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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Tuesday 19 March 2024

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Creative Industries

1. **Giles Watling** (Clacton) (Con): What fiscal steps he is taking to support creative industries. [902053]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Jeremy Hunt): At the spring Budget, the Government announced a package of tax reliefs for our world-leading creative industries worth £1 billion over the next five years, including a 40% relief on business rates for eligible film studios in England and enhanced tax reliefs for visual effects.

Giles Watling: As we know, the UK's cultural offer is world-beating and, particularly through the performing arts, the UK projects soft power across the globe. While welcoming the progressive tax breaks for our incredible film industry, it would appear that our far-reaching, high-end television offer has been left behind in the recent Budget. Does my right hon. Friend have plans to redress this deficit to ensure that the UK remains first on screens around the world?

Jeremy Hunt: No one knows more about high-end TV than my hon. Friend. Whoever said that politics is showbusiness for ugly people was absolutely wrong in his case. I will take away what he says and consider high-end television as a potential future Budget measure.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The Chancellor will be aware of the award-winning film “The Windermere Children”, which talks about the legacy of those Jewish children who survived the death camps in central Europe and made a new life for themselves on the banks of Lake Windermere at Troutbeck Bridge. For the last several years, there has been an ongoing exhibition on their legacy at Windermere library, and now we look to build a lasting memorial alongside a rebuilt Lakes School at Troutbeck Bridge.

Will the Chancellor be interested in meeting the families of the Windermere children, and those behind the new build and the provision of a new lasting memorial to their legacy, at Windermere at some point in the foreseeable future?

Jeremy Hunt: That is a very tempting offer, and I will see whether my diary permits me to visit the hon. Gentleman in his constituency. I have not seen the film, but I have seen a film on a holocaust theme called “The Zone of Interest”, which is a remarkable British-led film that I thoroughly recommend to him.

Strength of the Economy

2. **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the strength of the economy. [902054]

19. **Clive Lewis** (Norwich South) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the strength of the economy. [902076]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Jeremy Hunt): The economy is beginning to turn a corner after a series of unprecedented shocks. Inflation has more than halved, GDP grew in January and the economy is on a path to long-term growth.

Chi Onwurah: The economy has grown at a snail's pace under the Tories, but that snail is still 30% faster nationally than in the north-east, despite our strengths in clean energy, manufacturing, science and health. On average, my constituents are £11,500 worse off than they would have been had the economy grown at the same rate that it grew under Labour. Is it any wonder that the Public Accounts Committee found no compelling evidence of levelling up? Is a vote for the Tories not a vote for continued economic failure?

Jeremy Hunt: It is not, because we have grown faster than Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Germany and multiple other countries since 2010. With respect to the north-east in particular, the hon. Lady is absolutely right to say that our vision is to spread growth into every corner of the country. That is why, in the last three months alone, both the Prime Minister and I have been to the Nissan factory in Sunderland to mark its decision to make two electric car models in the UK. Just last week, we announced the opening of a massive new film studio in Sunderland that will bring more than 8,000 jobs to the north-east.

Clive Lewis: According to the LSE's Grantham Research Institute, the Government's current programme for investment to mitigate the worst effects of climate change will still see climate change damage to the UK increase from 1.1% of GDP to 3.3% by 2050 and 7.4% by the end of the century. To put it into context, that is the United Kingdom's entire social care budget of around £25 billion. The Climate Change Committee has said that the current approach to adaptation “falls far short of what is required.”

Has the Treasury made any attempt to assess the cost to GDP, the public finances and jobs of failing to invest for climate adaptation?

Jeremy Hunt: We listen very carefully to what the Climate Change Committee says, and we are absolutely committed to net zero. In fact, a Conservative Government passed the law requiring Governments to commit to net zero. The hon. Gentleman will know that we have just become the first major industrialised country to decarbonise by more than 50% since 1990. As well as the costs, we

are also mindful of the economic opportunities, which is why we are investing billions of pounds in our clean energy transformation.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that my constituency, which has Cambridge to the north, has fantastic new industries such as Johnson Matthey in Royston, which is at the forefront of hydrogen. We have pharma companies to the south and some of the best film studios in the world in Hertfordshire. Is he consciously trying to back those successful industries of the future so that our children and grandchildren have fantastic opportunities for the future?

Jeremy Hunt: That is absolutely what we are trying to do. Film and TV is a good example here, as it has now become an offshoot of the technology industry. Films such as “Barbie” have been filmed in Hertfordshire but have the look of the Californian sunshine; they can withstand the British rain because of the use of high-tech devices that simulate Californian sunshine, even in my right hon. and learned Friend’s constituency. What he sets out is our absolutely our plan and we will stick with it.

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): In response to covid, this Government introduced the furlough scheme, and delivered and funded the world’s first vaccine. In response to the energy price spike, this Government introduced comprehensive support for families. The Office for Budget Responsibility, so beloved of the shadow Chancellor, had its long-range forecast for 2025 to 2028 showing GDP increasing every year, GDP per capita increasing every year, average earnings increasing every year in real terms and productivity increasing in real terms. So does the Chancellor agree that when the shadow Chancellor says that we face a 1979 moment, she is right: a choice between a Labour party still in hock to its union bosses and a Conservative party committed to growth?

Jeremy Hunt: I have nothing to add to my hon. Friend’s brilliant list of statistics, except to cite another independent organisation, the International Monetary Fund, which says that in the next five years this country, under Conservative leadership, will grow faster than France, Germany, Italy and Japan.

James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op): The British people are paying the price for 14 years of Conservative economic failure, with lower wages, higher taxes and public services on their knees. Time and again, the Conservatives hide behind international factors and take no responsibility for their failures. Yet figures from the OECD confirm that the UK is the only G7 advanced economy now in recession and, according to the IMF, our economy is forecast to have the second slowest growth in the G7 this year. So can the Chancellor tell us: why is the UK so far behind other major economies under the Conservatives?

Jeremy Hunt: Well, it is not, because it is actually growing faster than France, Germany and a bunch of other countries. However, I am glad that the hon. Gentleman mentioned 14 years, because we can look at what has happened under 14 years of Labour in Wales,

where unemployment is higher, NHS waiting lists are longer, school standards are worse and growth is lower. What is Labour’s reaction to that terrible record? It has just promoted the Economy Minister to First Minister.

Tax Policies: Impact on Living Standards

3. **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the potential impact of his tax policies on living standards. [902056]

6. **Dan Carden** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the potential impact of his tax policies on living standards. [902060]

12. **Rachel Hopkins** (Luton South) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the potential impact of his tax policies on living standards. [902068]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Nigel Huddleston): Thanks to the combined impact of national insurance cuts and above-inflation increases to thresholds since 2010, an average worker on £35,400 in 2024-25 will pay over £1,500 less in personal taxes than they otherwise would have done. These national insurance contribution cuts were possible due to the significant progress we have made in combating inflation.

Paul Blomfield: I heard what the Minister has to say but does he not recognise the OBR’s assessment of the interplay between the Government’s threshold changes and NICs? The OBR concludes that for every 5p gain per year there is a 10p loss, particularly for those on lower wages. Does he accept the OBR assessment?

Nigel Huddleston: I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman looks carefully, he will see that the Government have demonstrated their commitment to supporting the most vulnerable in society. He will also have heard my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller) explain the circumstances as to why we have higher taxes than we would desire. If the hon. Gentleman is telling me that Labour party policy is to change the thresholds, perhaps he can have that conversation with the shadow Chancellor, who can explain how she would pay for that.

Dan Carden: The OBR has said that this will be the worst Parliament on record for living standards and the only one in which they have fallen: people are poorer after 14 years of this Government. We do not need fiscal tweaks; this economy needs renewal. It needs to bring in investment on a major scale, and a new age of education, training and employment in the real economy. My constituents cannot afford to wait while the Tory party looks for its polling fortunes to change. Have we not now reached the point where the best thing for the economy is a general election?

Nigel Huddleston: I completely disagree with the hon. Gentleman’s explanation. Not only will I repeat that our constituents completely understand the difficult global circumstances, with the pandemic and the cost of living challenges following the invasion of Ukraine, but I can say that we have grown faster since 2010 than many other major economies, and the IMF forecasts that we will grow faster than Germany, France, Italy

and Japan. In the year to the third quarter of 2023, real household disposable income per person was around £1,100 higher than the Office for Budget Responsibility expected in its spring Budget 2023 forecast. We have turned a corner, and the best thing to do is to stick with the Conservatives.

Rachel Hopkins: The Minister says that the economy has turned a corner, but households will be £870 worse off on average under the Conservatives tax plan, and they will also be seeing their costs up by £110 a week compared with before the last election. Is the Minister proud of his record?

Nigel Huddleston: We are immensely proud of our record since 2010: living standards have increased, and growth is now better than that of many other major economies. Our absolute commitment to protecting the most vulnerable in society was shown recently when we provided an average of £3,400 in cost of living support for each household. We have turned a corner, and the economy is improving. I am just disappointed that the Opposition constantly talk down the UK economy and their constituents.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Will my hon. Friend confirm that, following the 4p cut in national insurance that the Chancellor has introduced, the tax take on workers will be the lowest it has been for 50 years? In St Austell and Newquay, two people in a household on average incomes will be paying £1,800 less this coming year than they did last year.

Nigel Huddleston: Yes, absolutely, my hon. Friend has pointed out an important point on how we have had a laser focus on reducing the personal tax rates. Furthermore, the measures announced in the autumn statement and in the spring Budget will significantly add to economic activity, contributing about 200,000 full-time equivalent jobs to the economy, and I am sure that the whole House will welcome that.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): Pensioners can often struggle because they have a fixed income, so I was pleased that the Chancellor stuck with the triple lock last year, guaranteeing an increase of 10.1%. Will the Minister explain how the 8.5% rise that people will be getting in a couple of weeks' time will make a difference to their living standards?

Nigel Huddleston: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is the case that not only have the measures in the autumn statement and the spring Budget helped workers, but we have also focused on helping pensioners. Those on the new state pension will benefit to the tune of about £900 a year, which is significant, and the national insurance cuts will benefit the average worker—27 million employees—by £900 a year. Therefore, we have implemented a fair and balanced Budget and fair and balanced measures.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): Families in Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke have been supported by this national insurance cut, which means that the average family will be £1,800 a year better off. The freezing of the fuel duty means that motorists will be able to get around without being unfairly charged at

the pump. Money from this Government has enabled Stoke-on-Trent to cut bus fares by a third, so that people can travel around. We have had £56 million from the levelling-up fund and £17.6 million for the Kidsgrove town deal, which means that the sports centre will be refurbished and reopened, improving people's health chances. The Labour party closed it because it could not be bothered to pay a single pound to save it back in 2017. Is it not the reality that we have a clear plan that will help the families of our great constituencies, particularly in Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke, while Labour will borrow more, tax us higher and lead us back into recession, just as it did in 2008-09?

Nigel Huddleston: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. This is fantastic, and I think it is a recurring pattern, Mr Speaker. We have positivity, optimism, and confidence in the future of the UK economy from Conservative Members, but absolute negativity from Opposition Members, because they have no plan, they have no clue and they have no hope. We have a plan and it is working.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): Why does the Treasury Minister think people feel worse off after 14 years of Conservative Government?

Nigel Huddleston: As I said, we are turning a corner and have therefore made measures to put money back into people's pockets. I do not think it would come as a surprise to the hon. Gentleman's constituents, or to those of any Labour Member looking at the Labour Opposition's recent record, that Labour claimed on the one hand that it was supportive of tax cuts, but last week failed to support those tax cuts when it came to it in Parliament.

Darren Jones: The Minister did not answer the question about why the public feel worse off. We on the Labour side of the House know why. He mentions tax cuts, but he does not talk about the freezing of tax thresholds, or indeed about the council tax that is about to be levied on people, not just this year but each year for the next five years. Why cannot he admit that, for every 10p extra in the pound taken from people since 2010, the Government are only now giving back just 5p?

Nigel Huddleston: If I am hearing correctly, the Labour Front Benchers are announcing fundamental changes to policy that they have not yet costed. They did not object, as far as I am aware, to any of the measures required to support households and businesses during the pandemic, which necessitated increases in taxation. We are now reducing the level of taxation because we have turned a corner. They did not support that. It is interesting that they say one thing but then do not take action. I think they need to explain to their constituents why they failed to support the tax cuts last week.

Block Grant Funding

4. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential impact of the Spring Budget 2024 on levels of block grant funding for Scotland. [902057]

11. Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential impact of the Spring Budget 2024 on levels of block grant funding for Scotland. [902066]

17. Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential impact of the Spring Budget 2024 on levels of block grant funding for Scotland. [902074]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Laura Trott): As a result of decisions at the spring Budget, the Scottish Government are receiving around £295 million in additional funding in 2024-25 through the Barnett formula.

Martyn Day: According to the Commons Library, the Government have cut the Scottish Government's capital funding by 16% in real terms from 2022-23 to 2024-25. The Institute for Fiscal Studies forecasts that there will be a further 16% cut by 2029. After 14 years of austerity, inflation and covid, can the Minister tell me why the Chancellor is taking a hammer to our Scottish public services?

Laura Trott: The hon. Gentleman is aware that the block grant has been going up in real terms. He will also be aware that the Scottish Government can switch resource to capital—unlimited amounts, if they choose to do so. He will also be aware, I am sure, that the Scottish Government can borrow up to £400 million of capital each year if they so wish.

Deidre Brock: The Tories have failed to invest in our public services and high-growth industries, dragging the nations of the UK into recession and increased income inequality. The UK Government continue to impose hard cuts to public services. The Commons Library has found that the Scottish block grant will have fallen in real terms in every year since 2020, yet UK Government Ministers continue to deny that fact. Does the Minister understand what “real terms” actually means, and does she see the devastating impact that this is having on public services?

Laura Trott: Just to be absolutely clear, the Scottish Government's total departmental expenditure limit is growing in real terms over this Parliament by over 1% a year on average.

Alan Brown: Obviously, the Minister does not understand what “real terms” means after all. Analysis by the Institution of Civil Engineers shows a multiplier effect: every £1 spent in the construction industry brings in an additional £2 of spend. That means that the real-terms cut to the Scottish Government's block grant for capital by £1.6 billion over two years further deprives our economy of a wider £3 billion. Why do this Government think that it is okay to decimate infrastructure spend in Scotland?

Laura Trott: The Scottish Government are well funded to deliver their devolved responsibilities, and receive 25% more funding on average per person than the equivalent UK Government spending in other parts. That translates to £8.5 billion more a year on average.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Consequentials have consequences. The Chancellor announced in his Budget £20 billion of cuts for the public sector, including cuts of 13% in some Departments, and that defies logic. The public sector is crying out for funding, but his choices, if implemented, will lay waste to it. Does the Minister agree with the IFS, which said that it would be genuinely surprising if the Chancellor's plans could be carried out, or with the Institute for Government, which said that “these spending plans will be impossible to deliver”, or with the Resolution Foundation, which said that the plans were fiscal fantasy?

Laura Trott: Over the next Parliament, our plans are for spending to go up in real terms—I want to be absolutely clear about that. Equally, spending has gone up in real terms over this Parliament too. The hon. Gentleman will have noticed that at the beginning of my answers, I explained that Scotland is getting £295 million extra this year through Barnett consequentials.

Drew Hendry: It is no wonder that the Institute for Fiscal Studies says that there is a “conspiracy of silence” from both the Government and the Labour party over the scale of these cuts. As a percentage of UK spending, the Scottish block grant is set to fall to its lowest ever level under devolution, dwarfing its other plans. For Scotland, House of Commons Library figures show capital funding falling by 16% over the next two years. The Chancellor has already confirmed that the Scottish energy sector is the biggest loser from his Budget, and he is doubling down. Why are this Government and this Chancellor trying to be the new hammer of Scots?

Laura Trott: The only area in which I agree with the hon. Gentleman is that I would love to know what the Labour party's spending plans are for the next Parliament—perhaps Labour Members will enlighten us this evening. I will repeat what I said at the beginning about capital: the Scottish Government have unlimited ability to switch from resource spending to capital spending. That is a choice that they have.

Regional Economic Inequalities

5. Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): What recent fiscal steps he has taken to help reduce regional economic inequalities. [902058]

15. Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): What recent fiscal steps he has taken to help reduce the level of economic inequality between the north and south of England. [902072]

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Gareth Davies): The Government continue to tackle regional economic inequalities and level up the United Kingdom. The Government are empowering local leaders through a range of devolution deals, regenerating places across the country and investing in vital infrastructure.

Afzal Khan: In response to this month's Budget, the director of the Institute for Public Policy Research North has said that

“This Budget is the government’s admission that it has given up on levelling up this parliament, despite there being much left to do.”

