our determination, in government, to help to build a sustainable future.

5.22 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Jesse Norman): It is a delight to see you in the Chair, Ms Elliott. What a very interesting debate this has been. I congratulate the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) on securing it. She is right that this is a very important matter.

As the debate has shown, many Members have very strong views on this issue, not only in relation to the benefits that expansion could bring to the national and local economy, but also because of the potential impacts that they have highlighted on those living around the airport and wider environmental commitments.

I admire the chutzpah of the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), in raising London bridges, when the London Mayor and the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham have so abjectly failed to reopen Hammersmith bridge over the last four years.

Andy Slaughter: That is a whole 'nother debate. Given that the Government will not fund major strategic infrastructure because it is in London—if it were anywhere else in the country, they would be paying 80% or 90%—and given how much they have dragged their feet for years on this project, the Minister has a cheek, quite frankly, to make the comment he has just made.

Jesse Norman: I do not have much time, but I think the Chamber knows that the funding per head and the sources of revenue that exist in London are vastly greater than in other parts of the country, and it is appropriate that that money should be properly invested alongside any other support that can be given.

We are not going to be distracted from this important topic. On a more constructive point, it is noticeable that the Opposition's position on the issue of Heathrow expansion is not so very different from that of the Government. It is important to explore what the Government's position is.

Hon. Members will recall that, in 2015, the independent Airports Commission's final report concluded that a new north-west runway at Heathrow airport was the best solution to deliver the future additional airport capacity the country required. The Government considered the commission's recommendation and announced in October 2016 that they agreed with the conclusions.

The Government then developed a draft airports national policy statement that provided the framework and criteria against which a development consent application would be judged. The draft statement was published for consultation in 2017 and scrutinised by the Transport Committee, before being laid before Parliament. In June 2018, the airports national policy statement was designated, following Parliament voting overwhelmingly in favour of the north-west runway proposal, by 415 votes to 119. That is an overwhelming majority in favour of the north-west runway proposal. Following its designation, the airports national policy statement was subject to a number of legal challenges, which have been heard in the High Court, the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court. The legal challenges concluded in December 2020, when the Supreme Court unanimously concluded that the airports national policy statement is lawful.

Challenges against the statement, however, did not end there. The Planning Act 2008 requires the Secretary of State to review a national policy statement whenever they consider it appropriate to do so. Between 2019 and 2021, the Department received numerous requests from third parties to review it. When the Supreme Court determined that the airports national policy statement once again had legal effect, those review requests were considered. In September 2021, the then Secretary of State for Transport decided that it was not appropriate at that time to review the airports national policy statement. The Government said that the matter would be considered again after the jet zero strategy was published, and that the timing of re-consideration would need to have regard to the availability of long-term aviation demand forecasts.

The jet zero strategy was published in July last year and sets out the Government's approach to achieving net zero aviation by 2050. The idea that the Government have not thought at length and in depth about this, and set out a strategy for achieving it, as was raised earlier in the debate, is nonsense. The jet zero strategy and its accompanying documents set that out. The strategy focuses on the rapid development of technologies in a way that maintains the benefits of air travel while maximising the opportunities that decarbonisation can bring to the UK. It creates a strategic framework for aviation decarbonisation.

It is clear that the Government continue to support airport growth where it is justified, and that expansion of any airport in England must meet our strict climate change obligations to be able to proceed. The Government's approach to sustainable aviation growth is supported by analysis that shows that the country can achieve net zero emissions by 2050 without the need to intervene directly to limit aviation growth. The jet zero strategy set out a range of measures to meet net zero. I will touch on three of those.

First, we are supporting the development of new, zero-carbon emission aircraft technology through the Aerospace Technology Institute programme. An example of that is the announcement last week by Rolls-Royce that it has commenced the testing of its UltraFan technology, which will enable efficiency improvements in current and future aircraft and is 100% SAF compatible.

Secondly, this year the Government have conducted a call for evidence on implementation of a 2040 zero-emission airport operations target in England. My Department is currently considering responses and will publish a Government response shortly. Thirdly, the suggestion that this country is behind its international competitors on sustainable aviation fuels is entirely wrong. We have published a consultation on the SAF mandate, and that is currently available for discussion.

Gavin Newlands: Will the Minister give way?

Jesse Norman: I have no time, I am afraid. I have to stop in half a minute in order to allow the hon. Member for Putney to wind up the debate. I wish I had more time, but I am afraid that interventions and other speeches have not allowed for it.

