

Thursday
9 November 2023

Volume 740
No. 3



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 9 November 2023

House of Commons

Thursday 9 November 2023

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Metropolitan Police: Operational Independence

9.34 am

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Home Secretary if she will make a statement on the operational independence of the Metropolitan police.

The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp): About a month ago, Hamas perpetrated a sickening terrorist attack in Israel, murdering 1,400 innocent people, often in horrific circumstances. About 200 people remain held hostage by Hamas, a terrorist organisation, and I am sure that the thoughts of the whole House are with those hostages today. We have also seen, in the United Kingdom, thousands of people demonstrating in recent weeks. Thanks to the tireless work of the police, those incidents have largely passed without significant incident. However, a number of arrests, now nearly 200, have been made, where people have committed disorder, racially aggravated crimes or assaults on police officers. It is right that police officers have acted robustly in those cases.

It is also right that the police are operationally independent of government. That is a fundamental principle of British policing, as the Prime Minister made clear yesterday. The Metropolitan police asked protesters to postpone their planned protest this weekend, but the request was refused. The Prime Minister met the commissioner yesterday to seek reassurances that remembrance events will be protected. Of course, remembrance events play a special part in this nation's long and proud history, and it would be a grave insult if they were to be disrupted in any way. It is for the Metropolitan police to decide whether to apply to the Home Secretary to ban any march. As of this morning, no such application has been received, but the Home Secretary will, of course, carefully consider one should it be made. I reiterate that the police retain the confidence of the Prime Minister, Home Secretary and myself in using all the powers available to them, under terrorism legislation and public order legislation, to prevent criminality and disorder, and hate speech.

Let me say to the House that I have been contacted this morning repeatedly by members of the Jewish community who are deeply apprehensive about what this weekend may bring, and I want to put on record that we expect the police to protect those members of communities in London, including the Jewish community, who are feeling vulnerable this weekend. There are comprehensive powers in place to do that. Hate has no place on London's streets and we expect the police to ensure that the laws are upheld. There are powers in

place to deal with people spreading hate or deliberately raising tensions through harassment and abusive behaviour. The police can impose conditions on marches, as indeed they have done to prevent pro-Palestine protesters from approaching the Israeli embassy, to give one example. The police have also used section 60AA conditions to require people to remove face coverings, but the use of those powers is, of course, an operational matter for the Metropolitan Police Service.

This weekend should first and foremost be about remembering those who gave their lives in defence of this country. Any disruption to remembrance services would be completely unacceptable and an insult to their memory. I have confidence that the Metropolitan police and other police forces will ensure that this weekend passes off peacefully and without disruption.

Yvette Cooper: Where is the Home Secretary? She has sent the Policing Minister here to refuse to repeat her words. We have seen her words this morning; she has been attempting to rip up the operational independence of the police, attacking their impartiality in the crudest and most partisan of ways, deliberately undermining respect for the police at a sensitive time, when they have an important job to do, and deliberately seeking to create division around remembrance, which the Policing Minister rightly said should be a time for communities to come together and to pay our respects. She is deliberately inflaming community tensions in the most dangerous of ways. She is encouraging extremists on all sides, attacking the police when she should be backing them. It is highly irresponsible and dangerous, and no other Home Secretary would ever have done this.

Remembrance events are really important to all of us. Those events need to be protected. That is the job of the police: to enforce and respect the law, while maintaining public safety, tackling hate crime and extremism and respecting rights in law to peaceful protest. They have to follow the law and the evidence, whatever politicians think, not be the operational arm of the Home Secretary, because whether she likes it or not, that is the British tradition of policing and I, for one, am proud of it.

We know what she is up to—claiming homelessness is a lifestyle choice, picking fights with the police to get headlines—but the job of the Home Secretary is to keep the public safe, not run an endless Tory leadership campaign. Cabinet colleagues refuse to agree with her and former police chiefs are lining up to condemn her, so I have two questions: does this Government still believe in the operational independence of the police and how can they do so while this Home Secretary is in post? And did the Prime Minister and No. 10 agree to the content of the article? Either the Prime Minister has endorsed this or he is too weak to sack her. If he cannot get a grip on her conduct, it means he has given up on serious government, and he and the Home Secretary should both let someone else do the job.

Chris Philp: I thank the shadow Home Secretary for her questions, as always. She asked about where the Home Secretary is. It may have been wise to ask that privately rather than publicly, but she is with a close family member who is having a hospital operation this morning. I have the Home Secretary's permission to say that to the House in the event that somebody raised it, as the shadow Home Secretary has done, so I am passing that message on to the House.

[Chris Philp]

As we consider this topic, the House should keep in mind the fact that many of our fellow citizens are feeling deeply uneasy about what is going on in the middle east and the domestic repercussions. We have seen a spike in Islamophobic offences—there have been 21 arrests in the last four weeks for Islamophobic offences. We have seen a surge in antisemitic offences—there have been 98 arrests for antisemitic offences in the last four weeks.

I have been contacted this morning by members of the Jewish community who are deeply uneasy about what this weekend will bring. I do not think it is acceptable that our fellow citizens feel scared or uneasy walking about the streets of London. It is reasonable for politicians—the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and others, including, I am sure, some on the Opposition Benches as well—to raise those concerns and make sure that the police are protecting those communities. It is not acceptable to have fear and hatred on our streets. Let that message go out from this House today.

In relation to the question about operational independence, yes, of course the Government resolutely back operational independence, as the Prime Minister made clear yesterday, after his meeting with the commissioner at No. 10. But the Prime Minister also said after that meeting that he would hold the commissioner to account, as politicians are supposed to do—police and crime commissioners, including the Mayor of London, as London's PPC, do that, and so do we, as Members of Parliament. That is perfectly proper and perfectly right.

In terms of the approval process with No. 10, I am afraid I do not have any visibility on that at all, but let us keep in mind that we are seeing a humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza, there are 200 people being held hostage, some 1,400 people were slaughtered by terrorists and members of our own community are feeling scared this weekend. Let us keep that at the front of our minds, not party political point scoring.

Sir Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): Of course there is a principle of operational police independence, but I am concerned that the Metropolitan Police Commissioner keeps saying he has no powers to stop the march or arrest people in these marches. He certainly has powers under sections 3, 4 and 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 and under sections 1, 12 and 13 of the Terrorism Act 2000. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the commissioner's predecessors certainly felt that they had the power to ban marches by the English Defence League in 2011 and 2012 under the same legislation that we are talking about now? Does he also agree that the Home Secretary has a power under section 40 of the Police Act 1996? That says that where the Home Secretary feels that the police are failing to exercise their discretion reasonably, she can demand special measures to take action herself.

Chris Philp: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his question. His knowledge of the law in this area, as in all areas, is immaculate. The commissioner does have powers under—I think—section 13 of the Public Order Act 1986 to ban marches in certain circumstances. As my right hon. and learned Friend says, it was last used about 11 years ago, so it is quite a rarely used power. It applies when the police think that they are unable to deal with disorder that may break out. That is

quite a high threshold. The Metropolitan police have so far not made a request to the Home Secretary under that section, but, if they do so, it will be considered very carefully indeed.

As my right hon. and learned Friend said, the police have a wide range of powers that they have been exercising under anti-terrorism legislation. That legislation makes it an offence to glorify, promote and incite association with proscribed organisations, which of course includes Hamas. Section 18—I think—of the Public Order Act makes it an offence to use threats to incite racial hatred. There is a wide range of offences and they are being used. So far during these protests, 188 people have been arrested for hate crimes in relation to glorifying Hamas, inciting violence, and apparently praising the appalling terrorist atrocities that were committed, and we expect that wide-range of powers to continue to be used.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Let me make it clear that the evils of antisemitism and Islamophobia should be condemned wherever we find them.

More than 2.5 million Muslims fought for the British Empire in world war two to assert freedom, liberty and an end to fascism in Europe, using war to end all wars and promote peace through armistice. The protest for peace is far from the Cenotaph and starts later that day. The grandson of Winston Churchill, Nicholas Soames, has defended the right of people to march. Does the Minister agree with him? Does he empathise with the contributions of Muslims for peace, then and now?

Armistice Day has turned into Armistice Weekend, and a lot of discussion is focused on the Palestinian ceasefire march, when the police are more concerned about counter-protests from the far right, such as the English Defence League, and football hooligans, such as Football Lads Alliance. Will the Government also be looking to cancel the 10 premier league games scheduled this weekend, or the Lord Mayor's parade that overlaps the two-minute silence?

Finally, the former Met assistant commissioner said this morning that this is

“the end of operational independence in policing”

after the Government sought to pressure and exert control to ban Saturday's peace march, saying that they are on the verge of behaving unconstitutionally. Does that not mean that the Home Secretary is unfit for office and should be sacked?

Chris Philp: As I have said very clearly, I do not agree with the suggestion that operational independence is in any way compromised. The Prime Minister made that clear following his meeting with the Metropolitan Police Commissioner yesterday. None the less, I think that politicians on both sides of the House—both Members of Parliament and police and crime commissioners—are entitled to comment on matters of public policy and public order, as they have done over recent years. I do not think that offering comments undermines operational independence, which, as has been quite rightly said, is a sacrosanct principle of our system.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned sentiment in the Muslim community in the United Kingdom. I am sure that, like me, he has met the community in his constituency.

We understand, I am sure, that there is huge concern, not just in the Muslim community, but beyond, about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. That is why this Government are providing additional aid. That is why they are calling for a humanitarian pause to allow aid to get in. That is why our Prime Minister has worked closely with others, including President Sisi of Egypt, to make sure the Rafah border crossing is open to allow aid in and certain citizens out. It is why our Prime Minister has renewed his public commitment to a durable, two-state solution. Those voices for peace are heard as well.

Let me repeat what I said at the start: operational independence of policing is a sacrosanct principle and this Government will not interfere with it.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I know that the police are in a really difficult position, and that their powers to ban marches are constrained by law, but I have to say that I am deeply troubled by this march on Saturday. In all the many years that I have known the Jewish community, and in representing them in Chipping Barnet for 18 years, I have never known such fear and anxiety as I have seen over the past few weeks. Does the Minister agree that it is absolutely right that Members of this House and Ministers hold the police to account to insist that they deploy the full force of the law against any offences of hate crime and antisemitism at these protests?

Chris Philp: My right hon. Friend is a tireless campaigner for the Jewish community in Barnet and beyond. We of course expect the police to protect the Jewish community across London and across the whole country at a time when they feel deeply uneasy. In fact, describing the sentiment that the Jewish community are feeling as unease understates it; as I said earlier, I have received messages this morning from members of the Jewish community expressing fear about this weekend, and I will raise those fears with senior police officers later today to ensure that the Met are aware of them, and are policing that appropriately. There is no excuse for harassment. There is no excuse for inciting racial hatred. That has no place in a civilised country such as this one, and we will not let it happen.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Home Affairs Committee has spent many months scrutinising policing for a report that is due to be published tomorrow. That scrutiny has included the principles of policing by consent and the operational independence of the police, free from political interference, in upholding the rule of law, as set down by Parliament on protests and other matters. Alongside that, the Committee has been briefed on the policing of protests and will be looking to do more shortly. However, given the comments from the Home Secretary, the principles of operational independence of policing dating back to 1285, and the policing protocol, which the Home Secretary agreed in June this year, can the Minister confirm that if there is to be any discussion of these long-standing policy principles of policing, Parliament is the place to do it, possibly including the use of a royal commission? We should certainly not have these matters debated on the front page of newspapers at a time that is very challenging for communities in this nation.

Chris Philp: I thank the right hon. Lady for the work of her Committee. I look forward to reading her report greatly. I will give it close attention, as I always do. Scrutiny of action by the police, or indeed any other public body, is not the same as interference. Scrutiny is healthy and appropriate; interference is a different thing entirely. There is a distinction between scrutiny and interference. The operational independence principle is not one that we plan to revisit, but we look forward to discussing these questions, both with the right hon. Lady's Committee and in this House.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): On this Home Secretary's watch, every day 6,000 crimes across England and Wales go unsolved, so does she trust the police to do their job or not? If the purpose of her article was to say that she knows better than the commissioner of the Metropolitan police, she should say so—and she should say so here in this Chamber. If not, what possible motive could she have for seeking to undermine public confidence in the police in this way?

Chris Philp: We do have confidence in the police, but it is perfectly reasonable to scrutinise the police and hold them to account for their actions, as police and crime commissioners do every day, and as Members of this House do every day as well. In terms of confidence in policing more widely, according to the crime survey for England and Wales, on a like-for-like basis crime is now 54% lower than it was under the last Labour Government.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): This morning, a former chief constable of Durham warned that the storm being whipped up by the Home Secretary is diverting resources away from a very serious threat that might arise. Does the Minister not understand that the Home Secretary's incendiary and inflammatory comments ahead of what will be a really complex and sensitive policing operation for the Met this weekend is making their job even harder? Is this not a deeply irresponsible way for a Home Secretary to behave?

Chris Philp: I do not accept the hon. Lady's characterisation. The Home Secretary and other politicians on both sides of the House are perfectly entitled to hold policing to account, but of course this Government, as the Prime Minister said, accept—indeed, embrace—the principle of operational independence.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): We all know that many people will be on the march on Saturday. The organisers and participants have told me that they will be participating in ceremonies of remembrance and that their march has been organised in such a way that it will not impact on that. The truth is that the Government are attempting to draw the police into taking political sides in a very contentious matter in the country. There are millions of people who want a ceasefire. We are on a dangerous slippery slope, because the operational independence of the police to protect the right of assembly—the basic English right of liberty—is being challenged by the Home Secretary. She is not fit to hold that post, is she?

Chris Philp: I do not accept that characterisation. I am sure all of us—[*Interruption.*] Excuse me, Mr Speaker; I have a bit of a cold this morning. We all accept the

[Chris Philp]

right to protest, which, as the hon. Gentleman says, long predates the European convention on human rights. There are limits to that right concerning public order, incitement to racial hatred and so on, and it is for the police to police those laws, but it is reasonable for politicians to hold them to account for doing that, as many politicians on both sides quite rightly do.

Sir Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The fact that only two Conservative MPs have turned up to defend the Home Secretary shows that she has already lost the support of the House. The Minister is absolutely right when he says that there is no place for hate on our streets, but is not the truth of the matter that there is no place for hate in the Home Office either, and the problem with the present Home Secretary is that she is the person inciting hatred in this country? The Minister is right that it is perfectly fair for us to have scrutiny of the police, but that normally comes after an operational event, not before it. Is it not the case that this Home Secretary is really trying to command the police, which breaches every single understanding we have historically had of the operational independence of the police?

Chris Philp: I am slightly concerned that the hon. Gentleman said that there are only two Conservative Members in the House, when it is clear there are a great deal more than that—[*Interruption.*] Given his—

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not want to get into a tizzy about counts. I will help with a little clarification: there are more Conservative Members here, but only two have spoken. I think that was the point.

Chris Philp: That was not quite how it came across from the hon. Gentleman's comment, but I will move on—

Mr Speaker: Order. We all have a judgment, and I have made mine.

Chris Philp: Which of course I accept without hesitation or reservation, as I always do.

I agree that hatred has no place on our streets and I have said that repeatedly, but this is an unfolding event. The hon. Gentleman talked about what happens after the event, but these protests have been going on for four weeks now. The Home Secretary was not commenting entirely before the events; she was also commenting after events that have been unfolding over the last four weeks, which have included 188 arrests and a number of communities, both Muslim and Jewish, but particularly the Jewish community, feeling very uneasy. It is reasonable for the Home Secretary to try to ensure that communities feel safe and protected, and that is what she was trying to do.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): When women were treated brutally and unjustly by the Metropolitan police in this city in the wake of the Sarah Everard murder, Members came, correctly, to criticise the police, inside this House and out, for their failure and for their brutality. I remember people on the Opposition Benches calling on the Government to be more brutal on the police at that point. The hand-wringing hypocrisy and

the pant-wetting that we are seeing over someone correctly criticising the police is amazing. I have witnessed Irish nationalists and republicans, who the Home Secretary referred to in her article, running too quickly to the support of Hamas, to Colombian terrorists, to Hezbollah and a whole host of others. The Home Secretary is correct to call that out and to say it as she sees it, and this House is right to back her.

Chris Philp: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his words. He is right to point out those examples where Members of this House, particularly on the Opposition Benches, have in the past criticised the police. No one on those occasions claimed that those criticisms impinged on the operational independence of the police; they were simply holding the police to account, as politicians on both sides are entitled to do. I am grateful to him for reminding the House of those previous occasions when Opposition Members have exercised their prerogative to hold the police to account.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): I am thinking of the number of times I have spoken to criticise and call out the police for their behaviour in things that they have got wrong, but we are seeing the Home Secretary blatantly interfering with the operational day-to-day decisions of the police. We have to call that out; the police have to be independent. I have lost count of the number of people our Home Secretary has demonised, be they LGBT people, homeless people or minorities. Why? Why is there so much hate spewing from her? The organisers of the march have said that it does not coincide with Remembrance Day. Will the Minister correct that and stop conflating the two issues?

Chris Philp: I do not accept the hon. Lady's characterisation; it is both unfair and unintentionally inaccurate. There are all kinds of risks that the police will have to manage on Saturday if the march goes ahead, including the risk that groups break away, which did in fact happen last Saturday—a group broke away and ended up in Trafalgar Square, where they set off fireworks, and 11 police officers were assaulted. Those are the kinds of risks that will have to be managed by the police on Saturday. That is not an easy job, but I am sure that the police have the House's full support in doing it.

Samantha Dixon (City of Chester) (Lab): The shadow Home Secretary's question was whether the Minister could confirm that the Home Secretary's intervention to undermine the operational independence of the police was signed off through the normal No. 10 process and therefore has the support of the Prime Minister. The Minister said that he has no sight of that, so what will he do to furnish the House with an answer to that question?

Chris Philp: I am afraid that communications between other Members of the Government are not a matter for me. I am responsible for policing, delivering record police numbers and falling crime. That is my job and I am doing it.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): Does the Minister agree with the Home Secretary that "senior police officers play favourites when it comes to protesters"?

Chris Philp: It is up to the police to apply the law. It is important that the police apply the law even-handedly, and that is what I am sure all Members of the House want them to do.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): Words matter, so in the Home Secretary's absence, can the Minister explain in what way protest marches in the UK relating to Israel and Gaza are "disturbingly reminiscent of Ulster", and does he agree?

Chris Philp: That is not directly germane to the protests on Saturday. We have seen all kinds of protests in Ulster over the years—dissident Republicans among others. What we need to do is ensure that London's streets are safe, and that we do not have an atmosphere of fear or intimidation, and that is what we expect the police to deliver.

UK Sanctions Regime: Russia and Belarus

10.3 am

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the implementation of the UK sanctions regime against Russia and Belarus.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): The sanctions regime is dealt with by the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan), but I shall do my best to answer this most important question posed by the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty).

Sanctions are an important tool that we use to weaken Putin's war effort and to underline our unyielding support for Ukraine. Britain alone has sanctioned more than 1,800 individuals and entities under the Russia sanctions regime, more than 1,600 of which have been sanctioned since Putin's full-scale invasion. Although I cannot comment on individual cases, we are pleased that the High Court has in recent weeks recognised the Foreign Office's expertise on deciding which persons should be sanctioned to ensure maximum effect.

We have frozen over £18 billion-worth of Russian assets through designations and over 60% of Russia's central bank foreign reserves—assets that can no longer be funnelled back to Russia to fund its war machine. Rather than the surplus that the Russian Government predicted for 2022, Russia suffered an annual deficit of £47 billion—the second highest of the post-Soviet era. Its budget remains in deficit in 2023, despite tax increases. We have also targeted those who have enabled sanctioned persons to hide their assets in obscure and complex financial networks, and we are working to crack down on phoenix companies, which continue to operate after sanctions are imposed or which are developing fronts to avoid sanctions.

Just yesterday, we imposed 29 further sanctions targeting individuals and entities operating in and supporting Russia's gold, oil and strategic sectors—critical sources of revenue for the Russian war machine. Those sanctions include Russia's largest gold refiner, as well as international networks propping up Russia's gold, oil and finance industries.

Our co-ordinated sanctions, working in line with our G7 partners, are having an impact. Without our sanctions and those of our partners, we estimate that Russia would have over \$400 billion more to fund its war machine. We are starving Putin of the resources he needs to fund his illegal war on Ukraine. Sanctions are thwarting Russian access to western components and technology. Russia's budget remains in deficit. Our oil price cap has contributed to a fall of 25% in Russian oil revenues between January and September 2023, compared with the same period in 2022, and our export bans have starved Russia of thousands of products needed for the battlefield.

His Majesty's Government are fully aware, as Members will be, that sanctions are not static. We are constantly monitoring to see where and if they are being circumvented.

[Mr Andrew Mitchell]

Alongside our international partners, we are closing loopholes and tackling sanctions evasion, as Putin desperately scrambles to restructure the Russian economy and smuggle goods in through back channels. We will continue to isolate Russia's financial system and support businesses that are seeking to divest from their links with Russia. We will bring forward further legislation in the coming weeks to deliver on our G7 commitments and further deprive Russia of lucrative remaining revenue sources, including banning imports of Russian diamonds and ending all imports of Russian copper, aluminium and nickel—

Mr Speaker: Order. I have tried coughing; I have tried different ways of indicating that the Minister is almost a minute over. We need to get speeches better timed in future to three minutes. I am sure he is coming to the end immediately.

Mr Mitchell: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Finally, we will continue to combat circumvention and seek to degrade Russia's military capabilities by coming down hard on sanctions evaders and closing loopholes.

Mr Speaker: For the record, I want to say that we had a bit of drift over earlier. We are back in a new Session. The rules are quite clear: the time limit is three minutes for the Minister, and for those who have tabled the question, it is two minutes. Please adhere to it. Do not take advantage of the Chair, because you are taking advantage of the people I represent: they are called Back Benchers.

Stephen Doughty: I thank the Minister for his response. He will know that there is unity across the House in standing with Ukraine, but there are serious concerns about the effectiveness of our sanctions regime. Almost two years have passed since Putin began this phase of his illegal and barbaric invasion of Ukraine, but on Monday, it was revealed by *The Times* that a British company has allegedly continued to ship semiconductors to Russia since Putin's war began and that these have been identified within at least one Russian tank deployed in the conflict against Ukraine. It also reported that the company only stopped shipping to its Russian distributor after the bank refused to process payments for these exports. There are clearly serious deficiencies in the implementation of our regime that must be addressed. I had these raised with me on my recent visit to Kyiv, and I draw attention to my declaration of interests.

I would like clarity from the Minister on a number of key points. Can he confirm whether there are loopholes within our regime that continue to allow for materials to be exported to Russia and Belarus that could be used in the production of military items? Why do those omissions still exist, and what steps are being taken to deal with them?

Secondly, can he set out what assessment has been made by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Treasury of the existence of alleged loopholes that allow indirect imports into UK markets of Russian or Belarusian origin steel, or indeed Russian origin crude oil that has been refined in third countries? These are very serious allegations.

Thirdly, *City AM* revealed this week that nearly 130 UK companies have admitted breaching Russia-related sanctions as a result of a freedom of information request by the law firm Pinsent Masons. It is good that those companies have come forward voluntarily, but it shows the scale of the problem.

Finally, according to the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation, only one financial penalty has been issued regarding a sanctions breach within the Russia and Belarus sanctions regimes since February 2022, and only three penalties have been published across all UK sanctions regimes since June 2021. That compares very unfavourably with the United States and other allies, which have been issuing fines and dealing with this issue. Labour stands unshakeably with our allies in providing military, economic, diplomatic and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine in the face of Putin's illegal invasion, but that must include a robust sanctions regime.

Mr Mitchell: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for his comments—I know the revelations in the British media to which he referred at the beginning of his remarks. I will write to him today on some of the technical points he has raised, giving him a very specific answer. On the general point he has made, I can tell him that Britain has prohibited the export to Russia of thousands of products, including semiconductors, and our trade with Russia is down over 96% from pre-invasion levels. We are also providing advice to UK businesses on how to identify methods of circumvention and have shared a list of products of particular concern that could end up on the battlefield.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for the update, but he will probably be aware that there are backdoor routes that are leading to technology ending up in Russia. The most prevalent of those is British universities supplying technology to Iran that ends up on drones, which are then used by Russia to attack the brave Ukrainians. Will he undertake to investigate this practice and put a stop to it, and to apply appropriate sanctions accordingly?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend accurately identifies dangers to the sanctions regimes that can cause them to be circumvented. We are, I think, good at identifying and closing down such dangers, but I should make it clear to him that UK sanctions prohibit a range of activities related to the movement of prohibited items to and from Russia, both directly and indirectly. In that context, I will consider carefully the point that my hon. Friend has made.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I thank the Minister for his answer. The SNP welcomes the extension of sanctions against the Russian regime, but we still think more needs to be done. For example, are there any plans to extend the sanctions that are currently in place against Hamas and other terrorist organisations operating in the middle east, which we know are forging closer and closer links with Putin and his criminal terrorist networks? In particular, the United States has already sanctioned a number of Hamas representatives and people close to Hamas operating in different countries

in the middle east. Do the Minister and the Government have any plans to follow suit and sanction those same individuals?

The Foreign Affairs Committee recently described the UK Government's efforts to sanction individuals and organisations linked to Russia's Wagner terrorist group as "underwhelming in the extreme". What action do the Government intend to take in response to that report, so that organisations such as Wagner and those who run them are effectively sanctioned? We know that Ukraine has imposed sanctions on the former KGB intelligence officer Alexander Lebedev. Do the UK Government have any plans to follow suit?

Mr Mitchell: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for his comments. We do not give routine updates or a running commentary on sanctions, but he may rest assured that we are looking at Hamas in every respect. He drew attention to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee's report; as he will know, we recently announced sanctions—both direct and indirect—against Wagner. While we are careful not to discuss specific cases, we take all potential breaches very seriously, and all businesses that are registered in the UK are bound by law to comply with the Russia sanctions regime.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The Minister has given us a very informative statement. I am very interested in this business of intellectual knowledge getting to Russia via third parties. Can I take it that His Majesty's Government have contacted and spoken with the vice-chancellors and principals of our academic institutions the length and breadth of the UK to advise them how this must be stopped?

Mr Mitchell: I thank the hon. Member for his comments about my informative—but overlong, Mr Speaker—answer to this urgent question, and I can assure him that we deal with all relevant areas. The point he makes about academic areas is a very good one, and we will make sure that that is fully taken into account.

Business of the House

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Leader of the House.

10.15 am

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Penny Mordaunt): The business for the week commencing 13 November will be:

MONDAY 13 NOVEMBER—Continuation of the debate on the King's Speech, on building an NHS fit for the future.

TUESDAY 14 NOVEMBER—Continuation of the debate on the King's Speech, on securing high, sustained economic growth in every part of the country.

WEDNESDAY 15 NOVEMBER—Conclusion of the debate on the King's Speech, on reducing serious violence and violence against women and girls, and raising confidence in policing and the criminal justice system.

THURSDAY 16 NOVEMBER—Debate on the reports of the Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff, followed by a general debate on COP28.

FRIDAY 17 NOVEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 20 November will include:

MONDAY 20 NOVEMBER—Remaining stages of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill.

TUESDAY 21 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Media Bill.

WEDNESDAY 22 NOVEMBER—My right hon. Friend the Chancellor will make his autumn statement, followed by a debate on the autumn statement.

THURSDAY 23 NOVEMBER—Continuation of the debate on the autumn statement.

FRIDAY 24 NOVEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 27 November will include:

MONDAY 27 NOVEMBER—Conclusion of the debate on the autumn statement.

Lucy Powell: So there we have it: confirmation that the Government have given up on governing. The Prime Minister's first and likely only King's Speech, and what should be his moment of maximum power and authority—yet it was not, because he is too weak, he has no burning agenda, he cannot escape his Government's own record and he certainly cannot be the change the country is crying out for. The verdict is in: "thin gruel", "damp squib", "dull as ditchwater", "a series of gimmicks", and a Prime Minister who had

"already checked out, his wheelie was at the door".

Those are not my words, but those of Conservative Members. The Leader of the House knows it and they know it: yet another failed reset. They are out of ideas and out of road—"drifting to defeat", as one has put it today.

The programme is so thin it is embarrassing. Of the few Bills announced, five are carry-overs, four are barely longer than a page, three we have seen before and the flagship crime Bill has already been shelved. Despite the big issues facing our country, the Government's answers

[Lucy Powell]

are so small. There is nothing to tackle the cost of living crisis, just a Prime Minister deluded that everything is going great, and even getting his own figures wrong. There is nothing on NHS waiting lists or mental health, despite a Bill being promised many times. Education has been consigned to lofty ambitions years away. There is nothing of substance on transport, despite Network North being the Prime Minister's last big reset—another flunk. However, the Government have found time for the regulation of pedicabs and a Bill to make it easier to sack doctors. Do the Government really think that sacking doctors is the solution to an NHS crisis?

Other Bills are political stunts, not fixing problems. Take North sea gas and oil. Can the Leader of the House confirm that we already have regular North sea licensing and that it has not prevented the worst cost of living crisis in generations? Can she also confirm that, in the midst of that crisis driven by energy bills, the grand offer of this King's Speech is a Bill that, by the admission of the Energy Secretary, will do absolutely nothing about bills? The only way to bring down bills and get energy security is by going further and faster on cheap renewables. Instead, this Government are retreating and spending billions subsidising gas, the price of which is set globally anyway. It is politics first, country second.

Then there is the so-called flagship crime Bill—a Bill that has had to go back to the drawing board. The Prime Minister is too weak to stand up to his Home Secretary, who wants to criminalise giving homeless people tents because she thinks it is a lifestyle choice—despicable. We all know what she is up to; it is naked. Instead of sacking her, the Prime Minister cowers next to her. He is cowering next to her today, too. She is out of control. She is utterly irresponsible, undermining the police while stoking up division ahead of a difficult and important weekend. She is unhinged. Does the Leader of the House agree with the Home Secretary that police officers are playing favourites in this case? But the Prime Minister is so weak that he cannot rein in the Home Secretary. He is so weak that he could not even get his own ideas into his own King's Speech—

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not like the term “unhinged”. I understand that tensions are running very high, but I want us to try to moderate our language.

Lucy Powell: I will withdraw that, Mr Speaker, and I will ask my questions instead.

Nutrient neutrality has been dropped to avoid another embarrassing defeat. Whatever happened to the motorists Bill, briefed several times as the Prime Minister's big idea? It is nowhere this week. The ban on conversion therapy? Dropped.

One of the Prime Minister's pet projects did make it into the King's Speech though: a Bill on autonomous vehicles. But the joke being made on the Tory WhatsApp groups is that it is their own Government that is the driverless car. I can tell the Leader of the House that Labour is revving up. There is much that we would do. We would bring in a fiscal responsibility lock, so that mortgage payers never again pay the price of Conservative failure. We would ban water bosses' bonuses and clean up our rivers; end non-dom tax breaks and have more doctors and teachers; change planning laws to build

more affordable homes; levy a proper windfall tax; and set up GB energy. We would make work pay, legislate for proper leasehold reform and rights for renters, tackle crime and violence against women and girls, introduce a skills and growth levy, and pass real rail and bus reform—the list goes on.

The Prime Minister was right about one thing: this country needs change. But his programme offers more of the same: weakness, failure, political stunts and division. This Government have given up on governing and are preparing for jobs in opposition, but take it from me: Opposition is not all it is cracked up to be. It is a privilege to have the power of Government and a majority in this place. Is not the biggest travesty of all that they do not even want it any more?

Penny Mordaunt: I start by thanking you, Mr Speaker, all Members and all staff of this House for making the State Opening and the King's first Gracious Address to Parliament so successful.

I know that many right hon. and hon. Members will be taking part in remembrance services across the nation and overseas this weekend. Medals proudly worn by our veterans are not just thanks from a grateful nation; they are a message for the rest of us. We should remember their service and sacrifice, but also the lessons that made their service and sacrifice both necessary and possible. This weekend, as we attend services and lay wreaths beside memorials, we should reflect on how best to honour them and the freedoms we enjoy because of them, and protect their precious legacy.

The shadow Leader of the House started by talking about the cost of living. I am sorry that, as she did so, she did not recognise that this week we have paid out £2.2 billion in cost of living payments and that 99% of households eligible for the cost of living payment have already received it from this Government. I disagree with the hon. Lady, because I do not think that our cost of living issues are remotely helped by lessening our energy security, which is why we are bringing forward the Bill and why I ask her party to support it. It is not at all incompatible with investing in renewable energy and clean technology.

The hon. Lady is rather fond of criticising both our record and our plans for this Session, so it might be helpful to get the scores on the doors. She believes that our 43 Bills, 1,000 statutory instruments and record number of private Members' Bills—24—passed in the third Session of this Parliament is a shabby record. I point out to her that only in two of the 13 parliamentary Sessions between 1997 and 2010 were more Bills put through than we put through in the last Session. In the last Sessions of Labour Administrations, the average number of Bills brought forward was 21. The hon. Lady cannot justify her charge against us about the amount we have got done. She might be relying on the time it took us—it did take us less time than we had allocated to pass a lot of that legislation and to do Government business—but that is not really a problem for those on the Government Benches; it is a more a problem for those on the Opposition Benches, although I have no complaints about that. Those on the Government side of the House have been pulling their weight, even in Opposition day debates—in debates on school safety and animal welfare, for example, there were more Conservative speakers than Opposition speakers.

Let me go into the specific points that the hon. Lady raised. On tents, the Home Secretary has no plans to ban Millets—we are not doing that. The Government have made the largest investment ever in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping, providing £2 billion to accelerate its mitigation and prevention, including preventing 640,000 people from becoming homeless in the last five years.

On conversion therapy, we have a manifesto commitment, and it is still a manifesto commitment. The Secretary of State will keep the House informed on the work she is doing on this important matter.

I was surprised to hear the hon. Lady raise nutrient neutrality. I had hoped she would support our measures, but the Secretary of State will no doubt update the House on the further work he is doing in that area. However, we are bringing forward many measures that will assist more developments to happen, including reforms at the valuation office.

At the heart of the charge the hon. Lady presents are values and the question of who is fit to govern for the people of this country, and I would ask her to undertake just a little self-reflection. She mentioned doctors, but 80% of the medical doctors in the House sit on the Government Benches, while 91% of the veterans in the House sit on these Benches, so I do not think there is a problem with our values, our service or our duty.

Yesterday, outside this place, Just Stop Oil activists held up an ambulance on Waterloo bridge. It was Government legislation, passed in this House, that enabled the police to arrest 40 of those protesters and get the traffic moving—legislation that the hon. Lady blocked, along with reforms to protect the public from strike action.

The hon. Lady supports the regressive tax policies of the London Mayor and the tax and spend policies of the shadow Chancellor, which would saddle every household with an additional £3,000 of tax per annum. The one-time party of “education, education, education” is now the party of “tax education, education, education”—the hon. Lady should think about that for a moment and about the values it represents.

I will take no lectures from a Labour party that puts politics before people. Labour Members talk of change, but I am afraid that the Labour party has not changed at all.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): Yesterday, I hosted the first ever parliamentary reception for Yorkshire Cancer Research—a fantastic charity that has been working for nearly 100 years in the fight against cancer, and not just in Yorkshire. It is a significant funder of research, and we have some very fine research institutions in the north. However, institutions in the north as a whole—the north-east and the north-west, as well as Yorkshire—can do more. Please could we have a debate about research funding and the process by which it is allocated?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for the work he is doing. He raises an important point, and if he were to apply for a debate, I am sure it would be well attended. The Department of Health and Social Care invests about £1 billion a year in research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research, and that institution welcomes funding applications on any

aspect of health research. Its expenditure on cancer research in the last financial year was over £100 million. I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important matter, and I shall draw the attention of the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to what he has said.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Before her rapid rise to her current role as the Leader of the House, the right hon. Lady briefly served as Minister for Women and Equalities. There is—believe it or not—still such a role in this Tory Government. I raise that because recently there have been some absolutely shocking insights into the Government’s attitudes to women and equalities that give us an opportunity to assess her Government’s record, and—spoiler alert for her—it is grotesque.