Delivering on the Government’s levelling-up commitments would mean that my constituents would benefit from reduced social welfare dependency, increased earnings potential, and improved health and wellbeing. Does the Minister not think that my constituents and all citizens outside London and the south-east deserve the benefits that come with economic prosperity?

Gareth Davies: We are committed to levelling up, and are delivering on it across the country. Median pay growth has been higher in every region outside London and the south-east under this Government, and the hon. Gentleman’s constituency is receiving £19 million from round 1 of the levelling-up fund and £20 million from round 3. We have announced a Greater Manchester trailblazer devolution deal and a Greater Manchester investment zone, which will bring more jobs and prosperity for all of his constituents.

Kim Johnson: I have heard what Ministers have said this morning, and I must be living in an alternative universe. Liverpool has some of the most deprived wards in the country, which have experienced poverty and destitution over the past 14 years as a result of austerity. Some 300,000 people have accessed the household support fund, and while we are a resilient city and will continue to support those households, can the Minister explain what safety net will be put in place to support those in poverty and destitution when the household support fund ends in six months’ time?

Gareth Davies: The hon. Lady is right to highlight the fact that we have extended the household support fund for the most vulnerable. That is on the back of £96 billion of support during the energy crisis and nearly £400 billion of support through the global pandemic. I would just point out to the hon. Lady that the fundamental difference between Conservative Members and Labour Members is that we believe the best route out of poverty is through work, and our party is increasing employment.

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): Across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, most jobs are supplied by very small businesses, many of which fall below the VAT threshold. Given the economic inequalities around the region, the increase of the VAT threshold to £90,000 is very welcome, but the threshold being that low and the cliff-edge effect of going from zero to 20% have a chilling impact on growing small businesses and providing all-year-round jobs. Will the Minister consider introducing some sort of taper for that £90,000 threshold, and increasing the VAT threshold further—maybe in the region of £120,000?

Gareth Davies: My hon. Friend is right: we increased the VAT threshold for small businesses, which will benefit 28,000 businesses across the country. We feel that the £90,000 threshold strikes the right balance between managing public finances sustainably and supporting businesses, but as my hon. Friend knows, we keep these things under review.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): The port of Milford Haven in my constituency has been right out in front, taking a lead in investing in decarbonisation

and showing how it can boost the economy of Wales and reduce inequality. Yesterday, it was told that its bid to the Government’s floating offshore wind manufacturing investment scheme—its port funding scheme—had been rejected out of hand. Will my hon. Friend ask his good friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to meet me to talk about the important work being done at the UK’s leading oil and gas port, and about how the UK Government can support those efforts financially?

Gareth Davies: FLOWMIS is an incredibly important scheme in improving and enhancing our ability to expand floating offshore wind. We are a huge supporter of my right hon. Friend’s constituents and of the whole of Wales. If the Chancellor cannot meet him, I would be very happy to do so.

High-income Child Benefit Charge

7. Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con): Good morning, just, Mr Speaker. What assessment he has made of the impact of raising the high-income child benefit charge threshold on household incomes. [902062]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Nigel Huddleston): The Government will raise the point at which child benefit is fully withdrawn to £80,000 from £60,000, and we will raise the high-income child benefit charge threshold to £60,000 from £50,000 from 6 April 2024, taking 170,000 families out of paying the charge. Overall, these changes mean that almost half a million hard-working families will gain an average of £1,260 towards the cost of raising their children.

Karl McCartney: Good afternoon, Mr Speaker. [Laughter.] These changes are welcome, and they mean that more Lincoln families will receive more support from the Government, as I told the Minister in Lincoln on Friday. Will my hon. Friend confirm when the formal consultation on basing child benefit on household income rather than on individual income will commence, if the civil servants in the Treasury will let him do it?

Nigel Huddleston: I thank my hon. Friend. It was a pleasure, as always, to meet him in his constituency on Friday, where we discussed this matter and many others. The Government will launch a consultation in due course on how to end this unfairness by administering the HICBC on a household rather than an individual basis. Doing so would require significant reform of the tax system, as our tax infrastructure does not currently have a mechanism to consider household income, but the Government plan to end the unfairness for single-earner families in the child benefit system by administering the HICBC on a household rather than an individual basis by April 2026.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for that. Child benefit income is an integral part of how families make their money last through the whole week. If there are any changes that will reduce it in any way, is it the Minister’s intention to ensure that those who have questions, difficulties or concerns have their concerns and wishes taken on board? It is really important that those facing financial changes can cope with the changes to come.

Nigel Huddleston: I thank the hon. Gentleman. It is precisely because of the complexities involved that we will have the consultation. I am sure that his views and those of his constituents will be warmly welcomed in that.

Business Investment

8. **Simon Baynes** (Clwyd South) (Con): What fiscal steps his Department is taking to help increase the level of business investment. [902063]

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Gareth Davies): At the autumn statement in 2023, the Chancellor set out ambitious growth packages designed to boost business investment, including making full expensing permanent and a tax cut to companies of over £10 billion a year to ensure we have one of the most generous capital allowances in the world. With further growth-enhancing measures set out in spring Budget 2024, the Office for Budget Responsibility estimates that Government policy announced at the past three fiscal events is expected to increase the size of the economy by 0.7% by 2028-29.

Simon Baynes: Like my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas), I was delighted to see the increase in the VAT threshold from £85,000 to £90,000 in the Budget. That will help small businesses invest for the future, such as the Two Doves café and gift shop in Overton, which is popular with people from both Clwyd South and North Shropshire. However, given the vital importance to small businesses, will my hon. Friend prioritise increasing the VAT threshold again in the next fiscal intervention?

Gareth Davies: My hon. Friend comes to this House with significant business experience, so when he talks, we certainly listen, and I am delighted to hear that he was pleased with the VAT threshold increase. I can tell him that, in addition to what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) about the £90,000 threshold, this level is higher than that of any EU member state and is the joint highest in the OECD. Many of his businesses will be among the 28,000 that will benefit from the increase, so we have no plans at this stage to change it.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): But the actual record of this Government over the past 14 years is abysmal. It is a fact that business investment has been consistently among the lowest in both the OECD and the G7, and now the Office for Budget Responsibility is forecasting a further 5% fall this year. Why?

Gareth Davies: Announcements in each of our last three fiscal events have enhanced our business investment environment for international investors: we have the second highest foreign direct investment stock in the world; we have some of the best universities in the world, which are attracting businesses; we have announced full expensing, which is a £10 billion-a-year tax cut; we have the lowest corporation tax in the G7; and we are reforming our energy grid, bringing investment into our net zero ambitions. We are reforming our systems, reducing our taxes, and encouraging investment.

Safe Hands Plans

9. **Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Whether he has had recent discussions with the Financial Conduct Authority on the administration of Safe Hands Plans. [902064]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Bim Afolami): I recognise that this has been a very challenging time for Safe Hands customers. The hon. Member will be aware that the FCA, as the independent regulator of the funeral plan sector, is responsible for dealing with specific cases. However, the Treasury and the FCA have worked closely throughout the process of bringing the sector into regulation, as well as during the implementation of the new regulatory framework.

Nick Smith: My experience of the FCA and the Safe Hands funeral plan fiasco is that it took six months to reply to my freedom of information request and pleaded commercial confidentiality to key questions, and that, despite being warned, the Treasury failed to support consumers moving from an unregulated sector into regulation. It appears to me that the Treasury missed opportunities to support consumers and is still shuffling its feet. At least 47,000 people are out of pocket to the tune of £60 million. They were trying to protect their loved ones from expensive funerals at the worst of times. Will the Minister consider an independent review of this matter? A constructive response is needed to ensure that Safe Hands victims can have confidence in a system that for too long has let them down.

Bim Afolami: I share the hon. Member's anger at how Safe Hands customers have been treated. The business is under criminal investigation by the Serious Fraud Office and its administrators are bringing legal action against the former owner of the Safe Hands business. In the Treasury, we do not believe it is right to use taxpayer money to compensate consumers who lose out due to the conduct of unregulated firms; Safe Hands was not within the regulatory perimeter at that time. However, we have worked with the sector so that the two largest providers of funeral plans have agreed to provide significantly discounted replacement plans for the customers who have found themselves so badly treated.

Cost of Living

10. **Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential impact of increases in the cost of living on households in 2024. [902065]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Laura Trott): The rise in inflation caused by Putin's illegal war in Ukraine and the subsequent energy price shock has put enormous pressure on households. Thanks to work by the Bank of England and the Government, the rate of inflation is going down, with the Office for Budget Responsibility expecting it to be back to target next autumn.

Chris Stephens: Since the disastrous Tory mini-Budget of 2022, households are continuing to feel the squeeze at the supermarket, with food prices continuing to rise and real wages falling for the longest unbroken run

since records began. Food prices have risen by 26% over the last two years. When will the Government listen to those who wish to follow the lead of Canada and France by introducing a price cap on staple food items at the supermarket?

Laura Trott: Real wages are now, happily, starting to rise and, as I have said, the OBR has said that inflation will be back to target next quarter. What would not help the cost of living is putting people's taxes up, as the Scottish Government are doing.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): The tax burden is at a record high, wages are stagnant, rents and mortgages are up by hundreds of pounds, and food prices have gone up by 25%. The Resolution Foundation has confirmed that this is the only Parliament on record during which living standards have fallen. Our constituents deserve better. When is the Minister going to give the British public a chance to vote for change and call for a general election?

Laura Trott: We have talked a lot today about the £400 billion of support that we put in during the pandemic and the £100 billion of support that we put in to support people during Putin's energy price shock. The Labour party did not disagree with any of those things, and I think the hon. Lady in her heart of hearts will know that we have to pay for that—at least, I hope she does. We have had to take some difficult decisions, but because of that, the economy is turning a corner. We are able to reduce working people's taxes, and I hope that she and her party will find it within themselves to support us in that endeavour.

Support for Small Businesses

13. **Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): What fiscal steps his Department is taking to support small businesses. [902069]

16. **Paul Holmes** (Eastleigh) (Con): What fiscal steps his Department is taking to support small businesses. [902073]

18. **Mrs Flick Drummond** (Meon Valley) (Con): What fiscal steps his Department is taking to support small businesses. [902075]

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Gareth Davies): Small businesses drive our economy and we support them to thrive using levers across Government, whether that is through our small business rate relief, by increasing the VAT registration threshold, by providing reliefs such as the annual investment allowance or through various programmes offered by the British Business Bank.

Dr James Davies: The Welsh Government are increasing the burden on small businesses by reducing retail, hospitality and leisure business rates relief from 75% to just 40%, despite the UK Government rightly extending that relief in England in the Budget. That means that businesses in my constituency, such as the Little Cheesemonger, Now to Bed, Presents with a Difference and Tu Mundo, are all facing unsustainable business rates bills. One business has to find an extra £35,000 a year for business rates alone. What advice does the Minister have for small businesses in north Wales facing these onerous bills?

Gareth Davies: My hon. Friend is right that at the autumn statement, this Government extended the retail, hospitality and leisure relief in England—a tax cut worth £2.5 billion for small businesses. The Barnett formula applies to allow the Welsh Labour Government to offer similar relief if they want to. It is disappointing, if not surprising, that when given the opportunity, Labour decides not to cut taxes for working people.

Paul Holmes: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the best steps that the Government can take to support small businesses in Eastleigh, Hedge End and Botley is through a package of business rate reductions? Will he outline to the House the progress the Government have made in this regard, which was desperately needed?

Gareth Davies: My hon. Friend is right. Business rate relief is a great way to support small businesses in Eastleigh and across the country. Our small business rate relief means that one third of all properties in England already pay no business rates at all. We have frozen the small business multiplier, protecting more than 1 million properties from a multiplier increase. As I was just saying, we are supporting high streets with our retail, hospitality and leisure relief.

Mrs Drummond: Just after the Budget, I met some of the small businesses in my constituency at the Flower Pots in Cheriton. While they were pleased with some of the Budget, they talked about improving productivity and growth by raising the VAT threshold far beyond £90,000, and possibly to £250,000. They felt that that would incentivise sole traders and small businesses to expand and work longer hours. They feel at present that growth is restricted because of the level of the VAT threshold. Has the Chancellor given any thought to increasing the threshold to improve productivity?

Gareth Davies: My hon. Friend is right to engage in the way that she is with her small businesses. We believe that the £90,000 threshold, which has just been increased, strikes the right balance between managing the public finances and supporting small businesses. I encourage her to look at the wider package of support that the Government are providing for small businesses, not least the business rate relief that I was just talking about.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Will the Minister have discussions with his counterparts in the devolved institutions to ensure that the likes of sole traders and small businesses see a reduction in bureaucracy to make them more profitable, offering more business opportunities to more people across the United Kingdom?

Gareth Davies: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government engage frequently with our counterparts in the Northern Ireland Administration, and that will continue to be the case.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): According to the Federation of Small Businesses, two in three small businesses are suffering from late payments. We are now 14 years into a Tory Government. Why do the Government not follow Labour's lead and strengthen the law on this?

Gareth Davies: We are acutely aware of this issue, and I have had meetings with the FSB. That is why the Chancellor has announced plans to improve the situation for small businesses. I am happy to outline that in writing to the hon. Gentleman.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): One of the requests from female-led businesses in my constituency, including Cùrlach and Rock'n Rollers, was for a VAT cut for hairdressing businesses. Can the Minister tell me why that was not considered in the Budget? These businesses are an important part of our high streets and they are often led by women, who have missed out significantly in the Chancellor's Budget.

Gareth Davies: We of course support hairdressers, our high streets and women-run businesses, which is why we have extended the retail, hospitality and leisure relief to 75%. Cutting taxes for hard-working people is what the Conservative Government do.

Income Tax Policies: Pensioners

14. **Helen Morgan** (North Shropshire) (LD): What recent assessment he has made of the impact of his income tax policies on pensioners. [902071]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Nigel Huddleston): The Government have nearly doubled the personal allowance since 2010, and in 2024-25 it will be more than 20% higher in real terms than if it had been uprated by inflation since 2010-11. The personal allowance is currently set at a high enough level to ensure that pensioners whose sole income is the full rate of the new state pension, or the basic-rate pension, do not pay any income tax.

Helen Morgan: I have been contacted by pensioners in my constituency who get a full state pension plus protected payments from the old scheme. The increase in their pensions in line with inflation has put them over the personal allowance threshold for paying income tax, which has eaten away at that increase. Was it the Minister's intention in the Budget to drag pensioners into paying income tax?

Nigel Huddleston: As I have outlined, and as the Resolution Foundation and others have pointed out, pensioners have gained about £1,000 on average as a result of the Government's decisions since 2010 to increase thresholds. Some pensioners rely solely on the state for their incomes, and we are supporting pensioners through a variety of other measures: not only the triple lock but pension credit and cost of living support. Pensioners across the country will benefit from the 8.5% increase coming in April.

Dame Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): I welcome the recent tax cuts. We need to ensure that those who work hard and do the right thing are rewarded in their old age. Can the Treasury please stop allocating funds to France, which is clearly not stopping the boats, stop extortionate amounts being spent on hotels for illegal migrants, and reduce the foreign aid budget? Maybe then we can give even more to our pensioners.

Nigel Huddleston: My hon. Friend will be well aware that Government Members are implementing measures to tackle the very problems she outlines while turning the corner in the economy and doing everything we can to put more money back in people's pockets, whether workers or pensioners.

Tax-free Shopping

20. **Nickie Aiken** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential merits of reintroducing tax-free shopping for international visitors. [902077]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Nigel Huddleston): As set out at the spring Budget, we are considering the findings of the Office for Budget Responsibility's review of the original costing of the withdrawal of tax-free shopping, alongside industry representations and broader data. The Government welcome further submissions from stakeholders in response to the OBR's findings as we keep all taxes under review.

Nickie Aiken: Last week, the OBR informed the Treasury Committee that it has not assessed the Treasury's forecast that it would cost £900 million to extend tax-free shopping to EU visitors. The OBR has also failed to support the Treasury's assumption that EU visitor behaviour and costs can be extrapolated from assessed non-EU data. The UK retail industry firmly believes that it will cost as little as £50 million to reintroduce tax-free shopping for tourists. As we mark English Tourism Week, is it not time that we had a full, independent review of the Treasury's data on tax-free shopping?

Nigel Huddleston: I thank my hon. Friend for her consistent championing of tourism, particularly during English Tourism Week. It is not in the OBR's remit to consider the effect of alternative policies and, as expanding tax-free shopping to EU visitors is not current Government policy, it has not considered that. However, the findings of the review will be useful in giving insights on the overall behavioural incentives of the policy, which will be relevant for both EU and non-EU populations. It is therefore right that the Government take time to consider the OBR's findings along with other representations and within the context of broader data, as announced in the Budget.