Turning quickly back to covid-19, Members will be aware that covid-19 drastically revised the use of air transport. Almost overnight, most of the country's aircraft fleet was grounded. Thankfully, the UK is now on the way to recovery, but we have not yet returned to the demand before the pandemic, and uncertainty remains around the long-term impact that the pandemic has had on aviation demand. Further work therefore needs to be undertaken before any future forecasts can be developed.

I think I had better wind up there. I apologise, Ms Elliott, for having to truncate my speech owing to the pressure of time.

5.28 pm

Fleur Anderson: I thank all Members who have taken part in this important debate; they all added a different perspective and added to the case, giving strong reasons for why this is a deeply flawed plan. Heathrow expansion is not in the planet's interest or the national interest. I implore the Government to stop supporting the plan and invest in trains instead.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the future of Heathrow Airport expansion.

5.29 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 24 May 2023

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Serious Fraud Office Handling of the Unaoil Case: Independent Review

The Attorney General (Victoria Prentis): Following the Court of Appeal's judgment in the Unaoil case (R *v.* Akle and Anoi) in December 2021, the then Attorney General commissioned Sir David Calvert-Smith to conduct an independent review into the Serious Fraud Office's (SFO) handling of the case.

Sir David's full report was published on 21 July 2022, alongside a response to his recommendations. Sir David made 11 recommendations, which were accepted. These covered a range of matters, including record keeping and case assurance, compliance with policies, and resourcing.

At the same time, the then Attorney General laid a written ministerial statement (WMS) providing Parliament with the findings of Sir David's review and a response to his recommendations. This statement included a commitment to update Parliament on progress in delivering these recommendations in November 2022 and February 2023.

On 29 November 2022, I laid a WMS providing the first of these updates and a detailed progress update was also published on www.gov.uk. This update showed substantial progress in delivering Sir David's recommendations, with the SFO having already taken significant action to implement nine of his 11 recommendations. For the two remaining recommendations, work had commenced to address Sir David's proposals.

At the same time, this update highlighted that while many of the changes recommended by Sir David could—and have been—made quickly, it would take time to embed these changes and assess their effectiveness.

I also informed Parliament that the second progress update would be provided in May 2023 to allow the findings of an upcoming inspection of the SFO by His Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI) to be considered as part of the update.

Today, I am providing the second update on progress against Sir David's recommendations. As of May 2023, there continues to be good progress. Significant action has now been taken to deliver all 11 of Sir David's recommendations, with further activity planned in some instances. In addition, action to embed the changes that have been made and monitor their effectiveness is ongoing.

There is also independent evidence that the actions taken so far are proving to be effective. On 4 May 2023, HMCPSI published its follow-up inspection of case progression in the SFO. As part of the inspection, where issues raised in Sir David's review were within scope, HMCPSI used the evidence gathered to assess the progress made to address his recommendations. While highlighting some areas for further work, this assessment indicated positive progress on many of his recommendations.

It nonetheless remains the case that it will take time to fully embed Sir David's recommendations and assess whether the actions taken have been effective. To support this longer-term assessment, the Law Officers have asked the Chief Inspector of HMCPSI to consider an inspection of the recommendations' implementation as part the HMCPSI's inspection programme in 2024-25.

A detailed update on progress will be published on www.gov.uk today and copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS804]

HOME DEPARTMENT

The British Nationality (Regularisation of Past Practice) Bill

The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick): The British Nationality (Regularisation of Past Practice) Bill, introduced today, will confirm in statute a long-standing historical policy under which EU, EEA and Swiss nationals living in the UK in the relevant period and exercising free movement rights here were considered to be settled.

This will protect the nationality rights of people born in the UK to parents who were considered settled on the basis of that policy, and who were treated as British automatically, and those who registered or naturalised as British citizens on that basis.

The Bill also clarifies when EU, EEA and Swiss nationals could be considered settled on the basis of exercising an equivalent right in Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man, which are considered part of the UK for nationality purposes.

We want to be clear that we are not creating "new" British citizens, but rather confirming the citizenship of individuals we have long considered, and treated as, British already under established Home Office policy.

The introduction of the Bill was preceded by consultation with the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, with relevant officials in these locations having confirmed their support for the measures that the UK Government are looking to introduce.