First, we had the stomach-churning misogyny in language and behaviour described by witnesses at the covid inquiry. I imagine that even the Leader of the House would find it hard to defend the routine and disgraceful attacks on women in a Government she served. It told us so much. We then had the United Nations rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Oliver De Schutter, telling the right hon. Lady’s Government that their record on poverty was “simply not acceptable” and was violating international laws. That surprises no one who sees the effects of her Government’s cruel policies day in and day out. Then a former Tory chair joined the fray by saying that there was “rot at the heart” of the party she was once so proud to be a member of—a rot at the heart of Government.

What we are talking about is the Tory Government’s values, and those values are not Scotland’s values. Their values suggest that the way to help the homeless is to ban charities from supplying tents to rough sleepers—it is a “lifestyle choice” to be homeless, is it not? Those comments were so misjudged that even the Prime Minister was embarrassed. They have the values that say, “We don’t care if we break international laws on poverty and the human rights of the poorest”, and that women can be dismissed in the foulest way imaginable as a part of normal behaviour. Simon Case, the country’s most senior civil servant, said that he had

“never seen a bunch of people less well-equipped to run a country”.

He should know.

Can we have a debate on the Tory Government’s values and what 13 years under this “brutal and useless” Government have done to progress women and equalities and the interests of the most vulnerable among us in this far from United Kingdom?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Lady for her questions. The powerful words this week of Susie Flintham of Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice should give us all pause for thought. That is why the Government have placed professionalism and care of each other at the heart of what we do. We are the first Government to have set up a ministerial human resources function in Whitehall—it is shameful that previously that did not exist. That is also why we are focused on more training and support for MPs, Ministers and officials, and it is why, in my evidence to the Standards Committee, I said that the only way we will make the nation proud of our conduct here is to recognise the responsibility and duty

[Penny Mordaunt]

of care we have to each other across the hundreds of organisations that make up the political landscape—Parliament, political parties and Whitehall. The Government and I as Leader of the House take these matters incredibly seriously.

The hon. Lady talked about values and language. I hope that she will have a word with some of her party's activists, who have intimidated those who stand against her or stand up for their own principles. I point out that, despite by-election losses, the Government did arrive back here with a new MP who sits on our Benches. A little self-reflection about some of the reasons why that MP made that transition would be appreciated.

The hon. Lady wants to talk about values. On women and equalities issues, it is the SNP that has torn the social fabric of the UK with its plans on gender recognition reforms. It is the SNP and the Labour party, which backed the SNP on that, that have backed the anti-free speech Bill that the Scottish Government have been so keen to push. The parties are in coalition together at a local level. Labour would give the SNP powers on foreign affairs and has indulged the First Minister of Wales's separatist agenda.

The hon. Lady often comes here to say that the Government do not respect devolution. We do respect devolution; it is part of our values. Since the turn of the century, the UK Government have legislated for Scotland more than 200 times with the Scottish Government's consent. It is the SNP that does not listen to local voices. The party that does not respect local people and local decision making is the SNP, which overrules 50% of councils on planning appeals, did not consult local authorities regarding its council tax policies, and does not pass on funding from the UK Government that is designed for Scotland's local authorities. I think that our values are fine. The hon. Lady should look to her own party if she wants some improvement.

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): Some of the Ukrainians housed in Mid Derbyshire under the Homes for Ukraine scheme are worried about their futures, as their visas are starting to expire. They include school pupils who are uncertain about whether they can continue their education here, attend British universities and receive home student fees and funding. Will the Government make a statement outlining the future of the Homes for Ukraine scheme and how students will be affected?

Penny Mordaunt: Many Members are hosting Ukrainian refugees, and we are acutely aware of how difficult it is for them to plan their lives in the situations that they find themselves in. We will give them as much certainty as we can so that they can start to make decisions about studies or where they might go in a year's time. My understanding is that they must be given a year's notice, so many will be given information next spring. I will write to both relevant Departments to flag the point that if we can do anything earlier it would be appreciated.

Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab): The word "economy" was mentioned only once in the King's Speech. Given that the country faces the highest tax burden since the second world war, not to mention the

longest squeeze on wages in 200 years, does that not speak volumes about the Government's lack of a long-term plan for our economy?

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Lady will know that the biggest way we can help households is to curb inflation. That is the Chancellor's priority, and it is why we have exercised restraint on spending. I am sorry that the hon. Lady did not support us in those efforts, but she will not have long to wait for the Chancellor's autumn statement, which I announced in the business statement.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): Could we have a debate on the volunteers who support the Royal British Legion? I am lucky enough to be the honorary president of the Royal British Legion in Hinckley, 100 years since its formation, and my predecessor but three was also its honorary president. I have seen the work of the likes of Elaine Ward, who has been collecting for the poppy appeal for 50 years. I will be there in Hinckley on Friday. Could we have a debate about how magnificent this charity really is?

Penny Mordaunt: I am sure I speak for all Members of the House by thanking the hon. Gentleman for enabling us all to send our thanks to the Royal British Legion and its army of volunteers who assist all year round, not just during the poppy campaign. If we were to have a debate, it would be well attended and very long, because the work it does is tremendously diverse, helping families as well as veterans and serving members of the armed forces.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): This summer I welcomed to Parliament teachers from Oldfield Park Infant School and Twerton Infant School. They told me how they were struggling with staff shortages, underfunding and an increasingly unmanageable workload. In the south-west, teacher vacancies have risen by 175% in the last five years. So far, the Government have committed only to a fraction of the recommended £15 billion needed for catch-up education. Can we have a debate in Government time to get to the bottom of the considerable underfunding of schools?

Penny Mordaunt: As the hon. Lady knows, we have protected the schools budget and increased the number of teachers substantially—I think we have an additional 30,000 since 2010. Clearly, recruitment is an issue in certain parts of the country. There have been a number of campaigns through local authorities to attract teachers from particular disciplines into areas that do not have enough of them. I will write to the Secretary of State on the hon. Lady's behalf and ask her whether she and her Department could share some best practice with the hon. Lady and her local authority.

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): The Leader of the Opposition recently said that he would bulldoze local protests and opposition in order to build millions more homes, which has folk in my patch worried. Is there some way of finding Government time to have a debate to show that there always needs to be local consent and engagement to build the homes that we need? We need those homes to be affordable, proportionate, sustainable and appropriate.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important point. It is important to respect local decision making. We know from the neighbourhood planning forums we helped to establish that quite often they are more ambitious about building homes in their area than their own local authorities. We are on track to meet our manifesto commitment of 1 million new homes in this Parliament. Since 2010, we have delivered over 2.2 million homes, with millions moving into home ownership. Through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, we are also improving the planning process. At the heart of it, I am very happy to say, we still have local people and local decision making.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): Last Saturday I had the privilege of attending the launch of the north-east Field of Remembrance, run by the Royal British Legion, in Saltwell Park in my constituency. Will the Leader of the House join me in thanking and congratulating the Royal British Legion on an excellent ceremony? Saltwell Park is a massively brilliant venue for our north-east Field of Remembrance. I was also wondering how soon we might get an announcement that will lead to the recommencement of the Backbench Business Committee in this Session of Parliament.

Penny Mordaunt: First of all, I am very happy to join the hon. Gentleman in congratulating the Royal British Legion in his constituency on all the work they do all year round, but particularly at this time of year. I have been prodding my colleagues with regard to his request, and I hope to have some news for him this afternoon.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): This weekend, the nation will fall silent to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice in the great war, the second world war and other conflicts. Next weekend at the Cenotaph, the Association of Jewish Ex-servicemen and Women will conduct its annual march. That will be a really important security operation for the Metropolitan police. Last year, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) became the first ever Minister to lay a wreath at that service. Will my right hon. Friend allow a debate in Government time on the contribution made by Jewish ex-servicemen and women, and will she prevail on the Defence Secretary or a Defence Minister to attend the service and lay a wreath?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that very important point. It is right that we mark the contribution of all ex-servicemen and women. He mentions the—I think 120,000—Jewish servicemen who fought in world wars with our British armed forces. These are incredibly important events, and 19 November coincides with Mitzvah Day, a day when the Jewish community around the country will be supporting local charities and communities—another example of the service they give to their communities and this nation. I am very happy to ensure that there is ministerial attendance at that event. That tradition should continue. I cannot tell him which Minister, but I shall make sure that all relevant Departments remember the request.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): The Leader of the House has assured the House time and again that it is the intention of the House of Commons Commission and herself to bring forward measures on

risk-based exclusions, which we were meant to debate before the summer recess. It is now November. I am sure the right hon. Lady is bored of being asked this question, but not as bored as I am of having to keep asking it. With yet more recent reports alleging serious misconduct while measures to address them appear to be kicked into the long grass, when will time be found to discuss how to ensure Parliament is a safe workplace and to restore our reputation with the public?

Penny Mordaunt: When either the Committees of this House or the Commission bring forward proposals to be debated on the Floor of the House, we find time very swiftly—usually within a week. We did debate the proposals before the summer recess and there were some very legitimate comments from Members. The hon. Lady took part in that debate herself, if I remember correctly. The Commission is considering these things and as soon as it has finalised a proposal we will, just as we always have, bring it back to this House.

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): Since my election, I have liaised closely with the Environment Agency and City of Doncaster Council to ensure that we never again see as many flood victims as we saw in 2019. Storm Babet resulted in the flooding of 15 properties; far more were flooded in 2019. While that is an undoubted success and a testament to the hard work of the agency and the council, we in Doncaster are now being penalised for that success. For those 15 households who did suffer flooding, it is still a disaster, so may we hold a debate on my proposal that the Government's excellent compensation scheme for flood victims should apply to all areas, not just those where a minimum of 25 properties are affected?

Penny Mordaunt: I am very sorry to hear about those households, and my sympathies go out to all who have been affected. I am pleased to hear that the floods have had less impact than in previous years. That is a very good development, but of course it is of no comfort to those who have suffered. I would encourage my hon. Friend's local authority to contact the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities if it thinks that it is able to meet the criteria for support. I understand that the Department is open to listening and working with councils so that they receive proper support, and I think they have until late January next year to provide information on those criteria, but I will certainly ensure that the Secretary of State has heard my hon. Friend's advocacy for the 15 flooded households in his constituency.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): The overwhelming majority of people in Yorkshire are proud and patriotic, love their families, and work hard. How can it be, then, that families had to approach food banks 75,000 times last year in order to feed their children? That is shameful, and doubtless it was in the UN rapporteur's mind when he said that our country was in breach of its international treaty obligations under the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights. May we have a debate about child poverty in Government time, and will the Leader of the House arrange for a Government Law Officer to be present to tell us what their legal defence is for the position in which the Government have put us?

Penny Mordaunt: This is an important matter, and one that the Government take extremely seriously. That is why we have a package of more than £90 billion to support people through these cost of living strains, and it is why we are working to combat and mitigate the causes. What is happening internationally has placed immense strain on our fuel prices and so forth. I think that we should debate these matters, and I hope that we debate them in all parts of the UK. I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman applied for a debate, it would be well attended. He might also like to read the Senedd's report on the Welsh Labour Government's track record on child poverty, which is out this week: I think he would find it an eye-opening read.

Anna Firth (Southend West) (Con): Speeding and antisocial driving continue to blight Chalkwell and Leigh-on-Sea, with boy racers using illegal exhausts hurtling down our seafront at all times of the day and night. Even our local legend Linda Catling, who, despite being partially sighted, regularly knits woollen postbox toppers and has now created a speed camera topper, is considering moving out of Marine Parade owing to the dangerous driving. Given that road crime, including speeding, kills more people in Essex than all other crimes put together, may we please have a debate in Government time on speeding and antisocial driving?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for giving a plug to Linda Catling. I will have to google her knitted speed camera post box toppers—they sound very interesting indeed—and we send our best to her. I also thank my hon. Friend for raising such an important point. As she will know, one of the Bills that we announced in the King's Speech will hopefully lead to much greater road safety in years to come, and I hope she will support that Bill as it makes its way through the House.

Andrew Western (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Last weekend, the Home Secretary turned her damaging and divisive rhetoric on the homeless, describing homelessness as a “lifestyle choice” and suggesting that her Government should prioritise stripping homeless people of their tents and fining the charities that provide them with that shelter. Although I am relieved that this disgraceful proposal did not make it into the King's Speech, could I ask the Leader of the House to take this opportunity to apologise for her colleague's callous remarks?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I have already given some statistics on this Government's record on tackling homelessness, in terms of finance and how many people we have prevented from becoming homeless. Our Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has already ensured that more than 6,000 people have been prevented from becoming homeless. I am here to answer for the Government's record and the Government's agenda, and I have.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Mr Speaker, may I, too, thank you and your staff for all the hard work that was done to make the state opening such a magnificent occasion? It was exceptional, as usual.

Since 3 November, I have been inundated with correspondence and calls both from my own constituents and from constituents who should be represented by MPs who unfortunately boycott this place. Cystic fibrosis

kills far too many young people across the United Kingdom. According to National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidance, while Orkambi, Symkevi and Kaftrio are

“clinically effective treatments with important benefits”,

they are too expensive to be recommended for use. Such a decision robs suffering children and their parents of the hope of life. Does the Leader of the House think the four-week consultation is adequate so that representations can be made to see these drugs extended to suffering young people across the whole United Kingdom in order to save lives and give hope to parents?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this question, which will be of concern to everyone who has this condition, their carers and their families. He will know that there is a very clear process to ensure the drugs that are available and approved by NICE are both cost-effective and clinically effective. There are appeal processes, and I am sure he will assist his constituents to make representations. Of course, even if a drug is not approved by NICE, patients can, in certain circumstances, still have access to it if it can be shown that the drug would disproportionately benefit that individual.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Can we please have a statement from the Paymaster General to explain to the House why the very clear and final recommendations made by Sir Brian Langstaff in his report published in April—seven months ago—setting out the need to extend interim payments and to set up a compensation scheme this year, have effectively been trashed by the Government? Is it not shameful that, after setting up a five-year public inquiry and running a parallel compensation review so that the payment of compensation would not drag on for far too long, and with very clear recommendations from a well-thought-of, esteemed former High Court judge, the Government have decided not to implement any of those key recommendations?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the right hon. Lady for her diligent campaigning on this matter. She rightly notes that the compensation study was set up to run concurrently in order to save time. I know that the Paymaster General is planning some engagement in the coming weeks with the groups that are campaigning. Having raised this at a previous business questions, the right hon. Lady will know that I have also raised it with the Paymaster General. I will make sure that he hears what she has said again today. I can tell her that he is committed to acting as swiftly as possible to ensure that all people, including those who should receive interim payments, do so.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): It has recently been announced that the two islands in my constituency, the Isle of Arran and the Isle of Cumbrae, are each to lose their Bank of Scotland branch. Following hard on the heels of that announcement, Brodick post office on the Isle of Arran is also set for closure. Will the Leader of the House make a statement setting out her support for these vital resources for the viability of our communities, especially rural and island communities? Does she agree that it is time to protect, in legislation, these crucial physical services in island and rural communities?

Penny Mordaunt: I am sorry to hear about the potential situation that some of the hon. Lady's constituents will be in. She will know that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has made funding available to find solutions to ensure that people have access to banking services or post office services, with those sometimes being run out of other premises. I am not across what might be available in her local area, but I can write to the Secretary of State to ask his officials to contact her office to signpost her to what support is available. Even if stand-alone facilities have to go, that does not mean that the services have to go, and there are some great examples of how those services have been able to continue running across the country.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): May I, through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, thank Mr Speaker for facilitating the Constituency Garden of Remembrance, at which many of us have been laying memorials this week? I will be placing my own for constituents in Cardiff South and Penarth who have served and been lost or injured over generations of conflicts and wars. I think in particular of the diverse communities who have served—our diverse Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Jewish communities, and indeed many others, including those from across our Commonwealth. I should also mention our merchant navy, which is specifically remembered on Saturday in Cardiff bay. May we have a debate on the excellent work of not only the Royal British Legion, which has been referred to by a number of Members, but other veterans' organisations in our constituencies? I think of the work of Woody's Lodge and the Welsh Veterans Partnership in my constituency, which do so much to support those who have served, often where there have been life-affecting issues. Those organisations do excellent work and it is right that we remember them, as well as all those we have lost.

Penny Mordaunt: I join the hon. Gentleman in thanking the House staff and all Members who have made use of the ways in which we can remember those from our constituencies who have fallen, such as the memorial garden and the service that took place yesterday against the war memorial at the top of the Westminster Hall stairs—it is much appreciated. He has got on the record what I am sure is just a fraction of the incredible organisations in his constituency, and I thank him for doing that. This is one reason why we have set up the Office for Veterans' Affairs. We want to be able to commission services directly for veterans—something that could not be done as part of the Ministry of Defence. We must ensure that this country is the best place in the world to be a veteran, and I thank all Members who will be taking part in services and saying thank you to their veteran community this weekend.

Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba): A recent ruling by the inner house of the Court of Session in Edinburgh put beyond any doubt that the ill-conceived Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill of the Scottish Government impinges significantly on the Equality Act 2010, the sex-based rights of women and the same-sex rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. We have had a debate in Westminster Hall to discuss redefining and having precision in law about the word "sex". Will the Leader of the House discuss this

matter, and the possibility of bringing in legislation to clarify the definition of "sex" in the 2010 Act in the future, with her Equalities and Justice colleagues?

Penny Mordaunt: I know that the Secretary of State is very across this issue, and I think that that judgment was a helpful thing to have taken place. We deeply regret the lack of understanding on these matters about the need—whatever the Governments and Administrations in other parts of the UK wish to do—to bear in mind the social fabric of the UK. Tearing at that social fabric, what it is to be a citizen and the values and norms that we live under is a bad thing. We also need to ensure that we are upholding what is in the 2010 Act. I shall make sure that the Secretary of State has heard what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): I would welcome the Leader of the House's advice on how to expedite a response from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office for my constituents who are desperate to return home from Kyiv with their newborn son, who was born in September in Ukraine through surrogacy and for whom they are seeking an emergency travel document. I totally understand the importance of completing the passport application process, but my constituents have a vulnerable baby who needs to be cared for at home and a three-year-old back here in the UK who desperately needs her parents back.

Penny Mordaunt: I am sorry to hear about that situation. If the hon. Lady liaises with my office after this session, to give me the details and information about what she has already done, we will give her advice about how we can try to speed the process up for her. As an advert to other Members, the Home Office still offers bespoke surgeries; caseworkers can sit down with them here or online, and go through cases that are stuck in the system.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Wick harbour in my constituency suffered damage in the recent storms. If that is not dealt with very fast indeed, it could jeopardise the future use of the harbour. In the same storm, a section of sea defence beside the main railway line from Inverness to the far north fell away, so we had no trains, which are a vital transport link, for a length of time. The Leader of the House might say these are matters for the Scottish Government, but I would argue that they are strategic to the United Kingdom. Further to her previous answer, will she encourage officials at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to speak to the Scottish Government, and possibly the Highland Council, about these issues, so we can get them put right as fast as possible?

Penny Mordaunt: I am sorry to hear about that situation. The hon. Gentleman is right that unless these things are taken care of and mitigated, future bad weather will exacerbate the situation. I will make some inquiries on his behalf. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs may well be able to assist him more than some other Departments. In times of great crisis, we always ensure that the Scottish Government and local authorities across the UK are able to make a request for military aid to the civil authorities, in order

[Penny Mordaunt]

to get assistance from UK armed forces to keep our communities safe. I will make some inquiries on behalf of the hon. Gentleman and contact his office.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): This week, after three years of threatening journalists at *The Guardian* and elsewhere with legal action, wealthy business tycoons Douglas Barrowman and Michelle Mone finally admitted that they are indeed behind the dodgy covid company PPE Medpro Ltd. The Government have repeatedly promised to outlaw the practice of dodgy lawyers and dodgy clients using the threat of legal action to prevent the freedom of the press from reporting the truth in the public interest. Will the Leader of the House clarify which of the Bills announced in the King's Speech will fulfil that promise and outlaw the practice once and for all?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that important point. As someone who has been subject to such threats myself, I think these matters are very important. We did work on this in the previous Session. There is ongoing work in the Ministry of Justice and other Departments to ensure that people are able to whistleblow. In other parts of Government, we have moved to protect individuals who find themselves in different but similar sets of circumstances, particularly relating to issues of employment and sexual harassment.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the Leader of the House for answering the business question.

Artificial Intelligence Safety Summit

11.4 am

The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Michelle Donelan): With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall make a statement about the Government's artificial intelligence safety summit.

Today I update the House about a turning point in our history. With 1% of the world's population, we have built the third largest AI sector. We have rocketed ourselves to a 688% increase in AI companies basing themselves here in less than a decade, and UK AI scale-ups are raising almost double that of France, Germany and the rest of Europe combined. But the sudden and unprecedented growth in the speed and power of artificial intelligence presents unlimited opportunities along with the potential of grave risks, which we cannot ignore.

I truly believe that we stand at a crossroads in human history. To turn the wrong way would be a monumental missed opportunity for mankind, which is why last week presented such a watershed moment. We convened leaders, Ministers, developers, scientists and academics from across the globe to discuss for the first time the risks and opportunities of frontier AI. Although the collection of countries and organisations that came to Bletchley Park was unprecedented, our goal from the start was to leave with tangible outcomes. Let me briefly outline a handful of actions that have resulted from the summit.

First, 28 countries and the European Union, representing the majority of the world's population, signed up to an unprecedented agreement known as the Bletchley declaration. Despite some claiming that such a declaration would be rejected by many countries in attendance, we agreed that, for the good of all, AI should be designed, developed, deployed and used in a manner that is safe, human-centric, trustworthy and responsible. We agreed on the protection of human rights, transparency and explainability, fairness, accountability, regulation, safety, appropriate human oversight, ethics, bias mitigation, privacy and data protection.

We also agreed to measure, monitor and mitigate potentially harmful capabilities and the associated effects that may emerge—in particular to prevent misuse and issues of control, and the amplification of other risks—and that Turing prize winner Yoshua Bengio, credited as being one of the godfathers of AI, would lead on a state of science report to ensure that, collectively, we stay on top of the risks of frontier AI.

Countries with differing world views and interests, including China, signed the same agreement. Some had said that China would not come to the summit, but it did. They said that, if it does attend, China would never sign an agreement, but it did. Then they said that if China did sign the agreement, it would not agree to continue collaborating in the long term—but it did that as well. That alone would have made the summit a watershed moment in the history of AI safety, but we went further.

We surpassed all expectations by securing an agreement on Government-led testing pre-deployment of the models. This is truly a game changer to help ensure that we can safely harness the benefits of frontier AI while mitigating the risks. To facilitate it, the UK announced that the world-leading frontier taskforce will morph into the

world's first permanent AI safety institute, which will bring together the very best AI minds in the world to research future risks and conduct third-party testing of models.

This is just the start of the journey on AI safety, which is why we have also confirmed funding for the institute for the rest of the decade and secured future AI safety summits to be held in the Republic of Korea in six months' time and in France in one year's time, ensuring that the extraordinary pace of international action set by the summit last week is maintained into the future.

None the less, the summit is just one piece in the UK's overall approach to AI safety. Our White Paper published earlier this year was praised for ensuring that the UK can be agile and responsive as risks emerge. I am sure that Opposition Members will call for a one-size-fits-all "snapshot in time" piece of legislation, but we must ensure that we deepen our understanding of the problem before we rush to produce inadequate legislation.

We also need to ensure that we are quick enough to act, which is why we have taken the steps to ensure that we can keep pace with the development of the technology, with the next set of models being released within six months. AI is the fastest emerging technology that we have ever seen, and we need a system that can identify, evaluate and understand AI to then allow us to mitigate the risks with the right guardrails. That is why it is such an achievement to agree the pre-deployment testing of models; we should not underestimate that achievement.

Companies need to do more too, which is why before the summit we managed to go further than any country ever has. We secured the publication of the main AI companies' safety policies, along with a catalogue of the possible policies, ensuring transparency and a race to the top, complemented by the recent US executive order. It is also why I have been advocating for responsible capability scaling, which I often refer to as a kind of smoke alarm for AI developers.

The release of ChatGPT not even a year ago was a breakthrough moment for humanity. We were all surprised by the progress. We saw the acceleration of investment into, and adoption of, AI systems at the frontier, making them increasingly powerful and consequential to our lives. These systems could turbocharge our public services, saving lives in the NHS and tailoring education to every child's needs. They could free people everywhere from tedious work and amplify our creative abilities. They could help our scientists to unlock bold new discoveries, opening the door to a world where one day diseases such as cancer will no longer exist and there will be access to near-limitless clean energy.

But these systems could also further concentrate unaccountable power in the hands of a few, or be maliciously used to undermine societal trust, erode public safety or threaten international security. The British people deserve to know that those who represent them in this place are driving forward the right guardrails and governance for the safe development and deployment of frontier AI systems. I firmly believe that it cannot be left to chance or private actors alone, nor is it an issue for party political squabbling or point scoring.

As we stand here today, what was once considered science fiction is quickly becoming science fact. Just a few years ago, the most advanced AI systems could

barely write coherent sentences. Now they can write poetry, help doctors to detect cancer, and generate photo-realistic images in a split second, but with those incredible advances come potentially grave risks, and we refuse to bury our head in the sand. We cannot ignore or dismiss the countless experts who tell us plain and simple that there are risks of humans losing control, that some model outputs could become completely unpredictable, and that the societal impacts of AI advances could seriously disrupt safety and security here at home.

Countries entered the summit with diverse and conflicting views of the world. Some speculated that a deal between the countries invited would be impossible, but what we achieved in just two days at Bletchley Park will be remembered as the moment that the world came together to begin solving an unprecedented global challenge. An international approach is not just preferable, but absolutely essential. Some Members understandably questioned the decision to invite China to the summit, and I do not dismiss the very real concerns and grievances that many on both sides of the House might have had, but a Government who represent the British people must ultimately do what is right for the British people, especially when it comes to keeping them safe. I am firm that it was the right decision for the country in the long term. There simply cannot be a substantive conversation about AI without involving the world's leading AI nations, and China is currently second in the world in AI.

AI is not some phenomenon that is happening to us; it is a force that we have the power to shape and direct. I believe that we have a responsibility—and, in fact, a duty—to act and to act now. I conclude by taking us back to the beginning: 73 years ago, Alan Turing dared to ask whether computers would one day think. From his vantage point at the dawn of the field, he observed that

"we can only see a short distance ahead, but we can see plenty there that needs to be done."

For us in this place, there is indeed plenty that needs to be done, but we cannot do it in isolation, so I urge Members across the House to adopt the collaborative, constructive approach that the international community displayed at Bletchley last week. If we in this place put our differences aside on this issue and work pragmatically on behalf of the British people, this new era of artificial intelligence can truly benefit every person and community across the country and beyond. Our summit was a successful step forward, but we are only just getting started. I commend this statement to the House.

11.14 am

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of her statement. As we have heard, the opportunities of AI are almost endless. It has the potential to transform the world and deliver life-changing benefits for working people. From delivering earlier cancer diagnoses to relieving traffic congestion or providing personalised tuition to children, AI can be a force for good. It is already having a positive impact in the present: in NHS hospitals such as the Huddersfield Royal Infirmary, AI is being used to help patients, cut waiting lists and save lives. The Labour party wants that technology to be available in every hospital with our fit for the future fund.

However, to secure those benefits we must get on top of the risks and we must build public trust. We welcome the announcements made last week at Bletchley Park.

[Matt Rodda]

The future summits in South Korea and France will hopefully lead to more agreement between nations about how we make this new technology work for everyone. The AI safety institute will play an important role in making this new technology safe. Labour supports its creation, but we do have some questions. It would be good to hear the Secretary of State explain why the new institute is not keeping the function of identifying new uses for AI in the public sector. As the institute is taking all the AI expertise from the taskforce, it is also unclear who in her Department will carry out the crucial role of identifying how the public sector can benefit from cutting-edge technology.

There are also questions about UK computer capability. The AI safety institute policy paper states:

“Running evaluations and advancing safety research will also depend on access to compute.”

Yet earlier this year, the Government had less computing power than Finland and Italy. Can the Secretary of State update the House on how much of the AI research resource to which the institute will get priority access is available and operational?

Of course, the main task of the institute is to understand the risks of the most advanced current AI capabilities and any future developments. The Prime Minister told the public two weeks ago that,

“AI could make it easier to build chemical or biological weapons. Terrorist groups could use AI to spread fear and destruction on an even greater scale. Criminals could exploit AI for cyber-attacks, disinformation, fraud, or even child sexual abuse.”

Those are stark warnings and demand urgent action from any Government. Keeping the public safe is the first duty of Government. Yet Ministers have chosen not to bring forward any legislation on the most advanced AI. All the commitments that have been made are voluntary, and that creates problems.

For example, if a new company is established with advanced capabilities, how will it be compelled to join the voluntary scheme? What if a company decides it does not want to co-operate any more? Is there a mechanism to stop that happening? The stakes are too high for those questions to remain open, so I look forward to the Secretary of State’s being able to offer us more detail.

There was a space for a Bill on pedicabs in London in the King’s Speech this year, but not for one on frontier AI. Other countries, such as the US, have moved ahead with mandatory regulation for safety and security. It is confusing for the public to hear a Prime Minister on the one hand tell the country that there are dangers to our way of life from AI, but on the other hand say that his Government are in no rush to regulate.

Labour has called for the introduction of binding regulation on those companies developing the most powerful frontier AI because, for us, the security of the British people will always come first. I hope that the Government will now consider taking action and I look forward to the Secretary of State’s response to these points.

Michelle Donelan: I agree with the hon. Gentleman on the importance of building trust among the public, which will also ensure the adoption of AI. In relation to ensuring that we deploy AI throughout our public services, it was this Government who just the other

week announced £100 million to accelerate AI in our health missions, and more than £2 million to assist our teachers to spend less time with paperwork and administration and more time in the classroom. We will continue to work hand in hand with the Cabinet Office to ensure that we utilise AI in our public services, but to be able to do that, we must of course grip the risk, which is exactly why we called the summit.

On computing, the hon. Member will be only too aware that the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced earlier this year £900 million for an exascale programme, which we have allocated in Edinburgh. We have also dedicated £300 million—triple the original amount announced—to AI research resource facilities in Cambridge and Bristol, the first of which will come on stream this year.

The hon. Member also referenced the risk document that we published. We were the first Government in the world to be fully transparent with the British public, showcasing the risks that AI could present. That document was produced by scientists and our national security teams.

The hon. Member referenced legislation and regulation. It is not true that we have no regulation; in fact, we have multiple regulators. In the White Paper that we published earlier this year, we set out the principles that they need to work to. We should not minimise what we achieved just last week: that agreement to do testing pre-deployment is monumental. It is—absolutely—the start of a process, not the end. We could have waited and said, “Let’s just do our own piece of legislation,” which would have taken about a year, as he knows, but we do not have a year to wait, because the next set of models will come out with six months. We also need to deepen our understanding of the risks before we rush to legislate, because we believe that we need to better understand the problems before we insert long-term fixed solutions.

We need to concentrate on putting the safety of the British public first, which is what we have done, so that we can seize the limitless opportunities of AI. I hope that the hon. Member will see the foresight that this Government have had in putting that not just on the British agenda but on the agenda of the world.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the Chair of the Science and Technology Committee.

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): May I congratulate the Government on convening the summit and on its success? It is, as the Secretary of State said, a considerable achievement to get the US, the EU and China to agree a communiqué. It was good to have access to the frontier models that the summit agreed. Having future summits, in six months’ time, is also an important step forward.

As the Secretary of State said, the summit focused principally on frontier AI, but it is vital that we can deal with the here-and-now risks of the AI being deployed already. In the White Paper that they published in March, the Government said that they expected to legislate to have regulators pay

“due regard to the principles”

of that White Paper, but such a Bill was missing from the King’s Speech. Meanwhile, in the US, a very extensive executive order has been issued, and the EU is finalising its Artificial Intelligence Act.

Will the Secretary of State think again, in publishing the response to the White Paper, about taking this final opportunity before a general election to ensure that the good intentions and practice of the Government are not inadvertently left behind, with other jurisdictions' legislation preceding our own and other people setting the rules rather than the United Kingdom setting a framework for the world?

Michelle Donelan: I thank my right hon. Friend for his important question. I think it is right that we do not rush to legislate, because we need to understand properly the risks that we are facing. That is why we have been investing in bringing on board the correct experts, both into Government and into the taskforce that will now morph into the institute. It is why we have also committed not just ourselves but our international partners to producing the “state of the science” reports, so that we can stay up to date with those risks.

Absolutely, we will eventually have to legislate, but as we said in the White Paper that we published earlier this year, we do not need to rush to do that; we need to get the timing right to ensure that we have the right solutions to match those problems. There is a lot that we can do without legislation. We demonstrated that last week by convening the world for collective action to secure pre-model deployment testing, to ensure that we work together to get a better handle on the risks, and to encourage partners such as America to go further, on which we have seen us and them acting in lockstep.

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

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of her statement. The Bletchley declaration provides a baseline and is useful as a starting point, but it will be ongoing engagement that counts as we develop our understanding of the opportunities and threats that AI presents.

I was very taken by the Secretary of State saying that this was not an opportunity for party political point scoring. In that vein, on reflection, does she share my disappointment that the UK Government seemed to actively take steps to exclude the involvement of the devolved Administrations from around these islands from participation in the summit? Any claim that the UK might have to global leadership in AI rests in large part on the work that goes on in all parts of these islands, particularly from a legal, ethical, regulatory and technological perspective. It would have been very valuable had the other Governments that exist on these islands had the opportunity to fully participate in the summit.

While the declaration is a useful starting point, it is the future work on this that will count, so may I have an assurance from the Secretary of State that the UK Government will not seek to curtail again the involvement of devolved Administrations around these islands in future national and international discussions on these matters?

Michelle Donelan: I met my counterpart—and my counterpart from Wales—just days before the summit, but as the hon. Member will appreciate, AI is not a devolved matter, and the people of Scotland were represented by the UK Government.

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement and the frontier taskforce for all the work it has done to produce an important global moment not dissimilar to the COP process. My question is about the AI safety team. In Lancashire we have the National Cyber Force centre coming in Samlesbury, and there is already a big skills base in the region, with GCHQ in Manchester. Can she update me and my constituents on how AI safety will get fed into our national security and how she will work with the National Cyber Force centre?

Michelle Donelan: I know that my hon. Friend is a passionate advocate of cyber-security, which is one key area that we delved into at the summit. It is incredibly important that we maintain cyber-security throughout not just our Government and public services but our businesses, which is why we have been prioritising the area in the UK. I continue to talk to my hon. Friend and other Members about this work.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement. On her reference to poetry, may I remind her that AI creates nothing? It generates a facsimile of text, but it does not create poetry. On the 400th anniversary of the first folio, that can only be done by this quintessence of dust that we are.

On that point, why were the creative industries excluded from the AI summit, when the Secretary of State knows how bitterly disappointed they were not to be included and how profoundly existential this whole issue is for the creative industries—one of the most successful and fastest growing sectors of our economy? Instead, they have been offered the sop of a side roundtable in the future, which the platforms are not even attending. Will the Secretary of State think again about the importance of including our excellent creative industries in every discussion that the Government have about the future of artificial intelligence?

Michelle Donelan: Because the summit was only two days and was focused on a strategic conversation about frontier and the risks and opportunities, not everybody could be engaged and attend. We had an extensive programme called the road to the summit, where several roundtables were held with the creative industries, and both the Minister for Data and Digital Infrastructure and I attended. The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport led some roundtables as well. We are currently working on a code of practice, bringing together the creative sector and the AI sector, to identify and come up with some of the solutions in this area.