Topical Questions

T1. [902078] **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Ind): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Jeremy Hunt): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on living standards in the UK. The most recent data suggest that despite a tough couple of years caused by the pandemic and the energy crisis, living standards will return to their pre-covid peak next year: a full two years earlier than originally predicted by the OBR. They have risen by £1,700 a household in real terms since 2010, and this year's cut in national insurance will increase living standards by 1%. In other words, to coin a phrase, now is not the time to go back to square one.

Andrew Bridgen: Given that the Prime Minister has been forced to abandon his plans for an election on 2 May and could soon be facing a leadership challenge, does the Chancellor of the Exchequer believe that his Budget landed well with the public or even his colleagues on the Government Benches?

Jeremy Hunt: I say very simply to the hon. Gentleman, who used to be an hon. Friend, that the Budget will mean that the UK economy will grow faster than that of France, Germany, Italy or Japan in the next five years. That is doing the right thing for the country.

T3. [902080] **Anna Firth** (Southend West) (Con): I would like to thank the Minister for the opportunity to meet UK Finance yesterday, which told me and other MPs that the industry plans to roll out 225 banking hubs in the next 18 months. Given that my constituency has lost every single bank branch over the last few years, will the Minister help me to make sure that Leigh-on-Sea, which has 250 retailers, will get one of those 225 banking hubs?

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Bim Afolami): I thank my hon. Friend for her question. First, it is important to note her consistent championing of this issue for her constituents, for which she deserves huge commendation. To her precise question, it is important that industry, not the Government, makes decisions about bank branches or banking hubs, but she has made her case very ably. I urge her to work with Cash Access UK and LINK to ensure that she has the best chance of securing one of those new 225 banking hubs, as outlined by the industry, in her constituency.

Mr Speaker: We come to the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): After the Budget, the Chancellor wrote to Conservative party members telling them that the Government planned to abolish national insurance. The Economic Secretary said that “national insurance will vanish”, and the Prime Minister said it was his “ambition” to abolish it. Will the Chancellor confirm whether he asked the Office for Budget Responsibility to cost the Government’s unfunded plan to abolish national insurance contributions?

Jeremy Hunt: I am very glad that the right hon. Lady asks about national insurance cuts, because first she supported them, then she abstained in the Lobby, and now she appears to be against them—like the bankers’ bonus tax, which she was strongly in favour of and then strongly against; like £28 billion of borrowing, which she was strongly in favour of and then strongly against. Is not the actual truth that, where Labour should have an economic policy, there is just a black hole filled with platitudes?

Rachel Reeves: The Chancellor did not even attempt to answer the question. The chair of the OBR told the Treasury Committee the week after the Budget:

“It was not a measure given to us to cost”.

Even the Chancellor’s predecessor, the right hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng), who was sacked for his own kamikaze Budget, said, “If you’re going to

reduce taxes, you have to show at least partially where the money’s going to come from.” So I ask the Chancellor: where will the money come from? Will it come from cuts to the NHS, the state pension and public services? Will it come from increasing taxes, including for pensioners? Or will it come from increasing borrowing? Which one, Chancellor?

Jeremy Hunt: Even Torsten Bell from the left-leaning Resolution Foundation said that the right hon. Lady’s argument that this was a mini Budget-style black hole was nonsense, because we specifically said that we would not fund national insurance cuts from increasing borrowing or cutting spending on public services. I gently ask her, if she wants to put on the mantle of fiscal rectitude, where is Labour going to find literally billions of pounds to fund unfunded spending pledges, from grid decarbonisation to NHS waiting lists? We all know what that will lead to: higher taxes, like under every Labour Government in history.

T4. [902082] **Nickie Aiken** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): St Mary’s in Paddington is a much-loved, much-used hospital in my constituency. Although it was taken off the list of 40 new hospitals to be redeveloped, I am delighted to be working with my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan) and the Minister in the Lords responsible for hospitals to make a case with the trust to ensure that it is redeveloped. Could the Chief Secretary to the Treasury please update the House on the timeframe for making available Government funding so that we can submit the planning business case for the redevelopment?

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Laura Trott): I commend my hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan) on their great work on this project. There appears to be a compelling case, and I know that the programme team at the Department of Health and Social Care is looking closely at the proposal.

T2. [902079] **Wendy Chamberlain** (North East Fife) (LD): The Fife whisky festival took place in Cupar earlier this month, and was a great success. The industry welcomes the freeze in alcohol duty, but notes that it is only for six months. When will the Government provide the longer term consistency that the industry needs?

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Gareth Davies): Our support for the Scotch Whisky Association is long-standing, and it was a pleasure to meet its representatives recently. We have frozen or cut duty for Scottish whisky in fiscal events going back many years. We are representing the Scotch Whisky Association in trade agreements, and that support will endure long into the future.

T5. [902083] **Jill Mortimer** (Hartlepool) (Con): In response to the spring Budget, I have heard from constituents who feel that they may have been forgotten. Under the Conservatives, the number of pensioners living in absolute poverty has been slashed by 200,000 across the country, and we have protected the triple lock, but could my

right hon. Friend please remind me of all the steps that his Department is taking to support Hartlepool's pensioners, so that I can tell them on the doorsteps this weekend?

Jeremy Hunt: I would be delighted to do that. The independent Resolution Foundation said that, because of measures that this Government have taken, pensioners are £1,000 better off in real terms than in 2010. We did two things specifically in the Budget: we put £6 billion into the NHS, which is used more by pensioners than anyone else; and we backed workers' tax cuts to support growth in the economy, which means that we can continue to fund the triple lock for many years to come.

T6. [902084] **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): One of my constituents wrote to me last week about her son Fred. He has Down's syndrome and severe learning disabilities, is profoundly deaf and has an autism diagnosis. His parents and grandparents did the right thing and put money into a child trust fund for him. Fred will be 18 next month, but he lacks the capacity to access his money and there is no easy way for his parents to do so. Will the Chancellor work with colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions and the Ministry of Justice to unlock the money for Fred and an estimated 80,000 disabled young people?

Bim Afolami: I am happy to meet the hon. Member to discuss the precise circumstances of his constituent's case. In general terms, it is a priority for us to ensure that people get access to that money if it is due to them.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Treasury Committee.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): Did the Chancellor see an article yesterday in which the independent director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies confirmed that the average earner in the UK now has the lowest effective personal tax rate since 1975—lower than in America, France, Germany or any G7 country? Someone on £35,000—the average earnings for those working full time—faces an income tax and national insurance bill of nearly £2,000 less than they would have done on the same real earnings back in 2010. Does the Chancellor agree that now he has changed the rules on residence and domicile, the Opposition's unfunded spending plans could lead to higher taxes—

Mr Speaker: Order. These are topical questions, and I want to get to the Members who have not yet been called.

Jeremy Hunt: I thank my hon. Friend for her excellent question. She is right that it is not just the lowest effective tax rate for someone on average earnings since 1975, but the lowest headline tax rate and the lowest tax rate in the G7. That is the fundamental divide in British politics: taxes have gone up, and on the Government Benches we do not think that we have to accept the status quo; on the Opposition Benches they do. Why is that? Because lower taxes mean higher growth.

T7. [902085] **Dame Nia Griffith** (Llanelli) (Lab): A recent survey from the Debt Justice campaign has shown that 13% of adults have missed three or more bill or credit payments in the past six months, and 6.7 million people are now in financial difficulty. Does the Chancellor

accept that for millions of people, getting from one end of the month to the next under the Tories is a nightmarish struggle, and that people feel worse off because they are worse off?

Jeremy Hunt: May I gently correct the hon. Lady? As I said, living standards have risen by £1,700 per household since 2010, and the number of people in absolute poverty is down by 1.7 million. She is right to talk about the debt pressures that people face, which is why in the Budget we abolished the £90 fee for debt relief orders, having talked to Citizens Advice.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): The proposed changes to wine duty will add huge costs and complexity to business. Further to my Westminster Hall debate, will my hon. Friend meet me and representatives of wine businesses to hear their concerns, and make permanent the easement that is due to end on 1 February next year?

Gareth Davies: My hon. Friend is talking about the largest and most significant reform of our alcohol duty system in 140 years. We are making it more simple by saying: the stronger the alcohol by volume, the more duty paid. We introduced the wine easement to give the wine industry two years to prepare for the changes. I continue to engage with the industry, and I will continue to engage with him.

T8. [902086] **Sarah Owen** (Luton North) (Lab): Two years ago, P&O Ferries sacked 786 workers and replaced them with agency staff paid less than the minimum wage. After that fiasco, the Government promised to review all contracts with the company. Why is it that, since then, the Government have spent £900,000 directly with P&O Ferries? Why are the Conservatives so comfortable spending taxpayers' money on rewarding the appalling treatment of working people?

Jeremy Hunt: Let me say to the hon. Lady, who I very much enjoyed working with on the Select Committee, that our record is 800 more people in work for every single day of Conservative government since 2010. What will wreck that is Labour's new deal for workers, which the president of the CBI says will destroy the job-creating machine that the UK has become.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): I commend the Treasury for good fiscal policies that have resulted in inflation falling significantly since the pandemic. When might we see a commensurate fall in interest rates?

Jeremy Hunt: I am very sorry to disappoint my hon. Friend, but Chancellors never comment on decisions made by the Bank of England on interest rates. What I can say is that the Office for Budget Responsibility predicted at the Budget that inflation would fall to around target in the next few months. That gives the best possible prospect of interest rates starting to fall.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Ind): Last night on BBC's "Newsnight", it was clear that the needs of Wales, in particular on health, are not met in the UK. When has the UK Government ever given England Barnett consequential based on needs in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland? Surely the model of spending under which the Government in England decides for England, and everyone else gets a consequential of

that, must end. Nordic countries do not calculate spend as a percentage of their neighbours' spend. Why is the spending of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland dependent on what England decides to spend?

Laura Trott: The Barnett consequential formula is long established. It gives a clear framework, through which we can understand spending in the devolved nations. The hon. Gentleman will know that it means higher per-person funding in each of the devolved nations than in England.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is seeking to make the tax system more family friendly, including by collecting household data in the years ahead, but being family friendly includes looking after the family home. Sweden abolished inheritance tax in 2004. The result was a boom in entrepreneurship, economic growth and higher tax revenues. Will he, or one of the excellent ministerial team, meet me to discuss that further?

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Nigel Huddleston): I thank my right hon. Friend for his advocacy in support of families. We have had conversations, and I know that he very much welcomes the changes to the high-income child benefit charge and child benefit. We always keep taxes under review, and I am always delighted to meet him.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Does the Chancellor accept that he has caused a great deal of anxiety and further distrust among those who have been infected and affected by the contaminated

blood scandal by not making any provision in his Budget for compensation, although the recommendations for compensation were made to the Government last April?

Jeremy Hunt: I gently say to the right hon. Lady that I stand by every word I said when I gave evidence, twice, to the infected blood inquiry. The Government have an absolute moral responsibility, not just to pay the compensation owed, but to pay it as speedily as possible.

Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): I would like to join the Economic Secretary to the Treasury and my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Anna Firth) in discussing the closure of banks. Barclays bank, in particular, is both shameful and shameless in this regard. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need full transparency on the decisions made by Link and the Financial Conduct Authority? Something we learned yesterday that may be of interest to those in Chorley, Mr Speaker, is that the criteria take into consideration only the town plus areas within a 1 km circumference. That is not how the rural economy works. Will the Economic Secretary work with me to ensure that the criteria take into account the wider economy?

Bim Afolami: My right hon. Friend is another good example of a Member who is an excellent champion for her constituents, on this issue and so many others. As for her specific point, it is right for the industry to work out how it will increase provision and adapt the criteria for rural areas, but I will work with her to ensure that the banking hubs are rolled out in an equitable way, to rural as well as more urban areas.

Israel and Gaza

12.35 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab) *Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State if he will make a statement on the situation in Gaza and Israel.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question.

Israel suffered the worst terrorist attack in its history on 7 October last year. The scenes that we saw on that day were appalling, and Hamas's disregard for civilian welfare continues today, more than five months later. We remember all the time those who are still being held hostage and their families, and we call once again for their immediate release. However, we naturally remain deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the impact of the conflict on all Palestinian civilians. We have borne witness to death and displacement on a vast scale. More than 1,700,000 people have had to leave their home, many on multiple occasions. We are deeply concerned about the growing risk of famine, exacerbated by the spread of disease, and, of course, about the terrible psychosocial impacts of the conflict, which will be felt for years to come.

We are totally committed to getting humanitarian aid to all those people in Gaza who desperately need it, doing so either ourselves or through UN agencies and British or other charities. We and our partners are pushing to get aid in through all feasible means, by land, sea and air. We have trebled our aid funding to the Occupied Palestinian Territories this year, providing just under £100 million, of which £70 million has been delivered as humanitarian assistance. On 13 March a further 150 tonnes of UK aid arrived in Gaza, including 840 family tents, 13,440 blankets, nearly 3,000 shelter kits and shelter fixing kits, 6,000 sleeping mats, and more than 3,000 dignity kits. A field hospital, provided through UK aid funding to UK-Med, arrived in Gaza from Manchester last Friday. This facility, staffed by UK and local medics, will be able to treat more than 100 patients a day. Along with Cyprus, the United States, the United Arab Emirates and others, Britain will help to deliver humanitarian aid by sea to a new temporary US military pier in Gaza via a maritime corridor from Cyprus.

We have made it clear, however, that air and sea deliveries cannot be a substitute for the delivery of aid through land routes. Only through those routes can the demand for the volume of aid that is now required be met. We continue to press Israel to open more land crossings for longer, and with fewer screening requirements. There is no doubt that land crossings are the most effective means of getting aid into Gaza, and Israel must do more. There is also no doubt that the best way to bring an end to the suffering is to agree an immediate humanitarian pause, and progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life. Reaching that outcome is the focus of all our diplomatic efforts right now, and a goal that is shared by our international partners. We urge all sides to seize the opportunity, and continue negotiations to reach an agreement as soon as possible.

Mr Lammy: Yesterday, a UN-backed report revealed the shocking reality that famine in Gaza is imminent. Half the population is expected to face catastrophic levels of hunger—the highest number of people ever recorded as being in that category under this system. Only twice in 20 years have famine conditions been reached, but what distinguishes the horror in Gaza from what has come before is that it is not driven by drought or natural disaster; it is man-made. It is the consequence of war. It is the consequence of aid that is available not reaching those who need it. Food is piled up in trucks just a few kilometres away, while children in Gaza are starving. It is unbearable, and it must not go on.

International law is clear: Israel has an obligation to ensure the provision of aid. The binding measures ordered by the International Court of Justice require it. The world has demanded it for months, yet still aid flows are woefully inadequate. Aid actually fell by half between January and February. That is outrageous. The continued restrictions on aid flows are completely unacceptable, and must stop now—just as Hamas must release the hostages now. I do not doubt that the Minister agrees with me, but will he have the courage to say that the ICJ's orders, including on aid, are binding, and that Israel must comply with them? Do the lawyers at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office believe that Israel is currently in compliance with its obligations?

Amid this accelerating hunger crisis, Prime Minister Netanyahu reportedly approved plans for an offensive against Rafah. That would risk catastrophic humanitarian consequences. It would be a disaster for civilians and a strategic mistake. How are the Government working to prevent a further attack on Rafah? The truth is this: it will not be possible to address the crisis in Gaza if the fighting does not stop—and that is also the best way to secure the release of hostages. Will the Government finally join us and dozens of countries, and call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire?

Mr Mitchell: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his questions and comments, which I will try to deal with more or less sequentially. First, he asked me about the reports of famine. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, or IPC, report is clear: it says that famine is a very real scenario. We are doing everything we can to try to head that off, as I set out in my response to the urgent question. In addition to famine, there is also the danger of disease, the lack of health services, and the acute danger from the lack of clean water and effective sanitation. We are doing everything we can to head off the appalling circumstances that the right hon. Gentleman set out.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the number of trucks. I can tell him that on Sunday, 192 trucks did get in, but that is woefully short of what is required. It is more than have been getting in in March, which has averaged 165 each day so far, and in February that figure was only 97—although he will be well aware that before the crisis, more than 500 trucks a day were getting in.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked about the ICJ. As everyone in the House will know, the ICJ judgment is binding. In respect of the offensive against Rafah, the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister, and indeed

all our allies, have consistently warned that an offensive against Rafah at this time would have the most appalling humanitarian consequences.