To support scrutiny of the Bill by both Houses, we are publishing on gov.uk and parliament.uk the following documents:

Explanatory Notes
Equality Impact Assessment
ECHR Memorandum
Factsheet

[HCWS805]

Petitions

Wednesday 24 May 2023

OBSERVATIONS

EDUCATION

Special school in Biddulph

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the Government should take actions to construct a new special school in the town of Biddulph in the Staffordshire Moorlands so that children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities from there and the nearby surrounding areas have access to a local specialist school; notes that this follows discussions with parents and local councillors who have formed a support group and shows that there is a legitimate need for this kind of facility at a local level; further notes that mainstream schools do not have adequate resources to provide the specialist support that these students need and require; further declares that the number of students needing specialist education is increasing; furthermore there are also issues with lack of transport should this be needed for out-of-area travel, which can, on occasion, be both stressful and daunting for the children who are requiring specialist education.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to take into account the concerns of the petitioners and take immediate action to construct a new special school in Biddulph.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—*[Presented by Karen Bradley, Official Report,* 20 April 2023; Vol. 731, c. 473.]

[P002826]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Claire Coutinho):

This is a matter for Staffordshire County Council, since local authorities are statutorily responsible for ensuring that there are sufficient good school places for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The Children and Families Act 2014 requires local authorities to keep the provision for children and young people with SEND under review (including its sufficiency), working with parents, young people and providers.

In March 2022 we announced high needs provision capital allocations (HNPCA) amounting to over £1.4 billion of new investment to support local authorities to deliver new places for academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25 and to improve existing provision for children and young people with SEND or who require alternative provision (AP).

This funding forms part of the £2.6 billion we are investing between 2022 and 2025 and represents a significant, transformational investment in new high needs provision. It will support local authorities to deliver new places in mainstream and special schools, as well as other specialist settings, and will also be used to improve the suitability and accessibility of existing buildings.

Staffordshire has been allocated a total of just under £13.3 million through high needs provision capital allocations (HNPCA) for financial years 2022-23 and 2023-24. This funding will help the local authority to create new places and improve existing provision for children and young people with SEND or who require AP. Prior to that, the local authority received just over £2.4 million through its 2021-22 HNPCA funding announced in April 2021.

The Department for Education has also announced plans for up to 60 new special and AP free schools. Local authority applications for new special free schools closed on 21 October 2022. Staffordshire did not submit an application. Where local authorities identify the need for a new school, they can seek proposals to establish an academy through the free school presumption process. As of January 2023, there are 92 open special free schools and 51 open AP free schools, with a further 49 special and 6 AP free schools due to open in the future.

TRANSPORT

Traffic calming measures in Westwood Hill

The petition of residents of the constituency of Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow,

Declares that due to increasing levels of traffic, crossing Westwood Hill has become very dangerous, notes that due to a lack of traffic calming measures, residents near the area have raised concerns about their safety and further declares that traffic-calming measures and pedestrian crossing facilities should be created in Westwood Hill and the surrounding areas.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to work with the local council to implement traffic-calming measures and pedestrian crossing facilities.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—*[Presented by Dr Lisa Cameron, Official Report,* 16 May 2023; Vol. 732, c. 814.]

[P002833]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Richard Holden):

Traffic calming is a devolved policy area. We would therefore encourage residents and MPs to engage with the Scottish Government and the relevant local authority on this matter.

Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 24 May 2023

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Business of the House

The following is an extract from business questions on Thursday 18 May 2023.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Last night the Environment Secretary chose to say on ITV that there is "misinformation" about sewage being dumped into our rivers, rather than acknowledging the problem. That is really insulting. People have been made sick after swimming in raw sewage. It is a serious and disgusting stain on our country, yet the Environment Secretary blames "misinformation" for the scandal. May we have a debate in Government time, led by the Environment Secretary, on the alleged misinformation of sewage reporting, including why thousands of sewage monitors are broken?

Penny Mordaunt: When we came into office, just 6% of storm overflows were monitored. That figure is now 100%. But I know that there are issues, which are different in different areas, with the monitoring systems.

[Official Report, 18 May 2023, Vol. 732, c. 969.]

Letter of correction from the Leader of the House:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) at business questions.

The correct response should have been:

Penny Mordaunt: When we came into office, just **7%** of storm overflows were monitored. That figure is now 100%. But I know that there are issues, which are different in different areas, with the monitoring systems.

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Wednesday 31 May 2023

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