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): It was a great pleasure to join the Secretary of State, the Prime Minister, and business and Government leaders from around the world last week at the AI safety summit. Does the Secretary of State agree that Milton Keynes showcased that it was an excellent place to not only hold global events, but to invest in technologies such as AI and robotics?

Michelle Donelan: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I could not have thought of a better place to host this international summit than Bletchley Park. It is not just me who thinks so: all of our delegates remarked

[Michelle Donelan]

on how important it was to host it at such a historically significant venue, one so close to the vibrant tech capital of Milton Keynes.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The Bletchley Park declaration is indeed to be welcomed. Given the more or less consensual response to the Secretary of State's statement, it strikes me that taking this issue forward on a cross-party basis is going to be absolutely crucial. There was no mention of legislation in the King's Speech, and although I partially accept the Secretary of State's point about the time involved in legislating, Governments of all colours come and go, but this issue transcends those changes. Can we get an undertaking from the Secretary of State that there will be discussions right across the Chamber involving all the parties about where she sees things going and what legislation may have to be looked at in the future, in order to give continuity?

Michelle Donelan: I am more than happy to talk to anybody from around the House, and to convene a meeting with colleagues of all colours to discuss this important area and what the future may hold in terms of responses and action.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): It was in 1993 that the world wide web first became accessible to the public, and 30 years on, the world is still grappling with how to regulate and legislate for this industry. I am pleased that we heard from the summit that we are going to have proactive model checking, but I agree with the Chair of the Select Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), that much of this AI technology is already out there—that is the problem. How quickly will the safety institute be set up, and most importantly, how quickly will we see tangible results? Can we learn lessons from the vaccine, and from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency on how legislation and regulation can run alongside innovation in this sector?

Michelle Donelan: In fact, we are learning some of those lessons, because the taskforce itself was modelled on our world-leading vaccine taskforce. As to when the institute will be set up, to all intents and purposes it has already been set up, because it is the next chapter—the evolution—of the existing taskforce. That taskforce has already done research on safety, and has demonstrated to delegates at the summit the full potential of the risks that could be apparent. It has already begun testing those models, and I can assure this House that there will be pre-deployment testing of the models that are going to come out within the next six months.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The first folio has been quoted. I would like to quote a more recent famous science fiction series: one Commander Adama, who said,

“You cannot play God then wash your hands of the things that you've created.”

I absolutely agree that there are huge opportunities in AI, but we have already heard about the huge risks. The Secretary of State says that we should not rush to legislation, but the truth is that we have often lagged

behind in this area—for example, in regulating social media—and we see others moving ahead, including the United States, as we have heard. The EU is also planning legislation by the end of the year. If we are not having legislation, can the Secretary of State at least assure us that an urgent assessment is being made of how hostile states are already weaponising AI for military and other purposes, including information, cyber and hybrid warfare, but also in the chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear spheres? Some hugely worrying stuff is happening out there. Are we urgently assessing it, and deciding how we will respond and defend this country?

Michelle Donelan: Let me pull up the hon. Member on one comment he made, which was about us lagging behind on legislation for social media. We are in fact leading the world with the world's most comprehensive Bill—now Act—in that area. On the misuse of AI, this is one of the three pillars of risk that we discussed at the summit. The risk documents that we published just before the summit highlighted the fact that AI can amplify existing risks. There are already risks presented by the internet and other technologies in relation to biochemical warfare—they are present today and we are dealing with them. This could potentially amplify that, and we have certainly both talked about that internationally and are working on it domestically. We will be coming back to our White Paper within the year.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Historically, every revolution at a time of technology leads to threats of job losses—people not having opportunities to work, which is dreadful for people's lives. However, here we are today with almost full employment in the UK, and there are opportunities for AI to increase that, as well as to make people's lives easier, improve employment prospects and, indeed, conquer diseases. Will my right hon. Friend set out some of the advantages for the average individual of harnessing artificial intelligence for the benefit of all humankind?

Michelle Donelan: The opportunities from AI are limitless, and they can transform our public services. In fact, that is already happening. We see our doctors detecting cancer earlier, and we see us utilising the technology to try to tackle things such as climate change more quickly. In relation to jobs, my hon. Friend is quite right that AI, like any technology, will change the labour market. If we look back to 1940, we see that 60% of jobs we have now did not actually exist back then. AI will create new jobs, and jobs we cannot even think of, but it will also complement our jobs now, allowing us more time to do the bits of our jobs we actually train to do—for example, assisting teachers to have more time in the classroom and doctors to have more time with patients.

Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba): During the covid pandemic, one of my greatest concerns was the over-reliance on and the promotion of lateral flow devices as a gold standard, as it were, of testing and surveillance. It was all the more frustrating because, during that time, I was aware of domestic businesses that were developing AI models to surveil not just covid, but other viruses, such as Ebola and dengue fever. I had a recent very constructive meeting with Health, which is now on board with AI and looking at

domestic diagnostics. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss how these businesses can be brought forward as part of a co-ordinated strategy to develop AI testing and prepare effectively for any future pandemic?

Michelle Donelan: I would be more than happy to meet the hon. Member.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Sorry, but not only do I not buy the Secretary of State's excuses for not including devolved Governments in the summit when my constituency alone is bursting with leading fintech, cyber-security and creative organisations, but I do not buy her excuses for not introducing regulation more rapidly. She has said herself that the game-changing ChatGPT was introduced a year or so ago, and the EU is rapidly approaching completion of its first AI Act. Why have her Government once again been caught napping on introducing regulation?

Michelle Donelan: To repeat the comments I made earlier, AI is not a devolved matter, and the people of Scotland were represented by the UK Government—by me and also by the Prime Minister of the UK. In relation to her urging us to do a copycat of EU legislation, may I point out that it was our White Paper that was praised for its innovation and its agility? It has allowed us to attract some of the leading AI companies to set up their first international offices here in the UK, creating the jobs not only of today, but of tomorrow.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement.

Debate on the Address

[3RD DAY]

Debate resumed (Order, 8 November).

Question again proposed,

That an humble Address be presented to His Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Making Britain a Clean Energy Superpower

11.39 am

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Claire Coutinho): It is a pleasure to open today's King's Speech debate on behalf of His Majesty's Government. Throughout history, economies have succeeded when they can source enough cheap and secure energy. Now, as we face a new challenge—the global challenge of climate change—it is important that we source enough clean energy too. We have been a coal superpower and an oil superpower; if the Opposition are looking for a clean energy superpower, they should look no further. Britain today is a clean energy superpower, and our plans will enable us to go much further.

While the Labour party never ceases to talk this country down, I am proud that we are leading the world in this great energy challenge. In the first quarter of this year, 48% of our power came from renewables, up from just 7% in 2010. We are a world leader in offshore wind. We have increased our country's renewable energy capacity fivefold since 2010—more than any other comparable Government. We are building new nuclear for the first time since Margaret Thatcher's Government, and this brilliant innovation nation is leading the world in new technologies like small modular nuclear reactors and fusion energy. As recently as 2012, coal was generating 40% of UK electricity, but we are now on course to be one of the first major economies with power that is coal-free.

This work led by the Conservatives is dramatically reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. We have had the fastest reduction in emissions of any major economy, down almost 50% since 1990. Meanwhile France is down 23%, the US has not changed at all, and China has increased its emissions by 300%. And we are not stopping here. Which is the major economy with the most ambitious target to cut emissions by 2030? Is it the US, at 40%? Is it the EU, at 55%? No, it is the United Kingdom at 68%.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am very conscious that the net zero targets are set for the United Kingdom, but unfortunately Northern Ireland cannot participate nor can we add our physical support to achieving those targets, because the contracts for difference scheme is not in place in Northern Ireland. I have spoken to our Ministers about this. Will the Secretary of State also look

[*Jim Shannon*]

at this on behalf of all the constituents in Northern Ireland who want to contribute to achieving the net zero targets and be part of the contracts for difference scheme?

Claire Coutinho: I will happily look at that.

The UK was the first major economy to set a legally binding date for net zero. Our ambitions for 2030 are ahead of those of our peers and we have the plans in place to meet them. In fact, we have met every single one of our stretching targets to reduce carbon emissions, thanks in no small part to our clean energy success. Labour seems to have conveniently forgotten about the shameful state of our renewables sector when it left office. Just 7% of our power came from renewables in 2010; today, thanks to the actions of the Conservatives, that figure stands at near 50%. Never forget that it was the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) who described the idea of the UK getting to 40% renewables as “pie in the sky”.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I had to correct the right hon. Lady’s predecessor on the point she has just repeated. Her mistake is quite basic, confusing electricity and energy. The Guido Fawkes blog—not an institution I often praise—pointed this out when her predecessor made this mistake. What I actually said—it comes from David Laws’ memoirs—was that it was pie in the sky to say we could have 40% of our energy provided by renewables. Currently, the figure is 18%. The Secy of State’s remark is inaccurate and wrong, and I would be grateful if she withdrew it.

Claire Coutinho: I will happily go and look at that, and take that point on board, but I will say that it sticks with the trend of the right hon. Gentleman talking our energy and power down.

Edward Miliband: I will read from David Laws’ memoirs. During the coalition talks, I said, “all this stuff about getting 40% of energy production—energy production—“from renewables by 2020 is just pie in the sky.”

Energy production from renewables is currently just 18%. I would be grateful if the right hon. Lady corrected the record.

Claire Coutinho: As I said, I will happily look at that, but the right hon. Gentleman has made comments about nuclear—

Edward Miliband: I ask the Secretary of State for the third time. She claims that I said that it was “pie in the sky” that 40% of our electricity could come from renewables. I did not say that, and I have pointed out to her the exact quote, where I talk about 40% of energy coming from renewables. When one has said something inaccurate about another hon. Member in the House, the right thing to do is not to just keep reading the Conservative campaign headquarters lines, but to correct the record.

Claire Coutinho: As I said, I am happy to do the right hon. Gentleman the courtesy of withdrawing on this occasion, but I would also suggest that he correct the record himself about the fact that he said we needed no new nuclear in the past.

Now that I am allowed to move on, let me say that energy security means national security, and that means powering Britain from Britain and making sure we never have to worry again about generating enough power to keep the lights on or heat our homes. We saw what happened last year when Putin weaponised energy, and the full impact his illegal war in Ukraine had on energy bills for households around the world. I am proud that the Government stepped in with an unprecedented level of support, paying around half of people’s energy bills. With continued global instability, I know that households are anxious about the coming winter. That is why we have the energy price guarantee until April 2024 and why we will always protect the most vulnerable in society with targeted support such as the winter fuel payment, cost of living payments and the warm home discount.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): The Secretary of State is talking about energy bills, and thousands of my constituents are really struggling to pay their energy bills and are petrified about what the winter holds. On the media round on Monday, the Secretary of State said there was nothing in this King’s Speech to help people with their energy bills. What will she say to those thousands of my constituents and indeed other constituents?

Claire Coutinho: The Bill we are bringing forward will unlock billions of pounds in tax, which will go towards helping with the programmes I have just talked about—for example, the cost of living payments we are putting in place. It will also unlock billions of pounds of investment, which will go towards a greener transition, and I am sure the hon. Lady will agree that having more renewable energy in the future will contribute to lower bills for her constituents.

Our leadership is bringing wealth to our economy and to British workers. Since 2010, we have secured £200 billion in low-carbon investments, with potentially up to £375 billion on the way. Carbon capture will see 50,000 high-skilled British jobs in places such as Teesside and the Humber. Our world-leading offshore wind farms will see 90,000 jobs from Aberdeen to Cornwall by 2030. That is the difference between a Conservative Government, focused on attracting businesses, investment and jobs and creating livelihoods, and Labour, with its same old plans to borrow, borrow, borrow, intent on racking up billions of pounds of debt and then just leaving hard-working families to pick up the bill.

Let us look at the record and the Government’s plans to go further. We are a leader in offshore wind power. We do not just have the world’s largest offshore wind farm; we have the second, the third and the fourth largest, and we are now home to the fifth largest too. We expect growth in offshore wind to deliver enough energy to power the equivalent of every home in Britain by 2030 and to support 90,000 jobs. And it is not just offshore wind; it is floating offshore wind too.

We will generate enough solar energy to power 10 million electric vehicles by 2030.

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State tell us how much the UK’s offshore floating energy capacity will increase by as a result of the licensing round that has just closed?

Claire Coutinho: I would happily answer that point. The point the hon. Gentleman should understand is that a thriving oil and gas sector unlocks investment in other renewables. There are people interested in floating offshore wind who are part of the oil and gas sector now—the same subsea technology, the same people and the same skills will power our offshore wind and floating offshore wind sectors in the future.

We are also funding eight groundbreaking projects through our £1 billion net zero innovation portfolio to help us harvest the power of the sun from space. Space-based solar could provide clean energy day and night in all weathers and send it wirelessly to the Earth. Madam Deputy Speaker, I think you would agree that that is a superpower in itself.

Meanwhile, hydrogen hubs in places such as Teesside are not only creating the green hydrogen energy of the future, but bringing investment back to areas Labour left behind. By 2030, the sector could support up to 12,000 jobs and unlock up to £11 billion in private investment. However, hydrogen is not the only new technology we are supporting. In the last CfD allocation round, I was delighted to see that we had an unprecedented number of projects supporting emerging technologies such as tidal and, for the first time, geothermal energy.

So our green transition means up to £375 billion of investment and nearly half a million jobs across the UK. Of course, our plans also mean that by 2050 we could see our demand for electricity double, fuelled by our clean energy revolution, so we need to power up our electricity grid. I have made that my priority, and that is why I am ending the first come, first served approach to grid connections by raising the bar to enter the queue and ensuring that those who are ready first will connect first.

We will set out the UK's first ever spatial plan to give industry certainty and every community a say, and we will speed up planning for the most nationally significant projects coming forward with our response to electricity networks commissioner Nick Winser's review coming shortly. Those plans alone could unlock £240 billion of investment and support 130,000 jobs.

I turn to carbon capture and storage. We are investing £20 billion to make the most of our natural advantages in skills and geology. We have announced the first eight carbon capture networks that we will take forward, which are in the north-east, the north-west and Wales, and the next two carbon capture clusters, which are in north-east Scotland and Humberside. Those announcements put us on track to achieve between 20 million and 30 million tonnes of captured and stored carbon dioxide a year, which is equivalent to taking 4 million to 6 million cars off the road each year from 2030. Our plans will support 50,000 jobs by 2030 and add £5 billion to the economy by 2050. What is more, with 78 billion tonnes of potential storage in the continental shelf, the UK has the potential to become one of the greatest carbon storage bases in the world, thanks to the geological goldmine we are lucky to have on our doorstep.

Renewables are not always predictable, as they rely on the British weather—and, sadly, we have yet to develop a technology that can harness all of Labour's hot air. That is why we are ramping up nuclear to help us become a clean energy superpower. The right hon. Member for Doncaster North, who for years sat at Gordon Brown's side, did nothing to boost British

nuclear, and other Labour Front-Bench Members have been naive enough to say that we do not need nuclear. We on the Government Benches are righting their wrongs. Earlier this year, we set up Great British Nuclear to spearhead our nuclear revival. We are building two new large-scale nuclear power stations. In fact, each and every operational nuclear power plant in Britain began its life under a Conservative Government. We are accelerating the development of small modular reactors, we are accelerating advanced modular reactors and we are leading the world in fusion energy. We are backing this vision with £700 million. The House may not realise it, but we have the hottest place in the solar system here in the UK, just under 50 miles away at the Culham Centre.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making an amazing speech, showing how much the Government have done for our environment. Could she give us an idea of the timetable for the small nuclear reactors and when the first one is likely to be licensed?

Claire Coutinho: I thank my hon. Friend. We are working at pace to have the fastest competition possible. We have just moved past the first part of the process and will be setting out more details in the new year.

As the Government continue to consider our long-term energy security of the future, it is only right that we support our British oil and gas communities. Even the Climate Change Committee acknowledges that oil and gas will be part of our energy mix when we reach net zero in 2050. So if we will need it, it is common sense that we produce as much of our own of it here.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on nuclear energy, I hear that one of the biggest barriers to nuclear is not the investment that the Secretary of State talks about but planning and people. What will she do on that? I have not heard anything so far in what has been proposed to stop things such as judicial reviews going in to stop nuclear power stations being built.

Claire Coutinho: The hon. Lady is right to raise skills, people and planning. We have been looking at ways to speed all of that up and will be setting out more details by the end of the year.

The King's Speech included legislation for awarding oil and gas licences each year, giving industry the certainty it needs to invest in jobs here in the UK.

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Claire Coutinho: I will make some progress.

Oil and gas is an industry that supports 200,000 jobs and is expected to provide £50 billion of tax revenue in the next five years. That is the people and the money that the Labour party would send abroad, because it is not against oil and gas jobs, just against British oil and gas jobs—and for what? To increase our reliance on imports from foreign regimes with higher emissions and to send away billions of pounds of investment in carbon capture and hydrogen schemes. Opposition Members support those technologies but would rather the taxpayer footed the bill for them.

[*Claire Coutinho*]

With our ambitions on net zero and for our energy security, it is critical that we make the most of our own home-grown advantages, but Labour and the SNP's policy means jobs abroad, investment lost and energy security sabotaged. You do not have to take my word for it, Madam Deputy Speaker—the unions are sounding the alarm. It has been said that Labour “does not... understand energy”, is self-harming and “naive”, and that its policies would leave our oil and gas communities decimated, turning our oil and gas workers into the “coalminers of our generation”. Those are not my words but those of the GMB and Unite. We want to keep jobs and manufacturing here, but Labour has not understood that we need natural gas supplies. Those are the words of industry. The important truth is that we know we need to transition to clean energy, but it is the same people, communities and expertise that will unlock the green transition. The skills of those working on oil and gas rigs today are the same skills that we will need for the offshore wind jobs of tomorrow.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I am losing track of the number of times I have pointed out in this Chamber that just because we extract oil and gas from the North sea does not mean that it gets used here. It gets sold on global markets to the highest bidders, as we have said 100 times.

When it comes to annual licensing rounds, which the Secretary of State is flagging up, is it not the case that the North Sea Transition Authority was already licensing in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019? It only stopped because of the climate compatibility checkpoint. The tests that she sets out are not worth the paper that they are written on; she knows as well as we do that they are impossible not to meet, because they are set so low. Will she stop pretending that the Bill is serious, and just admit that it is nothing more than a gimmick?

Claire Coutinho: It is not a gimmick to protect 200,000 jobs. It is not a gimmick to protect the investment that will go into the cleaner energies of the future. On the hon. Lady's first point, 50% for the gas supply that we use here comes from domestic production.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): My right hon. Friend is being generous in allowing interventions. On the GMB leader's quote about oil and gas jobs becoming the coal jobs of the future, is it not the case that the people with oil and gas skills, who we really need to deliver the energy transition, will not be left on the unemployment line, but will go and do their jobs overseas and deliver other countries' energy security and energy transition?

Claire Coutinho: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We are lucky to have the skills, expertise and equipment in this country, which are the same skills that we need for a future in renewable energy. It is vital that we protect them and keep those skills here. To unnecessarily cut off those workers' livelihoods in this country would wreck our clean energy ambitions. We remain resolutely committed to our ambitious net zero targets. More renewable energy; a nuclear revival; exciting new technologies such as hydrogen, carbon capture and fusion; and, where we need oil and gas, jobs for British workers—that is our vision for the future.

Nadia Whittome: A moment ago the Secretary of State quoted the Climate Change Committee, which also said that expanding fossil fuel production is not in line with net zero. By the Secretary of State's own admission on Monday, not a single Bill in the King's Speech will help families struggling with energy bills. How can the Government justify turbocharging new oil and gas, when that does nothing for the cost of living crisis and blows a hole in our climate ambitions?

Claire Coutinho: I am afraid the hon. Lady is quite mistaken. The Climate Change Committee's own data shows that when we reach net zero in 2050, oil and gas will account for about 25% of our energy mix. That is why it is important to ensure that if we need it, it comes from here.

There are two futures here. One is the future I have just described, where we cut our emissions faster than any other major economy in the world; we drive hundreds of billions of pounds of private investment in wind, nuclear and hydrogen; we support UK industry with carbon capture; we create a world-class export opportunity in our continental shelf; we secure nearly half a million jobs, with our young people renowned globally for their expertise; we bring supply chains and manufacturing capability to our industry heartlands such as the Humber and Teesside; our coastal communities are renewed; and we protect our energy security and support families and businesses with the cost of energy. That is the future for Britain as a clean energy superpower.

There is another future: a bleak world. Imagine it is a grey day; the last private investor has just pulled out of the North sea. Those communities without the jobs to support them have disbanded. The right hon. Member for Doncaster North is explaining yet again why the Labour party has laden the country with debt. His mothballing of British oil and gas is seen as the worst handling of our natural resources since his old boss sold the gold. Norway, with its ongoing oil and gas licences, is forging ahead with its greener future. Meanwhile, jobs in Russia are booming. Our energy security has been jeopardised, as imports from unstable regions rise. That is the future we can expect from a party reliant on Just Stop Oil and Extinction Rebellion for ideas. With an awful predictableness, this parallel world has once again proven the law of British politics: every single Labour Government in the past left unemployment higher.

Of course, that future is not a surprise to anyone. The right hon. Gentleman said, after all, that we should sacrifice economic growth to cut emissions. [*Interruption.*] He would like to borrow £28 billion in his blind ambition for 2030, no matter the cost to ordinary people. Just three days ago he said that protecting the British oil and gas industry, 200,000 jobs and £50 billion of tax revenue was a stunt. But it is not a stunt to want to keep jobs in the UK, it is not a stunt to want to protect billions of pounds of taxes and investment in this country, and it is certainly not a stunt to prioritise domestic security over the threat of dictators such as Putin.

The British people have rejected the right hon. Gentleman's arguments before, and they will do so again. I am sure that he will today mention Great British Energy, a new Labour entity about which we know only one thing for sure: it will be run badly, funded by the shadow Chancellor who, when she is not

borrowing other people's words, is recklessly borrowing to fund Labour's policy and leaving the British people to pick up the bill.

What will GB Energy really look like? Will it be like Labour Nottingham Council's version, Robin Hood Energy, which collapsed in 2020 leaving local taxpayers with £38 million of debt? Will it be like Labour-run Bristol's version, Bristol Energy, which also collapsed, leaving local people with losses of £43 million? Or will it be like Labour's 50% stake in Warrington's Together Energy—people will get the pattern by this point—which also collapsed, with a £37 million bill this time for local residents to pick up? Not content with bankrupting Birmingham and Croydon or skewering local taxpayers in Nottingham, Bristol and Warrington, Labour now wants to bankrupt Britain. One thing is for sure: when Labour is in charge of your energy you will pay the price.

Energy transitions do not happen very often and now we are on the brink of the most important one of all to reverse centuries of global warming and reach net zero and secure energy resilience by powering Britain from Britain. It is only the Conservatives who have the plans to protect this country's energy security, to deliver the most ambitious 2030 emission cuts of any major economy, to promote jobs and investment in the UK, and to help this country stand tall on the global stage. We will do that all without forcing families to choose between protecting their family finances and protecting the planet.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the shadow Secretary of State.

12.2 pm

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): This Gracious Speech takes place against a backdrop of three crises facing our country: the worst cost of living crisis in memory; the long-term failure of our economy to work for working people, with stagnant growth over a decade; and the climate and nature crisis we see all around us. The question at the heart of this debate is whether the Government's legislative programme unveiled earlier this week in any way meets the scale of those challenges. The resounding answer is no. I am sure the Government think that they are being punished by the voters because the crises this country faces are so big, and that is probably true, but it is also because the politics they offer is so small. The King's Speech demonstrates that in abundance and nowhere is that more true than on climate and energy.

Here we are, the last King's Speech before the next general election and the Government release a two-clause political stunt of a Bill. They released it on Monday, during the worst cost of living crisis for generations, with energy bills still double what they were three years ago. Millions of people across our country—all of our constituents—are wondering what the Government are going to offer. On the day of the announcement, the Energy Secretary was asked a simple question by an interviewer: "Will it make a difference to energy bills?" For millions watching, surely the answer had to be yes, because, after all, that is what her job is all about. But this was her answer:

"it wouldn't necessarily bring energy bills down, that's not what we are saying".

I commend the Energy Secretary for her outburst of candour. In a Government of fake news, it is good to have the occasional warrior for the truth.

Claire Coutinho: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Edward Miliband: Oh, I will, definitely, yes!

Claire Coutinho: Does the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that I said it would also help fund renewable energy? Does he disagree with the view that a future with renewable energy would help to bring bills down?

Edward Miliband: I think that that is what we call wriggling.

As I was saying, I commend the Energy Secretary on her outburst of candour. She is right—she is telling it like it is—and, by the way, she is in good company. Let me read this to the House:

"MYTH Extracting more North Sea gas lowers prices. FACT UK production isn't large enough to...impact the global price of gas."

Who said that? Not somebody on this side of the House. *[Interruption.]* No, not a former Chancellor. It was the current chairman of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands), when he was the Energy Minister.

So here they are, they really are going to the country and saying with a straight face, after all the pain and anguish that the British people have faced, "Here is our grand offer to you: the 'we won't cut your bills' Bill." That is the offer from the Secretary of State: "Vote Conservative, and we promise we won't cut your energy bills." No wonder the Back Benchers are despairing. The Government could have done so much. They could have lifted the onshore wind ban to cut energy bills, but they did not. They could have legislated for a proper programme of energy efficiency to cut bills, but they did not. *[Interruption.]* I will happily give way to the Energy Secretary's Parliamentary Private Secretary if he would like to intervene.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): I cannot.

Edward Miliband: Never mind then. Keep quiet.

The Government could have legislated to change planning rules to speed up renewables and cut energy bills, but they did not. They do not seem to realise how tin-eared, how out of touch, how absurd they look.

So how did we end up with this Bill? The hon. Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans), who was not allowed to intervene, thinks it is about energy security, and that is what the Secretary of State said. The truth is, however, that she is trying to peddle an illusion, and I suspect that she knows it. Fossil fuels, with their markets controlled by petro-states and dictators and their price set internationally, cannot give us energy security. That is the obvious basic lesson of the past two years. Whether gas is produced in the North sea or imported from abroad, we pay the same price. How much did we import from Russia at the beginning of the crisis? It was 5%—but we were the worst hit country in western Europe, not because of our imports from Russia but because of the way in which the price is set on the international market.

I cannot put it any better than the National Infrastructure Commission, which said just three weeks ago:

"Reliance on fossil fuels means exposure to geopolitical shocks that impact the price of these internationally traded commodities."

[*Edward Miliband*]

We have had North sea licensing for the last 40 years in this country. If more of it were the answer, the British people would not have faced the pain that they have. According to Energy UK, new oil and gas licences

“will not lower customer bills or significantly improve the UK’s energy security.”

David Duguid: The right hon. Gentleman made a very good point earlier about the difference between the percentage of renewables for electricity and the percentage of renewables for energy overall, including heat and transport. Does he acknowledge that the United Kingdom is currently 75% dependent on oil and gas, and does he agree with the members of the Climate Change Committee, who have stated that themselves, and who have predicted that by 2050, when we get to net zero, the proportion will still be about 20%?

Edward Miliband: I think the Climate Change Committee is actually saying that its most ambitious scenario, which we should be aiming for, is for us to cut the use of gas by 90%. We are going to carry on using North sea oil and gas, but the question for the hon. Gentleman, and for the whole House, is this: do we choose, for the future, to carry on drilling every last drop? That is the Government’s policy, in contravention of all the scientific advice, which is that we will end up in a 3° world—needing billions of pounds of taxpayer subsidy to bring about that investment through persuasion, and diverting investment from the private sector. Personally, I do not think that that is the right choice.

The lesson of this crisis is one that the Government should have learnt, and one that other countries around the world have learnt: the only way to get energy security is to sprint for clean power. That is why the Government’s onshore wind ban is such a disaster. That is why their offshore wind auction is such a disaster. That is why their energy efficiency failures are such a disaster. This Bill neither protects us on price nor gives us energy security.

Here is the thing, the Bill is not motivated by millions of people lying awake at night, worrying about the cost of living crisis; it is motivated by a Prime Minister lying awake at night, worrying about the Conservative party crisis. The interesting thing is that this Bill was planned well before the right hon. Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho) became Energy Secretary. It is the last desperate throw of the dice by what we might call the No. 10 galaxy brains, to use climate change as what they call a “wedge issue.” They say this to the newspapers all the time. Series 1 of this new strategy was aired in September, when the party of Churchill and Thatcher became the peddlers of wacky conspiracy theories they found on the internet: abolishing the mythical seven bins; ending the imaginary threat of compulsory car sharing; saying no to invented conspiracy theories on 15-minute cities; and fighting the fictional meat tax. And now we have a sequel. No longer a few throw-away conspiracy theories, this is now the central strategy of their legislative programme.

Members should not take my word for it. It is what the Prime Minister’s advisers brief to the papers day after day. One paper I read on Monday reported that the Prime Minister wants to “weaponise climate change”

as a wedge issue. Where the British people see an energy crisis forcing up their bills, the Government see a wedge issue. Where the British people ask how they can have liveable towns and cities with good transport, the Government see a wedge issue. Where the British people worry about the effect of the climate crisis on their kids and grandkids, the Government see a wedge issue. The point is that the Government cannot really deny it, because they know this is what they are saying every day. “We think there is a big opportunity for the Conservative party to try to create division on climate change.” That is why the Prime Minister uses words like “eco-zealots.” It is all very transparent. They are locked in the boot of a strategy. Whether they agree with it or not, that is what is happening.

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): This is the problem. The right hon. Gentleman calls it a wedge issue but, in his own language, he boils it down to a binary issue. It is not a binary question of whether we have oil and gas or whether we have renewables; it is about an energy mix. Does he realise that, last year, there were 260 days—by my maths, that is getting on for nearly three quarters of the year—when there was not enough wind to generate enough power for this nation’s needs? Whether he likes it or not, we will need to have an energy mix. It is something that he just does not seem to understand.

Edward Miliband: I am afraid that all the hon. Gentleman is pointing out is the Government’s failure to go fast enough in driving towards renewables. Of course we need a mix of energy, but this is the question for the House and the country: do we decide that drilling every last drop, which is the Government’s position and which would be a climate disaster, is the right strategy? Or do we decide that the right way to go is home-grown clean power? We say it is home-grown clean power.

The problem is that all the nonsense the Government are coming out with really matters, and it worries me. By the way, I think it will be an electoral disaster for them, and we already see that because the intelligent Conservatives are asking, “Why are we doing all this?” Members on both sides of the House did this together. We built a consensus on climate over the past 20 years, to work across parties and not to weaponise it. People look at America and say, “Well, America has a culture war on climate. Thank goodness we do not have that in Britain.” That was the case until this Prime Minister—not the previous Prime Minister, or the Prime Minister before her—decided to do it.

On the day of the Prime Minister’s climate U-turns, the Home Secretary had a licence to go out and say that the danger of climate action is that it will “bankrupt” the country. The Home Secretary freelances on most issues, but on this issue she is actually speaking for the Prime Minister, because it is echoed by other Cabinet Ministers. This is a massive retreat from the position of both parties for two decades, that leadership on climate is not somehow a danger to our economy but is the way to seize and build our economic future. They have opened the door to the old, discredited idea that we can choose either our economy or the climate, but not both.

It is not just a retreat from the consensus; it is a retreat from reality. The reality is that there is a global race, with countries seeking to go further and faster to

create the jobs of the future. No wonder business is horrified. Just last Monday, Amanda Blanc, the chief executive of Aviva, warned about the Government's commitment to unlimited oil and gas drilling. She said that our climate goals as a country are "under threat", which

"puts at clear risk the jobs, growth and the additional investment the UK requires".

The Government try to claim that this is somehow consistent with climate leadership. I mean, come off it!

Seven hundred British climate scientists oppose the changes, and so do the International Energy Agency and the Climate Change Committee, which my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) quoted:

"Expansion of fossil fuel production is not in line with Net Zero."

The Government's own net zero tsar, the right hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore), who is in his place, also opposes them. They appointed him to advise them on climate and energy. They said how brilliant he is, and I agree—sorry to ruin his career even further. He is a very intelligent guy. *[Interruption.]* He is denying it. He has great ideas, and what did he say?

"There is no such thing as a new net zero oilfield."

Those are not my words, and they are not the words of eco-zealots or Just Stop Oil; they are the words of the right hon. Gentleman, who sits on the Government Benches. He signed the net zero target into law, for goodness' sake. We have to grow up.

In contrast to the right hon. Gentleman, we have the Minister for Energy Security and Net Zero, whom I like—*[Interruption.]* I do. We have worked together on climate, but I will now say something not so nice about him. This is what he said yesterday:

"There is nothing fundamentally wrong with oil and gas, it's emissions from oil and gas that are the problem".

For goodness' sake—what does that even mean? Here we are: the people who know what they are talking about do not speak for the Conservative party, and the people who speak for the Conservative party do not know what they are talking about.

I can tell the Secretary of State and her colleagues that this strategy is doomed to fail. The British people do not want a Government who say, "We are going to weaponise the climate crisis." They do not want a Government who say, "We are desperate. We are behind in the polls"—I remember that feeling—"and we therefore have to turn this into a wedge issue." They want a Government who will cut bills and tackle the climate crisis. All the Government are doing day after day with all this nonsense is proving that they are not the answer.

What would a Labour King's Speech have done? Today, every family is paying £180 more on their bill as a result of the onshore wind ban that has been in place since 2015. The Government could have lifted the ban but, two months ago, they did not. They offered a weak, half-hearted compromise that will make no difference. As RenewableUK says,

"the planning system is still stacked against onshore wind".

Why not lift the onshore wind ban? Why is it harder to build an onshore wind farm than an incinerator? The Government had to shell out billions of pounds in subsidies when the energy crisis hit. I think those subsidies

would have been something like £5 billion less if we had not had the onshore wind ban. Then we have offshore wind and the disastrous auction, which added £2 billion to bills, according to the industry.

A Labour King's Speech would legislate to lift the ban on onshore wind, to speed up the planning process and to sort out the grid, so we can decarbonise our power system by 2030. Clean power is the foundation, and next comes energy efficiency. I am afraid that here the Government have utterly failed, and their complacency is extraordinary. This is what the Climate Change Committee said about the whole sector:

"since 2010 progress has stalled, with no further substantive reductions in emissions."

It has been a shambolic 13 years. We all know the litany: the disaster of the green deal, the green homes grant, David Cameron's "cut the green crap". Insulation measures were running at 1.6 million in 2010, and last year—any offers?—they were running at 78,000, which is 20 times lower. A Labour Government would do what the country is crying out for and have a proper plan, funded by public investment, ramping up to £6 billion a year to provide support for home insulation and low-carbon heating.

Next, let us talk about the green economy and building our economic future. The Government are never short of boasting about their record, but we are actually eighth out of eight major countries in Energy UK's projections for renewable investment up to 2030. And get this: in the seven months after the passage of the US Inflation Reduction Act, which the Government do not like, the US created almost 10 times more green jobs than the UK created in the previous seven years. So in seven months, the US created 10 times more jobs than we did in seven years. What is the Government's response to the Inflation Reduction Act? They say it is "dangerous", "distortive" and "protectionist". This is not some accident; they do believe that this is a role Government. I am afraid to say that that is a recipe for Britain losing the global race.