May I finish by taking the point that the right hon. Gentleman again made about a ceasefire? As far as I am aware, the position of the Labour Front Bench is still the same as the position of the Government: we are calling for an immediate pause so that we can get the hostages out and aid in—followed, we hope, by a sustainable ceasefire. That is what we are working towards.

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

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): May I start by putting on the record my gratitude to the Minister for the Middle East, who made significant representations ahead of Ramadan to reduce tensions in Jerusalem and allow access to the Al-Aqsa mosque, which so far remains calm? The IPC report makes for breathtakingly difficult reading and the humanitarian situation is catastrophic, but it need not be. May I ask that we please push harder on truck entry from Jordan and ensure that it is fully operationalised, and can my right hon. Friend tell me when the House will be formally updated on whether Israel is demonstrating commitment to international humanitarian law?

Mr Mitchell: I thank my hon. Friend for her comments about my colleague Lord Ahmad, the Minister for the Middle East, which I will pass on to him. In respect of international humanitarian law, we are going through the necessary legal processes, which are complex, but I can tell her that as soon as we are in a position to update the House on what we have set out clearly before, we will do so.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I take absolutely no satisfaction in saying that a month ago in this Chamber I said that innocent people will die because of Israel's decision to prevent food from getting to those who need it. The reports of an imminent famine should surprise no one; we have all known that this deliberate, man-made famine was coming. The Foreign Affairs Committee has just returned from al-Arish, on the Egypt-Gaza border, where we saw hundreds and hundreds of lorryloads of food and aid waiting for permission to get into Gaza.

Let us be very clear about our language here: the people of Gaza are not starving; they are being starved. Does the Minister accept that there is no food shortage in the region? Does he accept that people are starving to death just 44 miles from Tel Aviv—the distance between Glasgow and Edinburgh—as a direct result of the Israeli siege and the premeditated decision to cut off food supplies? Does he also accept that starving a civilian population to death is a war crime? Finally, does he still believe that the UK is right, both legally and morally, to continue selling weapons to Israel?

Mr Mitchell: On the hon. Gentleman's final point, he is well aware of the arms sales regime that Britain adopts. As I have said to him before from the Dispatch Box, it is the toughest regime anywhere in the world.

[*Interruption.*] If I may say so, the difference between him and me is that he sees things as we would wish them to be, but we in the Government have to deal with them as they are. That is why we are taking so many steps to try to achieve the release of the hostages, and to get aid and support into Gaza.

One of the points the hon. Gentleman makes is right, and it is echoed by the shadow Foreign Secretary: the way to get aid into Gaza is by road and by truck. Of course we are doing everything we can to explore every way, including the maritime route and dropping aid from the air, but at the end of the day, aid is delivered by road. That is one reason why we are working so closely with Jordan to ensure that the aid route into Gaza by road is enhanced. At the end of the day, that is the right route to get aid in, and we are doing everything we can to try to make sure that it is pursued.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Last time, I asked my right hon. Friend about progress on trying to have a hostage transfer, because right at the core of this conflict is the visceral feeling of the Israelis that they want their people home, which anyone can understand. Has any progress been made, and would he like to update the House on where we are with that?

Mr Mitchell: I completely agree with my right hon. and learned Friend, which is why trying to get the hostages home and out of Gaza, and trying to get food in, are absolutely our twin objectives. In an extremely difficult circumstance, Britain is certainly right at the front of all countries in trying to achieve that. It would not be sensible for me to give the House a running commentary on hostage release, but he will have seen that negotiations have resumed in Qatar. Obviously, everyone in the House will hope that those negotiations are both speedy and successful.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): A new independent multi-agency investigation by the United Nations into an Israeli military airstrike on a residential compound housing an emergency medical team—including from Medical Aid for Palestinians, a UK charity—has found that it most likely involved a 1,000 lb US-manufactured bomb fired from an F-16 jet. Those F-16s include parts supplied by the UK. Can the Minister today set out conclusively that no parts supplied by the UK were used to bomb a compound housing medical staff from a UK charity—will he rule that out?

Mr Mitchell: The events that the hon. Gentleman describes are appalling, and what the British Government would say is that there must be a full and transparent inquiry and examination into how those events took place.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): It remains incredible that some people in this place can barely utter a word of criticism of the Hamas regime in Gaza, who themselves are being accused of stealing and hoarding aid. With regard to the operation in Rafah, the Israeli Government have been very clear that hostages are being held there and that some of them have been subjected to sexual violence and other abuse. Are we saying to the Israeli Government that they have no right to go in and seek to rescue those hostages?

Mr Mitchell: No. As my hon. Friend knows, we have been absolutely clear throughout that Israel has the right to self-defence, and what he is describing is covered by the right to self-defence. He sets out eloquently that absolute blame for what has happened lies with Hamas for perpetrating the events of 7 October, and once again he is absolutely right to set out that context.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): We are talking as if famine is imminent, but the fact is that the UN reports that 27 Palestinian children have already died from starvation and hunger. Josep Borrell has said that hunger should not be used as a weapon of war, and I hope that the Minister would agree. We need that ceasefire immediately. We need it to get the hostages out, we need it to get aid in, and we need it to get all the killing to stop. My question to the Minister is simple. What we are doing is not working, but there is one more thing we can do, which is to change how we vote at the Security Council. Will the UK stop abstaining and join the rest of the world in calling for that immediate ceasefire now?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady speaks on these matters with great knowledge and great sincerity, and I greatly respect what she says. The problem with calling for an immediate ceasefire is that it may salve our consciences but it is not deliverable, because neither side in this appalling brutality is willing to embrace a ceasefire. That is why the policy of the British Government is to argue in every way we can for a pause, so that we can get the hostages out and get aid in, which can then lead to a sustainable ceasefire. That is what we will continue to do in all international fora, including the United Nations.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): Over the past few months we have all listened to the Minister explaining that the Government have been begging, pleading with and pressing the Israeli Government to allow more aid in, but seemingly to little effect. Has he now reached the conclusion that the Israeli Government are wilfully obstructing the entrance of aid into the Gaza strip? If so, that would presumably be a breach of the International Court of Justice's ruling, and indeed of international humanitarian law. What would be the consequence of that conclusion?

Mr Mitchell: I do not agree with my right hon. Friend's premise, because I do not think we are in the position to reach that judgment, but the point he is making is that it is essential to get more food, aid, support and medicine into Gaza, and every day the British Government are working intently to that end.

Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Mr Speaker,

"Famine is a reality...the highest hunger level of anywhere else in the world in terms of total numbers...all manmade...A ceasefire is an absolute requirement".

Those are the words of Matthew Hollingsworth, the country director of the World Food Programme, and of the UN Secretary-General. Starvation is indeed being used as a weapon of war. In Gaza, it is clear that Israel is engineering a famine for more than 2 million civilians. It is also clear that UK diplomacy has failed, so the Minister must now indicate what action the Government will take to escalate pressure to stop Israel's military

assault, to demand a ceasefire and to ensure that emergency assistance is provided through UNWRA to those being starved to death.

Mr Mitchell: I think that many people in Israel and elsewhere will find part of what the hon. Lady has said profoundly offensive. She is right to say that the characteristics of famine are present in Gaza, as I set out in my earlier response, and that is why we are doing everything we can, together with our allies, to get as much food and support into Gaza as possible.

Sir Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): Officials on the ground have stated that Hamas are appropriating—or misappropriating—as much as 60% of the humanitarian aid entering the Gaza strip. This is part of a long pattern of prioritising fighters, abusing aid to produce rockets and using construction materials to build hundreds of miles of tunnels for their terror activities. We know that they do it; they have done it for years and they are doing it now. Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that Hamas are flagrantly disregarding the humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza, while Israel has been increasing the amount of aid going in exponentially?

Mr Mitchell: I very much agree with my right hon. and learned Friend that Hamas are using ordinary people in Gaza as a human shield. It is utterly repugnant as well as completely against international humanitarian law and, like him, I condemn it.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): Humanitarian organisations have been warning repeatedly that this would happen. A group of us met them last week, and when this conflict started I met Islamic Relief, which is based in my constituency. We now end up here, where we are seeing healthcare being attacked and systematically degraded. We are seeing no safe zones left. We are told of the onset of famine, and that the number of people being killed keeps rising. Will the Minister finally please listen to the calls of Members across this House, of the international communities and of the people working on the ground and call for an immediate ceasefire and unrestricted aid?

Mr Mitchell: I have set out several times already today why calling for an immediate ceasefire may make us feel better but is not a practical resolution. That is why—[*Interruption.*] There is no difference between the analysis that the hon. Lady makes, and the NGOs in her constituency, and my analysis. The question is: what do we do about it? That is why Britain, along with our allies, is continuously, on a 24/7 basis, doing everything practical that we can to get more food and support into Gaza.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): My right hon. Friend has mentioned the floating pier to be constructed by the United States. What assurances has he received that the pier will be used solely for the delivery of humanitarian aid and not, as has been suggested, subsequently repurposed for military use?

Mr Mitchell: It is early days yet to see precisely how that maritime initiative will deliver, but I do not believe that what my right hon. Friend fears will be allowed to

happen as we tackle that issue. We are giving strong support to all mechanisms for getting aid into Gaza—air, sea and land—but he, like me, will understand that the best mechanism is always by land.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I do not think I have ever received as many emails of concern from constituents as I have about the situation in Gaza. As has already been said, over 500,000 Palestinians are at starvation levels and 27 children and three adults have died so far as a result of starvation and dehydration. In the words of Medical Aid for Palestinians:

“This is not happening because the rains have failed or there has been a poor harvest. It is because...the Israeli authorities refuse to allow enough food into Gaza”.

So I have this question for the Minister, and my Edinburgh South West constituents will be listening to the answer: does he agree that starvation as a weapon of war is a war crime?

Mr Mitchell: The point that I hope the hon. and learned Lady will make to her Edinburgh constituents is that she and I, the Government and the whole House are intent on ensuring that more food and more support get into Gaza as rapidly as possible. That is what the Government are doing every day.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): I welcome the hard work that the Minister is doing to get more aid in, to bring an end to the fighting and to get the hostages released, but it is appalling to think that large numbers of innocent people, including children, are about to starve when there is aid just over the border. He is right that aid must flow across the border and that it is better to transport it in trucks, but if that is not possible, we must think of this like the Berlin airlift. We have to get aid in by sea and by airdrops. I welcome what the Americans are doing to drop aid on the shore, and we have to do whatever it takes to get the aid to the kids who are going to starve unless we get it to them.

Mr Mitchell: I completely agree with the sentiments that my hon. Friend expresses so profoundly. He is right that every single mechanism must be explored, but he will know that the amount of aid we can drop from the air, the danger to those underneath and the danger of the aid being misappropriated and stolen by Hamas are very real difficulties. He will also be fully aware of the difficulties of maritime entry. That is why we are doing everything we can to argue for more points of entry into Gaza, more trucks and more land routes to get the aid in that is desperately needed.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): The ICJ's interim ruling makes it clear that the killing of Palestinians in Gaza must stop, but it has not; that immediate humanitarian aid must be allowed into Gaza, but it is not; and that the safety and security of civilians must be guaranteed, but it is not. As a result, more than 1 million Palestinians in Gaza are left starving and on the brink of famine, as confirmed by today's IPC report.

The Israeli Government continue to flout international law by using starvation as a weapon of war. Children are starving, civilians are being killed and medical facilities are being attacked. What will it take for this Government to stand with international humanitarian law and oppose

the actions of the Israeli military? How many more innocent Palestinians must be massacred? How many more children must die through starvation? When will the Government call for an immediate ceasefire?

Mr Mitchell: The one thing that is missing from the hon. Gentleman's list is an urgent call for the release of the hostages.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's question, Israel must do more. We set out very clearly the five steps it needs to take: an immediate humanitarian pause; increased capacity for aid distribution inside Gaza; increased humanitarian access through land and maritime routes; expanded types of humanitarian assistance allowed into Gaza, such as shelter and items critical for infrastructure repair; and the resumption of electricity, water and telecommunications services. I hope that we can unite with everyone else in this House on going after those five key aims.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): The Israeli hostages must be released, and innocent Palestinians in Gaza must be supported. The Foreign Affairs Committee met Egyptian President el-Sisi when we were in the Gaza border region a fortnight ago. What particular support can this country provide to the Egyptians on delivering aid and averting a potential humanitarian and refugee crisis if the situation is not stabilised?

Mr Mitchell: I thank my hon. Friend and all the Select Committee members for their work, their visits and the powerful arguments they have added to those of the Government.

In response to my hon. Friend's direct question, I met the head of the Egyptian Red Crescent in Egypt. We are in very close contact to make sure that British aid and British support enhance the excellent efforts that the Red Crescent is doing everything it possibly can to prosecute.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): It is clear that Prime Minister Netanyahu has not taken the slightest notice of anything the British Government or even the Americans have been saying. Mrs Thatcher suspended arms sales to Israel in 1982, and Tony Blair did the same in 2002. What on earth would it take for this Government to follow their example?

Mr Mitchell: The right hon. Gentleman refers to the views of Prime Minister Netanyahu, and he will know that both our Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have engaged directly with Prime Minister Netanyahu to ensure that he is fully aware of what Britain thinks.

The right hon. Gentleman will also be aware that Israel is a pluralist democracy—the only one in the region. He will be aware that Israeli Minister Benny Gantz, whom the Foreign Secretary recently met in London, has different views from Prime Minister Netanyahu. There are many different views, and Britain strongly supports the views that I have set out to the House today.

It is not for Ministers to make policy on arms sales and the arms regime from the Dispatch Box. It is for the proper due processes—as laid down and approved by Parliament, and as laid down in law—and that is what we follow.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): Given the impending famine in Gaza, as outlined by the IPC report, will the UK align with the EU, Sweden, Australia, Canada and many other countries by restoring funding to UNRWA as the most effective way to urgently and immediately scale up the delivery of aid, food and medical supplies to Gaza?

Mr Mitchell: As my hon. Friend knows, we expect the report from the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services and, indeed, the interim report from Catherine Colonna, the former Foreign Minister of France, tomorrow, and we will read it with very great interest. Catherine Colonna is working with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute in Sweden, the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Norway and the Danish Institute for Human Rights, and we hope that her report will show a road map by which funding to UNRWA from Britain and many other countries can be restored.

My hon. Friend will equally be aware that UNRWA is fully funded for some months hence, and that British funding is fully paid up until into the next financial year.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): It is estimated that people in northern Gaza have gone entire days and nights without heating at least 10 times over the last 30 days. Lord Cameron has said that UNRWA is the only body with a distribution network in Gaza, and the Minister mentions the report that will hopefully be available tomorrow. Will he assure the House that the UK Government will take a decision on resuming funding as soon as possible, and at least before the end of this month, which is only 12 days away?

Mr Mitchell: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a precise timetable, but I can answer yes to his question about it being done as soon as we think it is possible to do so.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Every life matters, whether Muslim, Christian, Jewish, another faith or no faith. At the centre of this crisis—a crisis started on 7 October by Hamas's unprovoked attack on innocent civilians—whatever their faith or lack of faith, are children, women, men and vulnerable people who are suffering right now as we go off to our lunch or afternoon tea.

The Minister will know that I have been supportive of the Government, and that I will continue to be, but I hope he will note a change in tone. The figures vary, but it is estimated that 30,000 civilians and roughly 10,000 Hamas terrorists have been killed in Gaza. If it is true that 10,000 other terrorists are despicably hiding in Rafah among the civilian population, making it difficult to deliver aid, are we likely to see another 30,000 civilians killed so that Israel can find those terrorists? What is the British Government's position? Is this something the Minister would support?

Mr Mitchell: The awful symmetry that my right hon. Friend sets out is certainly one that no one wants to see. But the point he made so eloquently earlier in his question, setting out the views and feelings he holds, is widely reflected across the House, and I agree with him.

Kim Leadbeater (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Half the population of Gaza is at risk of imminent famine, described by Melanie Ward of Medical Aid for Palestinians as meaning starvation, destitution, acute malnutrition and death. So does the Minister agree that all available aid corridors must be opened without delay and that there must be an immediate ceasefire, to enable food, water and urgent medical supplies to reach more than 1 million people in desperate need? All hostages must be released and this living hell must end.

Mr Mitchell: I agree with almost everything the hon. Lady has said, but she will be aware, from what I have said today and previously, that calling for an immediate ceasefire is not, in the opinion of the British Government, a practical proposition. That is why we continually argue for a humanitarian pause, so that we can get the hostages out and food in, followed by a sustainable ceasefire.

Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con): Yesterday, the Israeli Prime Minister vowed to press ahead with the assault on Rafah, despite warnings from the international community. The prospect of millions in Rafah, who are there only as they desperately escape conflict to the north, being subjected to further suffering is intolerable. Will the Minister update the House on work that is going on with our international partners to make clear those concerns to the Israeli Government, while continuing to press Hamas to release the hostages?

Mr Mitchell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her call for the release of the hostages. In respect of any military operations in Rafah, may I draw her attention to the words of the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister about the terrible dangers, loss of life and humanitarian consequences involved in that? She, like me and, I hope, everyone else in the House, will be hoping that no such operation goes ahead.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I have no problem condemning Hamas, but I also have no problem condemning the use of starvation as an act of war. Israel has control on the ground in Gaza—enough to oversee the distribution of aid and to make sure it gets to the people who need it most. Do the Government agree that Israel, as the occupying force, has a legal duty to oversee the distribution of that aid?

Mr Mitchell: The important point about the distribution of aid is that it should be able to get into Gaza, preferably through road and land routes. I set out for the House earlier the amounts that are getting in. Although they are increasing, they are nothing like adequate and do not come anywhere near the numbers before 7 October. That is why the Government are doing everything they can to augment those figures.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): We all want to see a ceasefire that is sustainable and holds out the prospect of a lasting peace. But the very definition of the word “ceasefire” means that both sides have to agree to end hostilities. Does my right hon. Friend agree that anyone calling for an immediate ceasefire needs to make it clear that that must include Hamas releasing the hostages, ceasing all hostilities and committing to a future peace?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend is correct in what he says, but the important point, which I have repeatedly made in the House, is that in order to have a ceasefire we have to have agreement from those taking part in these actions that they will abide by a ceasefire. Israel has the right of self-defence and the right to protect itself from the appalling acts that Hamas perpetrated on 7 October ever taking place again. Hamas have made it clear that they wish to repeat those awful acts. Those things do not sound to me like a strong basis for having a ceasefire.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): Three standout statements from today have been that starvation is being used as a weapon of war; Israel is provoking famine; and the UK is still selling arms to Israel. When will the Minister understand the damning nature of this and the damage it is doing to the UK's international reputation—or, rather, what is left of it?

Mr Mitchell: We have been clear that Israel has the right of self-defence but it must abide by international humanitarian law and the rules of war. Britain is one of the leading nations on finding ways to get aid into Gaza and helping our allies and other regional powers to do everything we can to get the hostages out. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is proud of our country's intervention in both those respects.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): I welcome the recent news that the UK will be sending a UK Aid field hospital to Gaza. What assurances have been sought and what assurances have been given in respect of sufficient force protection for all the staff there, some of whom may be British?

Mr Mitchell: We are acutely conscious of the way in which humanitarian workers—not just in Gaza, but all around the world—put themselves, unarmed, in harm's way for the sake of their fellow human beings. My hon. Friend is right to say that a field hospital provided by UK Aid funding to UK-Med arrived in Gaza from Manchester last Friday. That facility is staffed by UK and local medics, who will be able to treat more than 100 patients a day. We are acutely conscious of the contribution they are making and we do everything we can to ensure that they are protected.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): To any reasonable and informed observer, the conduct of the war in Gaza by Israel contravenes basic international humanitarian law, in failing to distinguish between armed combatants and civilians, in using force beyond what is militarily necessary, and in offences against the prohibition of inflicting unnecessary injury, and it is wholly disproportionate. More than 100,000 Palestinians have now been killed or injured by Israeli forces in Gaza since last October. The Minister relies on Israel being a democracy that is capable of abiding by its legal obligations, but the overwhelming evidence is that it is not doing so, so what legal advice has he received about the complicity of and dangers to our country in failing to take sufficient action under the relevant treaties to which this country is a signatory, to deter such gross breaches of international humanitarian law?

Mr Mitchell: As I said, we continue to assess Israel's commitment and capability to comply with international humanitarian law. Those assessments are supported by a detailed evidence base, conflict analysis, reporting from charities, non-governmental organisations, international bodies and partner countries, statements and reports by the Israeli Government, and their track record of compliance. We take all of that into account in making our judgments. I point out to the hon. Gentleman that when it comes to targeting and military action, the Israel Defence Forces have their own lawyers embedded in those units, in much the same way of prudence that the British military do. That is not something we see in any other force in the region and it should give some confidence that the Israelis are seeking to abide by international humanitarian law.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): I welcome reports that Israel is opening new routes to directly deliver humanitarian aid into northern Gaza, amid a slowdown in UN operations and the widespread Hamas misappropriation of that aid, which was referenced earlier. Significantly, at the same time, every day the IDF documents more and more Hamas infrastructure, weapons and missiles within civilian buildings—this week at al-Shifa Hospital and last month underneath UNRWA's own headquarters. So is the grim reality not that as long as Hamas remain in control of Gaza, no matter how many times people cry for a ceasefire, there can be no peace?

Mr Mitchell: As my hon. Friend sets out, it is clear that there is no place for Hamas in any future for Gaza. What happened on 7 October is uniquely appalling and I agree with him that until Hamas are removed from Gaza, the opportunity of peace is very limited.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The UN's special rapporteur has been crystal clear that arms sales to Israel for use in Gaza are unlawful, given the clear risk that they will be used to violate international humanitarian law. Yet the Government have consistently refused to disclose whether licences, for example, for F-35 fighter planes, have been reviewed, let alone amended. Will the Minister take the opportunity finally to give Parliament a straight answer on this? I do not want to be told that reviews are possible, because we know that. I want to know whether those reviews have happened and whether he is going to publish the details. I do not want him to tell us simply that the arms regime in the UK is the toughest in the world. I know that, but it gives no reassurance at all to the more than 1 million people facing famine in Gaza right now.

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady asks me whether these matters are kept under review, and I can assure her that they are always kept under review. Equally, they are not decided at the whims of Ministers standing at the Dispatch Box; they are decided through a detailed, proper, legally governed, code-governed process, and that, as always, is what the Government are doing.

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): As we debate this topic, children are starving to death in Gaza. Babies are so malnourished that UNICEF says that they do not have the energy to cry. Famine is not just imminent; it is happening, according to the head of Refugees International. This is not a natural disaster and it is not

[Zarah Sultana]

accidental; it is intentional. Israel is using starvation as a weapon of war to collectively punish the Palestinian people. Israel blocks food from entering Gaza while bombing the people trapped inside. Will the Minister finally admit that officials have warned him that Israel is breaking international humanitarian law, or does his whole Department refuse to accept the truth that Israel is committing war crime after war crime in Gaza?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady uses florid language to describe these matters, but I hope that she will agree that the right thing is to do everything we possibly can to get the hostages out, support the people whom she so eloquently describes, and get support into Gaza, and that is what the Government are seeking to do.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Every month in Hammersmith, we hold “Ukrainian open house” to bring together all those supporting Ukrainian families who have fled that war. Every month, I am asked why there are not similar visa schemes to allow Palestinians to join their relatives in the UK, or to be hosted by families who wish to give them refuge here. What is the Government’s answer to that?

Mr Mitchell: The Government’s answer is that the two positions are not analogous; they are very, very different. The hon. Member will know that we are doing everything we can to help individual cases in both instances, and we will continue to do so.

Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Save the Children has reported that 1.1 million people across Gaza are facing catastrophic food insecurity at the hands of Israel, with one in three children acutely malnourished. Does the Minister agree that Israel’s tactic of starving the Palestinian people is a war crime?

Mr Mitchell: As I have set out several times, we are doing all we can to make sure that the necessary food and resources get into Gaza, so the point that Save the Children makes in the evidence that the hon. Member read out is addressed, and we will continue to do precisely that.

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): The Minister will know that the UK supplies approximately 15% of the components used in F-35 stealth bombers currently being deployed in Gaza—the very same bombers allegedly being deployed from RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus. Earlier this month, a Dutch court ordered the country’s Government to block all exports of F-35 parts to Israel after concerns that they were being used, in violation of international law, during the ongoing war in Gaza. Will the Minister commit today to suspending the supply of F-35 components, and will he also confirm whether RAF bases are being used as a launch pad for bombing in Gaza, or indeed, in any military operations supportive of the IDF and the Israeli military forces?

Mr Mitchell: I repeat that these decisions are not made at the whim of a Minister standing at the Dispatch Box. They are made in the normal way through a proper legal and coded practice. The Government will always operate on that basis in these situations.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Canada, Australia, Sweden and the European Union have now confirmed that they will restore the funding to UNWRA, refuting Israel’s position that 450 members of the agency’s staff had participated in the 7 October attack. With people dying from the imminent famine in Gaza and Palestinians being killed trying to get flour to feed their families, the international community holds a degree of responsibility for failing to stop this situation. In light of the catastrophic situation in Gaza, will the Minister commit to restarting and increasing this funding to UNRWA as a matter of urgency?

Mr Mitchell: We have already increased funding significantly, including to UNRWA. The hon. Member will know that Britain is not at the moment in the position of having to make that decision, because we have fully funded what we said we would fund and are not due to provide any further money until the end of April. The answer to his question, I hope, will be contained in the report from the Office for Internal Oversight Services and from Catherine Colonna’s interim report, which we are expecting tomorrow. I know that, like me, he will read it with great care in the hope that it shows a suitable way ahead that we can all endorse.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Can the Minister try to help the House in understanding the Government’s position on who they believe is directly responsible for blocking the aid going into Gaza? What is the Government’s direct response to the comments of the UN Secretary-General, who has said that this is the highest number of people facing catastrophic hunger ever recorded by the integrated food security system anywhere?

Mr Mitchell: Regardless of the accuracy of those final comments, there is no doubt at all, as I set out in my earlier responses, that the IPC report says that “famine is a very real scenario”.

That is why we are trying to do everything we can, by every possible means, to make sure that aid gets into Gaza. I have explained to the House the difficulties of the air and maritime options, but those difficulties are not stopping us from pursuing those opportunities. At the end of the day, it is by agreement with Israel that we will get more trucks in, open up more points of entry, and find other ways of bringing aid in by road. We are pursuing all those matters and will continue to do so.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): The need for an arms embargo in Israel was laid out by the International Court of Justice in January due to genocidal risk and serious harm to civilians. Since then, we have had no action from Ministers. UN experts have rightly called for hostage exchange and release, but they have also warned that the transfer of weapons or ammunition to Israel should cease immediately. We have seen more than 13,000 children killed, the destruction of 60% of civilian homes and hospitals destroyed. Water and food supplies are so low that Gaza is already in the midst of a catastrophic, man-made, state-made famine.

The Minister boasted moments ago that the UK has an arms licensing framework with some of the toughest regulations in the world. It is plain for all to see that that claim is in tatters. When will Ministers finally match

their words with actions, hold the Israeli Government to these standards, and hear the calls from aid agencies, the UN and my constituents to stop arms sales to Israel and to stop the onslaught against innocent Palestinian men, women and children?

Mr Mitchell: As I have repeatedly said to the House, the issue of arms sales is dealt with in a legal and coded way. The Government have no intention of varying from that process. It has been shown, as I have said before, that we have the toughest regulatory regime in the world and we continually keep it under review. None the less, it is important that these things are done properly and in accordance with the rules laid down by Parliament and laid down by the law, and we will not vary that.

In respect of the early part of the hon. Member's question, I agree that it is essential that we are able to get more supplies into Gaza. We spend all our time arguing for new ways of entry and for new opportunities to get aid in, but, as I set out in our five key aims, we want the resumption of electricity, water and telecommunication services as well as infrastructure repair to start as soon as possible.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): Across the House, we are all desperate to see the release of the hostages, but the negotiations for their release are not aided by the treatment of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails and detention centres. The Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz*, has reported that 27 Palestinian detainees have died in Israeli custody since the war and some during direct questioning. It has reported beatings, abuse, torture, sexual assault, and prisoners being prevented access to doctors, lawyers and medication. A magistrate in Jerusalem has reported that the prisoners are detained in cages not fit for human beings. Now we have had the family of Marwan Barghouti, the Palestinian leader who many hope will secure peace, say that he has been beaten with clubs by guards. Will the Minister demand that the Israeli Government provide access to the detention centres and prisons for humanitarian bodies to investigate these abuses and bring forward a report, which, hopefully, will end the abuse and assist in the negotiations for the release of the hostages?

Mr Mitchell: The right hon. Gentleman has put his finger specifically on the treatment of detainees. As he will be aware, the treatment of detainees is governed by international humanitarian law and the Geneva convention. He will have seen what the Foreign Secretary has said about the treatment of detainees, and Britain has consistently called for an inquiry, and for transparency in that inquiry, into any alleged abuses.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): The Minister has laid great weight this afternoon on the legal and coded process that governs the export of arms, but a new international humanitarian law compliance assessment process cell has been created in his Department. Will he publish every assessment that that cell has made of Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law, and will he tell the House whether the threshold has now been reached to review or cancel any extant open general export licence for arms sales?

Mr Mitchell: The right hon. Gentleman has served at a senior level in government and knows what Governments do and do not publish. However, he can rest assured that when we receive advice on international humanitarian law, we look at it extremely carefully, and when the Law Officers make their judgments on this matter, we come to the House and update it. That is what we will do in due course.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Many of us in this place have been calling since November for the release of the hostages, the removal of Hamas, an immediate bilateral ceasefire, and humanitarian aid. Sometimes, it seems the only thing that has changed is that the situation has got worse for people in Gaza. My constituents write to me constantly. They feel that the Israeli Government are ignoring pleas, and that the people of Palestine have been abandoned. The Minister said that he would do whatever it took in this situation—I have every respect for him and believe him when he says that.

Does the Minister accept that one of the biggest barriers to peace is illegal Israeli settlement in the west bank? Recently, there were sanctions against four Israeli settlers who had committed human rights abuses against Palestinians. The Liberal Democrats hope that that is just the start. Will the UK Government consider sanctioning Ministers Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, who promote that extremist agenda, and all the settler movements connected to them in a way that finally makes a difference to what is happening?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady will be aware that Britain has consistently condemned settler violence. We have made it clear that we expect those responsible to be caught, arrested, tried and punished for it, and we will continue to do so. As she mentions, four settlers have been sanctioned. We do not discuss on the Floor of the House the operations of the sanctions regime, but she may rest assured that the opinion of the Government is that the settlements and the acts that she described are illegal, and we will do everything we can to ensure that they stop.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): As MPs from right across the House have said this afternoon, children in Gaza are starving—they are being starved—and we cannot tolerate it. If the UK's standing on the rules-based order and international humanitarian law is to be worth anything around the world, the ICJ ruling must be binding, and there must be consequences for failure to comply with it. What are those consequences?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady says that people are starving in Gaza. Everyone agrees that that is the case. The issue is what we can constructively do to bring about an end to the very worrying starvation figures that have been revealed this week. We are doing and will continue to do everything we can. I have set out at some length to the House the various different ways in which we are trying to achieve that.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I will follow on from the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), which went to the heart of the situation. My constituents are heartbroken by the images that they are being sent from Gaza of

[Andrew Gwynne]

children dying of hunger, and they want to know why the world is largely doing nothing to help them. I believe in the rules-based system, which is under enormous strain right now from a variety of different quarters. International law matters, and we must show leadership when it comes to the rulings of international institutions such as the ICJ. What is Britain doing to ensure that Israel and other parties hold to the rule of international law and the judgments of the ICJ?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman says that his constituents are heartbroken by what is happening; we are all heartbroken by what is happening. The issue is what we do about it. I have set out throughout the course of the last hour a number of ways in which Britain is showing real leadership in trying to address the humanitarian situation and to ensure that negotiations to get the hostages out are successful. We will, along with our allies, continue to bend every sinew to ensure that everything that can be done is done.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The Minister spoke of the detailed evidence that his Government are relying on, but the world's media are prevented from reporting inside Gaza almost entirely. If we saw the daily reality of life there in more detail, I suspect the international pressure on Israel would be even stronger. What are the UK Government doing to ensure that any deliberate targeting of journalists—particularly Palestinian journalists—who are protected under international humanitarian law, is being passed on to the International Criminal Court for its investigation into war crimes?

Mr Mitchell: As I have set out, in the IDF—as in the British military—the issue of targeting is, unusually, governed by legal advice. Lawyers are embedded with the people who are making those decisions. In respect of the media, any such targeting would be absolutely outrageous. I pay tribute to the brave journalists who are ensuring that accurate reporting comes back from Gaza and the middle east.

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): I want to make it clear that I have opposed Hamas since 2007, I deplore the action taken on 7 October, and I totally believe that the hostages on both sides must be released. However, I agree with the Minister that the Israeli blockade is leading to famine and to death and displacement. Young children are dying of malnutrition and hunger. He says continually that the two sides will not sit down together. Why, then, does he not put a Security Council resolution to the United Nations to ensure that something is done on an international level, such as putting in a peacekeeping force to deal with the issue and allow people to continue normal lives?