What would Labour do differently? We would have a national wealth fund, not with one-off, ad-hoc investments, but a proper plan. We would be investing in ports, our steel industry and electric battery factories. We would also have a new publicly owned energy company, GB Energy, which I am glad the Secretary of State mentioned. It would be partnering the private sector in the industries of the future. The Government object to GB Energy, because they say that we do not need public ownership of energy in Britain. I have to say to the House that the Government may not realise it, but we already have public ownership of energy in Britain, with EDF, Vattenfall, Ørsted and Statkraft. They are all companies wholly or partly owned by states—foreign states. They own our industry. In fact, nearly half of our offshore wind industry is owned by foreign states—by state-owned foreign companies. So the Government take the extraordinary position that it is okay for state-run companies to invest in Britain, so long as they are not British state-owned companies; let French, Swedish, Danish and Norwegian citizens get the wealth from our energy industry, just not British citizens. That is the Government's position.

This makes me a nerd, but let me say that the late Ian Gilmour wrote an autobiography—*[Interruption.]* It is not that that makes me a nerd. *[Laughter.]* He wrote an

[Edward Miliband]

autobiography about his time in Mrs Thatcher's Cabinet, and some here will know that its title was "Dancing with Dogma". That is what we are seeing here, because the Government are in favour of public ownership of our energy assets, so long as it is by foreign states. That does not sound very Conservative to me.

GB Energy would be investing in the industries of the future, partnering local communities to create jobs and wealth for Britain. A Labour King's Speech would have contained an energy independence Act to make all of this possible: clean power by 2030 to cut bills; a proper energy efficiency plan; a national wealth fund; and GB Energy. That is an energy Bill equal to the scale of the crises we face.

Jim Shannon *rose*—

Edward Miliband: I am going to finish.

The Prime Minister has been in the job for more than a year and he has been rumbled, just as his party has been in power for 13 years and it has been rumbled. For all his talk of change, the public know, as does the House, that he cannot bring the change this country needs. The Government's pathetic, small legislative programme shows it, and they all know it. They are out of ideas and out of time, and the only solution for our country is for them to be out of office.

12.22 pm

Dame Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I warmly welcome this historic King's Speech and the "clean energy superpower" theme of today's debate. As the House will imagine, I will also look at the broader context within which this King's Speech has to be viewed.

Before I go on to that, I wish to pick up on the comments of the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband). I did agree with one thing he said: we should not play politics with climate change. I do not think the people we represent want that, but he just gave us a 20-minute masterclass in just that. I hope that he will reflect on his speech, because to be playing such petty politics with such an important issue was not worthy of the work that I know he has done over many years. It is just not credible for him to simply dismiss the past 10 years of achievements, as he did in one fell swoop. I am sure that on reflection he will wish that he had spent more time acknowledging what this Government have done.

Edward Miliband: No, I will not.

Dame Maria Miller: If he does not, people will judge him all the more badly for that.

As I said, I warmly welcome this historic King's Speech, which comes at a time when the challenges our country faces are starting to crystallise. We have had three major impacts to our economy in the past few years, and the doorstep conversations we were having at the time of the last general election in 2019 were nothing like the ones I am having with my constituents now. Whether we are dealing with the impact of the war in Ukraine, the appalling situation currently in Israel, our leaving the European Union or the impact of the global pandemic, the things that people are talking about now are interest rates and inflation—issues that have not been on the lips of our electorate for a number of years.

I am pleased to see that the Government have understood this challenge and are looking at the long-term challenges our country now faces, rather than simply looking at what has happened in the past 10 years. We need to look forward to make sure that we are planning for the very different set of challenges that our economy faces. The King's Speech will be just the beginning of that process.

When we consider clean energy, it is worth looking first at the track record of this Government. We were the first major economy to legislate for a net zero target, and since 1990 we have cut emissions by 48%. One could be forgiven for not understanding that, given the right hon. Gentleman's initial contribution. We are aiming to reduce emissions by 68% by 2030. Until we start to agree that there is success we can talk about, the electorate will continue to be confused. When we look at the progress that is being made and applaud it, we can then start to plan properly for the future.

In the first quarter of this year, 48% of our energy came from renewables, which was an increase from just 7% when the Conservatives took power in 2010. Perhaps some of the questions the right hon. Gentleman should be answering are why we were in such a relatively poor situation in 2010 and why more had not been done by the previous Administration. We are now an acknowledged world leader in offshore wind. I will address that later in my speech, because we could be working more with our friends, particularly countries such as Canada, to see how we can make sure that our renewable energy goes from strength to strength.

Jim Shannon: One success story of the past few years has been Wrightbus, in Ballymena in North Antrim, and its advancements in hydrogen and renewables. Does the right hon. Lady agree that we do not hear enough about some of the good things? That is one of the good stories and we should hear more about it.

Dame Maria Miller: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I heard a great deal about the importance of hydrogen to our future on my recent trip to Canada as the Prime Minister's trade envoy. There are a lot of complications associated with hydrogen and we need to do more work on it, but the hon. Gentleman is right to say that good things, such as those that he mentions, can be eclipsed by the Opposition's rhetoric if we are not careful. I think also of new nuclear power stations, small modular reactors and fusion energy, for which we have the test bed at Culham, which is being used the world over for the development of that innovative technology. There is also the work being done by the Minister for Industry and Economic Security on critical minerals, which I will come back to later.

Gas and oil will continue to be part of the mix of energy that we use into the future, as they will for most developed countries. Our Bill in this area safeguards those domestic supplies, which is really important, because we cannot leave our country open to not having that safeguard in place, particularly given recent events. The King's Speech clearly demonstrates a commitment to remaining at the forefront of the world's transition to net zero, but the Government have also made sure that they have that safeguard in place through gas and oil.

I particularly wish to address the importance of making sure that as we transition to clean energy, the Government, and others, keep a close eye on its impact

on our communities. I was reminded of that recently when there was an application for planning consent for an industrial lithium-ion battery plant in a sensitive part of my constituency, right next to a hospital and a river. Industrial lithium-ion batteries are an essential part of our transition to clean energy, because they help iron out the supply of energy, particularly wind energy. As one Member pointed out, the wind does not always blow at the right time and in the right place, so lithium-ion battery storage facilities can help to make sure that energy is available throughout the day, on every day of the year, but they need to be correctly located.

Our planning consents have not been updated to properly recognise the problems that such plants can cause. I am grateful that the Government listened to the arguments I made and have already made changes to planning guidance to introduce mandatory environmental permits soon, which will prevent the granting of planning permissions for those sorts of plants in inappropriate locations. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench to make sure that they continue to look for those sorts of issues as they arise.

New technology and a continued drive for clean energy will inevitably mean that further new technologies and processes will emerge. We need to ensure that our existing permitting systems are fit for purpose. Many hundreds of lithium-ion battery plants are planned for this country—I urge right hon. and hon. Members to look in their own constituencies to see if any are planned—and although they are a fire risk and an environmental risk, they are an essential part of the transition. We need to make sure they are safe when they are put in place.

The remarks made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made me think about the importance of rare earth minerals, which are an essential part of our transition to clean energy. I know my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Economic Security has already put together an important strategy in that regard.

When I was in Saskatchewan recently, I met the chief executive officer of the Saskatchewan Research Council, Mike Crabtree, which runs the rare earth processing facility. He described the incredible work that is going on in Canada to make sure we have supplies of rare earth minerals that can help us continue to see the transition to clean energy in the future. Wind turbines need such rare earth minerals, and we need plans and treaties in place with countries like Canada that can safely ensure we have a supply of these minerals into the future, so that we are not held to ransom by countries that may not have such stable and democratic regimes in place.

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should be using the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to review the supply chains for new technology, such as batteries? We know that modern slavery often takes place in countries producing those materials, such as those in Africa, so can we update the Act?

Dame Maria Miller: My hon. Friend makes an important point. When I speak to companies in Canada that are developing lithium mines and looking at mining rare earth metals, we talk about the importance of supporting indigenous people and of proper training. We should be

doing business with countries that take the issues around modern slavery, which my hon. Friend raises, very seriously. That will be taken into account as we continue to negotiate our free trade agreement with Canada.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State also mentioned skilled personnel associated with oil and gas. I reiterate the point she made in response to an intervention, drawing on my experience of a recent visit to Alberta. In that province, I saw how the skills of oil and gas personnel are already being used to develop renewable energy, whether that is expertise in pipelines, hydrogen—as mentioned by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—chemicals, engineering or other forms of innovation. There are transferable skills and the Government need to urgently ensure we are not losing those skills to other countries; we must keep that expertise at home. We have made huge progress in greening our energy supplies but there is more to do. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State can ensure that we do not lose that expertise to other countries.

At the heart of the King's Speech is resetting the dial for our country in the light of three enormous economic shocks. The new Trade (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) Bill has enormous potential to expand both our import and export markets, making sure that communities such as mine in Basingstoke continue to have vibrant businesses into the future.

Within the Gracious Speech, I also welcome the leasehold and freehold Bill and the continuation of the Renters (Reform) Bill. In my constituency, almost two thirds of households are owned as opposed to rented, but it is important that those who are in leasehold flats or renting in other ways have better protection. The Government's commitment to reform the rules around leaseholds, while not entirely in line with clean energy, is an important part of the Bill, as it will make it easier and cheaper for people to extend their leases and stay in the homes they love. That is important for my community and many others across the country.

My constituency of Basingstoke has seen historical overdevelopment, often at the hands of a Labour Government who put in place unrealistic housing targets. I have seen my community respond positively, but we have contributed our fair share. Will the Minister therefore confirm when the new national planning policy framework guidelines will be published? I think they are coming out soon. They will help communities like mine, including by better recognising the overdevelopment of the past, so I hope the Minister can give us a brief update on those guidelines. I know it is not just me on these green Benches who is interested in the timing.

In the Gracious Speech, we also heard the Government's commitment to the NHS and to seeing an NHS at its very best. I was proud to receive notice from the Government that an incredible £900 million has been ringfenced by the Treasury for a new hospital in my constituency. In the spirit of hoping that these things are above politics, I hope that those on the Opposition Benches can get behind projects like that, which are in the interest of the whole community, and that they do not become political footballs. A new hospital of that magnitude—an exemplar—will be important not just for my constituents, but for many hundreds and thousands of people around the south-east. I hope the Government are able to continue to put out positive messages about their hospital programme.

[*Dame Maria Miller*]

Finally, the criminal justice Bill mentioned in the Gracious Speech will touch on an issue I have raised many times in this Chamber—intimate image abuse. I was delighted to see that the Bill will include intimate image abuse legislation, building on the legislation that has already been passed as a result of a great deal of good thought by Ministers in the Online Safety Act 2023. I am particularly grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) for championing the inclusion of more work on intimate image abuse.

In the Online Safety Act 2023, we criminalised the sharing of intimate images without consent. Now we need the rest of the Law Commission's recommendations—that the making and taking of such images also be criminalised—to be enacted, and the Bill will give us the opportunity to do that. I am not sure that the Minister will be in a position to confirm the details of the Bill today, but if she knows anything about its timing, I would be most grateful to hear that.

I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate. There are many Bills in the Gracious Speech that will make a real difference to the people I represent and to people across the country. I hope that talk of it not having content will be seen as it is—political rhetoric. There is a great deal in the King's Speech that will make a real difference to people's lives. I look forward to debating the Bills in the coming weeks and months, and to making sure that they are as good as they can be.

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

12.39 pm

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): This Gracious Speech serves as a stark reminder that the Westminster Government cannot be trusted to deliver for the people of Scotland—certainly not in terms of energy. It is ludicrous that people living in energy-rich Scotland are having to grapple with unaffordable energy bills. As a solution, we have a King's Speech that does nothing to address that. The only energy-related Bill that was referred to in the King's Speech on Tuesday was the Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill, which the Secretary of State herself admitted just a few days ago would not bring energy bills down. It is therefore incorrigible that, at a time when a record number of households are facing fuel poverty, the only concrete proposal mentioned in the King's Speech is one that, by the Secretary of State's own admission, will not help cash-strapped households across these islands. It could though, she says, release funds to support households with energy bills—the operative word there being “could”. But even in this vaguest of commitments, the mask slips. Let me reinterpret that comment. It basically means that, in the absence of additionality to the Exchequer, this Government will stand idly by while people freeze.

The speech also included reference to help “attract record levels of investment into renewable sources” and

“reform grid connections”,

but no Bills were specifically named that set out how that might be achieved. There were no plans, and no detail or funding, to deliver the transition network that is needed to lower bills and ruthlessly dial out gas from

our generation systems, thereby protecting consumers. It is utterly hopeless. It is a blank cheque for new extraction based on maximising extraction in abstract, with very little strategic ambition or joined-up thinking, except that of maximising London's receipts from Scotland's hydrocarbon endowments. Old habits, it would appear, do indeed die hard.

This ambition also comes with the worst possible greenwashing nonsense as supposedly qualifying criteria, which are entirely permissive, including the carbon intensity test, which seeks to discern whether gas extracted from the North sea will have a lower carbon footprint than gas processed and shipped from around the world—I am pretty sure that you and I, Madam Deputy Speaker, can guarantee that it will. Then there is test that discerns whether the UK remains a net importer of both oil and gas. It seems that that, too, will be a fairly consistent position. It is not even clever or sly; it is almost an indignity to put criteria like that, which is so simple to meet or exceed, in the legislation.

With the same forked tongue that the Government used when they claimed that revenues could go to supporting household energy bills, they also claimed that tax revenues could go towards supporting renewable energy investment. If they meant that, they would be setting out exactly how that would happen; but they have not, because it will not happen under this Treasury or this Tory Government.

In Scotland, we know what the revenues from our oil and gas will be spent on. It is the same thing that they have been spent on by UK Governments over the past 40 years: infrastructure investment in the south-east of England and stemming the economic collapse of broken Brexit Britain. Scotland will not reap any endowment from this latest round of extraction. The Government claim that this is for energy security and to reduce our reliance on foreign oil and gas, when only last month they explicitly decided to prolong that very reliance on gas: through the rollback of the boiler replacement ambition; through the failure of auction round 5, resulting in even more gas generation, which will have to replace the offshore wind that did not happen as a result of that auction round; and through the rollback of the deadline to phase out internal combustion engine cars.

There is no progress on energy efficiency, home insulation, curtailing demand, protecting bills and keeping people safe in their homes—none of it—in this ambition. And the Government are now congratulating themselves on the gas front, because the gas that we will extract from the North sea is marginally less environmentally damaging than that which would have been shipped in from Asia or the middle east. It is the stuff of nonsense.

David Duguid: The hon. Gentleman says that the gas imported from overseas is only marginally more environmentally damaging. Does he not agree with the likes of the North Sea Transition Authority, Offshore Energies UK and other experts in the field that estimate that it could be anything between twice as much or up to five times as much the carbon footprint to take liquefied natural gas into this country, deliquefy it and then get it into our system?

Dave Doogan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution. I think that we actually agree: the gas that we extract from the North sea is less environmentally

damaging than that which would be shipped in from around the world. The point that I am making, and the point that many other observers are making in this space, is that we should be running as far away as we can from yesterday's hydrocarbon technologies and throwing everything that we have, including the kitchen sink, at getting into a renewable space, protecting bills and saving the environment from further damage. That is where we should be, so mithering over percentages here or there is not the way for us to proceed.

Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba): The hon. Gentleman is making some really important points, many of which are to be applauded. One significant point is how do we make that transition away from hydrocarbons and deplete the carbon that is already being generated and stored in offshore carbon banks? Does he agree that one way to do that is to introduce a wellhead tax on all new oil and gas to fund carbon capture and storage offshore? Secondly, does he support the establishment of a publicly owned energy company in Scotland?

Dave Doogan: On the hon. Gentleman's latter point, I say yes. On his initial point, we would not need to be overly sceptical to take a jaundiced view of the tax regime that operates in the oil and gas sector in the UK. Let me leave it at that.

The only way to achieve long-term energy security, which goes in some way to answering the hon. Gentleman's question, is through renewable energy produced on and offshore in the North sea and all around these islands. Scotland's future is at the heart of this green gold rush but we are, as usual in this so-called Union, held back by London doing to Scotland, never with, and talking at us but never for us.

Wind energy is demonstrably and by some margin the cheapest to produce of all the energy in the UK, but despite that, the UK Government managed in auction round 5 to offer a price for wind energy that was so low that not a single offshore wind producer could sign up to it. This is cack-handed arrogance from a Department that thought it knew better than industry—a Department that, rather than working in partnership with industry, deluded itself into thinking that it had the whip hand, that it held all the cards. In this, as with so much else, it was entirely wrong. It tried to call industry's bluff, but the Westminster Government were forced to blink first—you could not make this up.

The interesting thing about that failure in auction round 5 is that when that generation capacity comes online—now it will come online I assume as a result of auction rounds 6, 7 and so on—the gap will still exist in the supply pipeline. We do not have the energy infrastructure to take that generation from where it is being generating and deliver it to industry and homes across Great Britain. That infrastructure is not there. The Government talk about how good they are on a global scale. They love to trumpet their record—this ridiculous debate heading “clean energy superpower” is specious nonsense—which betrays the fact that we cannot even deliver the energy that is being generated today. This Government are paying generators to switch their wind off, but the demand still exists, so where does this energy come from? Yes, gas. Every way that the consumer turns in this country, they are being let down and circumvented by this Government.

We could augment the grid and network infrastructure by properly supporting community energy ownership and generation. But let me be clear: there is £10 million for England only—perhaps the Minister could clarify whether that will be consequentialised for the devolved nations—which is not properly standing up for community generation. In Scotland, community-owned wind farms average £170,000 a year for community benefit payments per installed megawatt hour—an astonishing leverage of capital into communities, compared with £5,000 from standard community benefit payments.

Not only do communities fund those projects themselves—no public money is used in their construction—they solve the problems of the local community, including fuel poverty, improving home insulation and upgrading heating systems. Local communities know better than the UK Government what their priorities are, and are willing to fix them themselves. I would have thought that that was pretty consistent with Conservative ambitions—the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) may want to intervene—of self-reliance and resilience, but apparently not.

Thankfully, the Scottish Government recognise the huge opportunity of community energy schemes to empower communities, solve those challenges, and reduce the need for vast infrastructure investment projects through the community and renewable energy scheme. In Scotland, the Government have provided more than £58 million. Contrast that with the £10 million from the English Government for England—it is not actually £10 million anyway, because £1 million is for administration; it is really only £9 million—and we can see which Administration are supporting community energy generation, and which are not.

Time and again, we hear from local community groups that there is no support for gaining connection to the grid, and that the Government are utterly apathetic regarding the benefits of community energy generation. Perhaps we can get an answer today on when the Government will launch the much-anticipated consultation on the barriers blocking growth in community energy generation, given their promise to do so back in September.

This debacle has needlessly set back wind production in auction round 5, and we need to see something very substantial in auction round 6. I assume that we will have a realistic strike price for offshore in auction round 6. I hope that it will be around 50% to 60% inflated over what was in auction round 5, in cognisance of supply chain constraints, construction price inflation, and the challenges of capital expenditure and attracting investor confidence in the UK, which of course has taken a real battering after the Prime Minister's announcements to row back on climate emergency legislation.

Richard Thomson: My hon. Friend is making a marvellous speech pointing out the shortcomings of the Government's approach to accelerating renewables and to the barriers onshore. Does he, as I do, detect the remnants of an anti-growth coalition living on among those on the Conservative Front Bench?

Dave Doogan: That would depend on what we want to grow. If we want to invest substantially in renewable energy and the technologies of the future, then yes, I do. If we want to invest in Chinese expertise, French reactors and nuclear power plants, then no, I do not. It is very

[*Dave Doogan*]

much horses for courses with this Government, and I wish that my constituents, and everyone else in Scotland, did not have to rely on these misguided ambitions any longer than we absolutely must.

David Duguid: I want to ask a genuine question of the hon. Gentleman, if he does not mind. He mentioned that he was hoping for between 50% and 60% inflation on the strike price for AR6, as and when it comes around. Could he expand on how that is calculated?

Dave Doogan: I do not want to go into the calculation elements of it, but it looks at the disconnect between the strike price that was delivered in auction round 4 and the ambition for auction round 5, wraps it up in the inflation environment that we are in—bear in mind that these are 2012 prices, so it is not actually that number—and comes out with a figure within that range. It is an auction, as the hon. Gentleman will know very well, so there is an element of second-guessing to it. However, after this Government's failure in auction round 5, we cannot allow something similar to happen in auction round 6, which will create a disinvestment in offshore wind that we cannot allow to happen.

Scotland is a well-established net exporter of electricity. In 2020, we created 31.8 TW of renewable electricity in Scotland, equivalent to powering all the houses in Scotland for three and a half years. That was in 2020, and we are now generating even more. Calls in Scotland are growing louder and louder, asking how it is possible that in our country of 5.5 million people, where we produce six times more gas than we consume, a staggering 50% of Scottish people aged 55 to 64 are living in fuel poverty. It is as well that they ask, because the answer lies in being handcuffed to Westminster.

Scotland is currently leading the world on floating wind, but only by a very slim margin. We need strategic ambition and significant investment to leverage our intellectual, engineering and geographic advantage into a systemic lead on this technology on a global scale, certainly for technology and design, and for manufacturing in the European sector. Until three months ago, Scotland had the world's largest floating offshore wind installation, but that title now belongs to Hywind Tampen in Norway.

We are at a critical juncture for offshore floating wind in Scotland, with the potential to exploit our enormous growth opportunity, and to export our manufacturing expertise across the world, but only if we get the strike price right. It is therefore frustrating in the extreme to see the Tories talk about the need for economic growth while at the same time utterly failing to do anything ambitious to support this burgeoning industry of almost limitless potential for Scottish jobs, UK jobs and global sales. Contrast that investment posture with the rush to welcome Chinese expertise and French technology into England's nuclear industry.

Floating wind must get an appropriate strike price in AR6 that reflects the enormous growth potential of the industry. The Department needs to stand up to the Treasury and secure an administrative strike price that reflects the rudimentary understanding that, as a new technology, floating wind will have a higher cost per megawatt-hour, but it will reduce over time. The price must reflect the advantage of having a more advantageous

strike price that allows the supply chain to fall on these islands, not forcing developers to get their supply chain from abroad.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): My hon. Friend mentioned standing up to the Treasury. The Secretary of State bragged about the Government's support for tidal, but it is a peedie amount in comparison with their loving support for nuclear. It is very disappointing, when we consider how efficient, steady and reliable—and how much cheaper—that electricity source is. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Dave Doogan: I absolutely agree. I can only assume that it is due to the Conservatives' blinkered reliance on nuclear. They cry, "We need baseload!" but we need a mix of energy storage and baseload solutions, just as we need a mix of generation. If they showed half the ambition for pumped storage, battery storage and hydrogen as they do for nuclear, we would be in a far better position and much less reliant on this grossly expensive generation technology.

On the pumped storage issue, I wrote to the Minister earlier this year and was informed that the Government were

"committed to putting in place an appropriate policy framework", but we saw nothing in the King's Speech and we detect no sense of urgency regarding pumped storage. Long-term energy storage is yet another way to ensure energy security that the Government seem more than happy to ignore.

To maximise the efficiency of renewable energy generation while ensuring the lowest possible prices for consumers, we require a properly functioning energy grid, which will necessarily include long-duration energy storage. Industry has been super clear that future expansion of pumped hydro storage is achievable and affordable, and that crucially a number of projects already have planning permission, such as Cruachan in the west of Scotland. However, the UK Government's current market mechanisms prevent the investment needed to ensure that those vital projects are delivered in a timely manner, consistent with the climate emergency and the ambition to lower consumers' bills.

A cap and floor mechanism will fix pumped storage, and I would be very interested to hear the views of the Secretary of State on that, but when we take all these issues in the round, it is very clear to me and to the people of Scotland that we need control over our energy future. The only way to do that is with the full powers of independence.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. There is not massive pressure on time, but as colleagues can see, a number of colleagues wish to get in. My advice would be that were everybody to speak for no longer than 12 minutes, everybody would get in and have sufficient time. If people go on for too long, it puts pressure on others.

12.59 pm

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me in what is my last Gracious Speech debate. My constituency of Kingswood is being formally abolished in the boundary changes and there is nowhere for me to go, but I have had a great time participating in these debates over the past 13 and a half years.

I remember my first Gracious Speech debate. A loyal Back Bencher who knew no better, I was sitting in the Library, and a Whip came around and asked whether I might participate. I said, “Yes, sure, I’m happy to. Would five minutes be okay?” He said, “Yes, come in, but we actually need you to speak for 45 minutes, if that’s all right.” I am delighted that we have far more people in the Chamber now compared with that debate, when I was one of the few Members in the room. That demonstrates, I think, the interest and the enthusiasm on both sides of the House for focusing on the importance of the energy transition not just to tackling the climate crisis, but for the opportunity it presents the UK economy.

I was delighted to hear in the Secretary of State’s speech her enthusiasm for setting out in detail the UK’s progress internationally. We are a clean energy superpower. We can debate among ourselves the finer policy details, but the reality is that over the past 15 years we have decarbonised further than any other G20 nation. We have reduced our emissions by 50%, while at the same time growing our economy by 70% on 1990 levels.

That is a paragon and a model that all other nations look to, but it is important that once we have earned a reputation, we seek to preserve that reputation. Many countries now are following the UK, and we are now in a new global net zero race. We may have gone further and faster initially, which made us able to attract inward investment into this country as a result of our climate leadership, but other countries are following up further and faster in our tracks. I am reminded of the tale of the tortoise and the hare; the tortoises of the world are coming up, and we cannot just sit there pausing, thinking that this is good enough.

We have the United States Inflation Reduction Act, setting out £370 billion of investment in clean technologies, and the EU’s green deal, with the opportunity of up to €1 trillion of investment, but it is not just the investment that is important here—it is the certainty. I chaired the net zero review and published the “Mission Zero: Independent Review of Net Zero” report in January. We were very kindly granted a debate in both Chambers on the recommendations of those reports. Above all, the narrative that that mission zero report set out was that net zero is not a cost but an opportunity and an investment, and that there are two paths ahead of us.

The Secretary of State talked about two paths, and I will come on to that in a moment, but my own analysis is that the net zero path can potentially bring up to £1 trillion of inward investment and up to 480,000 new additional jobs by 2035, if we so wish. However, that path requires commitment from the Government to provide certainty, clarity, continuity and consistency—the four Cs that we identified—and a mission-based approach that provides long-term programmatic certainty. That certainty is almost more important than the money.

If we look at what the States has done, the 45Q and 45X tax credits are guaranteed until 1 January 2033. The Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau programme in Germany and the MaPrimeRénov’ energy efficiency programme in France are guaranteed over a decade.

In contrast, in the UK we are still exposed to the tyranny of the spending review, and many of our programmes, whether in energy efficiency or clean energy, are bedevilled by the fact that they only last for three to four years at most and then have to start all over again. That does not provide the certainty to build out supply chains, it does not provide certainty for local authorities or regional Mayors to make investment, and it certainly does not provide the certainty needed for inward private investment to come to this country.

Let us be clear: of course there is a capital cost to energy transition and there is capital investment that needs to be made, but once the capital investment is made, the operational cost is far less than for fossil fuel technologies. However, that money will come above all not from the taxpayer, but overwhelmingly from private investors, who need certainty. Certainty does not come only from Government policy, legislation and regulation, although the net zero review was very clear in setting out 129 recommendations for how Government and Parliament can provide frameworks to ensure that investors have the opportunity to reduce delays and unblock the current problems whereby people cannot get grid connections until 2035. I welcome the progress that is being made on that, but certainty also comes from having cross-party consensus.

What is cross-party consensus? It does not necessarily mean that we will agree on everything. It is right in this democratic nation that we discuss the details of policies and hold each other to account, but let us understand that the consensus we need on climate was fought for by working closely together. The Climate Change Act 2008 was passed by the then Labour Government. The right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) was the Secretary of State at the time, but he had the political courage to accept an amendment from the Conservative party, then in opposition, to raise our ambition from 60% emissions reduction on 1990 levels to 80%.

The legal framework that we had in place, with the carbon budgets process, and on top of that the Climate Change Committee acting as an independent advisory body—it does not make any policy recommendations, and to suggest that it does is deeply flawed, because all it does is to report back and advise on policy decisions, whoever makes them, whether it is the UK, Scottish or Welsh Government or even the Opposition—has been admired across the world as a paradigm of stability. Not only that, but it allowed me, as the Energy Minister back in 2019, to bring net zero into law.

Why was net zero so important for developing a clean energy superpower? Because it meant that there was nowhere to hide. No one could claim to be in that 20% that was too difficult to tackle. Net zero was everyone’s business, and with that came a moment when net zero went viral. If someone had told me back in 2019, I simply would not have believed that 93% of global GDP would have now signed up to a net zero target in some form.

However, for the UK that means that investment is now going elsewhere unless we raise our ambition. The terms of the game have changed in this year alone, partly due, obviously, to what has happened in geopolitics and the cost of oil and gas crisis generated by Russia’s illegal war in Ukraine. All countries in Europe have woken up to the fact that the answer to tackling the cost of gas crisis is to build out more renewable power. Even

[Chris Skidmore]

Ukraine has built 18 times more wind turbines than we have built onshore in the UK. There is only a finite amount of labour and investment, and we have a political choice to make whether we want that to come to UK, or whether we want to see it onshored elsewhere. I want to see it come to the UK.

We must set our priorities very clearly. Our priority must be that we want private investment to come to this country. We should retain that consensus and that ability to understand that, whoever becomes the next Administration at the next general election—I am not making a party political point here—we still need to work together. We all live under the same skies. We all operate under the same climate. Carbon dioxide does not care whether you are a Labour, Tory or SNP MP. All that matters is the real-terms emissions reductions we need to see.

When it comes to those emissions reductions, it is not about 2050; we cannot keep on kicking the can down the road. As COP28 will show, the globe will commit to a trebling of renewables and a doubling of energy efficiency measures in order to meet a halving of emissions by 2030. The UK needs to lead on the 68% emissions reduction target that it set in its own nationally determined contributions. The decisions we make today count not just for 27 years' time, but for seven years' time. That is what is at stake here.

That brings me, in conclusion, to the question of the future use of fossil fuels in this country. I understand that it is a closely fought debate, and unfortunately it has become politicised. I regret the decision that has been taken, but let us focus again on the evidence at hand. To start with, everyone in this Chamber, as far as I know, understands that we will need to continue using oil and gas. The Committee on Climate Change has set out the so-called balanced pathway, working alongside the North Sea Transition Authority, to recognise that we will still need to use oil and gas into the 2050s, but that we should do it with our existing wells and fields.

In reality, when it comes to looking at the future of oil and gas in this country, I do not belong to Just Stop Oil—I am not some eco-extremist just because I signed net zero into law, which was the bare minimum we could do. I saw net zero as a conservative mission, recognising that one of the priorities of the Conservative party, if anything at all, is to conserve. At the same time, it allowed us to generate economic growth and to ensure that all jobs, no matter the industry, were protected.

I am glad that we have raised the issue of jobs and people in oil and gas communities, because we must think about the individual communities and the people who work in those industries. They are highly talented and highly skilled, and we absolutely need their support to ensure that we can have a successful transition. The net zero review set out that we need an offshore industries passport; we need to make it far easier for individuals to move across into the industries of the future.

Politics is about priorities and deciding where investment goes. The Secretary of State mentioned the coalmines in the 1980, and in a way, I agree with her. Looking at what is left in the North sea, the decisions in the King's Speech will mean, as Carbon Brief and a number of other environmental organisations have demonstrated, that instead of taking 95% of oil and gas out of the

North sea basin, we will take out 97%—the equivalent of two weeks' worth of oil and gas a year. That is the reality of what this energy security supposedly means.

It is not just me saying that. I have been handed this Conservative campaign headquarters brief, so I assume CCHQ wants me to read from it. It says:

“Even with continued licensing, production from the UK Continental Shelf is projected to decline at 7 per cent annually, this decline is faster than the average global decline”.

I even have the Conservative research department brief agreeing with me that there is not enough oil and gas in the North sea to make a difference; we will still be dependent on foreign oil and gas in future. It will predominantly be oil, and we do not have the refineries to be able to refine it, so it will still have to go the Netherlands and it will still be sold on international markets by foreign companies. Rosebank is operated by Equinor, a Norwegian company. I have nothing against Equinor, but we cannot pin a claim of energy security on the production of future oil and gas.

If we want to deliver effective energy security, we need to turn the debate on its head, because we have not really focused on what we need to achieve, which is a reduction in demand. We have been speaking a lot about supply, and that is fantastic, but if we want to be a clean energy superpower, we need to focus on our ability to reduce demand through energy efficiency measures such as heat pumps, and through understanding that we can reduce our gas demand, which is at the mercy of foreign petrostates and international markets, by up to 40%.

I know that the debate on oil and gas is emotive, and, to be honest, it is not helped by the performative protest of Just Stop Oil, which does not get anyone anywhere. No one in this Chamber supports Just Stop Oil. If we are honest, as democratically elected representatives, it is beneath us to suggest that any of us is in the same camp as Just Stop Oil. We are diametrically opposed, because we come to this Chamber to have democratic debate, across parties, about what is needed for the future, not to oppose for opposition's sake. In understanding what needs to happen with the net zero transition, we need to ensure that we work together using the existing legislative apparatus—the CCC, the carbon budget process—and that we continue to lead, but that requires political certainty and political stability.

As I said, this is my last Gracious Speech debate, and, although I have so far supported every single such Speech in my parliamentary career, unfortunately this will be the first time that I am unable to vote for the King's Speech. I apologise to His Majesty in advance—I hope that he does not mind—but I will not be put in a position of supporting new oil and gas licensing when it is not needed, either for environmental reasons, obviously, or for economic reasons.

This year alone, we have seen investment in oil and gas plummet. We have now seen investment in solar rise, to the point that it is at parity with oil and gas. If we continue to suggest that we can produce oil and gas forever, we will let down the communities that we need to transition. That is the point about the coalfields: we will end up being the Arthur Scargills of this world, claiming that we can forever continue mining coal. We cannot continue to drill for oil, because there is no oil left to drill. That is the economic reality that investors already understand. They are moving away from fossil fuels, and in 10 years' time, people will look back at this

debate and recognise that Westminster and Whitehall were behind the curve. The private sector and the markets are moving already. We need to listen now and clearly if we are to protect jobs for the future.

1.15 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

It is often said that it is a great pleasure to follow the previous speaker, and it could not be more of a pleasure for me to follow the final speech in a King's Speech debate by the right hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore), because he has been a champion in this House for a sensible way forward. His work on the Skidmore review was exemplary.

I also want to pick up on what the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Dame Maria Miller) said about the need to maintain the cross-party consensus, which has been so vital to the progress that we have made over the past 10 years—and more than that, the past 15 years. Cross-party consensus has enabled us to progress. Yes, the past 10 years have been years of progress; the past 13 years have been years of progress. The foundation was laid very ably by my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), the Government took advantage of that, and we are now in a good place. We are in the lead, but we are not showing leadership. That is the difference: we need to show more leadership now.

Last winter, there were 4,706 excess winter deaths in Britain caused by living in cold, damp homes. That was 1,520 more than in the year before, and last winter was considered mild—let us all pray that this winter too is considered mild. I will examine what the King's Speech will do for those in fuel poverty and those who will struggle in any winter because their property is simply draughty, damp, cold and un-insulated. How will this King's Speech prevent even more excess deaths this winter?

It is often said that the first job of Government is to protect their citizens. That does not just mean from external threat or internal crime, but in the basics of life. What could be more basic than the warmth of a decent home? Thankfully, energy prices have fallen since last winter, but they remain 70% higher than in the year before, so what is the Government's strategy? What demands have they made of the energy supply companies to help customers get through this winter? What measures are there to improve the energy efficiency of buildings? Some 21% of UK emissions—over a fifth of all our emissions—comes from heating leaky and inefficient buildings; 21% of emissions, but 100% misery for those living in those buildings.

The majority of those 4,706 excess deaths were pensioners, who are most vulnerable to the cold. What measures are the Government taking to ensure the uptake of pension credit? The Secretary of State worked at the Centre for Social Justice and at the Housing and Finance Institute, and she has been a Minister in the Department for Work and Pensions, so she knows the plight of pensioner poverty. Yet this King's Speech holds no hope that the Government will tackle the problem of 37% of pensioners not getting pension credit.

Where is the Bill to retrofit energy efficiency measures in all our housing stock, to save money and save lives by making sure people can turn their heating down because

their property is not losing every therm it pumps out? There is nothing—well, not quite nothing. Ahead of the King's Speech, the Prime Minister announced that he was dropping the proposal to oblige landlords to ensure that the properties they rent to their tenants are brought up to a minimum energy performance certificate standard of C by 2028. That will ensure that 2.4 million privately rented homes continue to be cold, damp and energy-inefficient. It will ensure that 1.6 million children who we know are currently living in what are officially classed as “non-decent” homes have no relief for another seven years, until the new date set by the Prime Minister of 2035.

Of course, it is not the wealthy landlord who pays the heating bill. That means insulating the properties properly is not something they have an incentive to do, unless it is mandated by Government. It is calculated that the tenants, who do pick up the bill, will end up paying an extra £1 billion in their gas and electric bills because the Prime Minister wants to show that he is not an “eco-zealot”. I would not be proud to wear a badge of moderation on the backs of some of the poorest private sector renters in our country.

I am sure that Government Members will wish to point to the £400 payment from the energy bills support scheme, funded from the windfall tax on oil and gas producers last year. Of course, that still left bills twice as high as they had been previously and provided no relief for off-grid properties or those who had to use prepayment meters. Their alternative scheme for those 900,000 households reached just 2,000 bill payers and returned £440 million to the Treasury. Could the Government not even have the wit to put that money back into the system to provide energy efficiency measures for those properties?

What about the warm home discount? Two years ago, the Government revised the qualifications for it, which means that those 37% of pensioners who are not claiming pension credit do not get the warm home discount either. More than that, not all energy providers are obliged to offer the discount, and even those that are obliged have a limited obligation, which is used on a first come, first served basis.

The job of government is to get the help available to the people who need it. Winter is coming. The Government need to look at this again. They should be introducing a social tariff to protect our most vulnerable, struggling, fuel-poor citizens. They should get rid of the unfair and regressive standing charge and introduce a rising block tariff, so that those using less energy pay less per unit of energy, so that the principle of “polluter pays” applies and so that those who need to heat their swimming pools pay much more per unit to do so.

What we have in this King's Speech is not the Bill to tackle fuel poverty that we need, but a Bill to shovel yet more public money to the oil and gas sector through the Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill. The Government seek to justify the Bill by saying it will “enhance” this country's energy security. It will not, because companies such as Shell and Siccarr Point Energy sell their gas on the international markets and refine their oil abroad. The International Energy Agency has made it clear that we have already identified five times the amount of oil and gas that the world could possibly use if it is to keep within the 1.5° threshold of dangerous climate change.

[Barry Gardiner]

These licences are part of a scramble to be the last country to sell the last barrel of oil. I gently remind the Secretary of State that the stone age did not end because of a lack of stone, and the oil age will not end because of a lack of oil—oh, but it will end! What my constituents living in cold, inefficient homes do not understand is why, under the tax rules devised by the Prime Minister when he was Chancellor, they are the ones who will end up paying to develop these licences. The taxpayer gives 92p in tax rebate for every £1 those companies spend developing these new fields in the North sea basin—companies such as Shell, whose own chief executive called his company's profits “obscene”.

The Secretary of State tries to persuade the House and the public that these licences are justified because of the tax revenue they will bring. That might be an argument if the facts did not tell us that any tax revenues will not flow from these licences for the five to eight years that it will take to develop them. That might be an argument if the facts did not tell us that it will divert investment away from the real, cheaper, cleaner renewable energy that will actually reduce bills. It might be an argument if it were not the case that, even with the windfall tax, the tax take from oil and gas producers is less than the global average.

When the windfall tax expires next year, the UK tax take from oil and gas producers will fall back to the lowest tax rate in the world—not 10% less than the global average, and not 20% less, but 38% less than the global average. If we levied tax at the global average, we would get an extra £14 billion into the public purse that could address fuel poverty and retrofit those houses.

How does the Secretary of State explain that to the 4,706 families who lost loved ones to excess deaths, the 37% of pensioners not getting their warm home discount or the 2.4 million families now waiting an extra seven years for their landlord to insulate their homes properly? What will she tell them—that there was no time for a Bill to deal with the scourge of fuel poverty, but there was time to introduce a Bill to deal with the scourge of unlicensed pedicabs? Priorities; priorities.

Let me mention two further Bills in the Gracious Speech. I welcome unreservedly the Holocaust Memorial Bill and urge the Government to introduce it swiftly in the eight months before purdah sets in for the next general election. The significance of this Bill has only been heightened by the hideous terror attack on 7 October. Both sides of the House will give the Bill a speedy passage, so that we can build the memorial and learning centre. If there were ever a time that we needed such a learning centre against hatred, it is now.

Finally, I give a much caveated welcome to the leasehold and freehold Bill. If the Government see this Bill as a vehicle to end the feudal system of leasehold, they are wrong. It extends the right to enfranchise and own the freehold of one's own home only to leasehold homes, not to the 5 million people who live in the misery of leasehold flats. England and Wales is the last redoubt of this antiquated and unjust property ownership. Every other country in the world has a commonhold or strata title system.

The fundamental problem with leasehold is the inequity of power. The leaseholder pays full market value for their apartment, but they have no power to take any of

the key decisions that relate to it. They are told by the managing agent what repairs are required, who will do them and how much they will cost, but the leaseholder has to pay. It is not enough, as the Gracious Speech says, to improve leaseholders' consumer rights. What we need is an abolition of leasehold. We need to abolish marriage value, and we need to enable enfranchisement, so that all leaseholders—not just leasehold house owners, but leasehold flat owners—are able to enjoy the full rights of property ownership, instead of being exploited as they are now.

1.28 pm

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): It was my honour to attend the state opening of Parliament this week, representing the people of Banff and Buchan, particularly on this occasion of the first King's Speech in over 70 years. I join others across the House in thanking His Majesty King Charles III for delivering the Gracious Speech.

In general terms, the King's Speech shows that this Government are making the necessary long-term decisions to get this country on the right path for the future. One of the criticisms I am sure we all receive across the House is that politicians often focus too much on short-term outcomes, so this long-term approach is to be welcomed. This bright future will be delivered by growing the economy, strengthening society, keeping people safe and promoting our national interests.

The topic of today's debate is making Britain a clean energy superpower, and it is on growing the economy and particularly the subject of energy security that I would like to focus. That will come as no surprise to most people in this House, as I have spoken at length in this place on the combined subjects of energy security and net zero even before that became the name of the Department headed by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho). The main thrust of my contributions has been, I believe, to reinforce the critical role played by oil and gas companies; their workers with their skills and expertise; the technology, supply chains and service companies; and, yes, the capital that those companies bring in making this country's energy transition a success. I recognise that this appears counterintuitive to some across the House, but delivering on our energy security objectives and on our energy transition objectives are not mutually exclusive goals.

I therefore welcome the Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill that was introduced this week. While this country continues to scale up our domestic, renewable and low-carbon sources of energy, data from the Climate Change Committee tells us that we are currently 75% dependent on oil and gas for our energy needs. As the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband)—who is no longer in his place—mentioned earlier, that figure is not just for electricity generation, but includes transportation and heat. It was the Climate Change Committee that pushed for the very ambitious target of the UK getting to net zero emissions by 2050. That target was put into law by this Conservative Government—in fact, by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore)—making the UK the first major economy anywhere in the world to do so.

That data from the Climate Change Committee also tells us that by 2050, when we reach net zero, this country is predicted to still be at least 20% dependent on oil and gas. As has already been established, we have decarbonised faster than any other G7 country compared with 1990 levels: we have reduced emissions by almost 50%, with a target to reach a 68% reduction by 2030. We have almost completely transitioned away from coal, which provided 70% of our power generation in 1990 but provides less than 2% today, and the deadline for zero unabated coal power has been brought forward to 2024—just next year.

However, we have some way to go if we are to get to net zero. I make no apologies for saying this: we absolutely must continue to develop and install more and more renewable, low-carbon and sustainable sources of energy to generate the electricity and provide the heat and transport that our economy needs. We will continue to deliver more wind, solar, carbon capture and storage, hydrogen and other technologies to actively reduce the demand for oil and gas. We have come a long way, but we are not there yet. We need to get from where we are today to where we need to be in the future through the energy transition that we have already embarked upon—an transition that the oil and gas industry has been embarked upon for decades.

To give an example, we need look no further than Peterhead power station in my constituency. That power station came onstream in 1980, and is today the only dispatchable thermal power station north of Leeds. Originally designed to run on fuel oil, which already made it cleaner than coal-powered stations elsewhere in the country, it was operating fully on natural gas by the 1990s. In the 2000s, combined cycle gas turbine technology was installed, which made the station even more efficient. It is now towards the end of its life, and a new power station is planned to be built at the same site. With roughly two thirds of the capacity of the current power station, but linked to the Acorn carbon capture project at the nearby St Fergus terminal just up the coast, that new facility will generate power that is at least 95% emission-free. As many in the House will know, Acorn forms part of the Scottish CCS cluster, which will help decarbonise industrial processes at the Mossmorran liquefied natural gas plant in Fife and the petrochemical complex at Grangemouth in the central belt, among others.

As I have said, the energy transition is already happening, not just within the hydrocarbon production industry but by utilising the skills, technology and supply chains of that industry. I welcome this Government's recognition of the vital role that oil and gas companies, and their more than 200,000 workers across the UK, will have to play in that energy transition.

The Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill will require the North Sea Transition Authority to run an annual process inviting applications for new production licences in the UK continental shelf. A licensing round would take place only if the UK was projected to import more oil and gas from abroad than it produces domestically—that is, to continue being a net importer. The carbon emissions linked to UK gas production would also need to be lower than the equivalent emissions from imported liquefied natural gas. Those two tests are already included in the Government's climate tests for new licences, known as the climate compatibility checkpoint. The Bill would make the tests legally binding.

I have heard some Members say, including today—in fact, I think it is the official Opposition's policy, or at least it has been their policy—that not only should we not award any new production licences, but we should simply keep producing from the wells we have. That shows a staggering lack of understanding of how oil and gas reservoirs work. According to Offshore Energies UK, the trade body for the offshore energies industry,

“There are currently 284 active oil and gas fields in the North Sea and by 2030 around 180 of those will have ceased production due to natural decline.”

OEUK has warned that without fresh investment, by 2030 the UK will be reliant on oil and gas imports not for 50% of its needs, as it is today, but for 80%. As I have said, more than 200,000 jobs depend on the continuity of North sea energy companies. That workforce has developed world-leading specialist skills since oil and gas production from the UKCS began in the 1970s. About 90% of those workers have skills that can be readily transferred to renewable energy production, and in the growing carbon capture, utilisation and storage sector that figure is probably closer to 100%.

To recap, why does the UK need more oil and gas licences? Data from the NSTA shows that the UK replaced only 3% of production with new reserves in 2022, meaning that only one new barrel was invested in for every 33 barrels produced today. The UK is expected to close production from 20 fields this year, while only two new fields will start producing, and for every oil and gas well drilled, around three are closed. Even with an increase in new wells, we will not be producing more oil and gas; even in the most optimistic projections, with new oil and gas, production is predicted to continue to decline by 7% a year. Let me repeat that: new oil and gas does not mean more oil and gas, but we do need to maximise the amount of oil and gas we get from the UKCS for as long as we need it. And need it we will—need it we do!

As I said earlier, as we grow our capacity for renewable, low-carbon and sustainable forms of energy, our demand for oil and gas is set to decline, from 75% today to 20% in 2050. As such, if we need oil and gas, it makes sense at the most basic level of understanding that we should produce it as locally as we can. The carbon footprint of importing liquified natural gas, for example, can be anything between two and five times that of domestically produced gas.

Caroline Lucas: What about Norway?

David Duguid: Norway is the two. Actually, it is broadly equivalent, but apart from Norway, any gas coming in from overseas has between two and five times the carbon footprint. New oil and gas capacity will reduce exposure to global instability—the kind of instability that we saw when Russia invaded Ukraine. This Bill means that we can reach net zero without unduly burdening families and businesses. Data from the North Sea Transition Authority and the Climate Change Committee tells us that if we produce as much oil and gas from the new wells as we can, that will still merely slow the decline in production. Even with an optimistic 7% year-on-year decline—I mean optimistic from a producer's point of view—that decline is faster than the average global decline needed to align with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 1.5°C pathway.

[David Duguid]

Finally, if we follow the SNP's presumption against new oil and gas or Labour's Just Stop Oil approach and shut down this vital industry too soon, we will not see a massive transfer of workers to the renewables sector, as is predicted. We will not even see a bunch of unemployed oil and gas workers; we will see a massive exodus of those oil and gas workers, going where the oil and gas industry is being promoted.

Richard Thomson: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. In his haste to castigate the SNP for presumptions against oil and gas, will he not at least have the intellectual honesty to recognise that in the climate change compatibility checkpoints, his own Government are introducing a presumption against further development, no matter how weak and feeble that presumption might seem to anyone with a care for the subject?

David Duguid: I have heard the hon. Gentleman make that remark before, and I am sorry to say that I completely disagree. A presumption against new oil and gas development is a presumption against new oil and gas development; a climate change compatibility checkpoint is part of an assumption of new oil and gas, so it is not a presumption against new oil and gas. [Interruption.] I have just explained it.

Those workers with their skills and expertise, those supply chains and those service companies with their technology will simply go elsewhere—as I have said—and deliver someone else's energy security and energy transition. I commend the Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill for showing this Government's commitment to not let that happen, and to make the right decisions for this country's long-term future.

1.39 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I would like to start by saying what I think we can all clearly see: that the Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill announced in the Gracious Speech is no more than a cheap and divisive gimmick. It is nothing but a last-ditch attempt to boost the Prime Minister's ailing poll ratings and simultaneously prop up the dying oil and gas industry. It is a deeply dangerous attempt at that, because undermining the hard-won climate consensus for short-term electoral point scoring is simply reckless and threatens the progress that all of us in this House have worked so hard to achieve.

In reality, the Bill will make no difference at all. It will require the North Sea Transition Authority to run an annual process of inviting applications for new production licences. However, as the Minister well knows, the NSTA was already holding annual licensing rounds—most recently in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. This was only paused in 2020 when it said that it would await the so-called climate compatibility checkpoint before opening further rounds. Now that the checkpoint is in operation, we can expect the NSTA to resume regular licensing rounds, not least because it has the obscene legal duty to “maximise economic recovery” of petroleum from the North sea.

Instead of adding more obsolete and outdated legislation to our statute book, the Government should be bringing our laws up to date and ensuring that they help, rather than hinder, our transition to a zero-carbon society,

especially when this embarrassment of a Bill will do absolutely nothing, as so many hon. Members have said, to help those struggling households facing energy bills that are double what they were two years ago, with a staggering 6 million households in fuel poverty as we head into the winter. Indeed, it was the Secretary of State herself who let the cat out of the bag earlier this week by almost immediately contradicting the Prime Minister's claim that new licences would help to reduce bills by admitting, as we have heard, that

“it wouldn't necessarily bring energy bills down, that's not what we're saying.”

Even the Prime Minister's closest allies cannot stand by his falsehoods, and it is no wonder. Despite the Prime Minister's failed attempts to present this legislation as “benefiting families”, the truth is that the only people it will help are the fossil fuel companies that pocket the profits, because any oil and gas that is extracted will be owned by private companies and sold on the global markets to the highest bidder—I really do not understand what is so difficult about getting one's head around that—and because

“more U.K. production wouldn't reduce the global price of gas.”

Those are not my words, but those of Tory party chairman and former Energy Minister, the right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands).

If the Government genuinely cared about reducing households' costs, they would look to urgently decouple the price of electricity from expensive gas. If they genuinely cared about people's bills, they would work to get off costly fossil fuels altogether, including by bringing forward a much-needed and long-delayed nationwide, street by street, local authority-led energy efficiency programme to upgrade the UK's cold and leaky homes. If the consequences were not so dreadful, the Prime Minister's claim that his party is saving British families money would be frankly laughable, because the Climate Change Committee itself has been crystal clear that the callous decision to scrap the upgrade to the minimum energy efficiency standards for private rented homes

“will lead to higher household energy bills”.

In fact, at current prices, tenants of upgraded homes would stand to save over £300 a year, and would still save about £250 at so-called normal prices. What we have is an energy affordability crisis, not an energy supply crisis, so the Government's decision to double down on the very thing that is driving high energy bills is not just negligent, but positively absurd.

Let me turn to some of the Government's other misrepresentations. It is exasperating that, despite being told time and again that new oil and gas extracted from the North sea will not improve the UK's energy security, Ministers continue to rehearse the same old tired line, with the Prime Minister once again pointing to energy security in Tuesday's debate. Let me remind the Minister again why new licences will not deliver on that goal. First, 70% of the remaining North sea reserves are oil, not gas, the majority of which will be put in tankers and exported overseas because it is not suitable for UK refineries. Secondly, the hundreds of licences that have been issued already in the 13 years under Conservative Governments have provided the UK with a grand total of 16 days' worth of gas, half of which was exported to the Netherlands. Thirdly, the NSTA has itself confirmed that new licences would only make a difference to gas production “around the edges”, given the age and geology

of the basin. As I have said, the best solution to volatile gas prices is to reduce our dependence on gas altogether, not to redouble it.

When the Prime Minister announced this Bill on Tuesday, he emphasised its importance in

“supporting hundreds of thousands of British jobs.”—[*Official Report*, 7 November 2023; Vol. 740, c. 20.]

I very much share his concern for workers in the North sea, but the reality is that, while the Government have awarded more than 400 new licences in the last decade, over 200,000 jobs have been lost in the sector over that same time period, because—I say it again—the North sea is a declining basin. So may I urge Ministers to stop playing politics, and instead get on with delivering a proper just transition for workers and communities, alongside unleashing our abundant renewables to create good, well-paid green jobs for the long term?

May I also draw Ministers’ attention to the words of Fatih Birol, head of the International Energy Agency, who recently said that those expanding oil and gas production could be

“taking very unhealthy, unwise economic and climate risks”.

While they may profess the economic benefits of new oil and gas, we should not ignore the risk of stranded assets, as Mr Birol suggests, which it is estimated could exceed \$1 trillion globally, nor the Office for Budget Responsibility’s warning that continuing to rely on gas at our current levels could cost more than double the public investment required for the transition to net zero.

Finally, it was utterly bizarre to hear the Secretary of State say earlier this week and again today that the tax revenues from future oil and gas production, which may not materialise for decades, could be invested in renewables. Why not just invest in renewables in the first place, and do it now?

Hon. Members: We are!

Caroline Lucas: No, you are not. From a sedentary position, Ministers say, “We are”, but I would draw their attention to the last round for offshore wind. Tell us again how much that delivered? It was a big round zero—so let us be a little bit serious about this issue.

Moving to the specifics of the Bill, the Government’s proposed tests are simply not worth the paper they are written on. These tests are meant to ensure that a new licensing round supports the delivery of net zero, if indeed such a thing were possible with a new round. Let us look at the tests. The net importer test is supposed to ensure that the UK remains a net importer of both oil and gas, which clearly does not relate to the impact of oil and gas on our climate at all.

The carbon intensity test is to ensure that the average carbon intensity of domestic gas is lower than the average carbon intensity of imported liquefied natural gas. It is profoundly frustrating that the Government continue to point to LNG, the dirtiest form of gas imports, while ignoring the fact that more than half of our gas imports come via a pipeline from Norway, where gas production is half as polluting as in the UK. Worse, these tests ignore the fact that new oil and gas production can never be compatible with our climate targets.

The Climate Change Committee itself observed earlier this year:

“Expansion of fossil fuel production is not in line with Net Zero.”

Indeed, it went on to spell out:

“The UK will continue to need some oil and gas until it reaches Net Zero, but this does not in itself justify the development of new North Sea fields.”

I know the Minister may say that what they are proposing is not an expansion and that even with continued licensing, as we have heard, production from the UK continental shelf is projected to decline at 7% annually, while not proceeding with new licences increases reliance on imported LNG. Yet that thinking implies that this new production in the UK will replace expansion elsewhere, and we know that that is simply not the case.

However much the Government choose to ignore our climate reality, the truth is that there is already far more coal, oil and gas in existing developments than can be safely burnt if we, our children and our grandchildren are to have any hope of a liveable future. Indeed, I draw their attention the latest UN production gap report, which was published just yesterday. It revealed very plainly, as I say, that Governments already plan to produce more than double the amount of fossil fuels in 2030 than will be consistent with limiting heating to 1.5°C.

I do wish the Government would end the misinformation that they continue to promulgate. Instead, would the Minister confirm if these tests will be replacing the climate compatibility checkpoint, which is marginally more robust despite abysmally failing to take account of scope 3 emissions—in other words, those produced when the oil and gas is actually burnt, rather than just the extraction emissions—and if so, will she admit that this is a further weakening of our climate commitments, and heed the advice of the Climate Change Committee and halt this legislation all together?

Will Ministers also stop Rosebank, which was cynically approved during conference recess, when there was no opportunity for parliamentary scrutiny? The project is no less than a climate crime and would leave the UK’s climate record in tatters. At nearly 500 million barrels of oil and gas, this development is enormous—triple the size of neighbouring Cambo. If its contents were to be burned, they would produce over 200 million tonnes of CO₂; that is more than the combined annual CO₂ emissions of all 28 low-income countries in the world, which together are home to 700 million people. That is not to mention the fact that the British public would carry almost all the costs of developing Rosebank, thanks to the Government’s generous subsidy regime, which would hand Equinor over £3 billion in tax breaks, all while Equinor pockets the profit. In what world could that ever be justified, let alone in the context of the climate and cost of living crises?

Let us remind ourselves that this Bill has nothing to do with protecting households, and everything to do with populism and division. It is just part of the Government’s cynical attempt to stoke yet another culture war by falsely pitting meeting our climate targets against the cost of living scandal, rather than taking steps to address the very real concerns that families up and down this country face. Instead, we have this pitiful Bill, which will do nothing to help anyone except the fossil fuel companies.

Why are the Government not delivering the future we know is possible by, for example, bringing in a green new deal Bill to kick start the transformation we need: a future in which everyone has a warm and comfortable

[Caroline Lucas]

home to live in and the scourge of fuel poverty is eliminated; a future where everyone has access to good green jobs and a proper just transition has been delivered for workers and communities; a future that is powered by cheap and clean renewables, rather than the fossil fuels which are driving the climate crisis; a future in which the Government have responded to the urgency of the climate and ecological emergency, as we know the public are crying out for them to do? It is entirely possible to deliver this future, yet what has been made painfully clear by this King's Speech is that this Government are neither capable nor willing to do it. We are out of time for our country and our climate. We need a general election now.

1.52 pm

Sir Geoffroy Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): It was wonderful to see His Majesty deliver his first Gracious Speech as King, announcing the Government's priorities for this year. I am grateful to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and the House for giving me the opportunity to participate in this important debate.

It is customary in this House to commend the previous speaker, but in this case, I think I will just leave it at that.

I would like to see the measures in the King's Speech formed by the Government into a coherent narrative, so that my constituents in The Cotswolds have a clear understanding of the direction in which we wish to take this country over the next few years. This is an important opportunity to present a long-term vision.

Our foremost priority is to see our economy flourish and to alleviate the burden of the cost of living. A key component of economic growth will be securing our energy supply, including through the introduction of modular nuclear reactors, which I mentioned when I intervened on the Secretary of State. It is interesting to note that, despite the recent geopolitical tensions, gas and oil prices have stabilised to pre Russia-Ukraine conflict levels. That stability will translate into tangible relief for households this winter, as we anticipate a notable reduction in winter utility bills. The Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill, mentioned many times in this debate, will help to protect hundreds of thousands of jobs in the energy sector and support the Government's bid to achieve energy security.

As the Secretary of State mentioned, we should use the revenue from licensing to help to fund the transition to clean energy and jobs and to support the Government's pragmatic approach to reaching the goal of net zero by 2050, which I know is an important commitment to my constituents. The UK is one of the first countries to commit to ending unabated coal-fuelled generation and has cut emissions by more than 40% since the turn of the century. At the same time, our economy has grown by two thirds.

Inflation, as we all know, casts a wide shadow, affecting every facet of our lives and everyone from individuals and families to businesses, Government and local authorities. I am pleased that the King's Speech opened and closed on a goal of reducing inflation to the Bank of England's 2% target rate, but I am concerned that while the Bank of England unbundles quantitative easing, it is busily selling bonds at today's yields, which will lock us into high interest rates for many years to come.

I cannot conclude my speech without making a plug for tax-free shopping, which I have been championing for many years, with the help of the Association of International Retail. I called a debate in September to discuss how extending tax-free shopping to EU visitors would create a new multibillion-pound shopping-led tourism market. Restoring tax-free shopping to foreign visitors to this country would directly create 78,000 new jobs in the UK, add up to £4.1 billion to UK GDP annually, and result in a net positive for His Majesty's Treasury of £300 million each year. I hope the Ministers on the Treasury Bench heard that, because it is important. Such a policy would be a real win for retail businesses, manufacturers and hospitality venues up and down the country.

I want to take this opportunity to reassure my constituents that the Government are steadfast in their resolve to reduce inflation, which should create the opportunity to reduce interest rates. By the turn of the year, we expect to witness a significant decrease in the rising cost of essential commodities, including food and energy, which will shore up the finances of many households.

After the economy, the second biggest issue being raised with me on the doorstep is the NHS. I acknowledge the challenges, particularly in Gloucestershire, of prolonged ambulance waiting times and bed shortages. Strides have been taken to address those concerns and we are witnessing a commendable downward trend, but we are aware of the need to make further progress, particularly by strengthening social services to provide enhanced care at home for those who need it, so that people can be discharged from hospital quickly.

Despite growing waiting lists, the NHS is treating 10% more patients than before the pandemic, and 1.42 million people came off the waiting list in August compared with 1.29 million in August 2019. We have seen improvements in the backbone of our healthcare system—GPs and dentists—particularly in Gloucestershire, I am pleased to say. We have taken steps to improve the availability of NHS treatment, and from this month a number of local dentists will be providing some additional urgent capacity on a newly commissioned contract for both in and out-of-hours work, as well as a number of stabilisation appointments. Nevertheless, it is important to tackle the bottlenecks caused by strikes by junior doctors and consultants, which hinder waiting list reduction and harm patients' prospects. Finally, I welcome the announcements in the King's Speech on tobacco and vaping, which will be a step in the right direction of protecting the health of future generations.

The third biggest issue raised with me when I speak to constituents is education. I had the pleasure of a productive meeting with the acting head of Cirencester College, which stands at the forefront of T-level education—a Government initiative that has witnessed a commendable increase in enrolment. With the increase from 10 to 13 T-levels Cirencester College is thriving, with a record 3,300-strong student body coming from a 60 km radius, underscoring its importance to our community. I share the acting head's enthusiasm for the proposed advanced British standard and for increasing apprenticeships. I know the college is keen to be at the forefront of the ABS policy's introduction, leading the way in shaping policies on advanced education. This enthusiasm stems from a belief that a blend of academic and vocational education produces rounded individuals who are better equipped for both the workforce and higher education.

None the less, we must not overlook the pressing need to address mental health concerns and absenteeism among youngsters in our schools. Government figures indicate that 54% of secondary school pupils who have some involvement with the social care system are persistently absent from school. Among other children, the figure is only 28%.

Since covid, I have worked closely with a number of schools in my constituency that have faced a growing problem with absent children or with pupils who require mental health support. Many of our teachers provide excellent help, but deep-seated problems in our society are not always recognised. Young pupils are accessing social media with their phones and setting alarms to wake them up literally in the middle of the night to see the next episode of their chosen thing. That is just one aspect of what is happening in our society today.

Our ambition to nurture some of the most highly educated pupils in the world is rooted in our desire to harness the full potential of new technologies. From groundbreaking medical advancements to the integration of AI, which we heard about in the statement to the House earlier, we are committed to modernising regulation to facilitate the growth and competitiveness of major tech firms in the UK. That has the potential to revolutionise this country, particularly in respect of some of its deep-seated problems, such as how to decarbonise and meet our 2050 targets. A series of Bills, including the Automated Vehicles Bill, the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill and the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill will be introduced to govern the actions of those global tech giants, ensuring a level playing field for established and emerging technologies.

Finally, after 15 years of campaigning for the A417 Missing Link/Air Balloon project in my constituency, I am glad to tell the House that construction is now beginning. The project will provide a safe dual road linking the M4 at Swindon to the M5 at Gloucester. What the House may not know, because I have not said this before, is that this is also an exciting project from an environmental perspective. Some 140,000 trees will be planted, a 38 metre-wide green bridge will span the road and a significant area of rare calcareous grasses will be planted. That should ensure that this big project produces a net biodiversity gain—among the first for a major road scheme in this country.

The Government must continue to build on their commendable environmental record; to lead the charge in combating climate change and particularly biodiversity loss, which has not been mentioned so far in the debate; to support developing nations in their transition to sustainable energy sources; and to hold other nations accountable for their own environmental commitment, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has so ably set out today.

2.2 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): Unfortunately, as we have heard from other hon. Members, both today and yesterday, the King's Speech failed to address some key policy areas, and I am going to highlight just three missed opportunities.

In 2024, automotive companies such as Nissan in my constituency will experience new financial and regulatory pressures, including the zero-emission vehicles mandate, which requires 22% of new cars sold in 2024 to be zero

emission, and that will increase to 80% by 2030. Nissan, of course, is confident that it will meet all these new measures, but instead of helping manufacturers cope with the increased pressures, the Government have pulled the rug from under them by changing strategy and delaying their electric vehicles net zero 2030 commitment. That has inflicted uncertainty on investors, which will only delay the critical infrastructure that must be built for electric vehicle use. It also gives consumers less incentive to buy electric vehicles, which will simply leave manufacturers footing the bill as a result of decreased demand. That is the opposite of what should be happening: the Government are in the way of progress, not supporting it. We need them to move out of the way, get out of the seat of power and make way for a Government who have a plan, and indeed a mission, to reach net zero in a timely manner.

In the meantime, however, the Government must find a route forward that ensures that manufacturers are not left to deal with the consequences of Government indecision. The 2030 target is right for the public, right for manufacturers and right for the planet. We must ensure that the right signals are sent to investors and customers by delaying no longer and supporting the financing of key infrastructure such as much-needed battery gigafactories—I have one in my constituency, but we need at least another eight or nine to reach the 2030 target—and charging points at home and in public spaces.

As well as our manufacturing sector, the UK is known around the world for punching above our weight in music, theatre and sport. We as a country should be proud of our cultural industries, and that brings me to my second point. We are plagued by online touts who, often with the help of bots and other malicious software, buy tickets on an industrial scale and then resell them at hugely inflated prices. That is occurring everywhere, from local football games to our theatres, music venues and arenas and, sadly, even our much-loved Royal Albert Hall, where Ed Sheeran tickets originally costing £200 were resold for up to £6,000—30 times their original value. That comes despite Ed Sheeran and other artists, such as Taylor Swift before her forthcoming world tour, explicitly condemning inflated ticket resales and putting measures in place to prevent them. Ed Sheeran even wrote to all the seat holders at the Royal Albert Hall pleading with them not to resell their tickets at inflated prices. However, some still did.

Sites such as Viagogo, which resell huge numbers of tickets at vastly inflated prices, buy themselves to the top of every Google search by using paid-for ads. Regulatory bodies such as the Competition and Markets Authority—our enforcement body—lack the powers to tackle these secondary sites appropriately even when criminality is known to be present, and it is almost impossible to enforce against them. When the CMA asked the Government for much-needed extra powers in the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill to tackle this ticket abuse, the Government said no. One can therefore only assume that they are on the side of the touts—they are certainly not on the side of the fans.

I am chair of the all-party parliamentary group on ticket abuse, and our demand is simple: ticket resales should be capped at face value plus a small amount up to a maximum of 10% to account for booking fees—I do not want this to affect anyone who genuinely buys a ticket and then cannot go to the event. These reforms have already seen great success in Ireland, where a

[Mrs Sharon Hodgson]

version of my 2011 private Member's Bill—the Sale of Tickets (Sporting and Cultural Events) Bill—became law a few years back, although my Bill was, sadly, talked out in this Chamber. It is time that we sent a clear message to touts that the UK cares about live events and genuine fans, not touts. When the Labour party is in government, I hope we will back that sentiment with legislation, as Ireland has.

Finally, since the pandemic, we have seen a public outcry of support for policies expanding school food programmes but almost nothing from our Government, including in this King's Speech. As the cost of living crisis rages, more and more families are struggling with rising food costs. However, the cost of living crisis is affecting not only families; it is also crippling the catering services that deliver school meals to our children. The current funding allocation of just £2.53 per meal still massively fails to keep up with inflation and has increased only by 5% since 2014—that is 5% in almost a decade. In the same period, the national minimum wage has increased by over 60%, and rightly so.

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady, but perhaps the reason why there is not a note in the King's Speech about school food is that we introduced the Procurement Act 2023, which is very much designed to shorten those supply chains to make it easier for that food to get into our schools and public organisations. As I understand it, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has promised to look at models such as in Denmark, where there are these targets, to ensure that we can improve the quality and value of the food we are giving to children.

Mrs Hodgson: Absolutely, and that might help, but that does not take away from the fact that £2.53, which is what schools get to procure food from wherever they do so, is not enough. Every day, providers tell me they are having to start to cut back on the quality of ingredients and, at the same time, raise the prices for the children who pay for their school food; otherwise, literally the whole service will collapse. In my opinion, that is just unacceptable. Providers tell me that funding for free school meals and universal infant free school meals needs to be increased to well over £3 per meal just so that they can break even and provide the high-quality, nutritious meals that we all want to see our children eating in our schools.

Shockingly, 200,000 children in England are technically eligible for free school meals but are missing out on this important service because we do not have auto-enrolment. Implementing auto-enrolment would resolve that injustice quickly and easily. It would prevent more eligible children from slipping through the safety net that is there for them and be a great support for struggling families, meaning that they do not have to provide a packed lunch every day for their children when they are actually eligible for free school meals.

In an even more shocking statistic, there are 800,000 children whose families receive universal credit and are identified as living below the poverty line, yet they are ineligible for free school meals due to the ridiculously low earnings eligibility threshold of £7,400 before benefits. That threshold needs at least to be almost doubled to

£14,000, which it currently is in Northern Ireland. With those 800,000 and 200,000 children I just spoke of, there are a million children in need being failed every day, with many going hungry. Our school food system is in crisis, and it cannot go on like this, but the King's Speech did nothing to address any of that. In my opinion, that is shameful.

2.12 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), who makes her points with great candour and is, as always, well researched. I was honoured to witness the first King's Speech in more than 70 years, albeit from a tightly cramped room at the back of the House of Lords, not being able to see the King and just about able to hear him. However, it was a true landmark in British history.

I welcome the Government's commitment to ensuring that we deal with long-term issues and change the country for the better. There is an agenda of exciting Bills that will have an exceedingly positive impact on the people of this country, but much of government, of course, does not have to be legislation; it can be good administration.

On energy, I well remember how in the 1980s, before I came to this House, I account managed the computer equipment that kept our power stations running, and indeed in the early 1990s I was responsible for the team who kept our power stations' telecommunications running as part of my roles at Unisys and then BT. The transformation that has taken place in our power stations up and down the country is enormous. From having mainly coal-fired power stations, it is truly transformational that we now have renewables supplying so much more of our power, but what we have failed to do over successive Governments is invest in the new nuclear power stations required to replace the ageing ones. My hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) mentioned small modular nuclear reactors. We must advance that technology rapidly, get it in place and ensure that nuclear plays its part, because it is vital for our energy security that we have a mixed supply of energy, with renewables, nuclear, and fossil fuels where required.