Mr Mitchell: The House will understand that the issue of a policing force inside Gaza is premature. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments about Hamas and for what he said about deploring all the things that Hamas have done—I agree with him about that. He sets out the scale of humanitarian need. Throughout this urgent question, I have been setting

out how Britain is, along with our allies, seeking to help move the dial to get more aid and support into Gaza and get the hostages out.

In terms of the United Nations Security Council and its resolutions, the hon. Gentleman will know that Britain is one of the leading architects of those resolutions in our role as one of the permanent five in New York. I pay tribute to Barbara Woodward, Britain's permanent representative at the United Nations. The British mission at the UN is working ceaselessly to ensure that there is agreement on resolutions that can help bring an end to this.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): The unfolding famine is entirely man-made and is being used as a weapon of war by Israel. It is a war crime, and those who continue to support that collective punishment and deny aid are complicit in this unfolding tragedy. Last week, Janez Lenarčič, head of humanitarian aid and crisis management at the European Commission, said that neither he nor any other UNRWA donor had been presented by Israel with any evidence of UNRWA involvement in the 7 October attacks. When the International Development Committee visited northern Egypt recently and spoke to the head of UNRWA, they also had no evidence, so my question is very simple: has the Minister been presented with any evidence to support his decision to pause the UK's life-or-death funding to UNRWA?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman will have seen the evidence that has been put before the international community, and will know that it was sufficiently strong for the head of UNRWA to immediately act against some of his officials. On all these matters, tomorrow we will hear the interim report from Catherine Colonna, the former French Foreign Minister. We look forward to studying that report when we have a chance to read it, in the hope that it will take matters forward.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): As the Minister will be aware, thousands across Israel have protested in opposition to the approach that Prime Minister Netanyahu is taking, including the hostage families—they know that the situation in Gaza will not help release their family members. People in Israel see what is happening to the Palestinians; they hear the words of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, who has said today that what is happening and Israel's continuing restrictions on aid

“may amount to the use of starvation as a method of war”.

He is explicit about that and the concerns that it raises. I understand the Minister telling us that he does not want to make policy from the Dispatch Box, but will he tell us whether he has sought explicit legal advice on the question of whether Israel is now committing a war crime in its use of starvation—yes or no?

Mr Mitchell: We are always in receipt of legal advice, and we act on it. When we receive it, we take the necessary steps, as the hon. Lady would expect.

In the first part of her question, the hon. Lady she set out a point that I was making earlier, more eloquently than I did: Israel is a pluralist democracy. There are different views, and I tweeted last weekend about the extraordinary, moving work being done by two people

who had come together from opposite sides, whose families had suffered so grievously in the aftermath of 7 October. It is that pluralist democracy that gives us the chance that accountability will be properly followed in Israel, which—as I say—is the only pluralist democracy in that part of the world.

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): The IPC report published today shows that one in three children under two years old in the north of Gaza is now acutely malnourished. In February, that figure was one in six. This month, people of Muslim faith across the world will be observing Ramadan. The situation in Gaza is dire and urgent, so will the Minister call for an immediate ceasefire to ensure that no civilian goes hungry, malnourished or without medical support in Gaza?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman and I both share the desire that people should not go hungry in Gaza. That is why the Government, along with our allies, are working so hard to get more food in. We will continue to do everything we possibly can to make sure that the suffering that has been so eloquently set out by Members from all parts of the House is brought to an end as soon as possible.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Does the deliberate starvation of a civilian population constitute a war crime—yes or no?

Mr Mitchell: There would be, I think, very serious doubt about the term “deliberate starvation”, so I am unable to give a yes or no answer to the hon. Lady’s question.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): We all know that behind Hamas sits the malign power of Iran and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The same is true of Hezbollah and the Houthis. With the Foreign Secretary having been in post for five months, can the Minister update the House on what progress has been made on proscribing the IRGC?

Mr Mitchell: As the right hon. Lady knows, the issue of proscription is not one that we discuss on the Floor of the House, but the arguments for and against are kept under very close review by the Government and will continue to be kept under review.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): To deal with the grave and worsening humanitarian crisis for the sake of the dying children and innocent civilians as Palestinians desperately try to survive and observe the holy month of Ramadan, it is imperative that both sides agree to an immediate ceasefire, which is what I recently voted for in Parliament. Aid in huge quantities is critical, and any attempts by the Israeli Government to block it must be condemned, so what are the UK Government doing to achieve an immediate ceasefire, get hostages released, and put pressure on the Israeli Government to allow unimpeded aid into Gaza?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman will have seen the words of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary about the absolute imperative of getting more aid and humanitarian supplies into Gaza. I have answered the point about an immediate ceasefire on a number of

occasions over the past hour and a quarter. As the hon. Gentleman knows, in order to get a ceasefire, both sides in this terrible conflict need to agree to one, and there is absolutely no indication whatsoever that Hamas have any intention of a ceasefire—indeed, they have made absolutely clear that they wish to perpetrate once again the terrible events that took place on 7 October.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Ind): Hamas’s cold-blooded murder of at least 1,300 Israeli civilians on 7 October was truly abhorrent, but sadly, those horrific numbers are now dwarfed by the number of innocents of all faiths who have had their lives taken away from them in Gaza. I welcome the fact that the Government are moving on their position, but I believe they are going to have to move further and faster to prevent a catastrophe and further loss of innocent lives. The Minister has stated that the International Court of Justice ruling is binding; will he inform the House how that ruling can be enforced?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman’s point about the Government moving on their policy is not true. Basically, the Government have made it clear throughout that we will do everything we possibly can to achieve a pause, so that we can help get the hostages out and food and support into Gaza. We are continuing to do everything we can, night and day, to reach that conclusion.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): The head of the UN, António Guterres, the head of security policy for the EU, Josep Borrell, and multiple accounts on the BBC have all indicated that famine is under way. The Minister has repeatedly said this afternoon that he is moving the dial, and that the Government are doing everything they can. My constituents would like to understand how he is doing absolutely everything he can and how he is showing leadership to ensure that all routes are opened by Israel and that we avoid further human catastrophe. Can he explain that in very practical terms?

Mr Mitchell: I have set out for the House the work that we are doing, in respect of both the maritime corridor and supporting food and medical supplies delivered from the air. At the end of the day, though, those are inevitably going to be relatively small amounts, particularly from the air. The answer is to try to open up more access points into Gaza by road and to make sure that trucks flow more easily through those access points. The British Government have been doing everything we possibly can with our allies to ensure we take that agenda forward, and we will continue to do so. As I set out, a number of tonnes of aid arrived in Gaza on 13 March; a very large number of family tents, blankets, shelter kits, shelter fixing kits, sleeping mats and dignity kits went in. That is on top of the enormous amount of aid we have provided previously to UNRWA, and also to UNICEF, the Egyptian Red Crescent and to other NGOs, charities and medical organisations that are doing everything they can to try to alleviate the suffering in Gaza.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I am absolutely clear that the hostages must be released. I am also absolutely clear that the situation in Gaza has gone from dire to horrendous to cataclysmic, and my

[*Chi Onwurah*]

constituents do not understand why it is being allowed to continue. The majority leader in the US Senate has identified Netanyahu's ultra right-wing Government as a barrier to peace, and the European Union foreign policy chief has said that Israel, one of the richest and most militarily powerful nations in the world, is "provoking famine". So will the Minister say clearly that it is unacceptable for Israel to prevent aid from entering Gaza? Will he also say clearly what he is actually doing about it—what demands he is making of Israel, what consequences he is setting out to Israel for its actions—beyond wringing his hands?

Mr Mitchell: I thank the hon. Member for her clarity on the issue of the hostages. She asks why all of this is being allowed to continue. I would point out to her, as I have consistently this afternoon, that the Government, along with our allies, are doing everything we possibly can to stop it continuing. She asks me about what else we can do to try to ensure that it does not continue. I would point her to the comments I made in my response to the shadow Foreign Secretary about all the different ways in which Britain, along with our allies, is seeking to alleviate the suffering taking place in Gaza.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Children in Gaza are dying at the fastest rate the world has ever seen, according to the IPC report. Instead of calling out Israel for its culpability, the Government still refuse to sign UN resolutions and they still sell arms to Israel. Their great wheeze is to try to find ways to bypass the Israeli blockade by delivering aid by air or by sea, which is clearly not going to get enough aid in. The Government are not going to admit how absurd their position is, but will the Minister answer this directly: have the Government received legal advice that Israel's hindering aid getting into Gaza violates international law?

Mr Mitchell: The Government keep our legal advice under review at all times. The current legal advice is that Israel has both the capacity and the will to abide by international humanitarian law, and if that position changes as a result of the advice of the Government lawyers, we will of course make that clear to the House.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): We heard this morning how half the population in Gaza—and this is the first time in modern history that such a large population has been affected—is being subjected to famine. We also heard about the absolute imperative that we as a country, and also our allies, obey and abide by international law. Given that, and that the Minister has said that he and his Government are doing all they can, can I ask on behalf of everybody here—and, most importantly, on behalf of my constituents, because they do not understand—what exactly that is, and in apologising for being so blunt, why it seems to be so ineffective?

Mr Mitchell: On the hon. Lady's first point, everyone must abide by international humanitarian law, and Britain is doing everything it can to ensure that the rules of war and international humanitarian law are respected. She asks why our efforts are "so ineffective". I would argue with her wording, but this is not a situation that Britain

is tackling alone. All of us—the Americans, the European Union and those across the region—are doing our very best to ameliorate the suffering going on in Gaza. It is a collective effort, and Britain will not be found wanting in continuing to exert all the pressure we can, along with our allies, to ensure that this situation is brought to a conclusion.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): The horrific famine in Gaza is made even worse by the fact that we know it is man-made. There is no agency better than UNRWA at delivering the small amount of aid that there is currently. I have listened to the Minister's responses, and I have heard him tell the House that there is a report due out tomorrow and that funding from the UK Government remains in place until the end of April, but the end of April is now 43 days away. How will the Minister ensure that there is no break in funding for UNRWA? Will the Government urgently resume the funding so that UNRWA can deliver what little aid there is to the people who so desperately need it?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady is right that UNRWA has the logistics hubs, warehouses, vehicles and infrastructure that are essential for the delivery of aid in Gaza, and everyone understands that. She asks me whether I can guarantee that we will be able to resume funding at the end of April. I very much hope that will be the case. It will be very much dependent on the report tomorrow from the former French Foreign Minister, and indeed on that from the United Nations. We are doing everything we can to advance the case to make sure that we can resume funding when it is possible. I will update the House in due course on the results of those reports and on the judgment that the British Government make at that point.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): This week, Prime Minister Netanyahu confirmed with his Cabinet that he plans to proceed with an operation in Rafah. We know this assault will end in the killing of many civilians, including children, and it will of course impede aid flowing into Rafah, which is the main place where aid now enters Gaza. The consequences will be catastrophic. How is the Minister using the ICJ and sanctions to stop further assaults in Gaza, not least in the light of the comments from the Prime Minister of Israel that

"no international pressure will stop Israel"?

Mr Mitchell: On military operations in Rafah, the hon. Lady will have heard what the Prime Minister has said and the advice he has given to Prime Minister Netanyahu, and she will have heard what the Foreign Secretary has said very clearly indeed. She will have heard what the European Union has said, and indeed what President Biden has said. We very much hope that the Israeli Government and Prime Minister Netanyahu will heed these words, which come not from enemies of Israel, but from friends of Israel.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): One million people face the imminent prospect of famine. Matthew Hollingworth, the country director of the United Nations World Food Programme has confirmed that the situation is reversible. In fact, in January, the

Foreign Secretary—the Minister's boss—confirmed that Israel has a legal obligation as the occupying power to provide food and water to the Gazans. Does the Minister agree that the Israeli Government must allow the full reopening of land bridges into Gaza, and that they should recommence the issuing of new visas for humanitarian workers? Finally, will he confirm whether his Government are in lockstep with Chuck Schumer and President Biden, or with Prime Minister Netanyahu?

Mr Mitchell: We are working incredibly closely at all levels with the American Administration. The hon. Member asks about new visas. We have consistently urged the Israeli Government to grant the UN visas and, indeed, renew visas as swiftly as possible. He is quite right about the effects of famine being reversible, and that is why Britain is seeking to ensure that aid in much greater amounts gets in by road, sea and air in every way we possibly can.

Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab): Famine in Gaza is imminent and the death toll is rising. Like many, including the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, I cannot help but be concerned that continued restriction of aid, and therefore starvation, is being used by the Israeli Government. The holy month of Ramadan risks turning into a further tragedy for millions of Palestinians facing hunger and disease. Stern words just are not cutting it with Netanyahu, so what will it take for the Government to go further, and stop the export and sales of weapons to the Israeli Government? I respect the Minister for saying that he cannot make up policy on the hoof at the Dispatch Box, but when will he be able to stand at the Dispatch Box and give this House answers to the serious questions on arms sales, unimpeded aid, the restoration of UNRWA funding and potential sanctions?

Mr Mitchell: On all those matters, I have been clear to the House about where the Government stand and their direction of travel. The underlying points the hon. Lady makes are the reason why we are arguing with such force and passion for a humanitarian pause in which we could get resources into Gaza and get the hostages out, and such a pause could lead to a sustainable ceasefire. That is what the Government will continue to do.

James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op): We urgently need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, a massive surge in aid, all hostages released, and a lasting peace with a two-state solution. I recently met with Medical Aid for Palestinians to discuss the desperate and unbearable humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Can the Minister explain the details of what the UK Government are doing to press for the necessary food and aid to get into Gaza and, critically, for it to be distributed there rapidly?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is right in his final point about the logistical difficulties. We are working with all the resources we can to make sure that the aid can be delivered and is not siphoned off, pilfered or attacked by people who are very short of food and

desperate to get it. He sets out the importance of a humanitarian pause, hostages being released, and a new political vision of the future for Palestine. Those three things are very much at the heart of what the British Government are seeking to achieve.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his answers to the questions, and his focus on finding a lasting ceasefire and peace, because that is what everyone in this House wants. Will he outline what aid and assistance have been provided to those in the Gaza area who can use arable land to attempt to grow food for community use? Can we in this place do anything more to provide self-sustaining aid?

Mr Mitchell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. The issue of arable land use inevitably takes a bit of a back seat at the moment because of the difficulty growing crops in Gaza, but in a future settlement, and in building towards a two-state solution, that would definitely be part of reconstruction. I very much accept the wisdom of what the hon. Gentleman says on these matters, and I am sure that the issue will be addressed when we reach that stage. I point out to him, as I have mentioned to the House before, that the progress made at Oslo was on the back of appalling events in the second intifada, and we must hope that, in spite of the desperate current events, we are able to lift people's eyes to the political possibilities of a two-state solution in which both Palestine and Israel live in peace behind secure borders. Ensuring that that happens, when the moment comes, is the central aim of the British Government, and a great deal of work and planning is going into what such an initiative would look like.

Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): Over 1 million people in northern Gaza are on the verge of famine, and aid groups are issuing dire warnings of catastrophic levels of hunger and man-made starvation. Just last week, the UN reported that humanitarian aid is being denied or postponed by Israeli authorities. We are not powerless—this Government can and should take action—so what else can the Government do to lobby the Israeli Government on allowing more aid to enter Gaza as a matter of urgency? Do Ministers agree that we need a ceasefire now, and that is the best way to get the release of hostages?

Mr Mitchell: I set out to the House and for the hon. Lady the issues around a ceasefire, and why it is the view of the Government and many others that a pause for humanitarian purposes could lead to a sustainable ceasefire. That is the sensible way to proceed. She asks what more the British Government and others could be doing. I submit that Britain is doing everything it possibly can to achieve aims that are commonly held across this House: bringing an end to the situation in Gaza; getting the hostages home; and getting aid and support into Gaza. I reassure the hon. Lady and the House that we will continue to do everything we can, night and day, until we reach those objectives.

Points of Order

2.4 pm

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. On 19 September 2023, the chair of the Brook House inquiry, Kate Eves, published her report on the mistreatment of individuals detained at the Brook House immigration removal centre. The report contained shocking accounts of incidents at Brook House, including serious problems with the way that force was used by detention staff on detained people. These accounts were so disturbing that the Select Committee on Home Affairs held a private session with the chair of the inquiry. I have met the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group, and later this week we will visit Brook House to discover what progress has been made. We will also hold an oral evidence session on the subject after the Easter recess.

Although we welcome the Government's written response to the Brook House inquiry today, I am very disappointed that the Home Office chose not to update the House through an oral statement, but instead used a written ministerial statement. The matters raised in the report are very serious indeed, and Members should have the right to question the Minister on the situation at Brook House and the action that the Home Office will take. May I seek your advice, Madam Deputy Speaker, on how we can ensure that Home Office Ministers are brought to the House at the earliest opportunity to answer questions?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am grateful to the right hon. Lady, who Chairs the Select Committee on Home Affairs, for giving me notice of her point of order. As she points out, the Government have not so far sought to make an oral statement to the House on this issue, but I am sure that those on the Treasury Bench will have heard her comments and will pass them back, perhaps to Home Office Ministers and officials. In the meantime, the right hon. Lady is a very experienced Member of the House, and I am sure that she will be aware of the various options open to her in the Chamber and Westminster Hall, and indeed through her Select Committee.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. On 7 January 2020, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) led an Adjournment debate in this House on the UK special forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. I attended that debate not only as a constituency MP, but as the brother of someone who served in Iraq and Afghanistan and who, like the majority of the armed forces, did so diligently and with the utmost professionalism. In response to my hon. Friend, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), who I have informed of this point of order, stated:

"There have been allegations made by individuals, a very small number of whom worked within the investigative teams."—[*Official Report*, 7 January 2020; Vol. 669, c. 362.]

Only last month, the Minister submitted evidence, not only in person but in writing, to the independent inquiry on the deployment of special forces in Afghanistan, in which they stated that they had inadvertently misled Members of this House by reading out statements that they later found to be incorrect. Indeed, that was also

communicated through a letter that they sent in August 2020 to the then Secretary of State—it was part of the evidence submitted last month—which states:

"That I have been allowed to read out statements to the House of Commons that individuals in strategic appointments in the department knew to be incorrect is completely unacceptable. These were clearly not complaints by 'a small number of individuals within the investigations team' but widespread.

I have continually downplayed these allegations in public, too, to support"

the special forces

"and the department."

The Minister had the opportunity to correct the record when the House returned from the summer 2020 recess, but they have yet to do so in this Chamber.

You may correct me, Madam Deputy Speaker—I hope you will not—but the ministerial code is very pernick that it is of paramount importance that Ministers of the Crown be accurate and truthful in giving information to the House. It states that Ministers of the Crown must correct

"any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity".

Indeed, the Minister stated recently on social media platforms:

"I am an elected politician who serves the public. I am not an appointed official and my position relies on my reputation and my ability to sustain public confidence in my character."

I wonder whether you, Madam Deputy Speaker, agree with the former chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, who advised the House that the Minister may have been guilty of

"letting the House of Commons down".

It sounds like major incompetence.

The House of Commons is based on trust in the word of Ministers of the Crown, and trust that what Ministers say is true. If they promise to do something, it undermines the integrity of the political system when they do not keep to their word. Madam Deputy Speaker, can you advise how the Office of the Speaker will ensure that after more than three and a half years, the Minister comes to the Dispatch Box to correct the record and apologise to the House, and to those members of the armed forces who conduct themselves in a professional manner?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am grateful to the hon. Member for giving me notice of his point of order, and for confirming that he has informed the right hon. Member to whom he referred that he intended to raise this issue. Mr Speaker has always been clear that if Ministers feel that the record needs to be corrected, they should do so as quickly as possible, but it is also true that Ministers are responsible for what they say in the Chamber—hence why they should correct the record if there is a problem. The operation of the ministerial code is not a matter for the Chair, and I hope that the hon. Member understands that. Having said that, those on the Treasury Bench will have heard his concerns, and will feed them back. If the Minister considers a correction is necessary, one will be forthcoming. I think we will leave it at that.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Last week, in this House, I called on the Government to not only publish their contingency plan in the event of Thames Water's financial collapse, but go a step further and put this failed,

polluting giant into special administration. In preparation for that debate, I tabled a number of named day written parliamentary questions to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, scheduled for publication on Friday 15 March, yet I still have not received—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I have to listen carefully to Members, so if others could refrain from chatting, that would be helpful.

Sarah Olney: I still have not received a response to those questions, two days after the deadline. The questions I asked were: how many meetings the permanent secretary of the Department has held with Thames Water on Operation Timber in the past 12 months; if the Secretary of State will the publish the minutes of meetings that officials in his Department have had with Thames Water on Operation Timber in each of the last six months; and when the permanent secretary of his Department last met officials from Thames Water to discuss Operation Timber. The continued failure of this Conservative Government to be transparent about their rescue plans for Thames Water amounts to nothing short of a cover-up. It is now crucial to raise this issue in the Chamber through a point of order. What steps can I take to receive a response from the Department to my questions?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving me notice of her point of order, and I am sure that all hon. and right hon. Members, whether they are here or not, would agree that answers to parliamentary questions should be given promptly. Again, I know that those on the Treasury Bench will have heard her point of order. She may wish to take up any undue delay in ministerial answers with the right hon. Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Dame Karen Bradley), who chairs the Procedure Committee, which keeps under review departmental performance on answering questions. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) is lucky that the Chair of that Committee happens to be in the Chamber, and I can see that she has heard what the hon. Lady has had to say.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your assistance on a matter that many MPs will understand through that bread and butter work that we do on behalf of our constituents. I have informed the Minister's office of my intention to raise this matter. Last December the Minister for Armed Forces, the right hon. Member for Wells (James Heapey), said that he

"would love to sit down with the hon. Lady to talk through the details of the cases."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 2023; Vol. 742, c. 636.]

Those were the cases of two constituents who are British citizens but whose families are stuck in Pakistan, even though they served in support of our armed forces in Afghanistan. Their families are at high risk of harm.

I am yet to have that meeting with the Minister. Indeed, the meeting has been cancelled several times, and now my office has been told that we probably need to wait until another Minister is appointed. I wonder whether the Secretary of State or Ministers could help. We all know that Ministers are busy and we understand

that these things are complicated, but this is a life-or-death situation for my constituents and I am at a loss as to how to assist them, four months on from the original query. Can Ministers advise on how best to make progress?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Can the hon. Lady just clarify in which Department the Minister sits?

Stella Creasy: The Ministry of Defence.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order. She has successfully shone a light on what has happened in this instance. I see that there is a Defence Minister on the Treasury Bench, so I am sure that her comments will be fed back and hope that the meeting to which she refers can take place accordingly. I think she has achieved her objective of highlighting the problem.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I sat through today's urgent question and listened to the various questions raised on the supply of arms to Israel. It is clear that the Government are continuing to supply arms to Israel, some of which will have been used in the attacks on Gaza. Some of those attacks have been judged to be contrary to the International Court of Justice judgment and are potentially war crimes. Can I ask Mr Speaker to seek and publish legal advice on the legal responsibilities of individuals of this House in holding the Government to account to prevent complicity in those war crimes, so that we are all aware of our responsibilities and the role we have to play, as this Government receive their authority from this Chamber?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order. He did not give me notice of it, so I have been unable to seek advice on the legal point he raises. I am unclear on whether he is asking Mr Speaker to publish legal advice.

John McDonnell: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologise; I could not give notice of my point of order because it arises from the urgent question, which has only just concluded. I am asking Mr Speaker to seek legal advice on our behalf and to publish it, because it is important that we all know our legal responsibilities in respect of the potential complicity of this Government in war crimes.

Madam Deputy Speaker: My initial response is that the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), has come here and answered a number of questions on the issue that the right hon. Gentleman raises. The Minister is indicating that he may be able to help me out a little on legal advice. It feels highly unusual for Mr Speaker to seek legal advice on an issue affecting the Government, because the Government obviously get their own legal advice. Perhaps we could hear from the Minister before going any further.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), who is an extremely experienced Member of the House, is seeking—ingeniously—to continue debate on the subject of the urgent question. He knows perfectly well that the Government operate under the rule of law. When it

[Mr Andrew Mitchell]

comes to arms sales, the arms regime and the work of the arms inspection committee, all those matters are determined by the law of the land. When it comes to international humanitarian law, the position is precisely the same: the Government take advice from the Law Officers, who are charged with advising us on these matters, and the Government act on that advice.

John McDonnell rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is the point that I was trying to make, but obviously the Minister, who I am sure often works with legal advisers, was able to make it much more coherently. I am not sure that we can pursue this much further. I will let the right hon. Gentleman have one more go, but I think that we will have reached the end of the questioning after this.

John McDonnell: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am not seeking to extend the debate at all; this is an incredibly serious point. The Minister just said that the Government are operating under the rule of law, but some of us believe that is not true any more, because of how the ICJ judgment was phrased. So we need advice as individual Members, separate from the Government—and it is the Speaker's responsibility to ensure that we are properly advised—about our responsibilities when we believe there is potential complicity in war crime. All I seek is that advice should be sought and published.

Madam Deputy Speaker: As I said, the Government perform within the legal advice that they receive, not least from the Attorney General. Separate legal proceedings are going through the ICJ, and I do not think it is for Members of the House to interfere in that process either. The right hon. Gentleman will know that individual Members of the House have the right to seek legal advice. His comments will have been heard, and if there is anything further to be added to them, I know that the Clerks will advise us whether we should return to the matter, but I think his request for specific legal advice to the Speaker would be highly unusual. If I need to add anything to that, I assure him that I will come back to him.

BILL PRESENTED

FOOTBALL GOVERNANCE BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Lucy Frazer, supported by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary James Cleverly, Secretary David T. C. Davies, John Glen and Stuart Andrew, presented a Bill to establish the Independent Football Regulator; to make provision for the licensing of football clubs; to make provision about the distribution of revenue received by organisers of football competitions; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 187) with explanatory notes (Bill 187-EN).

Illegal and Unsustainable Fishing (Due Diligence)

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

2.23 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require suppliers and retailers of fish and related products to establish and implement due diligence systems to ensure that those products are not obtained from illegal or unsustainable fishing; and for connected purposes.

In recent years the House has extensively debated the disastrous loss of biodiversity and habitats around the world. Our focus in doing so has rightly been on the threat to forests—in particular, the major forest areas in the Amazon, the Congo basin and south-east Asia—and on the implications of a situation where illegal deforestation to grow products such as palm oil and soy is doing huge damage.

The Government have done the right thing by being at the forefront of creating legislative frameworks to help address the commercial exploitation of those forest risk products. The Environment Act 2021 created the first real framework requiring UK businesses to know where their supplies come from and whether they come from areas affected by illegal deforestation, although I would nudge Ministers—I see the Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries in his place—about the need finally to sort out all the secondary legislation that goes with that Act. However, illegal deforestation is not the only threat to biodiversity around the world. The loss of marine life and of marine ecosystems is as serious a priority for us all.

The destruction of fish stocks is nothing new: huge fisheries in the Atlantic have been destroyed through excessive levels of catch over the past century; massive stocks of herring and cod off our shores have steadily disappeared; huge cod fisheries off Canada suffered a similar fate; and more recently the common fisheries policy has failed to halt the pressure on fish stocks, with politics often overriding scientific advice. But that excessive extraction of fish stocks in a regulated environment is just one dimension of the problem facing marine life.

Over the course of this Parliament, I have pushed for a rapid extension of the ban on bottom trawling in marine protected areas around the United Kingdom. I am pleased that we are now free to change those practices, which were permitted under the common fisheries policy, and that the Government are making real progress on moving away from an unacceptable situation, though there is still much to do on that front. The creation of highly protected marine areas is also a major step forward as long as it is done in the right areas, but even once the bans are in place I am in little doubt that rogue vessels will continue to push the rules to the limit and exceed them when no one is looking. These new laws will not stop the practice altogether.

The frank reality is that illegal practice is a feature of fisheries around the world. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is doing massive damage—ironically, particularly to the small coastal communities that depend on their fisheries for their local economy. Illegal operators have little regard for national or international law. They use

illegal equipment, and they have no regard to whether the species they are catching are endangered and protected, or whether it is a closed season. Backing those fleets up are refrigerated transport vessels and supply ships moving vast quantities of catch to markets around the world.

In many maritime regions of the world, IUU fishing has massively contributed to the depletion of fish stocks, especially in developing countries' coastal waters. One of the biggest problem areas is west Africa, where IUU fishing accounts for an estimated 40% of all fish caught and about 20% of worldwide illegal fishing. Apart from the environmental damage, it is estimated that the practice costs those coastal communities in Africa billions of dollars a year. IUU fishing is practised in particular by China and Russia, and it tends to target species that are already over-exploited by legal fishing or are subject to restrictions. They target high-value species such as cod, salmon, trout, lobster and prawns.

The UK and the EU have tough rules on IUU fishing and systems in place. Imports have to be properly certified, but it is generally accepted that that does not stop fish from IUU vessels getting into Europe. There is seldom enough enforcement available to prevent illegality from taking place.

One thing we learned when the Ukraine war started and we began to put restrictions in place was just how much of our white fish imports were sourced from Russia; less well known was how much comes from China. Those two countries—together with Norway and Iceland—are by far the biggest suppliers of fish to the UK, and they are the biggest global source of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. To be frank, we should not trust either country to be ensuring that its fishing vessels conform to international norms and rules on good fishing practices. It is therefore right that we have a tight national regulatory regime and that it becomes tougher still, but I do not believe that a regulatory regime should be the only weapon in our armoury to tackle IUU fishing, and indeed illegal fishing closer to home.

I believe that we need to take an additional step in protecting fisheries here and around the world, which is to place the same duty on retailers for fish sourcing as we have for forest risk products. That means having a mandatory system of due diligence for retailers, and

particularly those buying their supplies via third-party wholesalers and other intermediaries, on which a big part of the industry depends. All we need those retailers to do in taking their purchasing decisions is to be clear that they know they are sourcing their stock from trusted and reliable sources and that they have a line of sight over their supply chains. That is what we are moving to do with forest risk products, and we need it to apply to fish as well.

I would like to see clear rules on the sustainability of UK fish stocks in the revised fishing arrangements that will need to be put in place in the next Parliament, regardless of the EU approach, which all too often allows catch limits above scientific recommendations. When the new agreement is reached in the coming years, there has to be a clear line that fishing must be sustainable in UK waters. Due diligence rules should then be applied to UK-sourced fish as well, particularly if there is a risk of illegal operations in marine protected areas. I fear that, notwithstanding the change to the rules, we will see that in future.

The purpose of the Bill is straightforward, and my proposal is very simple: we simply extend what we have already done in one area of critical biodiversity risk to another area—the future of our oceans. I am proud that this Government and this country were one of the first to address the issue of forest risk products and take action on the risks of those products coming to the UK. I want us to go a step further and apply the same principle and the same rules to fish from illegal fisheries around the world. I want us to be absolutely certain that when we buy fish in our shops, we know that we are not contributing to more unsustainable biodiversity loss in this country and elsewhere. With this Bill, we can protect our oceans and fisheries and do the right thing for our environment. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Chris Grayling, Andrew Selous, Harriett Baldwin, Alex Sobel, Dr Matthew Offord, Ian Levy, Barry Gardiner and Trudy Harrison present the Bill.

Chris Grayling accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 21 June, and to be printed (Bill 186).

Trade (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) Bill [Lords]

Consideration of Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee

[Relevant documents: Second Report of the Business and Trade Committee, UK accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, HC 483; and oral evidence taken before the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on 21 November 2023, 6 February and 27 February 2024, on UK trade policy: food and agriculture, HC 162.]

New Clause 1

REPORT: ACCESSION OF STATES TO THE CPTPP

“(1) Before any decision is made by the Government of the United Kingdom on the accession of economies designated a ‘threat’ or ‘systemic challenge’ in the Integrated Review to the CPTPP under Chapter 30 of the CPTPP, the Secretary of State must publish a report assessing the impact of the accession of that economy on the United Kingdom.

(2) Both Houses of Parliament must be presented with a motion for resolution on the report under subsection (1).”—
(Sir Iain Duncan Smith.)

This new clause seeks to ensure a parliamentary debate and decision on the UK’s position towards the accession to the CPTPP of certain states presenting a threat or systemic challenge to the UK.

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.33 pm

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 2—*Assessment of impact of CPTPP on deforestation and import of certain products*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a report containing an assessment of the impact of the implementation of the CPTPP on—

- (a) the volume of UK imports of palm oil;
- (b) the volume of UK imports of tropical wood;
- (c) the rate of deforestation in Asia;
- (d) the UK’s ability to fulfil its obligations under—
 - (i) the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; and
 - (ii) the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

(2) A report under subsection (1) must be published no earlier than a year and no later than 18 months after the passing of this Act.”