Dave Doogan *rose*—

Bob Blackman: By the way, the hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan) referred to the title of this great debate, but he was wrong in that regard as it was chosen by the Opposition, not the Government. I will give way to him in a moment.

The reality is that we need to ensure a continuity of supply. We should understand that nuclear power is vital to keeping the baseload, and we build on that on the grid when demand increases. Of course, gas-fired power stations are often required at peaks and troughs when we need to get energy quickly into the grid. Unfortunately, it often seems that many colleagues do not understand the industry or the science behind it.

Dave Doogan: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his insight and education in the vagaries of this place—although I have no intention of hanging around long enough to become expert myself. He is an advocate of SMR, which he is entitled to be. What is his best guess for when the first megawatt of electricity from SMR will be generated in the United Kingdom?

Bob Blackman: I am not a clairvoyant, so I cannot predict when that will happen. However, I urge my hon. Friends on the Front Bench to get on with the job and ensure that we deliver that for the people of this country.

It is equally important that we ensure that we are not reliant on hostile regimes from abroad for the supply of our energy. The important point made by, I think, my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan, was that the new licences for drilling in the North sea that we are talking about are only replacing those going out of commission, so we continue to be in a position whereby we enable our net zero transition to take place. It is also important that, when we face hostile regimes such as those in Russia and Iran, we maintain our domestic supply as appropriate and, as has been said, safeguard 200,000 jobs in the UK as a result.

It is right that we take those sensible decisions to encourage the growth of renewables and utilise them, but, when the wind does not blow and the sun does not shine, we cannot always rely on renewables, so we need a mixed supply. That is my key message for the Government. We do not need legislation for much of what needs to be done; we need good administration, and I can rely on my hon. Friends on the Front Bench to deliver that.

I turn to other measures mentioned in the King's Speech, the most exciting of which for me were those on smoking and youth vaping. I declare my interest as chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on smoking and health. Ever since I arrived in this place 13 and a half years ago, I have been leading debates on the scourge of smoking and trying to prevent young people from ever starting to smoke. I sponsored the original debate on standardisation of tobacco products packaging and met Ministers on that. I was opposed by the Government at the time, but of course we delivered that from the Back Benches and the Government took it up. Indeed, I have worked with Dr Javed Khan to establish the clear roadmap that we need to make England smoke-free by 2030.

I was delighted to hear the Prime Minister's speech at party conference—and I looked back and saw that plagiarism had arrived, because much of it was gleaned from speeches I made either in this Chamber or in Westminster Hall. I was delighted to hear him take up those words of wisdom. I have also spoken to Professor Sir Chris Whitty on what we need to do to ensure that smokefree 2030 actually happens. Raising the age of sale will prevent people from becoming addicted to smoking in the first place. Government modelling suggests that we will avoid up to 115,000 cases of stroke, heart disease, lung cancer and other lung diseases—admittedly by 2075, but saving tens of thousands of lives in the process and billions of pounds for the national health service on treating people who smoke.

Once someone smokes, it is likely that they will carry on smoking for the rest of their lives, and find it very hard to quit. The damage they do comes in later life, in their 30s, 40s and 50s—that is when they suffer. Two thirds of the public support the measure. It is not a matter of free choice to smoke once people are addicted. Two in three people who try just one cigarette go on to become daily smokers. Most of them regret ever starting. I do not want any children to take up smoking. It is still the leading cause of preventable death and disease, responsible for a quarter of all cancers and 64,000 deaths a year. No other consumer product kills up to two thirds of its users. Once they start, four in five smokers

become addicted before they turn 20. The reality is that we must raise that age rapidly—I would rather see it raised more rapidly, but at least we are making a great start.

Smoking has a direct cost to the public purse of £21 billion a year—more than double the £10 billion raised through revenue. The chief medical officer, Professor Sir Chris Whitty, made the point succinctly:

“The key points about vaping...can be easily summarised. If you smoke, vaping is much safer; if you don't smoke, don't vape; marketing vapes to children is utterly unacceptable.”

I welcome the measures to be introduced in the Bill. They cannot come soon enough, particularly for young people.

I move on to the leasehold reform Bill. We have yet to see the detail of the leasehold reform, and I echo the words of the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), my constituency neighbour. It is important that we make it cheaper and easier for leaseholders to extend their lease and take over management of their building. The Bill will definitely ban leaseholds for new houses, but not for new flats in England and Wales. Therefore, although the standard lease extension will increase to 990 years from the 90 years originally allowed, that will not achieve the enfranchisement and the abolition of leasehold that many of us in this House would dearly like to see.

I welcome the measures to be introduced, but we must remember that many young people who buy their first property do so on a leasehold basis. They are often not given proper legal advice about what happens and, as a result, they do not understand the consequences.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I declare my interest as a chartered surveyor. There is a scourge that we need to deal with in the Bill. I have lots of constituents living in homes on housing estates built in the past 10 years that are leasehold and have escalating ground rents. As my hon. Friend said, they did not understand the consequences when they bought those homes. We need to address that problem.

Bob Blackman: I agree. The other measure that must be introduced is to stop the scam of property developers building properties, selling the leaseholds and then selling the freehold to finance companies, which rip off the leaseholders without the leaseholders even being told that their leasehold has been sold. I have been campaigning on this issue for some time. It is the policy of some house builders in this country to do that after six months without even notifying the leaseholders. Considering that individuals might not be given the proper advice about the potential consequences during conveyancing, it is absolutely disgraceful. The final thing I will say about the leasehold reform Bill is that we need to extend the measures in the Building Safety Act 2022 to ensure that freeholders and developers are not able to escape their liabilities for building remediation work required for fire safety and beyond.

I declare my interest as the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group for ending homelessness. Let me be clear: homelessness is not a lifestyle choice. Every case of homelessness and rough sleeping is unique. All those individuals who, unfortunately, are forced into sleeping rough on our streets need help; they need to be sought out and given an opportunity to rebuild their

[Bob Blackman]

lives. Many may have suffered accidents and are unable to work. Many may have been in a broken relationship that they were unable to sustain, and have nowhere to live.

Under my Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which I note several Ministers claim to be a Government measure—it was my private Member's Bill that the Government supported and we put on the statute book—every individual who is threatened with being homeless or is rough sleeping can go to their local authority and seek help. That local authority must give them assistance and provide them with help and advice to get them a place to live. I will put this on the record, as I have done in the media: we must not stigmatise people for being homeless. They must be helped and assisted. I want to see the long-promised abolition of the Vagrancy Act 1824, which makes it illegal to be homeless and to beg aggressively. I agree that we need measures to stop aggressive begging, but people must not be arrested for being homeless—instead, they must be assisted. Our language on these things is vital and has consequences.

Finally, the Holocaust Memorial Bill removes an obstacle that has been in the way of preparing the building. I declare my interest as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on holocaust memorial. We owe it to the survivors, the British people and future generations to ensure that the holocaust can never happen again. I would like to express my thoughts and prayers for the whole Jewish community as the war in Israel rages on, following the horrific attack by the Hamas terror group, causing the largest loss of life in a single day since the holocaust. The Bill is eagerly awaited; obstacles have been put in the way, and it is up to the Government to ensure that we progress it as quickly as possible.

2.27 pm

Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman). I agree with some of his comments and the facts on smoking and vaping, and I certainly remember his private Member's Bill.

This is certainly an underwhelming King's Speech and Government programme. Not surprisingly, it is more notable for what is missing than what is included. Where is the coherent, long-term plan to fix the economy, tackle the cost of living crisis, make our streets safer, achieve net zero and rebuild our NHS? While the country is crying out for change, the Tories are simply offering more of the same: more empty words, broken promises, repackaged policies and sticking plaster politics.

This Government simply do not have any answers for the challenges facing my constituents or the country. Indeed, they are the architects of most of the challenges, due to their failed policies that have precipitated a decade-long national decline. Over the past 13 years, this Government have trashed the economy and eroded our much cherished public services. The NHS is a case in point: after 13 years of Tory Government, it is on its knees. It faces the most profound crisis in its history: waits of weeks and weeks to see a GP; patients finding it impossible to get an appointment with or register at an NHS dentist; ambulances unable to get people to hospital in time to save lives; dangerously long waits in A&E; a workforce crisis; more than 7 million on the waiting list for hospital treatment—it is a system at breaking

point. Be in no doubt: my constituents deserve so much better, and so do our dedicated NHS workers, who do such a fantastic job in extremely difficult circumstances.

Just last week, I met staff and managers at University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust, which I am proud to have in my constituency—it is probably a stone's throw from where I live. There can be no doubt about the passion and commitment of those workers. The challenges they face, though, are immense. They are now seeing record ambulance and patient attendances daily. There are growing challenges, such as dementia and the crisis in social care, and specific issues in recruiting paediatric nurses. All of that adds to the growing pressure on services.

The staff I spoke with would like to see investment not only in the workforce and buildings, but in new technology that will speed up procedures, decrease waiting times and create better outcomes. What they want is an NHS fit for the 21st century. They must feel very betrayed and demoralised by the Government's failure to include measures in the King's Speech to achieve that, and to ensure the NHS receives the investment and reform that is needed to get it back on its feet.

Let us be clear: my constituents and our health workers deserve a Government who will give our NHS the resources it needs, a Government who will build an NHS fit for the future that is always there when people need it, and a Government who have a plan to tackle the immediate crisis in our NHS and address the long-term challenges it faces. They deserve a Labour Government. Sadly, while this Tory Government remain in place, I fear the crisis in our NHS will worsen, and patients and staff will continue to be badly let down. Put simply, our NHS and our constituents cannot afford another five minutes of Tory failure, let alone another five years.

There are a couple of things in the King's Speech that I agree with in principle, but there is little in it that will make a tangible difference to people in my constituency and they need that tangible difference. Certainly, when it comes to tackling the challenges in our NHS and rejuvenating our health service, the Conservatives are not part of the solution; they are, I am afraid, very much part of the problem.

2.32 pm

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): On Monday, the Prime Minister visited a tiny coastal village on the far extremities of north Norfolk in my constituency, just a few hundred metres from the cliffs and the North sea. Unless they have heard one of the many times I have spoken about it in the House, many people will not have heard of the village of Bacton, but it is home to one of the most important gas processing sites in the UK. As we toured the site, we were met by the CEO of National Gas.

I made this point earlier to the shadow Secretary of State and I will repeat it, because it is a remarkable statistic. Last year, there were 260 days when there was not enough wind to generate our nation's power. That is nearly three quarters of the year. Guess what it was that kept the lights on: gas. Whatever we think about fossil fuels, we have to recognise that renewables, at the moment, simply cannot operate solely on their own. That is why we need a pure mix of energy—a mix that will include oil and gas for the foreseeable future, as well as nuclear, alongside renewables. That is why I have spoken in this House time and again about the Bacton gas terminal.

The Bacton gas terminal is responsible for a third of the gas supply into this country, yet nobody seems to recognise how important it is. That is until Monday, when the Prime Minister saw it for himself and described it as Norfolk's "hidden hero"—a bit of justice that puts north Norfolk on the map. For me, the Prime Minister's recognition was just the tip of the iceberg, because of the amount of work that was done in the lead-up to his visit.

In my view, the need for an energy mix from various sources can be summed up in three words: security, employment and the economy. Clearly, the wind does not always blow and the sun does not always shine, but we do have our own natural resources. Instead of carting them halfway across the world, with the emissions that that leads to, it is pure common sense and practicality that we should continue to use them as part of the overall mix and for security. The Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill will ensure we do exactly that for the foreseeable future.

About 200,000 jobs are clearly linked to the oil and gas industry. Opposition Members seem sometimes not to recognise the stark reality that we need taxation going into the Exchequer to pay our way and fund the public services that help this country. Money does not grow on trees. Statistically, I think £50 billion is what is raised for the Exchequer from oil and gas companies. If we were to turn that off tomorrow, where on earth would we get the money to continue to run this country? We are in a transition and that is the whole point. We have made a far greater stab at decarbonisation than virtually every other nation on earth and we will continue to do that, but we have to do it in a way that does not risk the economy and the hundreds of thousands of jobs that are still dependent on that transition happening at a just rate.

Bacton epitomises all of that in miniature form. Not only does it process an enormous amount of gas through its pipelines; it is already making the transition. The site has a licence, which was given just a few months ago, to carry out carbon capture and storage. Eni was granted a licence for the depleted Hewett gas field, which is expected to be in operation in the next few years. That alone will have the capacity to store millions of tonnes of carbon dioxide. But that is just the start. Monday's visit was all about getting the Prime Minister to recognise that Bacton can also be a green energy hub for the future. For heavy machinery and industry, it is the perfect site in the east of England to be a hydrogen hub. It is the only site in the east, I believe, with an interconnector into Europe—it goes to Belgium. If we start off small with blended hydrogen, it is quite feasible that over time the operation has the capacity to be a major hydrogen hub in the east of England.

I welcome what was said in the King's Speech about securing our energy mix and security. With gas, CCS and hydrogen production all possibly happening in my constituency, it propels a small village on the north Norfolk coast into quite possibly being a major player in energy production in the east of England. It could be an energy hub for the future and it is on a journey to securing more green jobs for an area that typically just does not have them. Agriculture and tourism are the mainstays of the economy, but the site has the ability to secure the high-quality jobs of the future.

I thank the Prime Minister for visiting. I thank the CEO of National Gas, Jon Butterworth, who helped enormously in raising Bacton to prominence and securing

the success we have had in the past six months, and I thank especially Jake Tudge for all his support. The next time the Prime Minister visits Bacton, I do not want it to be described as a "hidden hero" any more. I want it to be a flagship energy hub in the east, and not hidden at all.

2.38 pm

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): The King's Speech was interesting as much for what was in it as what was not. I welcome the announcement of measures to ensure that violent sex offenders serve their full sentence behind bars, for example. In fact, that was my ask in my first Prime Minister's question, three Prime Ministers and four Home Secretaries ago, in March 2020. I hope the Government will focus on delivering the prison places we need for that commitment to be worth the paper it is written on, given our current context.

The announcement on leasehold reform is also something I have been calling for since I was elected. It will be warmly welcomed by many of my constituents who are affected, although we see that the proposals will not include new flats and it is unclear what they mean for retirement properties and park homes. I hope we can address those issues when they come before the House for debate to ensure that we get it right. The independent regulator for football is also long overdue, and warmly welcomed.

So the King's Speech is not all bad. In fact, my largest criticism is its thinness. Even if we choose to ignore—the Prime Minister conveniently does—the previous 12 years of Tory Government, with all the chaos of the last year in the House and in Whitehall, with the succession of different Prime Ministers, Secretaries of State and other Ministers cycling in and out of Departments, we have seen a year of inertia on some of the biggest issues facing our communities and our country.

This King's Speech was an opportunity for the Government to show real ambition and purpose in the time that we have left before an election. Of course I hope we will see a change of Government at that election, but my constituents cannot wait for a change of Government. I remain as willing as I have always been to work across parties on the issues that affect them now to help them now, but trying to make meaningful change on the issues on which we do have cross-party consensus does not seem to be on the Government's agenda.

The starkest example of that is the mental health Bill that was so shamefully missing from the King's speech. Mental health is one of the issues about which I am contacted most frequently, and it comes up at every single weekly surgery and event that I hold in Warrington North, whether it involves carers, scouts, sports clubs, veterans' groups, schools or faith groups. I have heard so many harrowing stories about how so many are being let down. I hear of young people languishing on child and adolescent mental health services waiting lists for years, only to drop back down to the bottom of the list—the adult list—when they turn 18. I hear of suicidal people finding themselves criminalised during their attempts to end their own lives, and of people who are told that they are not suicidal enough to access any support. I hear of specialist treatment for conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder being unavailable, or only accessible privately at huge cost. And I hear of the shameful ongoing detention of autistic people and those

[Charlotte Nichols]

with learning disabilities, who would be better cared for and supported in the community. Harm is perpetuated every day that the outdated and unfit Mental Health Act 1983 remains on the statute book without reform.

It will be helpful if I set out the background. The Government announced an independent review of the Mental Health Act in 2017. The review completed its findings in 2018, and the Government published their response in the form of a White Paper in 2021. In 2022, they followed up the White Paper with a draft Mental Health Bill, on which pre-legislative scrutiny began last year. The Joint Committee on the Draft Mental Health Bill published a report on its findings in January 2023.

It is easy to understand why all those mental health charities such as Mind, patient advocacy groups and people with lived experience of our broken mental health system view the Bill's exclusion from the King's Speech as such a kick in the teeth. After more than six years of work and engagement and cross-party support for change, not only is mental health reform not a priority for the remainder of this Parliament, but the lack of its inclusion in the King's Speech means that it is now highly unlikely that the legislation will be passed before a general election. Too many in this place, and in Government, seem to view mental health as something abstract that happens to other people. It is not good enough.

Another stark omission—I have had hundreds of emails from constituents about this, and it has broad cross-party support—is a ban on the abhorrent practice of so-called conversion therapy. If the Government are worried about a row with some of the crank elements within their own party, they can be assured that Labour Members will help to ensure that a Bill passes on to the statute book, thus securing the protection of some of the most vulnerable members of the LGBT community.

There was also nothing in the King's Speech about a review leading to reform of personal independence payments, despite the fact that, 10 years since its introduction, the flaws in the scheme are well known and have a real impact on people who need support. People with multiple sclerosis and many other conditions are routinely failed by PIP assessments because their symptoms fluctuate from day to day. One of my constituents emailed me recently to say that he had not been able to receive PIP in the years since his diagnosis, despite the additional costs associated with his disability—which is exactly what PIP is meant to help people with. He wrote:

“I have to use crutches everywhere I go. My wife is an unpaid carer. I work from home and although I earn a wage, I feel like the application process is blaming me for having this disease. The condition can result in one day a change in my physical appearance, speech and completing simple day to day activities. Then the next day I can do the normal things and routines that people take for granted. MS is unpredictable hourly and at a moment's notice”.

His experience is sadly not unique. The Department for Work and Pensions loses 70% of cases that it rejects on appeal, and in about 91% of those cases the claimant has won without any new evidence being provided. Getting the process right would mean that those who need help were not subjected to a dehumanising and often arbitrary process to secure the help to which they are entitled, and that valuable civil service time was not spent fighting clearly legitimate claimants. Surely that is something that all of us can agree should be a priority.

Despite reassurances that the measures in the dropped Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill would be returning, only one element of it was included as the sole animal welfare measure in the planned Bills announced for this Session, with other manifesto commitments left outstanding. Again, those measures had cross-party support, as well as widespread support from the animal welfare charity sector. I have had thousands upon thousands of items of constituency correspondence about animal welfare. I implore the Government: help us to help you make some progress, and bring more measures forward.

For the sake of brevity, and because the points have been made so cogently by colleagues on both sides of the House—including my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband); the right hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore), who, to his credit, was not just reading from the CCHQ brief; and my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson)—I will simply point to how much willingness there is to co-operate on making the UK a clean energy superpower. But the focus in the King's Speech on oil and gas when new legislation is not actually needed to achieve the Government's stated aims, in an attempt to use energy as a wedge issue, is beneath the Government when there is so much more we could be doing to accelerate new nuclear, renewables and hydrogen, which has not been prioritised in the same way in the parliamentary time that this will consume.

I am somewhat bemused by the prominence given to the Trade (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) Bill in the King's Speech, given that CPTPP membership is projected to add just 0.06% to Britain's long-term GDP—welcome, of course, though any boost to the economy is. As a member of the Business and Trade Committee, frustrated, like many of my fellow members, by a lack of parliamentary scrutiny on trade, I would like to ask whether the Government have ensured that Parliament will have had the opportunity to debate the CPTPP trade agreement, and to vote on a substantive motion on the terms of our accession, before the Bill comes to the House.

I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Gracious Speech. I hope, perhaps naively, that its thinness will be corrected in the autumn statement with funded measures to help my constituents with the cost of living and the construction of a new hospital in Warrington, and to support the greening and growing of our economy locally and nationally as a priority. Let us not waste the opportunity to make progress in the time that we have left. If we are to maximise the potential of this Session, there are, as I have said, plenty of areas in which we can co-operate on a cross-party basis to do so, even if the King's Speech itself missed the opportunity to set out a robust and ambitious framework for that purpose. With another year of more of the same, my constituents and I will be left wondering why this Government are so determined to cling to power to deliver so little, when Labour is ready and waiting to give Britain its future back.

2.48 pm

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols). Her faith in technology—she read her speech from it—is far greater than mine. I have seen many a speech kiboshed in mid-flow. I agree with much of what

she said. There is certainly work that can be done on mental health and PIP. I have always been amazed by PIP assessors' inability to understand the causes or symptoms of the issues from which people are suffering, and by their inability sometimes to understand whether or not a claimant's circumstances might change. The constant need to reanalyse claimants throughout their lifetime causes a great deal of hardship for family members who have to do the applications. My office spends a great deal of time on the issue.

It is a pleasure to speak in this debate in support of the King's Speech. I am surprised that we have not heard a little more positivity in today's debate because, across the House, it is recognised that we have been a leader on energy markets, on growing our economy and on cutting emissions. The Vallance report, for example, identifies this country's extraordinary growth. Between 1990 and 2019, we grew our economy by 78% and, at the same time, cut emissions by 44%, which shows the significant changes we have made in this country and our significant progress in creating a green economy.

We have to remind people, both in this Chamber and across the country, that we have cut emissions faster than any other country in the G7, which is something to be proud of and to build upon—and we forget it at our peril. It breeds hope among our people and our businesses that we can set up the infrastructure and the network to encourage more businesses to do the same.

I have heard from many Members on both sides of the House about how they hope to see oil companies become a dying breed. I say this with a little caution, but I do not think there is a single person in this room who, if we could flick a switch and transition immediately to a green economy—taking all the oil industry jobs and all the investment with us—would not gladly flick that switch. In the absence of a switch, we have to encourage and push the oil companies to go green, as so many of them are. The oil companies are part of the answer to a greener economy. Encouraging them to invest in solar, wind and marine power has to be part and parcel of that mix and structure.

I am also surprised that, in this debate, we have not spoken more about the Treasury's position on incentivising businesses to do more to invest in green technologies in this country, whether through tax credits, encouraging research and development, innovation funds, the UK Infrastructure Bank—I can see the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury nodding; he knows a great deal about this—or the £22 billion of capital that has been made available for businesses to invest in this sector in the United Kingdom. We forget that at our peril, because it will create the certainty to help us transition to a cleaner, greener economy that addresses climate change.

That said, we can all recognise the opportunities. I will cite a few examples from my constituency of Totnes and South Devon. The first is marine energy. We have some of the strongest tides in the world, and we should use them. Until recently, I would have argued that our interest and investment in marine energy has been lacklustre, yet recent trials across the country, supported by the UK Government, have shown the huge potential to go green in our coastal areas. Indeed, a vicar in Dartmouth is trying to make his church the first marine energy-powered church in the country. Such things need to be promoted and supported.

We need to review things like tidal lagoons. It has been far too long since we have had a proper debate in this place on the Swansea tidal lagoon and the power it would have generated. There are mechanisms out there to support these things, and we have to explore them to make sure we have a diverse mix—not just solar and wind but marine and, as others have said, nuclear, and using the last vestiges of oil and gas where necessary.

I do not know whether he is still sponsoring this Bill but, two years ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (David Johnston) presented the Local Electricity Bill. Many of us on both sides of the House supported the Bill, which would have allowed electricity generators to become local electricity suppliers. I very much welcome what the Secretary of State said in her opening remarks, because she talked about upgrading the grid. If we can upgrade the grid, the possibilities of the Local Electricity Bill would be immense and we could find all sorts of innovative ways to power local communities.

An example in my constituency is Sustainable South Brent, which has erected a wind turbine that is powering parts of the village and helping to reduce the costs for those buildings. We should be trying to replicate these things across the country, but we can only do so if we upgrade the grid and encourage and embolden local communities to take such action.

It was a privilege to hear the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore), and I agreed with much of it, although I am sorry that he will not be voting for the King's Speech. He is right that we are a paragon and a model to the rest of the world, and that we have been a leader in this area. Where I disagree with him is that I think we are still a leader.

Of course, we have to take people with us. We are in this place only because people have sent us here to represent their views, and there is a great deal of scepticism out there. The Prime Minister is right to be honest with people about the cost of the green transition. He is right to make sure that we are realistic about our plans and proposals, and he is right to try to minimise the significant costs that might end up on people's doorstep. Those things are to be applauded, and I do not think they are watering down our green agenda.

I wish to make a few remarks about other parts of the King's Speech. I serve on the Select Committee on Business and Trade, having served on the former Select Committee on International Trade. We have to inject a bit more energy—literally—into our trade deals. A number of countries want to sign up to free trade agreements with the UK, including Morocco. It wants to introduce a solar and wind interconnector to the UK, and an FTA can help to facilitate that. The fact that it is rumoured that the connecting point will be in Devon has nothing to do with my raising this matter, because I do not believe it would be in my constituency. This does show the power and potential in our trade agreements to find new ways in which we can co-operate on an international scale to help harness the power of our natural resources.

Our trade agreements are the perfect way in which we can help harness and create technology here and trade it with like-minded countries around the world. We have already heard the important points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Dame Maria Miller) about battery power and battery technology in

[Anthony Mangnall]

this country, and the relationship the UK has with Canada. We need more of that, because that is what our FTAs can facilitate.

David Duguid: My hon. Friend knows more about trade than many people in this place. In addition to all the different renewable and sustainable energy technologies we could be exporting that we develop here, does he agree that an opportunity is provided by the mere act of having a successful transition from 75% oil and gas dependency today to 20% oil and gas in the future? Being seen to be able to do that and our showing how to do that can, in itself, be an exportable commodity?

Anthony Mangnall: My hon. Friend is spot on. If we can help and support those emerging democracies and economies around the world to leapfrog the intensive carbon industries that they think they might need, and to go in a green direction, it will be to the benefit of not just our countries and economies, but the whole world. We should absolutely be talking about this stuff.

The hon. Member for Warrington North mentioned the CPTPP and trade scrutiny. I have caused the Government constant angst by talking about scrutiny. The debate on CPTPP is welcome and I look forward to seeing as many Members as there are in the Chamber now when that Bill comes before the House. I firmly believe that if this House is denied proper scrutiny, we are all poorer off in our constituencies, with our respective businesses, farmers and fishermen. It should be part of our due process that we make sure that a proper, significant level of scrutiny is provided in this place.

With that in mind, I have a proposal: it is time to update Labour's Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 to make sure, now that we are outside the European Union, that we have a proper debate on it, with a votable motion if that is required. Let me add an aside: it would be advisable to give Privy Counsellor status to all members of the Business and Trade Committee—I declare my interest on that front. There is an important point to this, which is that we can do better, as we have seen with the trade agreements that have come before. We need greater attendance, scrutiny and ability to talk up the benefits of the trade deals.

I am sorry to focus on the hon. Member for Warrington North, but she said that 0.8% was not a lot. I urge caution on forecasts, because on trade deals they are often wrong. They are judged at a static point, rather than on the basis of how businesses take advantage of them. In nearly every instance of a trade agreement that is signed—such as the North American free trade agreement, which was predicted not to be worth a significant amount to the United States economy but turned out to be worth a great deal more—we should not necessarily go with the forecasts. There are enough quotes out there to say why economists are wrong. However, I welcome the Bill and the opportunity for more discussion about joining one of the fastest growing regions in the world.

Let me make a couple more points. I have already spoken before in this place about the Renters (Reform) Bill. We do badly when we pass pieces of legislation quickly. I welcome the fact that we have committed to repealing section 21 evictions in that Bill, but we need to make sure that we have a Bill that works for both

landlords and tenants. We have to have that balance, because at it stands we are about to present a Bill into Parliament that will deter people from putting properties into the long-term rental market. It will incentivise the short-term market over the long-term rental market, which will be a disadvantage to the millions of tenants in this country. We must be careful about that. It is easy for us to clip small parts of our speeches in this place and put them out because they say the right thing, but the devil is in the detail and we have to get it right.

It is fantastic to see the Prime Minister double down on apprenticeships, T-levels and what we can do with further education. South Devon College, in my constituency, is the absolute exemplar of what can be done in further education. It trains people in subjects from photonics to boat building, bricklaying to hospitality and tourism—the range is staggering—and it has Government funding and support. The more we can encourage businesses and students to take advantage of the opportunities in their areas that lie within our agenda for further education, the better off people will be in finding jobs and the more likely we will be to find ways in which we can create businesses, not just in centralised parts of the country but across all the regions of the UK.

Finally, over the last few days we have spoken a lot about what the King's Speech says about keeping people safe. There is no doubt that it is right that we have a robust response to those who have committed the most heinous crimes. As ever, we can do far more to tackle antisocial behaviour and rural crime in areas across the south-west and other parts of the country. Local initiatives have been set up across the south-west that the Government would do well to support, not least the councillor advocate scheme, set up by Alison Hernandez, the police and crime commissioner for Devon and Cornwall, in which she liaises with councillors across the area to enhance police visibility and engagement, or my own initiative to create police hubs in village halls across South Devon, driving up visibility, disrupting rural crime and antisocial behaviour and inspiring more confidence that the police are there to help and serve, as we all know they are.

It is a pleasure to be able to support the King's Speech and to speak up about the proud record this country has in addressing climate change, reducing emissions and creating new technologies and industries. We should be proud of that, talk it up and never let the fearmongers win.

3.1 pm

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): I am sorry to put a downer on the debate, but frankly the King's Speech shows that the party in Government is completely out of ideas.

Some 1.5 million food parcels have been given out by the Trussell Trust in the last six months, thanks to this Government's policies. I am regularly contacted by constituents living in cold, damp homes, thanks to this Government's policies. NHS waiting lists are the longest on record, thanks to this Government's policies. And in the midst of this crisis, what is the Government's response? The Conservative party is more worried about preventing key workers from exercising their right to strike and cracking down on pedicabs in London than cleaning up the mess it has made of the country after 13 years in Government.

Not only are the Government failing to tackle the biggest challenge of our future, but they are intent on escalating it. Already catastrophic flooding turns millions of lives upside down every year, including thousands in the UK, while droughts are affecting food production, causing prices to soar. The climate crisis will only make that worse. The science is clear: without decisive action, our future is under threat. But as we have seen throughout the course of today's debate, this Conservative Government are in thrall to fossil fuel companies and are attempting to turn the race to net zero into a culture war. There is no other explanation for their decision to water down climate policies and turbocharge new oil and gas, announcing legislation for a new annual system for awarding drilling licenses.

We must not be fooled: it is working-class people who will suffer the greatest consequences if we fail to lower our emissions. The climate crisis and cost of living crisis are two sides of the same coin, and there are solutions that can tackle both at the same time. A just transition is possible if the super-rich and polluters are made to pay their fair share. We should see the sprint to net zero as an opportunity to redistribute wealth and power in our communities.

Public ownership is an important way of doing that, and it is popular too. Recent polling shows that 65% of people support public ownership of energy, so I am pleased that a Labour Government are committed to setting up a new publicly owned energy company that will create jobs and help us to reach 100% clean energy by 2030. A Labour Government would also insulate 90 million homes, cutting bills and emissions at the same time. I am thrilled, too, that our party is serious about preparing young people for their future, with teaching about the climate and sustainability throughout the curriculum in schools and colleges across the country.

This was not the King's Speech that our country deserved. My constituents deserve action on the climate, the cost of living, and decent jobs. This Government have shown that they will not deliver on any of them. Perhaps in her winding-up speech, the Minister can tell us when the Prime Minister will be putting the country out of its misery and calling a general election.

3.5 pm

Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba): There is not an awful lot to talk about in this King's Speech. Certainly there is not a lot to encourage the people of England, Wales, Ireland or, indeed, Scotland. In fact, there is really nothing in the King's Speech for Scotland other than more pain. Today's debate is about making Britain a clean energy superpower. That sounds grand, but it will not help the people who are struggling to pay their energy bills, and what is the cost to Scotland? The Government's North Sea Transition Authority is concerned only with the transition of Scotland's wealth south into His Majesty's Treasury.

In 2014, we were told that our oil was running out and that we needed the broad shoulders of the United Kingdom. Those broad shoulders were built on the poverty and deprivation of generations of Scots, and that is a price that we are still paying. We often hear the words—and we heard them today from the SNP spokesman, the hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan)—“energy-rich Scotland and fuel-poor Scots”. Let us take a look at that. There is no doubt that Scotland has vast energy wealth. According to the Office for Budget

Responsibility, as of April 2023, the projected cumulative tax receipts from North sea oil and gas for the year 2022-23 was £11 billion. Throughout my lifetime, Scotland has bankrolled the UK Treasury and global corporations to the tune of billions and billions of pounds.

In 2019, oil and gas production in Scotland accounted for 82% of the total UK production. By 2030, Scotland will be sending south 124 billion kWh of energy—all for nothing. That is 12.5 times the amount of energy that Scotland requires. With 8.1% of the UK population, Scotland is responsible for almost a quarter of the UK's green energy production, 85% of its hydro production, 82% of its oil and gas, 90% of its surface fresh water and 50% of the world's tidal stream capacity. Despite that, we have fuel-poor Scots.

In 2019, a quarter of Scottish households were estimated to be living in fuel poverty. Speaking to Energy Action Scotland yesterday, I learned that, as of 31 October 2023, fuel poverty now sits at a disgraceful 34% in energy-rich Scotland. One in three households live in fuel poverty. That is why, in a Tory-made cost of living crisis, independence is the only urgent priority for the people of Scotland.

For some time this winter, Tory mismanagement will be a matter of life and death. None of this is hyperbole. We need only look at Norway, our direct comparator across the North sea. We know that the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund is equivalent to £1,175 billion—I repeat, £1,175 billion. The Scottish equivalent is zero. The UK equivalent is zero. We know that successive Labour and Conservative Governments hid the McCrone report from the people of Scotland and hid the truth along with it. Gavin McCrone spoke of an “embarrassment of riches”. He rightly predicted the riches that Norway currently enjoys, but that Scotland has been denied all along. In return, we are chided by Conservative and Labour Members as scroungers. The destruction of our economy and our communities has happened under Westminster's rule, and still the robbery goes on.

In the past, Scotland enjoyed some crumbs from the table. When I was younger, there was employment in manufacturing and supply chains. Offshore, there were jobs. People were content with that, despite the robbery. I listen very carefully to UK Government Ministers when they talk about the great bounty of Britain's energy, which is truly Scotland's energy. There is no surprise from me there, but I also listened to the leader of the former party of Scottish independence, the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn). All he could muster was a plea for more devolution; he did not mention independence once. That is not all that his party has abandoned. The hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) was right that it has abandoned North sea oil and gas. That is unthinkable for any Scottish MP, let alone one from Aberdeen, north or south.

Scotland faces challenges on two distinct fronts: first, our southerly Government in London and their well-established rapacious greed; and secondly, a Scottish Government who have abandoned North sea oil and gas, sold off ScotWind for a song, capitulated to Tory tax havens on the Forth and Moray estuaries, and driven the case for independence up a cul-de-sac in the UK Supreme Court. They have parked the vehicle of independence and walked away from the aspirations of the people who want to live in a normal independent country. I plead with SNP Members to get back on track.

[Neale Hanvey]

The Minister is free to correct me, but there is nothing in the King's Speech for my Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath constituents, or for the people of Scotland. Scotland needs something more than this. We need more than a party that comes to London waiting for independence to fall into its lap. It is time for Alba to lead Scotland.

3.12 pm

Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab): People are sitting at home unable to buy food or pay their energy bills, while watching the King's Speech in its all pomp and ceremony—so much money spent for the King's Speech to be so vacuous and void of policies, with barely any Bills, announcements that have already been shelved, and no answers for the majority of the country. The speech was a wasted opportunity. The Government have no new ideas, no plans to improve the country, and nothing for small businesses, or for the majority of people in the UK. The Government have made no attempt to help the 14 million people living in poverty, no attempt to tackle rising unemployment, and no attempt to fix our broken benefits system.

The empty promises will not tackle the housing crisis, the NHS crisis or the cost of living crisis, or lift any of the 6,000 hungry kids in my constituency of Jarrow out of poverty. It is not right that in one of the richest countries in the world families are having to turn to food banks. The Trussell Trust has delivered 1.5 million food parcels in just six months. We have a Government who have given up on governing. They have wasted the last 18 months in Parliament. On 100 days, the Government finished early, cancelling planned legislation and votes as they made U-turns and broke promise after promise. In 2022, they announced 29 Bills, more than a third of which were abandoned or not introduced. In this King's Speech, they announced just 21. We have to wonder how many of those will ever see the light of day.

The Government's failed economic policies have resulted in £2.6 trillion of public debt—the highest debt the country has ever faced, alongside the highest rate of inflation in 41 years. Decades of inaction have left us with runaway rents, rising evictions and record levels of homelessness, and Ministers are blaming everyone but themselves. Despite the worst energy bill crisis in a generation, they admit that their lauded flagship plans will not cut energy bills by a single penny. There was nothing in the King's Speech that will help people to pay their bills and stay warm this winter, no help for pensioners and children in cold homes, and no help for the record numbers of people currently in debt on their energy. With more than 75% of people saying that they are very concerned or somewhat concerned about affording energy bills this winter, we need a Labour Government that will bring down energy bills once and for all and make Britain energy-independent.

We have a morally compromised Government attempting to gaslight the country. Their sleaze, cronyism and failure to deliver on promises have left the country in a mess, degraded Parliament and eroded trust in politicians. Their new oil and gas plans will not deliver energy security. Their housing plans will not tackle the housing crisis, help renters or ban no-fault evictions. There is no sign of local housing targets or of the reform needed to our planning system.

The Government say that inflation has finally started to fall, in the full knowledge that that will not help with the cost of living crisis. The damage has already been done, and it will be even worse for most people this winter. They talk up their Victims and Prisoners Bill, when the reality is that they have destroyed our policing and criminal courts, with 90% of crimes going unsolved and prisons already full. Their plans to reduce or scrap sentences for abuse, harassment and stalking, in order to tackle the overcrowding crisis in prisons, is just appalling. Although the Government have repeatedly said that ending violence against women and girls is a priority, it continues at epidemic proportions, with an estimated 1.7 million women experiencing domestic abuse last year. Women and girls should not be put further at risk, yet those plans could see thousands of abusive men released.

The Government blame NHS workers for the crisis in the NHS, when it is their drive to privatise and underfund it that caused issues far before the pandemic or any strike action. The King's Speech failed to address the NHS nursing workforce crisis, and the NHS and patients will continue to pay the price until at least the next general election. We need investment in the NHS, not the introduction of minimum service levels. Only the Conservative party thinks that the answer to the shortage of doctors and nurses is to sack NHS staff. After the past few years, it sums up how out of touch this Government are that one of the only things they promised to do in the King's Speech was to sack doctors.

Ministers have doubled down on their anti-worker rhetoric, when the right to strike is a fundamental human right, protected in UK and international law. They have failed to tackle those making billions in profit while simultaneously leaching money from our public services and dumping raw sewage in our waterways, and they hope that people will not realise that the taxes they are paying are the highest they have been for 70 years.

Unfortunately, neither the King's Speech nor yesterday's statement called for a ceasefire in Gaza. People in Gaza are without food, water, electricity, fuel and communications, and the death toll is now more than 10,000. I agree with Oxfam, the United Nations Secretary-General and many others that a ceasefire is the only real solution. A ceasefire is essential to ending the huge daily loss of innocent lives, to ensuring that aid gets into Gaza and to ensuring the safe return of the Israeli hostages. We must have a path to peace out of the conflict in Israel and Gaza.

Instead of plans to improve people's lives, what we get from this Government is divisive rhetoric, a "war on woke", attacks on benefit claimants, attacks on minorities, attacks on refugees and attacks on the LGBTQ+ community—attacks designed to make us hate each other instead of hating this Government's actions. The Home Secretary talks about "decent British people" at the same time as playing politics with our police force and wanting to remove tents from the homeless. Those plans may have been dropped by the Prime Minister, but they portray the callous and contentious way the Conservatives view people.

The Government's failure to ban so-called conversion therapy shows a vile disregard for LGBTQ+ people living in this country. So-called conversion therapy is not therapy; people cannot consent to abuse. The decision to leave LGBTQ+ people suffering that torture, and at the mercy of bigots and abusers, is despicable. The Government have previously described conversion practices

as “abhorrent”. They first pledged to outlaw them in England and Wales in 2018, as part of their LGBT+ action plan. That was pledged again by the then Prime Minister in 2019, then again in the 2021 Queen’s Speech, and then again in the 2022 Queen’s Speech, and yet again by Ministers in January this year.

Neale Hanvey: I thank the hon. Member for giving way on that point. This matter is important to us both, although I accept that we have very different views on it. One point that I struggle with when it comes to the discussion about conversion therapy is what to say to young gay men who have gone along with transition without talking therapy and then discovered that transition was actually completely wrong for them. They now find themselves with complete sexual dysfunction and have in some cases had their genitals removed surgically, and the same is true of young women who have gone through that. If we call talking therapy “conversion therapy”, and pursue an affirmation-only model, what hope is there for young gay people, or young people who are questioning their gender, to be able to get the support they need to have a decent puberty and grow up successfully?

Kate Osborne: I think the hon. Gentleman is conflating the issues here. We are talking about so-called conversion therapy, which starts from a place where it has already been decided that people need to be converted. What people need is support and understanding to help them through whatever process is best for them.

Multiple promises have been made by five different Ministers and four Prime Ministers in five years, and all of them have been broken. The work on the legislation has been completed; it has been worked on for years. The Women and Equalities Committee has said to Ministers that

“conversion practices are abhorrent and need to be stamped out.” It is time to stop making empty promises, take action and make the ban a reality. With that aim in mind, I have tabled amendment (f) to the King’s Speech. I hope that as many Members as possible will agree to back it, including the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Neale Hanvey), and that Mr Speaker sees fit to select it.

As I say, the work has been done. The Government know that the legislation is vital. The Leader of the House said this morning that

“it is still a manifesto commitment”,

and that they will update us on progress, but we cannot wait any longer. They should take action. They must accept my amendment and find a way to bring forward legislation to ban so-called conversion therapy as soon as possible.

Labour will ban those conversion practices in full. I hope that the next general election is very soon so that Labour can get on with passing the legislation. Many LGBTQ+ people are suffering now and need the ban to be put in place immediately. I plead with Members to back my amendment, and with the Minister to take action.

3.23 pm

Simon Lightwood (Wakefield) (Lab/Co-op): Last year I delivered my maiden speech during debate on the Energy (Oil and Gas) Profits Levy Act 2022. It had taken seven long months of dither and delay for the

Government finally to accept Labour’s calls for a windfall tax. Instead, they spent that time attacking us—proof that the Tories are out of touch. Months on, and we are still in the middle of a Conservative cost of living crisis: stagnant growth, soaring energy bills and skyrocketing mortgages. To tackle it, the Government have responded by announcing the fewest Bills in a state opening of Parliament for almost a decade—again, a Government who are out of touch.

The Tories have yet again doubled down on oil and gas licences as their solution, but that does nothing to fight the climate crisis, and even the Energy Secretary cannot say that it will bring bills down. Our communities have been hit harder than anywhere else in western Europe, and last summer the price of gas was nine times higher than that of renewables. To add to this, their ban on onshore wind, as well as their scrapping of the energy efficiency programme, has added hundreds of pounds to every family’s bills. The King’s Speech also made no mention of the community energy sector, which would build renewable energy capacity and put communities in control.

It is time we had cheaper energy bills and higher living standards, and that is what Labour’s plan for energy would deliver, establishing Great British Energy so that we can have clean and cheap power produced in Britain; starting a national warm homes plan to insulate millions of homes across the country; and tearing down the barriers to clean power in our communities. Those measures will create high-skilled and well-paid jobs, such as over 19,000 jobs upgrading homes in Yorkshire and the Humber alone. That is exactly the type of investment—with jobs—that our communities are crying out for, to bring long-term growth to our towns and cities.

On that note, the King’s Speech referred to regenerating our towns, but the Government did not announce any legislation to get on with the job. Does the Prime Minister really think that the people of Wakefield will trust him after his track record in office—“Hunger Games”-style funding pots, pitting town against town; services that continue to be cut to the bone, with more cuts; and money being handed out so late and inefficiently that not a single council in the north could spend all their shared prosperity funding? These sticking-plaster funding pots do not deliver the long-term change that we need in our town centres. We must replace the business rates system and level the playing field between online corporations and the small traders who are the beating heart of our high streets. That is the difference a Labour Government would make.

That cannot be done without people feeling safe on our streets, but serious violent crime has risen. I recently went on patrol with the hard-working policing team in Wakefield city centre to see at first hand the challenges they face. Antisocial behaviour in Ossett and Wakefield has seen buses diverted and passengers left stranded, and constituents reach out to me all the time to say they are not seeing enough police officers on the streets. That is the Tory record on crime and antisocial behaviour.

As I mentioned in my maiden speech last year, the shockingly high levels of sexual assault and violence are being made worse by the abject failure of our criminal justice system under this Government. The proposed sentencing Bill cannot work if victims—including many of my constituents—are having to wait months, if not years, for justice to be served. Some rape victims heard

[Simon Lightwood]

a senior judge saying that their perpetrators may have to stay on bail because our prisons are too full. This is a Government with the wrong priorities, failing to protect our communities.

To conclude, last June the voters of Wakefield sent a message to Boris Johnson that they had simply had enough. Over the last year, voters from Tadcaster to Tamworth have agreed with that verdict, and they have voted overwhelmingly for a fresh start with Labour. Instead, we face a zombie Government who have so little to offer the public that they sent MPs home early on half of all sitting days in the last Session. They really are the dementors of British politics, sucking the life out of this mother of all Parliaments, draining the hopes and aspiration of our great country over the past 13 long years. This is a King's Speech from a Government who are out of energy, out of ideas and out of time. The British people have had enough. Change is coming.

3.28 pm

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak in a debate about energy, because it feeds into the most pressing crisis that all our constituents face at this point in time: the cost of living crisis. We know that higher interest rates are not the answer to the inflation they face. Brexit has certainly made things a great deal worse by increasing the cost of imports, but the cost of living crisis has at its core the massive increase that we have seen in the cost of energy. That taps into our energy security and, as we have heard, it taps into the climate crisis, but it also taps into the opportunities for economic transformation as we industrialise—at least, we have the opportunity to industrialise—through the green revolution.

The Government seem to be failing to provide answers in this area. I agree with the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband)—words that I do not say very often—that I cannot think of a Government, certainly in my lifetime, who have been so ill suited to facing up to the challenges of the era we all face. No matter how graciously it happened to be delivered, the King's Speech revealed that we have a Government who are not guided by principle, by strategy or by science, whether woke or otherwise. Instead, they appear to have made a lifestyle choice—if I can put it that way—to be guided by the whims of a few hundred voters in Uxbridge, where they squeaked a very narrow by-election victory, in the vain hope that by pandering on the issues that they thought brought them success in that corner of suburban London, they might find a wedge issue that will allow them to progress in the culture war they are waging against everyone in the UK except their core supporters, to try to protect them from the electoral wrecking ball that appears to be coming their way with increasing force and momentum.

To genuinely be a clean energy superpower, three things are needed. First and foremost, we need an energy market that works. We also need a genuine energy transition, not one that just pays lip service to the idea, and we need Governments who are prepared to invest in making that happen. On the first point—having energy markets that work—one of the reasons we have heard for energy bills being so high is the artificial link mandated by Government between the price of electricity and the

price of gas, which the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) mentioned in her substantive contribution. That completely distorts the market, artificially inflating the cost of electricity, which hits both industry and consumers hard.

Another reason why our electricity markets do not work is the inadequacy of not just the energy grid, but grid pricing, particularly when it comes to electricity. That means that anybody generating electricity in the north of Scotland pays a subsidy for the privilege of feeding it into the grid, whereas the further south we go in the UK, generally speaking, that turns into a subsidy for the generator. We are left with the utterly ludicrous situation of somebody who wishes to promote a wind farm in the north of Scotland having to pay handsomely to get that energy into the grid, whereas if they were able to reactivate Battersea power station and burn coal in it, they would end up with a subsidy because of the locational pricing structure we have. That is an absolute nonsense. I can see the brows being beetled feverishly on the Government Benches; I encourage Members to think on that, because it is the situation that the national grid pricing structure has given us for years, and it is holding Scotland back.

Turning to the storage of energy, the UK foolishly did away with most of its storage capacity for gas, on the flawed assumption that it would always be able to buy gas whenever it was needed at the price that was right. We have seen the folly of that in recent times, but of course, it is not just gas storage that is important; we need the means of storing electricity, whether through electrolysis at peak times to generate hydrogen that can be stored and released back into the energy system at other times, the greater use of batteries on an industrial scale, or using pumped storage hydroelectric power. I should confess a particular interest in pumped storage hydropower, because my father was an engineer at Cruachan power station in Argyle, and that is where he met my mother. If it was not for that pumped storage power station in Scotland, I would not be here, so I put that interest on the record. [Laughter.]

There are proposals to double the capacity at Cruachan power station, and to develop a very large pumped storage facility at Coire Glas. It is the regulatory role of the UK Government in those projects, or the oversight they have, that will decide whether or not they go ahead. I encourage the Minister—it might be worth her listening to this—to make progress on those projects, because that is one of the ways in which we will deal with the fluctuations of renewable energy to meet the baseload requirement.

That takes me to my second point, which is on how to be a clean energy superpower. We need a genuine energy transition, and that starts with a bit of basic honesty about the role that oil and gas need to play. The unlimited extraction of oil and gas is simply not compatible with our climate obligations. However, we also need to recognise that, even if there was not a pressing climate change catastrophe looming, our domestic capacity is in long-term decline. Any new licences that are issued and actually come to fruition are only going to slow the rate of overall decline, and we need to be making an impact where we really can, which is in licensing new renewables.

The right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Dame Maria Miller) gently chided us about playing politics on this issue. I must say that I always enjoy it very much when

the Conservatives decide not to play politics with energy, particularly when it comes to the debate in Scotland. While it is tempting to say that the Labour party now appears to have the policy on oil and gas that the Scottish Conservatives have long accused my party of having, we really need to raise the debate from that level.

In an exchange with the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid), I pointed out the Conservative policy that dare not speak its name: the Government's own presumption against further oil and gas development. It prompts the question that if any new oil and gas developments do not meet their tests, what then happens? My presumption would be that they fail, and I understand that also to be the presumption of the Government.

David Duguid: It is really very simple: the difference is between a presumption in advance of deciding whether we even want new oil and gas and a caveat that we put in place after a decision that we want to produce more oil and gas. A presumption—a “pre-sumption”—is different from a caveat.

Richard Thomson: I am not sure I am any the wiser after that intervention. Either a development passes or it fails, and presumably if it fails, it does not go ahead. I will leave the hon. Gentleman to dance on the head of that particular pin.

On the Government deciding to license new fields, we need to recognise that not all of those licences will be taken up and not all of them will produce any significant amount, so when it comes to mitigating where we are, renewables are the only way forward. That is the way to lock in low prices for the future and the way to guarantee energy security.

The Secretary of State, who is now back in her place, was good enough to take an intervention from me, just as she was reaching a rhetorical zenith about floating offshore wind. The answer to my question, which she quite understandably chose not to give, is that the last round of floating offshore wind options would increase capacity by absolutely nothing because not a single bid came in. The reason for that is embarrassing. It yielded absolutely no bids because the price was wrong. The industry told the Government that, and the UK Government persisted in thinking that they knew best. The auction, rather predictably, fell flat on its face, and the result of that auction round was that the increase in offshore wind capacity was net zero.

The final point I wish to make is on the need to invest in making this happen. We need to learn the lesson that future oil and gas can only slow the rate of decline, and that we need to be doing much better in incentivising the technologies of the future. When Prime Minister Boris Johnson paid a visit to the Moray East offshore wind farm, he made a predictably vacuous and facetious remark, saying that Margaret Thatcher was a green pioneer through her virtual destruction of the coal industry. Just as we know there was no just transition for the miners, it looks unlikely that there is a just transition planned for steelworkers who may be affected by recent announcements. We need to make absolutely sure that there is a just transition for the oil and gas sector, but it does not look as though there is anything in prospect from anything the Government are planning, other than that it will be everybody for themselves.

That is in stark contrast to the approach of the Scottish Government, who have earmarked £500 million exclusively to aid the transition, onshore and off, in the north-east of Scotland. That sum is equivalent to the amount that both the Scottish and the UK Governments are putting into the Aberdeen city region deal. The failure—the repeated failure—of the UK Government to match that is not only, I believe, a betrayal of the communities of the north-east of Scotland, but a complete abrogation of the UK's constitutional and moral responsibilities.

I shall wrap up. What was needed was a King's Speech that delivered on the means by which we would achieve energy security, that tackled the climate crisis and that delivered the potential for economic transformation, as well as giving relief to hard-pressed energy users. The evidence is that this is not going to happen in Westminster, and it should be devolved. We should be independent, which would be a better place for Scotland to be, so that we can get on with taking the right decisions for the right reasons, off the back of our own decisions mandated by the electorate of Scotland.

3.39 pm

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): It is always a privilege to close one of these debates, but to do so in response to a debate on the first King's Speech in 70 years is truly historic. I thank each and every one of the 19 Members of Parliament who have taken part today. These debates are not just a part of our history or our pageantry, or a simple act of ceremony; they allow a Government to set their direction, to frame their agenda and to explain to the public what the Government will be doing on their behalf, and that is an amazing and privileged thing to be able to do. On behalf of those of us who have only ever sat on the Opposition side of the House, I have to express a sense of genuine envy for the power and opportunity that Conservative colleagues have, as the Government, to shape the future of this amazing country of ours, although to be frank I think they sometimes forget how blessed they are to have that opportunity.

What is it that we have been presented with? The Government's major announcement in the weekend preceding the King's Speech was a proposed ban on homeless people having tents, because the Home Secretary believes that homelessness is a lifestyle decision. I am pleased that that shameful proposition has been dropped, but should not the Government have a better story to tell than that? I was very pleased to hear some colleagues, including the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), explicitly say that those comments did not carry their support.

As we heard the Gracious Speech, we realised that the Government's programme is not only incredibly thin, but completely incoherent. It was a speech that promised record investment in renewable energy, just weeks after the Prime Minister abandoned climate leadership and dropped key targets for the transition. It was a speech that promised a more competitive Britain, without acknowledging the huge increase in red tape facing so many of our exporters, for which this Government are responsible. It was a speech that promised long-term decisions, just days after the country's flagship long-term infrastructure project was cancelled. Most of all, it was a speech that offered no change, despite the Prime Minister himself saying that after 13 years of Conservative

[Jonathan Reynolds]

Government, change is essential. On that score, he is surely right. This Conservative Government over the last 13 years have been one of the least successful in British history, and now we know that this latest Prime Minister will fail on his own terms, because he is only offering more of the same.

I admire the Prime Minister's candour about his own party's record over the past 13 years. Our public realm is literally crumbling, we have the lowest business investment in the G7, we have had over a decade of poor economic growth, people are struggling to pay their bills, we are not getting the basics right—we are short of houses and infrastructure—and we face big and complex challenges like net zero and charting a course to a prosperous post-Brexit future. All those things require the very best of Government. We need a Government who come to this House with urgency and passion, courage and ambition; a Government who want to work with industry and workers to get the transition right; a Government who will put the interests of working people ahead of the hobby-horses of their own Back Benchers; and Ministers with vision, drive and determination. But that is not this Government, and it never will be.

The subject of today's debate is making Britain a clean energy superpower, and Britain could and should be that clean energy superpower. We are entering an age that will be dominated by offshore wind, solar, nuclear and carbon capture, and we have several competitive advantages that should make us the envy of the world. We genuinely have the potential to do things that no other country could do, but that is not going to happen by accident. We need to deploy political and economic capital to make it happen. The Climate Change Committee says that there is a policy gap that amounts to a fifth of the emissions that need to be reduced to meet the 2030 target, yet I think only one Conservative MP even mentioned that in the debate.

The only way to insulate ourselves from future energy crises is to minimise our exposure to volatile fossil fuel prices. Before the invasion of Ukraine, we were never dependent on Russian gas, but we were heavily exposed to the price of all gas—more exposed, in fact, than any other nation. That must never happen again, but it will happen again under the Conservatives.

The North sea is an incredible source of British pride and success, and it will continue to have a role in the energy mix for decades to come. But the belief that more oil and gas licences are the answer to Britain's energy security, lower bills or more jobs is evidently false and risks both our prosperity and national security—the right hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) made that case extremely well in his speech, and I pay tribute to him in what he believes will be his final King's Speech.

There were many references to the legacy of the coalmines and the difficult transition in the 1980s and 1990s—I am from one of the areas affected and I grew up there, and I recognise those issues—but the job of Government is to recognise that, when change comes, they will help people to make the transition. I have listened to all the speeches today, but what is the Government's plan, knowing that a transition will have to come at some point? At what point will they stop further oil and gas licences? Do they even recognise that

those decisions have to be made? If every country in the world maximises its own domestic resources, all of this agenda will be for nothing, and 3rd and beyond will be the reality of the world we live in.

There is so much that this King's Speech could and should have said. At the top of my list would have been having a real industrial strategy so that we get the benefits of being a clean energy superpower when we achieve that. Such a strategy would give investors confidence after the frequent and disastrous changes of policy over the last few years, deal comprehensively with the problems that hold investment back, and see public investment used to leverage in the private investment we are lacking.

We need the planning system sorting out urgently so that it does not take 13 years to build a wind farm. We need reform of the apprenticeship levy so that more money goes into the skills and retraining that the transition requires. We need a new deal for working people so that they have the security they need to provide for their families. We need greater devolution, power and control to go to our towns and cities. We have to improve our deal with the EU as part of a proper trade strategy that stands behind our great British exporters and strengthens Britain on the world stage. All those things would bring wealth, opportunity and pride back to Britain.

Many of my Opposition colleagues made excellent speeches, which I want to reference. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) lamented that the UK is no longer showing leadership on this issue. He talked about the need to decarbonise buildings and pointed out correctly that the Government's retreat on energy efficiency standards for domestic properties, particularly in the private rented sector, will cost people money. That was one of the most glaring points where the Prime Minister got it wrong in his speech.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) summed up the Government's two-clause Bill by saying it would have no impact on bills or energy security and that it represents a gimmick at a time when we need seriousness. If I may say so, I thought she deserved a more gracious response to her speech from those on the Government Benches.

My hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) highlighted three particularly significant points she wanted to see action on. She talked first about the problem of the Government changing their target for phasing out petrol and diesel vehicles, while local businesses in her constituency, such as Nissan, had already invested as part of the Government's existing timetable. That is a prime example of what we have seen time and time again over the last 13 years: deadlines are changed, and the private sector cannot rely on what the Government will do. That is one reason why investment is so poor in the UK.

My hon. Friend talked of the music and sport sectors and her lengthy campaign against online touts, and I would love the chance, as a Business Secretary, to work with her to fulfil her long-standing campaign aims. She also talked about school food and the need to recognise the pressures on the school food procurement system, and her points were well made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) demanded a coherent long-term plan, and she is right that that was at the heart of what we needed from the King's Speech. In what I thought

was a very fair-minded speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) recognised that there were parts of the King's speech that we would all give a warm welcome to, such as the demand for tougher sentences, but she was right to ask how that is consistent with the Government not having sufficient prison places for people already committing crimes. She also talked of the fundamental lack of ambition in the King's Speech and the missed opportunity it represents.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome) talked about how the King's Speech was completely incongruous with the reality of the problems that the UK faces, and about how the energy and net zero agenda is fundamentally an opportunity—on that she is surely right.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Neale Hanvey) said that there was not much to discuss in the King's Speech; I thought that was a good line. On the points we heard about the relationship between this agenda and Scottish independence, I think it is fair to point out that at the time of the Scottish independence referendum, even the independence White Paper proposed keeping a UK-wide energy market. That is because surely the right way to develop Scotland's incredible potential is to match the chance to develop that with a UK-wide subsidy regime. That case, which was made at that time by adherents of independence, should be acknowledged.

My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Kate Osborne) was right to call the speech “vacuous” and a wasted opportunity. She also compared it to the scale of the challenges we face and pointed out how the Government did not even use the last Session of Parliament well. The Government have not just run out of steam in relation to this agenda; they ran out of steam some time ago.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Simon Lightwood) pointed out the need to address the real, practical things that are holding the country back. He mentioned business rates reform, and a commitment and desire to see greater community safety. That is what Labour has done, and that is why he is just one of many new Members of Parliament on the Labour Benches, adding to the by-election victories that we are totting up.

Finally, the hon. Member for Gordon (Richard Thomson) gave us in his speech not only points about the fundamental failure of Government policy but energy policy as a family love story, which I thought was wonderful; I am sure that we send his family all the best in that.

The desire for change and real practical ways in which we can deliver it flowed through every speech made by Opposition Members. We can offer that change because we have had the courage to change ourselves. We have acknowledged our defeat in 2019 and put our own house in order. As those speeches reflected, we have focused on the priorities that matter most to the British people and the need always to put our country first in a way that is true to the best Labour Governments of the past. In contrast, I see a Conservative party that is not only tired and out of ideas but, unfortunately, increasingly beholden to cranks and extremists.

This may have been the first King's Speech for 70 years, but it is clear that our country needs it to be the last Conservative one in quite a while. The contrast between the Conservatives and Labour could not be starker: it is

failure versus hope, the past versus the future, and short tactical gimmicks from a dying Government versus a long-term plan for national renewal.

I have the deepest of respect for every colleague who comes to this place, makes a speech in a debate such as this and represents their community. I believe that the overwhelming majority of us do so in good faith and with good intentions. That is why being a Member of this House is, and always will be, an honour and a privilege. But the combination of national decline and the erosion of standards in public life over the last few years, so visibly illuminated in the evidence we have heard from the covid inquiry, is nothing short of a disgrace. This is a Government who are not living up to the potential of the country or the job our constituents need them to do, so we do need change—the Prime Minister is right on that—but it has got to be real change. The only way that real change can come is by giving the people what they want and what they need, and that is a general election.

Let's let the people decide on the future and the change they want. Only then will we get the King's Speech, and the change and hope, that this country needs and deserves, and which we on the Labour Benches fully intend to give it.

3.53 pm

The Minister for Industry and Economic Security (Ms Nusrat Ghani): It is a pleasure to close today's debate on the King's Speech on behalf of the Government and even more of a joy to be representing Wealden, my constituency, in doing so. There have been fantastic and insightful speeches from Members on both sides of the House—19 in total—and I will do my best to run through all the points raised. These debates are a moment for both anticipation and reflection; we welcomed King Charles to open Parliament for the first time, and looked forward to his reign, while remembering the late Queen and her many decades of public service.

The last time a King opened Parliament was back in 1951. Because I do not sleep much, I glanced through *Hansard* to see what was discussed then, when the Government's focus was—as it is now—on protecting prosperity, safeguarding key industries and protecting UK interests at home and abroad. Just like Winston Churchill's Government seven decades ago, we must turn our minds to similar issues, finding 21st century solutions to age-old questions, many of which were addressed by colleagues today.

Let me turn to my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Dame Maria Miller), who has huge experience and secures respect on both sides of the House. It was interesting that she reflected on the political sketch by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), who politicised the energy debate just as he politicised the NHS back when he was running for leader. We were hoping for a grown-up conversation, but unfortunately he turned it into a political sketch—*[Interruption.]* And he is continuing to do so now, which is a shame.

It was good to hear my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke acknowledge that we are world leaders in offshore wind and other renewables, especially small modular reactors and fusion energy, and to hear about her recent experience in Canada as our trade envoy. She reflected on battery plants and storage, and will be

[*Ms Nusrat Ghani*]

pleased to know that I will publish the battery strategy shortly. She reflected on critical minerals—she knows I published a critical minerals strategy recently—because we cannot have a net zero agenda without them. She also asked about the NPPF; we got a note back to say that it is on its way. Of course, that is not within my remit, but I do not doubt that her words have been acknowledged.

Let me reflect on the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) and his tremendous work on the Skidmore review. I agree that we have earned a reputation in the UK as leaders in achieving net zero, and now that reputation needs to be preserved. It is indeed a race, and we started off fast so we need to ensure that we continue ahead of the game. He also reflected on the Inflation Reduction Act, which has changed the game plan—I know that, as the Industry Minister—and the challenges it poses for supply chains. It is unfortunate that this will be his last King's Speech debate, but I do not doubt that we will hear his voice on this agenda.

The hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) talked about cross-party consensus—who can disagree with that?—and about energy bills; a huge amount of work has been done to cover energy costs, and we will continue to provide people with support as we can.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) talked about long-term decisions. Stability should be at the forefront of our minds, not the short-term decisions with short-term outcomes that seem to be the most popular. He reflected on growing the economy; on energy security; on being measured, which means having a mix of energy in the system; and on the dependence on gas and oil, and ensuring that they are in the mix. He talked about protecting power stations, including the one in his constituency, and about the importance of having oil and gas to ensure that we are not reliant on imported fuel but can rely on ourselves.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), gave a speech that was far more ideological than embedded in the reality of people's lives, and did not reflect at all on our track record on getting to net zero and reducing emissions. I always find it curious that people talk about resilience but are prepared to let other markets boom at the cost of markets being invested in and jobs being grown here in the UK.

My hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), who is a dear friend and an incredibly powerful treasurer of the 1922 committee, spoke about tax-free shopping. I am sure that Treasury Ministers were listening and will respond in due course.

The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) spoke about Nissan; later I will speak about the investments made by the automotive sector, including Nissan, and some of the challenges not only around energy but fundamentally around supply chains. I have been working with industry and the automotive sector on providing more resilience in supply chains to get the minerals and critical products needed into the UK, so that we can continue to manufacture.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who is also a member of the 1922 committee, talked about good administration versus having lots of

policy. He is absolutely right; we need to ensure that we can administrate well, and if that requires working in collaboration, it must be done. He mentioned the lack of previous investment in nuclear, and said that we need to move at pace to ensure an energy mix in the UK. He must also be commended for his work on tackling homelessness and dealing with leasehold issues.

The hon. Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) felt underwhelmed by the policies set out in the King's Speech. Hopefully she will be overwhelmed by the work now being done by the Government to ensure we deliver for our constituents across the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Duncan Baker) talked about Bacton gas terminal, which the Prime Minister visited very recently. My hon. Friend fundamentally believes the site should be the most senior hydrogen hub in the UK. No doubt his campaigning will enable that to be delivered for his constituents.

The hon. Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) is a fellow member of my Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee. She said that the King's Speech was not all bad—I always think that is a good place to start. She spoke about mental health and many other issues, but I look forward to continuing to work with her, as we did previously on steel and the supply chain.

Charlotte Nichols: I thank the Minister for giving way. She referred earlier to the politicisation of energy. Unfortunately, the Secretary of State inadvertently misled the House in her own opening remarks with the comments she made about Warrington Council's exposure in the administration of Together Energy. The £37 million bill she quoted is entirely wrong, something I have had confirmed as one of Warrington's MPs. Will the Minister take the opportunity to correct the record on behalf of the Secretary of State?

Ms Ghani: I am sure that putting that forward now means that the record will reflect it. If it was not £37 million, I dread to think what it was.

My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) made a fantastic comment that maybe all the members of the Business and Trade Committee should be Privy Counsellors—yes, but only if previous members of the BEIS Committee are offered that, too. He spoke about the fact that we should not forget about the growth in our economy—it has grown by 78% since 1990—and the 46% reduction in emissions. We must be positive and promote what we have been able to achieve. He spoke about marine energy and maritime power linking into a local church. I am intrigued—I want to be invited to come by and take a look.

There were contributions from the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome) and—forgive my pronunciation—the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Neale Hanvey). I think it is best that the SNP Members reflect on the points that he raised. The hon. Member for Jarrow (Kate Osborne) spoke, as did the hon. Members for Wakefield (Simon Lightwood) and for Gordon (Richard Thomson). I never thought we would end up on an SNP love story, but we are all going to be thinking about that over the weekend.

I am anxious about how much time I have left to speak. I am closing the debate as a Business and Trade Minister, and have many more opportunities coming up

to help ensure that we deliver on growing the economy and achieving net zero. We have a couple of programmes of work that were reflected in the King's Speech in the Trade (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) Bill and the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill.

Turning to the subject of today's debate, the Government are already turning the country into a clean energy superpower. "Already" is the important word there, because while the Opposition might try to claim otherwise, this work is well under way. Let me remind the House of the formidable record we are building on. The UK achieved the fastest rate of greenhouse gas emission reductions of all G7 countries, while renewables already generated over 48% of our electricity in the first quarter of this year—the highest ever level. Of course, we know we can and must go further, which is why the UK has one of the world's most ambitious 2030 targets. However, the Government are also acutely aware that we cannot ask our citizens and businesses to pay undue burdens for achieving our net zero goals, particularly in these challenging economic times. Nor can we ignore the fact that Putin's war of aggression means that we are living in a more dangerous world with far more complicated supply chains. As the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero has already explained, it is only right that we reduce our reliance on volatile international energy markets and hostile regimes. She will be doing so through legislation such as the Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill.

The Opposition talk about strategies and plans, so let me remind the House that the Government have them in abundance. In fact, the Government's green strategies aim to drive £100 billion of private sector investment into our green industrial base by 2030, supporting around 480,000 jobs by the same date. I am surprised the Opposition are not welcoming that.

However, the Government are not just focusing on words; they are taking action. Between 2020 and 2023, my Department alone supported more than £28 billion of net zero-related inward investment, creating 30,000 jobs. Thanks to our work, the country's economic geography is also shifting—from clean technology development in the midlands, offshore wind in the north-east and Scotland and turbine manufacturers in Hull, to innovative hydrogen-powered buses in Northern Ireland. With the North sea transition deal, the Government are helping workers, businesses and the supply chain in fossil fuel-related industries to adapt to a net zero future, providing £20 billion of funding to encourage the early deployment of carbon capture, usage and storage, and to unlock private investment and jobs. Whether we are talking about our recently announced plans for carbon capture clusters in the north-west and north-east, the first 15 winning projects to receive investment from the Government's £240 million net zero hydrogen fund, the port towns that stand to benefit from the £160 million-worth of floating offshore wind manufacturing schemes, or our freeports and investment zones, our policies are creating jobs, reinvigorating communities and opening horizons the length and breadth of the country.

It would be remiss of me not to talk about my own brief, which covers industries and, fundamentally, the automotive, aerospace and maritime sectors. Here again, my Department is playing an instrumental role. We recently announced a joint investment package with

Tata Steel, worth £1.25 billion, to replace end-of-life blast furnaces with electric arc furnace steel production. That will preserve steelmaking for generations to come and enable green steel production to take place in the UK. While we are helping manufacturers, including steel producers, to access lower-cost hydrogen through the net zero hydrogen fund, we are also enabling our world-renowned automotive sector to seize the opportunities of the net zero transition. For instance, we have the automotive transformation fund from the Advanced Propulsion Centre, and the Faraday battery challenge. That has unlocked investment into the UK. Stellantis is producing electric vans at its Ellesmere Port plant, the first factory to be dedicated to the manufacture of electric vehicles, BMW Group is investing £600 million to bring two new all-electric Mini models to Oxford by 2026, and Tata has announced a £4 billion investment in Europe's largest here in the UK. All that shows what our strategies are already providing.

Chris Skidmore: I thank the Minister for making an important point about job creation. As I said in my speech, the net zero review pointed to the 480,000 additional jobs resulting from green industries. When it comes to green steel both in Port Talbot and in Ellesmere Port, and the future of electric arc furnaces, does the Minister agree that, as politicians on both sides of the House, we need to fight the corrosive disinformation that green steel is somehow costing jobs—there would otherwise have been 6,000 job losses in Port Talbot rather than 3,000 potential job transfers—and point out that it is green industries that are keeping jobs alive? If we stick with the status quo, we will simply lose every job.

Ms Ghani: That is a valuable point. The most frustrating aspect of being a Minister is the lack of sufficient time and space to talk about some of the challenges and how we respond to them. If we had not provided support to enable Port Talbot to have those electric arc furnaces, thousands of jobs would have been lost. Unfortunately, however, there are always some people who argue that change inevitably brings challenge, and we get stuck on that point. However, our investment means that those jobs are now secure, as are, I believe, more than 10,000 jobs in the supply chain. That will give people the reassurance that they need about their continued ability to produce steel or products in the supply chain.

Jonathan Reynolds: Owing to the importance of this issue, I must add something to the record. As the Minister and the Secretary of State know, electric arc furnaces are not the only way to decarbonise the steel industry. There are examples around the world of the use of ammonia and hydrogen in what is known as the direct reduced iron process, and other technologies are under way. Are we to be the first developed country to lose the capacity to make virgin steel? That appears to be Government policy, but I am not sure that the Minister could deliver the necessary votes for that on her own side of the House. I think she should clarify whether it is indeed Government policy, because she would not say so during yesterday's exchanges on the urgent question.

Ms Ghani: We were talking about Port Talbot and the change to electric arc furnaces there. There is, of course, the DRI hydrogen option, but it will not come online within the time that is required to provide the change

[Ms Ghani]

from blast to electric arc furnaces. That was a commercial decision taken, with the unions, at Port Talbot. When a technology involving hydrogen is advanced and can be commercialised, that will no doubt become an option, but we are where we are. People might think we can jump from one to another without a transition, but we are providing support for the transition to support jobs in these communities.

I believe I have until 5 o'clock, but that might distress our colleagues. I will conclude, although I am prepared to continue.

The Minister for Defence Procurement (James Cartledge): They are all listening.

Ms Ghani: They are all listening.

Just over 70 years ago, in 1951, Churchill's Government stood on the cusp of an extraordinary era of innovation that heralded the computer and the space race, and today we are on the edge of a new, equally significant age of green technology and innovation. It is thanks to this Government's hard work and focus that we are ready to seize the opportunities with both hands as we grow the economy, ensure our energy security and provide a prosperous future for the country and its people. Our policies will turn this country into a green powerhouse, which will not only transform our communities but provide leadership to the world.

Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.—
(Mr Mohindra.)

Debate to be resumed on Monday 13 November.

Funding for Canals

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mr Gagan Mohindra.)

4.11 pm

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I draw the House's attention to the funding of canals, particularly in an area of my locality called the Northern Reaches, just north of Carnforth in a place called Tewitfield—a place I know very well. Back in January 2011, I tabled an early-day motion highlighting the need to restore the canal system between Carnforth and Kendal known as the Northern Reaches. The EDM read:

“That this House notes that the Northern Reaches is an historic waterway begun in 1792 linking Preston, Lancaster, Kendal and the Lune Estuary via a branch to Glasson Dock; further notes that since the Second World War the waterway has declined and parts have been filled in; applauds the work of the Lancaster Canal Restoration Partnership in working towards reopening the Northern Reaches; and calls on the whole community to support this important project, rebuilding a unique part of the UK's industrial heritage.”

I thought it was a shame that part of our heritage was lost to time and transport changes in the last mid-century. The Northern Reaches was not in my constituency, so I could not do anything constructive to help the growing number of volunteers dedicated to restoring this heritage gem until now, as the Northern Reaches is coming into the new constituency of Morecambe and Lunesdale.

Last Friday I was invited to celebrate the completion of the Stainton aqueduct and Lancaster canal towpath trail project, hosted by the Canal & River Trust. The successful £2.5 million project was made possible by the generous grants of £1.3 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and £400,000 from the Rural Payments Agency, and by contributions from Cumbria County Council and the Ramblers Association.

I met the volunteers and explained that, over the years, I have been watching their amazing efforts and progress in restoring the local waterways. I showed them the research I have commissioned over the years from the House of Commons Library and the obscure books I have collected about the Northern Reaches, as little is known other than the rumour that it was filled in with rubble from the building of the M6 motorway back in the 1950s and '60s.

The volunteers have an encyclopaedic knowledge, and they have already restored a significant portion of the reaches over the years at the Kendal end. Post covid, the jobs, tourism and general wellbeing that can be realised by the restoration of this facility are now needed more than ever, especially with the Eden Project on the horizon in my constituency, as the original towpath can be reutilised as a walking path or rural cycle lane concocting Lancaster and Kendal, which fits in with my holistic vision of the green tech and tourism that my area can offer to the rest of the UK.

The volunteers I spoke to were astonished that the “Eden MP”, as I was flatteringly called, has been deeply interested in their cause. They were also amazed that I had already secured a debate in the House of Commons on canal funding in the week of the King's Speech.

I told them it will focus on the Northern Reaches, and I touched on my idea of water security distribution for the population via the canal system.

The Lancaster canal was constructed between 1792 and 1819, a very long time ago, with the Glasson branch link to Glasson dock being added in 1826. The canal originally extended from Kendal, in the north, to Aspull, near Wigan, in the south. The Lancaster canal was constructed primarily to move coal and limestone. The merchants of Lancaster wanted to improve the supplies of coal from around Wigan into north Lancashire and to supply the south with limestone. Another import from Wigan was me, into my constituency, but that is for another time.

The Act of Parliament

“for making and maintaining a navigable Canal from Kirkby Kendal in the County of Westmorland to West Houghton in the County Palatine of Lancaster”

was obtained in 1792. In the following year, another Act was obtained to build a branch from the canal near Galgate to the recently completed Glasson dock. When first built, the Lancaster canal was 69 miles long. The canal between Preston and Tewitfield, just north of Carnforth, was opened in November 1797. The route north from Tewitfield to Kendal—the Northern Reaches, as we now know it—was built from 1813 and was completed in 1819. Coal was the most important commodity carried on the canal, but in practice anything was carried. Several packet boats were established specially to move people and small parcels. Speed was of the essence, especially when the canal was competing with the railway lines from the 1830s onwards.

A little-known aspect of the canal’s history is that in 1940 its central section was fortified to form a defensive stop line—this was relatively common in the south but perhaps unexpected in the north-west. The purpose was to protect the north-south communication lines. Many of the bridges were altered, and tank traps and other impediments were installed, many of which are still visible to this day. The final half mile of canal into Kendal was closed in the early 1940s.

Sadly, in 1947, the last commercial boat sailed on the canal carrying coal from Preston to Lancaster. The canals were nationalised in 1948 and the Lancaster canal became part of the Docks and Inland Waterways Executive of the British Transport Commission. The canal was closed above Stainton Crossing bridge, above Stainton aqueduct, following the Transport Act 1953. This is all very technical and it all started in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Then, during the 1960s, as I alluded to before, the construction of the M6 motorway cut the canal above Tewitfield in several places. Later, the canal was further cut by the construction of the A590 link road to Kendal.

The canal between Preston and Tewitfield remained classed as a “cruising waterway”, whereas the Northern Reaches was deemed to be “remainder waterway”, following a 1955 Act of Parliament, and the canal was carved up by further road transport. If restored, the Northern Reaches would connect to the Millness to Stainton section of the Lancaster canal. The name Northern Reaches refers to a 14 mile stretch of the Lancaster canal that was isolated during the 1960s when the M6 motorway was built. Importantly, the Fraenkel report recommended that the towpath be kept clear from the amenity development by local authorities at this time. However, with hindsight, most will see all this as cultural vandalism. Obviously, I would like to ask my friend the Minister whether there

are any costings on the reinstatement of the Northern Reaches canal network. The Lancaster Canal Trust stated in its 2019 restoration report that it had raised £13,000 for the restoration of the “first furlong” of the Northern Reaches, which I will talk about later. Are any further funds in place to improve the towpath in its entirety, as outlined in the 1950s Fraenkel report?

The Lancaster Canal Trust is planning a strategy to maximise the opportunities to secure the funding likely to be required to make the restoration of the Northern Reaches to Kendal a reality. Originally founded to oppose the closure of the canal to navigation in the 1960s, the trust is now dedicated to its restoration. I believe that work is complete to restore the “first furlong”, a 200 metre section between bridges 172 and 173, near Stainton. I believe further works are being planned for a further 400 metres. This trust is exemplary; it actually gets things done, which I really like to see in my community.

Indeed, I was excited to be invited to the celebration of the completion of the Stainton aqueduct and Lancaster canal towpath, hosted by the Canal & River Trust. The successful £2.5 million project was made possible by a generous £1.3 million grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Lancaster Canal Regeneration Partnership has arranged funding to upgrade the towpath between Hincaster and Stainton to a multi-use route, and it is already a public right of way.

In June 2023, Westmorland and Furness Council awarded the trust a lawful development certificate, as I mentioned, confirming that it could line and rewater another 400 metre section between bridge 173 and the A590. These may just be points on a map to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, but they are very important to my community.

Separately, the Lancaster Canal Regeneration Partnership was registered as a community interest company in December 2022. The LCRP includes the Lancaster Canal Trust, the Canal & River Trust, the Inland Waterways Association and local authorities. The LCRP had previously sought to fully rewater the Northern Reaches and restore it to cruising standard. However, its current focus is on restoring the towpath along the canal between Lancaster and Kendal. Background to those proposals and progress to date are set out in a report to South Lakeland District Council.

Our canals have truly seen a renaissance over the past 70 years, and recovered from the dark days of decline and dereliction of the mid-20th century. With more boats on the waterways and the use of the towpaths more popular than ever, we are seeing their benefits realised on a grand scale once again, repurposed for leisure and recreation, health and wellbeing. That must be made permanent.

Canals play a wider role. At a time when our water supply has never been more critical, because of our changing climate and the increased risk of drought, the trust’s canals improve the resilience of the nation’s water security. They have inadvertently come back into fashion because of global warming. They currently move water around the country to support water supplies for approximately 5 million people, including those in Bristol and parts of Cheshire, and the trust can support more such water transfer schemes.

About half the trust’s planned asset spend is now on reservoir safety, adding nearly £100 million to its priority expenditure over the next five years to 2027. As a

[David Morris]

not-for-profit charity, the Canal & River Trust is arguably the largest urban blue space provider in the UK. A rigorous evaluation, summarised in the recently released “Valuing our Waterways” report, evidenced that it delivers £4.6 billion-worth of social welfare value for the nation each year, plus £1.5 billion per year in economic value, supporting 80,000 jobs. That is very significant.

Our inland waterways are a national treasure and a critical part of our national infrastructure. As outlined, I would like to see the Northern Reaches restored in its entirety, but I realise that it has taken the brave volunteers decades to preserve and improve in part what is already there. Will the Minister write to me with an estimated cost for the full restoration and a breakdown of what can be achieved in the short term, for example with the towpath? What funding streams are available to assist the trust and volunteer groups?

I will soon dedicate a full day to taking a walk along the Northern Reaches—I can’t wait—with Bill Froggatt, from the Canal & River Trust, who has helped me immeasurably with this speech, along with chief executive officer, Richard Parry. In the future, I am sure they, along with the fantastic volunteers, will become like a new family to me, post Eden campaigning.

4.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Trudy Harrison): What an absolute delight it was to listen to my good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris), speak with such passion about the value of England’s waterways. It made me think about my nana, Nana Alice, one of the famous Robinsons from Kendal. In 1947 she would have been living just outside Kendal, at Brigsteer, and will certainly have known, and possibly travelled on, that canal, so it means something to me personally to see this project fulfilled.

Although I am not the Minister responsible for inland waterways, I am the Minister responsible for access in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Perhaps my hon. Friend would be so kind as to invite me along when he spends his day in the area? If my diary allows, I will certainly prioritise that but, if not, I will make another trip to visit the volunteers. It is the volunteers my hon. Friend described who are really making the most of the inland waterways, including through partnerships and working with local authorities.

May I take this opportunity to let the House know that we are introducing local nature recovery strategies across 48 upper-tier authorities? These will prioritise how those authorities can create more access, and that will be done in partnership with our legal commitment that everyone, wherever they live in England, will be able to access a blue or green space within a 15 minute walk.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): I am extremely grateful to the Minister for giving way. I do appreciate her help with this. I also wish to commend the hon. Gentleman’s work on this matter. From another corner of England, in my constituency of Reading and Woodley, we are very fond of the Kennet and Avon canal, which is a significant waterway. Sadly, some of the access has deteriorated a little in recent times and we have had

some issues with the Environment Agency not removing sunken boats, and also problems with litter. Residents appreciate the ability to access waterways. They are a wonderful part of our heritage and are important to neighbourhoods. I thought the hon. Gentleman’s speech about his area was wonderful. Can the Minister advise me on how we can better work together on this important matter? I realise that the funding has unfortunately been cut, but there are partnerships in place. Perhaps she or a colleague could write to me to update me and my local council on some of the funds that are available.

Trudy Harrison: Certainly, and I will come on to just how much funding has been made available. I draw the hon. Gentleman’s attention to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, which has provided £454 million recently to a couple of projects. Moreover, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, through levelling-up funding, has provided more than £33 million to another couple of projects. That is perhaps an area that my hon. Friend could also look into. I know very well that he has previously been incredibly successful in securing levelling-up funding. As a champion of the Morecambe Eden project, I understand that £50 million has been raised through the levelling-up project in his area, so I am well aware of his capability in that field.

In response to the hon. Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda), let me say that I would be delighted to look into funding opportunities, specifically around access. I will write to him about that, because I am not familiar with what might be available at this time.

On the wider funding for canals and inland waterways, we know—because my hon. Friend has just explained—how important these national heritage assets are, providing many public benefits. I am also fully aware of how important it is to have access to water and green spaces for our physical health and mental wellbeing, not to mention the benefits that they provide for nature. Those benefits are set out in our Environmental Improvement Plan. Halting the decline of nature by 2030 and increasing its abundance thereafter is the apex priority following the Environment Act 2023. Canals and waterways, rivers, lakes, coastal areas and streams are fundamental to that. People enjoy being by canals and waterways and using them for leisure and recreation, as well as, in the case of canals, for their historical value. They form an important part of our natural environment by providing the green corridors along which biodiversity can flourish, as well as contributing to the growth of local economies, such as through domestic tourism.

The Canal & River Trust reports that there were nearly 900 million visits to its canals last year, many of which were repeat visits—with around 10 million individual users each month. That gives us a real sense of the scale and popularity of our canals.

I pay tribute to the Canal & River Trust for the work that it does day in, day out to look after the network. Our navigation authorities have an important role to play into the future as well, because they will make sure that our nation’s key infrastructure is resilient to climate change. As we have set out in our national adaptation plan of how we will mitigate and adapt to the risks set out by Climate Change Committee, these waterways may suffer the consequences of climate change more than others.

Importantly, the work that the navigation authorities do will help us meet our net zero targets through sustainable transport and energy generation, and help to achieve water security through flood mitigation measures and water transfers.

I will write to my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale with the specifics of any funding analysis that has been done. As I say, I am not the Minister responsible for inland waterways, but I will take the time to write a detailed analysis if I can. I may require further information from the volunteers and the partnerships that he mentioned.

The Canal & River Trust and the Environment Agency are the two bodies that receive direct funding, and it is important to be clear that we will continue to provide significant funding. The Canal & River Trust was set up in 2012 as a charity independent of Government. The idea was to replace the publicly owned British Waterways and free it from public spending constraints. The trust owns and manages a network of some 2,000 miles of canals and rivers in England and Wales. The original endowment in 2012 was £450 million, but it is now worth £1 billion. From 2027, £400 million is proposed to be granted over a 10-year period. We will continue to support the Canal & River Trust, but we certainly encourage it to work with others to make the most of the commercial opportunities as well.

Now that the trust is free of public sector financing constraints, it can source alternative revenue streams, including charitable donations and legacies, charity tax relief, third-party project funding and borrowing on the financial markets, while continuing to receive a substantial Government grant. The trust was also endowed by the Government with a significant property and investment portfolio from British Waterways. As I said, it was originally worth £450 million and is now worth over £1 billion. That is the result of sound investment management by the trust. To provide further support and financial certainty for the trust while it was becoming established, the Government agreed in 2012 to provide a 15-year grant of around £740 million.

An important part of the 2012 transfer from British Waterways was the memorandum of understanding signed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the trust, which contained a clear objective that the trust would progressively move towards greater self-sufficiency and reduced reliance on public

funding, through its £1 billion property and investment portfolio and freedom from public sector financial constraints. Following a Government review of current grant funding that was announced in July this year, a further substantial grant funding package has been announced that will provide £400 million across the 10-year period from 2027. Importantly, that will bring the total amount of Government support for the trust to around £1.1 billion since 2012.

I also want to discuss the funding for the Environment Agency; as I mentioned, there are two bodies that look after the network of canals and rivers. The Environment Agency's 630 miles of navigations are funded in the form of an annual grant in aid. For the three-year period from 2022-23 to 2024-25, that amounts to £73 million. I hope I have set out that this Government really have supported canals and rivers, whether through the Canal & River Trust or the Environment Agency, but that there are other ways in which those organisations can bring in additional funding, as we have heard.

To focus on the project that my hon. Friend is progressing, which is the most important thing, I cannot commend too highly the volunteers and their ambitions for their area. The project has such importance for the local community, because it will not only bring back something that was last used in 1947, but will bring benefits such as tackling climate change, improving people's physical and mental wellbeing, and supporting biodiversity. That is absolutely what we should be doing. It supports the targets of the environmental improvement plan and the work of groups such as Sustrans, public rights of way and national trails. We all recognise the benefits of being near water and appreciating nature—and, goodness me, we all need to get a little bit more active.

I confirm that I will write to my hon. Friend with the detailed analysis of the funding for the project so far, and I will take a look at other funding streams as well. Most importantly, I look forward to visiting him, perhaps in Kendal, to congratulate the volunteers on their hard work and success to date. It is brilliant to end today's sitting with some wonderful good news about a really successful big society mission.

Question put and agreed to.

4.35 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 9 November 2023

EDUCATION

Higher Education update

The Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education (Robert Halfon): My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education, Baroness Barran, has made the following written ministerial statement.

Today I am announcing the introduction of regulations to allow plan 2 (undergraduate), plan 3 (postgraduate) and plan 5 (undergraduate) student loan interest rates to be capped automatically each month, where they would otherwise exceed comparable prevailing market rates. This ensures ongoing compliance with requirements in primary legislation and removes the need to lay time limited regulations, as has previously been the case, whenever student loan interest rates would otherwise have exceeded comparable prevailing market rates.

I am also announcing a change to the calculation of the overseas fixed instalment repayments for plan 1 student loans—available to new borrowers from 1998 to 2012. Fixed instalments are due by student loan borrowers residing overseas who fail to submit their income details to the Student Loans Company (SLC) with the result that income-contingent repayments cannot be made. The amended fixed instalment rate will increase, and will now be equivalent to the monthly repayments of a plan 1 student loan borrower earning twice the median working age graduate salary in England. This removes a perverse incentive whereby higher earning borrowers residing overseas may have chosen not to submit their earnings information to the SLC in order to reduce their monthly payments.

[HCWS25]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Bill

The Minister for Security (Tom Tugendhat): The Government introduced the Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Bill in the House of Lords yesterday, as committed to in the King's Speech at the start of this parliamentary Session.

Building on the recent statutory report published by the Home Secretary on the operation of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 (IPA) since it came into force—<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/report-on-the-operation-of-the-investigatory-powers-act-2016>—this Bill will make urgent and targeted amendments to the IPA to ensure that our security and intelligence agencies have the right tools at their disposal to keep the country safe.

The key elements of the Bill include:

Making changes to the bulk personal dataset regime, which will improve the security and intelligence agencies' ability to respond with greater agility and speed to existing and emerging threats to national security.

Expanding the oversight regime to support the Investigatory Powers Commissioner to effectively carry out their role, including putting more of their functions on a statutory basis. This will maintain the robust, transparent, and world-leading safeguards in the investigatory powers regime.

Reforming the notices regimes, which will help the UK anticipate the risk to public safety posed by the rolling out of technology by multinational companies that precludes lawful access to data. This would reduce the risk of the most serious offences, such as child sexual exploitation and abuse or terrorism, going undetected.

Updating the conditions for use of internet connections records to ensure that these can be used effectively to target the most serious types of criminal activity and national security threats without a corresponding increase in levels of intrusion.

Increasing the resilience of the warrant authorisation processes which will allow for greater operational agility for security and intelligence agencies, as well as for the National Crime Agency, in its investigations and support it to tackle the most serious national security and organised crime threats.

These new measures will:

Update the IPA to reflect that the world has changed significantly since 2016. Technology has rapidly advanced, and the type of threats the UK faces continue to evolve.

Enable the security and intelligence agencies to keep pace with a range of evolving threats, against a backdrop of accelerating technological advancements that provide new opportunities for terrorists, hostile state actors, child abusers and criminal gangs.

Ensure that the security and intelligence agencies can develop the necessary tools and capabilities to rapidly identify intelligence insights from vast quantities of data, allowing them to better understand and respond to threats to the UK.

These limited and targeted reforms to the IPA do not create new powers but, instead, recalibrate elements of the current regime to ensure that it remains fit for purpose to respond to modern threats.

This Bill has been developed in close partnership with the security and intelligence agencies, law enforcement agencies and the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office. The measures being taken forward have also been driven by the recommendations made in the Home Secretary's review and the independent review by Lord Anderson KBE KC which was published in June 2023: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-the-investigatory-powers-act-2016--2>

[HCWS24]

Death of Jalal Uddin: Statutory Inquiry

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman): Today I am announcing the establishment by the Home Office of a statutory inquiry, under the Inquiries Act 2005, to investigate the death of Mr Jalal Uddin on 18 February 2016 in Rochdale, Greater Manchester.

The inquiry will be chaired by His Honour Edward Thomas Henry Teague KC, Chief Coroner of England and Wales.

In accordance with the provision of section 3(1)(a) of the Inquiries Act 2005 His Honour Judge Teague will sit alone as chair.

I am establishing a statutory inquiry after careful deliberation and on the advice from the Chief Coroner that this is necessary to permit all relevant evidence to be heard.

The formal setting up-date of the inquiry is today. I will place a copy of the terms of reference for the inquiry in the Libraries of both Houses.

The direction of the inquiry's investigation will be a matter for the chair. As the sponsoring Department, the Home Office will provide support and ensure that the inquiry has the resources needed to fulfil its terms of reference.

[HCWS23]

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Intergovernmental Relations Quarterly Transparency Report: 1 April to 30 June 2023

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Felicity Buchan): Today, the Government published the second of 2023's quarterly reports summarising our engagement with the devolved Administrations on gov.uk.

This report covers a period of engagement between the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government, and Northern Ireland Executive from 1 April to 30 June 2023. During this reporting period the Administrations worked together on a number of key areas, such as ways to tackle the cost of living, supporting the NHS, and marking key milestones such as the 25th anniversary of the Belfast agreement. The report highlights that through our collective work we demonstrate a stronger ability to face and tackle big changes and challenges.

The report is part of the Government's ongoing commitment to transparency of intergovernmental relations to Parliament and the public. The Government will continue with publications to demonstrate transparency in intergovernmental relations.

[HCWS26]

Leasehold Reform: Ground Rent Consultation

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove): The Government are committed to promoting fairness and transparency in the residential leasehold sector, and giving homeowners a fairer deal.

Today we have published a consultation on capping existing ground rents. It cannot be right that leaseholders can be required to make payments that require no service or benefit in return, have no requirement to be reasonable, and can cause issues when people want to sell their properties.

Today's publication builds on the success of the Leasehold Reform (Ground Rent) Act 2022, which put an end to ground rents for new, qualifying long residential leasehold properties in England and Wales as part of the most significant changes to property law in a generation.

There are nearly 5 million leasehold homes around the country and 86% of owner-occupier leaseholders report paying a ground rent. Historically, ground rents were typically small sums, even a peppercorn. But in this century, we have seen an increase in these rents,

often rising at frequent intervals. This can blight people's homes and lives, leaving them facing ever rising costs yet unable to sell the property easily due to these charges.

Service charges offer a way for freeholders to charge leaseholders for legitimate expenses. The measures we are bringing forward as part of our leasehold reforms will make them transparent to leaseholders and make it easier to challenge unfair or unreasonable charges.

We know that there are ways to manage buildings effectively without exploiting leaseholders—many freeholders are already effective, responsible building owners; others need help in adjusting their business models so that they are fit for the 21st century, and I want to hear views from all interested parties on how we can help them do that.

I understand that this is a complex area, with many different interests including leaseholders, freeholders and investors, and I want to hear those views through this consultation to inform our decision.

In this consultation, I outline five options to reform ground rent for people who already pay it. We must make sure that leaseholders are better protected from some of the egregious examples of poor practice we have seen in recent years. This Government believe that all leaseholders should be treated fairly and equally, with greater confidence about the costs of managing property. Where they pay money, they should receive something in return.

Through this consultation we want to understand better the challenges these options may present. This includes understanding any blockers to moving towards a fair and transparent model of charging for legitimate expenses through the service charge, and how we can address them.

Subject to this consultation, we will look to introduce a cap through the leasehold and freehold reform Bill.

[HCWS22]

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

AI Safety Summit

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Paul Scully): I am providing the House with an update following the UK's AI safety summit on 1 and 2 November 2023 at Bletchley Park—the birthplace of computer science.

As the Prime Minister set out in his speech on 26 October, the world stands at the crossroads of a technological revolution, and if we are to seize the benefits of AI, we must tackle the risks. AI is developing at an unprecedented speed, driven partly by greater computing power and innovations in model design. The capabilities of powerful AI systems will only increase, with profound economic and societal consequences, bringing unprecedented opportunities and risks. I am proud to share what the UK has achieved at this defining moment.

The summit was a first-of-its-kind event that has firmly established the UK as a global leader on AI safety. We brought the world's leading powers, and major AI industry, academia and civil society organisations together to build a shared understanding of the risks

and opportunities of frontier AI; to acknowledge the need for action; and to agree to work together to address these in the interest of all humanity. These common goals and shared principles were encapsulated in the Bletchley declaration, signed by 28 Governments representing not only the current world leaders in AI development, but also a majority of the world's population and economy.

Over the two days, an unprecedented range of attendees agreed a raft of measures to support those objectives. These included:

A joint agreement for frontier AI models to be tested for safety both before and after they are rolled out;

A shared ambition to invest in public sector AI capability, to ensure that Governments can both steward industry effectively and directly scrutinise from a technical standpoint;

A "State of the Science" report, led by one of the "Godfathers of AI" Yoshua Bengio, which will collate and distil the latest insight from across the global community help build a shared understanding of the capabilities and risks posed by frontier AI.

The UK also used the leadup to the summit to gather feedback and insights from hundreds of UK stakeholders, and work with and encourage leading frontier AI organisations to publish their safety policies. We also launched the world's first AI safety institute, which will build public sector capability to conduct safety testing and research into AI safety, in partnership with countries around the world.

I am pleased to share more details of the Bletchley declaration and our work against each of our summit objectives.

The Bletchley declaration by countries attending the AI safety summit

The landmark Bletchley declaration agreed an initial, mutual understanding of frontier AI, and the risks associated with it, and set out that countries will work in an inclusive manner to ensure the deployment of responsible, trustworthy, and human-centric AI that is safe. It committed countries to further collaborate on establishing a shared scientific and evidence-based understanding of the relevant risks.

Objective 1—a shared understanding of the risks posed by frontier AI and the need for action; and

Objective 2—a forward process for international collaboration on frontier AI safety, including how best to support national and international frameworks.

Informed by demonstrations from the UK's frontier AI taskforce and a discussion paper on the capabilities and risks of frontier AI, summit attendees learned of the impact and urgency of the key risks from frontier AI. They recognised that potential harms from misuse, loss of control, and the potential for leaps in capability were particularly pressing.

Attendees engaged in substantive discussions on the impact of AI on wider societal issues, including potential harms caused by disinformation and the amplification of existing inequalities. Participants expressed a range of views on which risks should be prioritised, noting that addressing risks at the frontier of AI is not mutually exclusive from addressing existing AI risks and harms.

With the speed of technological change, participants affirmed the importance of continued collaboration and agreed on the urgency of establishing a shared international consensus on the capabilities and risks of

frontier AI. In order to maintain public trust, attendees agreed that future decisions on AI safety must be underpinned by appropriate evidence, and recognised the necessity of fast, flexible and collaborative action by all actors, in particular Governments and frontier AI developers, to further understand those risks and ensure effective oversight.

All countries in attendance welcomed the UK's initiative to deliver a first-of-its-kind state of the science report on frontier AI. Building on the commitment for scientific and evidence-based collaboration as set out in the Bletchley declaration, the report will facilitate a shared science based understanding of the risks and capabilities associated with frontier AI. The UK has commissioned Yoshua Bengio, a pioneer and Turing award winning AI academic, to chair the delivery of the report. He will be supported by a group of leading AI academics and advised by an inclusive, international expert advisory panel made up of representatives from participating countries.

Objective 3—appropriate measures that individual organisations should take to increase frontier AI safety; and

Objective 4—areas for potential collaboration on AI safety research, including evaluating model capabilities and the development of new standards to support governance.

As set out in the Bletchley declaration, no single part of society can address the impacts of frontier AI alone; delivering on the potential of AI requires sustained attention of Governments, businesses, academia, and civil society, with a particularly strong responsibility for actors developing frontier AI capabilities.

Ahead of the summit, the UK published an overview of emerging frontier AI safety processes and associated practices to share best practice on how such AI systems can be developed in a safe manner. The UK was, therefore, pleased to see leading frontier AI organisations (Amazon, Anthropic, Google DeepMind, Inflection, Meta, Microsoft, OpenAI) respond to this by publishing their own AI safety policies. This formalises their own position on AI safety to enable public scrutiny of their outputs and encourages all frontier AI developers to consider how they can build trust through the further development and publication of such policies.

Building on this, countries and leading AI companies agreed on the importance of bringing together the responsibilities of Governments and AI developers and agreed to a plan for safety testing at the frontier. Participating countries committed, depending on their circumstances, to the development of appropriate state-led evaluation and safety research, while participating companies agreed that they would support the next iteration of their models to undergo appropriate independent evaluation and testing.

As an initial contribution to this new collaboration, the UK detailed its launch of the world's first AI safety institute, which will build public sector capability to conduct safety testing and research into AI safety. In exploring all the risks, from social harms including bias and misinformation, through to the most extreme risks of all, including the potential for loss of control, the UK will seek to make the work of the safety institute widely available. The UK welcomed commitments from companies in attendance to work with the institute to

allow for pre-deployment testing of their frontier AI models and commitments to work in partnership with other countries' institutes, including the US.

Objective 5—showcase how ensuring the safe development of AI will enable AI to be used for good globally.

Attendees together recognised a shared ambition to unlock the significant potential of frontier AI, which has the ability to transform economies and societies for the better.

Participants welcomed the exchange of ideas and evidence on current and upcoming initiatives, including individual countries' efforts to utilise AI in public service delivery and elsewhere to improve human wellbeing.

The UK will continue to be a leader on AI for good, and I welcome the announcements of our new £100 million fund for an AI life sciences accelerator mission to bring cutting edge AI to bear on some of the most pressing health challenges facing society, and a £32 million philanthropic partnership to shape the future of our best-in-class UK biobank. AI also has extraordinary potential to support teachers and students, which is why the Government are investing £118 million into the AI skills base, including postgraduate research centres, a new visa scheme, and postgraduate AI scholarships.

Many participants at the summit set out that for AI to be inclusive, it must also be accessible. I was pleased to announce that the UK, with Canada, the United States of America, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and other partners, announced £80 million for a new AI for development collaboration, working with innovators and institutions across Africa to support the development of responsible AI.

Keeping up momentum

With the frontier of AI constantly moving, the ambitions of the Bletchley declaration and the summit discussions cannot be rooted in a single moment.

I am pleased that the Republic of Korea has agreed to co-host a mini virtual summit on AI in the next six months, with France to host the next in-person summit a year from now.

The summit would not have had this level of success without the engagements we had in the weeks leading up to it. Ministers and senior officials led an inclusive public dialogue on international safety. These substantive, practical discussions not only informed and enriched our conclusions and conversations at the summit, but also allowed a range of voices to be heard in shaping the key policy decisions.

We will continue these conversations with key stakeholders, to ensure that we build on the conclusions reached at the summit and ensure that international agreements are underpinned by a robust domestic regulatory framework for AI.

We will be publishing the AI regulation White Paper response by the end of this year to further set out our next steps on our approach to this fast-paced and transformative technology.

[HCWS21]

TRANSPORT

Channel Incident of 24 November 2021: Inquiry

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Mark Harper): On 24 November 2021 there was a tragic mass-casualty incident, resulting in at least 27 fatalities, from a small boat attempting to cross the channel. Our thoughts are with the loved ones of those who died, and with those who responded to an extremely distressing event.

Incidents such as this continue to demonstrate the danger inherent in illegal crossings and underline the importance of putting a stop to them.

When events such as these occur, there is a legal obligation to investigate. While this would normally be the remit of a coroner, in this case the bodies of the deceased were recovered to France, and this does not allow for a coroner's inquest. Therefore, I am announcing the establishment of an independent, non-statutory inquiry into this incident.

The inquiry will be modelled on a coroner's inquest and will allow a full and independent investigation into the circumstances of the deaths to take place, following the Marine Accident Investigation Branch's report published today.

The inquiry will focus on investigating this individual incident, with the aim of ensuring that the rights of those affected are upheld and allowing the survivors and family members of the deceased to be heard. Crucially, it will also examine the circumstances in which the deceased lost their lives and what lessons can be learned to prevent incidents like this in the future.

The Department for Transport is working at pace to finalise the appointment of the chair and the terms of reference, both of which I will announce in due course.

It will be for the chair, in due course, to make decisions concerning the inquiry's processes and procedures. In particular the chair will consider the most effective way to establish what happened and make recommendations for the future.

[HCWS27]

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 9 November 2023

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
EDUCATION	23WS	LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES —	
Higher Education update.....	23WS	<i>continued</i>	
HOME DEPARTMENT	23WS	Leasehold Reform: Ground Rent Consultation.....	25WS
Death of Jalal Uddin: Statutory Inquiry	24WS	SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY ..	26WS
Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Bill.....	23WS	AI Safety Summit	26WS
LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES	25WS	TRANSPORT	30WS
Intergovernmental Relations Quarterly		Channel Incident of 24 November 2021: Inquiry ...	30WS
Transparency Report: 1 April to 30 June 2023 ...	25WS		

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

not later than
Thursday 16 November 2023

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Thursday 9 November 2023

Metropolitan Police: Operational Independence [Col. 241]

Answer to urgent question—(Chris Philp)

UK Sanctions Regime: Russia and Belarus [Col. 250]

Answer to urgent question—(Mr Mitchell)

Business of the House [Col. 254]

Statement—(Leader of the House)

Artificial Intelligence Safety Summit [Col. 268]

Statement—(Michelle Donelan)

Debate on the Address (Third day) [Col. 278]

Debate adjourned

Funding for Canals [Col. 352]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Written Statements [Col. 23WS]