New clause 3—*Report on the impact and use of the Investor-State Dispute Settlement procedure*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, lay before Parliament a report on the impact of the implementation of the Investor-State Dispute Settlement aspect of the Investment Chapter of the CPTPP on the UK.

- (2) A report prepared under subsection (1) must include—
- (a) analysis of the likely use of the Investor-State Dispute Settlement procedure in relation to the UK, and the likely impact of such on the UK;
 - (b) details of discussions held with other signatories to the CPTPP regarding the use of the Investor-State Dispute Settlement procedure in relation to the UK; and

- (c) discussions held with, or agreements made with, other signatories to the CPTPP regarding the exclusion or exemption of the UK from any use of the Investor-State Dispute Settlement procedure.”

New clause 4—*Report: accession of new states to the CPTPP*—

“(1) Before any decision is made by the Government on the accession of a new state to CPTPP under Chapter 30 of the CPTPP, the Secretary of State must publish a report assessing the potential benefits and impact of the accession of that candidate state on the United Kingdom.

(2) Both Houses of Parliament must be presented with a motion for resolution on the report under subsection (1).”

New clause 5—*Review: Investor-State Dispute Settlement*—

“The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a review of the financial risk of the implementation of the Investor-State Dispute Settlement aspect of the Investment Chapter of the CPTPP, not more than 18 months after the day on which this Act is passed.”

New clause 6—*Impact assessment: environmental standards etc*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must lay before each House of Parliament an assessment of the impact of the implementation of the procurement Chapters of the CPTPP on—

- (a) environmental standards,
- (b) food standards, and
- (c) animal welfare standards.

(2) An impact assessment under subsection (1) must be published not less than two years, but not more than three years, after the day on which this Act is passed and every two years thereafter.”

New clause 7—*Report on business impact of CPTPP*—

“The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, publish a plan outlining the steps being taken to—

- (a) measure the impact on UK businesses of the implementation of the CPTPP; and
- (b) support UK businesses to benefit from the UK’s membership of the CPTPP.”

New clause 8—*Impact assessment: labour standards*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament an assessment of the impact of the implementation of the CPTPP Labour Chapter not more than eighteen months after the day on which this Act is passed and every 18 months thereafter.

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

- (a) the impact on the Government’s commitments to the conventions of the International Labour Organisation;
- (b) steps that have been taken to ensure adherence to the conventions of the International Labour Organisation in CPTPP partner countries; and
- (c) how the experience and impact of implementation might inform negotiation of future trade agreements.”

New clause 9—*Comparative analysis of impact on UK businesses*—

“(1) Within three months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must lay before each House of Parliament a report on the impact of the implementation of the CPTPP on the matters listed in subsection (3).

(2) The report must include an analysis comparing the respective situation for each of the matters listed in subsection (3) prior to the implementation of the CPTPP with the situation post the implementation of the CPTPP.

(3) The issues which must be included in the comparative analysis contained in the report laid under subsection (1) are—

- (a) tariffs paid by UK businesses to bring in or remove items from the UK;

- (b) costs of non-tariff border control measures paid by UK businesses to bring in or remove items from the UK;
- (c) inflation in the UK;
- (d) the extent of alignment of regulations relevant to UK businesses;
- (e) the ability of UK businesses to trade with the EU;
- (f) the implications for UK businesses of introducing new trade and climate regulations, including for carbon pricing;
- (g) tariff and non-tariff costs facing businesses trading with the EU; and
- (h) trade volumes for UK businesses trading with the EU.

(4) Within 10 days of a report being laid under subsection (1) the Government must schedule a debate on the findings of the report in each House.”

New clause 10—*Report on economic impact of implementation of CPTPP*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, publish a report on the economic impact of the implementation of the CPTPP.

(2) A report published under subsection (1) must include an analysis comparing the respective situation for each of the matters listed in subsection (3) prior to the implementation of the CPTPP with the situation post the implementation of the CPTPP.

(3) The matters which must be included in the comparative analysis contained in the report laid under subsection (1) are—

- (a) the UK’s trade in goods;
- (b) the UK’s trade in services; and
- (c) UK GDP.”

This new clause would require the Government to publish a comparative analysis of the impact of the implementation of the CPTPP on UK trade and GDP.

New clause 11—*Impact assessment: new states acceding to the CPTPP*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must prepare and publish a report assessing the impact of the accession of new states to the CPTPP on the United Kingdom.

(2) In respect of states that have submitted a request to the Depository of the CPTPP to join the CPTPP since 2019, the Secretary of State must lay a report before both Houses of Parliament within three months of this Act coming into force.

(3) In respect of states submitting a request to the Depository of the CPTPP to join the CPTPP following the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State must lay a report before both Houses of Parliament within three months of a request being made.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to provide an impact assessment on the accession of countries that have made and will make a formal request to join the CPTPP.

New clause 12—*Impact assessment: UK performers’ rights*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must publish an assessment of the impact of the implementation of performers’ rights provisions in the CPTPP.

(2) The impact assessment under subsection (1) must include—

- (a) consideration of the impact of performers’ rights provisions on qualifying individuals in the UK;
- (b) an assessment of the reciprocity of rights across qualifying countries;
- (c) consultation with such persons as the Secretary of State considers appropriate.”

This new clause would mean the Government must publish an assessment of the impact the performers’ rights provisions in the CPTPP will have on qualifying individuals in the UK.

New clause 13—*Review of regulatory impact of implementation of the CPTPP treaty on UK businesses*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within one year of the passing of this Act, lay before Parliament a report on the regulatory impact of the implementation of the CPTPP treaty on costs to exporting and importing businesses in the UK.

(2) A report under subsection (1) must take account of the existing levels of costs to exporting and importing businesses arising from trade regulations.”

This new clause would require the Government to report on the impact of implementation of the CPTPP treaty on the costs to businesses in the UK. The report would need to take the existing trade costs facing such businesses into account.

Amendment 2, in clause 2, page 2, line 2, at end insert—

“(5) Regulations under subsection (1) may not be made before Government has moved a substantive motion to resolve that the UK Accession Protocol should not be ratified.”

Amendment 1, in clause 5, page 6, line 36, at end insert—

“(7A) The Secretary of State must, after a period of three years from the passing of this Act, lay a report before Parliament containing an assessment of the impact of changes made in this section.”

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: It is a pleasure to speak to new clause 1, which is signed by a cross-party group of MPs who all believe that Parliament should have the right to scrutinise trade deals. It seeks to ensure appropriate parliamentary scrutiny of the UK’s position toward the accession of economies that are designated—that word is very specific—as “threats” or “systemic challenges”. It would achieve two things. First, the Government would be required to produce a report assessing the impact of the economy’s accession on the UK, and both Houses of Parliament would have a non-binding vote on the UK’s position regarding the accession of the economy in question. In other words, we would take the temperature of Parliament’s view, even if it disagreed with the Government. That is important, because the public need to know about it, so we should not be frightened of this.

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for introducing the new clause. Some of us have been arguing for parliamentary scrutiny of trade deals for the last four years. There is a mechanism in the form of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010. Is that not the better vehicle, because it has already passed? It also offers a vote, theoretically, for us to be able to scrutinise our trade deals.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: I will come to that in a minute, because it does not, and that is the whole point of the new clause. In the 2023 integrated review refresh, the countries defined as threats were Russia, Iran and North Korea, while China was designated a systemic challenge. The new clause does not directly mention China, but of the eligible countries under the current integrated review, China is the only economy that has applied to join. In fact it is theoretically next on the list to go into the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership.

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con): I completely understand the point my right hon. Friend is trying to make, but one of the interesting things about being a

[Mark Garnier]

member of CPTPP is that countries then have a power of veto. That gives us quite a lot of strength to potentially prevent China from joining.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: I enjoy the idea that my hon. Friend puts such trust in Government never to take other arrangements into consideration. We know how that works. It will be fine today with my right hon. Friend the Minister here, but there may be others in charge in future, and I am not sure I would always want to rest my defence in Ministers.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way and for this new clause. Was he as surprised as I was that when we asked the Secretary of State whether she would block China's accession to CPTPP she was unable to give us an unequivocal answer?

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: I think the right hon. Gentleman makes my point. I sat in Government and all I can say to him is that one cannot always say that Ministers will necessarily do the right thing; rather, they will do the right thing by the Government, which is sometimes not the same. I do not mean to cast aspersions on my party's Government by any means, but that has happened in the past. I simply want to make the point that China's potential accession has huge implications for all sorts of things, including because of its immense economic and political influence in the region and the pressures on the UK if we were almost isolated in our observations.

China is not a likeminded party—there may be other countries that are rather similar. It openly seeks to revise the liberal, open and rules-based order and establish itself as a regional hegemon. If admitted, it would be the largest economy and dominant economic and trading partner in the CPTPP, with unrivalled political influence. It could block a future US entry. As we join it is important for us to make way for the US and bring it in, which will help in a whole range of areas. China's accession would help to cement Beijing's desired leadership in global trade. I will remind the House that China is next up for the CPTPP, so this is not something conjured up.

China's entry also risks further increasing economic dependence on it, which is already too high, and building resilience into the Chinese economy to weather sanctioning should tensions over Taiwan escalate, which they almost certainly will. That would run counter to the UK's strategic efforts to de-risk and maintain the status quo in the region. Serious human rights abuses are and continue to be embedded within Chinese supply chains. China is the most egregious offender in this regard, with its actions on religion in Xinjiang and in Tibet, where slave labour is also practised. Slave labour undercuts the World Trade Organisation and normal trade. Those are good commercial reasons why the membership of any country with the views China happens to have would have a real impact.

China's accession is unlikely to drive economic reform in the country. There is no political ability to drive such reform under President Xi, who has moved China further away from the spirit of the CPTPP on labour rights protections.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I have just returned from leading a parliamentary delegation to Lithuania, where my right hon. Friend was talked about by many Lithuanian politicians. They mentioned the leading role he is taking in warning western democracies about the conduct of the Chinese Communist Government. Does my right hon. Friend agree that Lithuania is a very interesting case for us to study, so that we can perhaps learn from how a European country confronts and takes on the increasingly nefarious conduct of the Chinese Communist party?

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: It is always kind to be referred to in another country, which leads me to wonder whether I should stand there. [Interruption.] I need no encouragement from those on the Opposition Benches, thank you very much. My hon. Friend is quite right; Lithuania is a tiny country, but rather bravely it has recognised Taiwan and it has come under the cosh from China as a result. I thank him for that intervention.

As I said, this is not a pipe dream. China applied to join the CPTPP on 16 September 2021, and is next in line. It is widely reported that Beijing is already lobbying hard for membership, and that countries previously opposed have softened their line. Australia has done so because it has had trade problems, as we know. All that is required for Chinese accession is for other members to permit it. The current labour regulations would seem to preclude China's accession, but the risk is there and we should not take it.

An actor-agnostic approach—linking to the integrated review rather than naming any specific actor—would also enable the Government to create a threshold that is reflexive to developments rather than static. That would mean that a report, debate and vote would be required only where the integrated review had designated specific economies as threats or systematic challenges. The language in the review is weak in its own right, but none the less it is there.

I want to deal with the CRaG process quickly. The new clause is in line with the Government policy, but exposes a loophole in the CRaG process. There is currently no provision for a debate and non-binding vote on future accession to plurilateral trade agreements. The process would not require the Government to produce an impact report on China's accession to the CPTPP, nor would it provide for a parliamentary debate or vote. Given the long-term significance to the UK of being in a plurilateral trade agreement where the biggest partner is China, it is appropriate for Parliament to be furnished with an up-to-date, accurate report, and to have the opportunity to consider the matter—after all, there is no other reason why we are here if not to discuss such important matters.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Gentleman makes a good point about some of the weaknesses of CRaG and the need to strengthen it, particularly when there are accessions or other material changes to a treaty to which we are a member. The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, which I sit on, has published a report that outlines some of the changes to the way that the Government operate under CRaG. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that we need to change it so that significant changes to treaties and accessions should

always automatically be subject to a report and potential vote in this House? Otherwise, we will sign ourselves up to things without knowing what will happen further along the line.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: I agree. I was not so certain about this, so I looked at what Lord Lisvane, the one-time chief Clerk in the House, said about it. He produced a note on it, which I quote:

“The issue, as I recall, was whether a Motion to approve the PRC’s accession could be amended. Commons S.O. No 24B says that when a Motion in neutral terms (in the judgement of the Chair) is tabled, no amendments to it may be tabled. I think this would probably rule out seeking to amend a simple ‘take note’ or ‘has considered’ Motion.”

I want to emphasise that it is not true that a motion to take note can be amended—that was used in the other place as a defence. The CRAg process does not provide for a vote; it does not even guarantee a debate. That is why the new clause is needed.

Under UK trade policy, it is not unusual for bilateral trade agreements to be subject to parliamentary approval—free trade agreements are routinely subject to it. In response to criticism of the CRAg process in 2021, the Grimstone rule was established, whereby the Government agreed in principle to allow time to debate prospective FTAs where the International Agreements Committee has published a report. I happen to believe that there are Ministers who are keen and happy to have debates—I mention no names, but that is the case. However, I know that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office absolutely opposes them, because it hates to have any serious debates about its prerogative.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I am pleased that the right hon. Gentleman is keen on debates. On that basis, I invite him to sign my prayer against this treaty, to urge the Government to give us a debate on the treaty as a whole.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: I ask the right hon. Gentleman not to tempt me beyond my new clause. I always happy to look at this issue, and I believe in debate. It is vital, otherwise Governments are never held to account.

2.45 pm

It is important to emphasise that once the Bill is passed, the CRAg process cannot be applied to future accessions. I am aware that it is against long-standing UK policy to tie the Government’s hands on trade. That is why the vote provided for in the new clause would not be binding. That allows the Government to take note of the debate and perhaps change policy in due course.

Article 30.4 of the CPTPP agreement explicitly provides that accession may be

“subject to...the applicable legal procedures of each Party and acceding State or separate customs territory (accession candidate).”

The UK’s procedures already allow for some parliamentary scrutiny. There is no legal basis to argue that enhanced scrutiny would impact the UK’s accession.

The UK is not alone; other Governments have spoken freely in the past about their opposition to China’s accession—in particular, key UK allies Japan and Australia. Australia stated that it would not endorse China’s application while Beijing continues to block the import of Australian goods including wine and barley. That is a

matter for Australia to debate. It has joined Canada, Japan and New Zealand in condemning China’s economic coercion. Despite a little softening in its line, Australia was still warning that there was no chance China would join in the near term.

Japan, a country that has been most astute in dealing with China economically, continues to see China’s application as fundamentally geopolitical. Japan’s Minister of Finance stated:

“China...is far removed from the free, fair and highly transparent world of TPP, chances that it can join are close to zero”.

He said that China’s application

“can be thought of as a move to prevent Taiwan from joining.”

Taiwan, by the way, is second up. For those who do not know, it is not about countries but economies, which is why Taiwan can bid to join the CPTPP even if its status as a nation is not recognised by everyone.

Daniel Kawczynski: My right hon. Friend is highlighting the various concerns about China’s conduct and why it should not join the CPTPP. Does he agree that the conduct of the Chinese Government in the South China sea—a waterway through which 60% of the world’s trade passes—where it has stolen hundreds of atolls from Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and others, is also a cause for concern?

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: It is, although I cannot follow my hon. Friend through Lithuania and the atolls of the far east, because I would be ruled out of order by the Chair. I hope he will forgive me, but he makes a strong point.

I say gently to the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas), that it was a Labour Member, Lord Leong, who tabled the amendment in Committee in the Lords. Labour said that it would whip for the amendment if it were reworked to not mention China. Strangely, the new clause does not mention China, so I would have hoped that Labour would support it, but it does not. I understand that Labour has tabled its own new clause.

Parliament should be able to make its voice heard on a matter of such national significance. The new clause does not overturn constitutional conventions by a long way. Having a report, a debate and a non-binding vote would not determine Government policy, but it would determine the House’s view on the elements of this particular trade deal. I note that Opposition new clause 4 also seeks to look at this, but there are other issues that I will not bring up now.

There are elements in the Government who believe that debate is not a bad thing, because it allows them to make their case for why such a trade deal is important. I urge the Government to be positive about this, because being positive about debate in the House of Commons is a restatement of democracy. It allows people to decide whether they agree. More importantly, this is about accession. If those who follow us in seeking to join the treaty are defined as a threat, as they are in the review, that will at least inform the Government. It will also allow the House to pressure the Government over its real concern about what they might be doing. In future, a Government from either side of the House or of whatever form may choose, under pressure from China over economic issues, to let it accede to the treaty.

[Sir Iain Duncan Smith]

Who knows? I do not say that that is the mood, but it is for Back Benchers to make their point about what the Government should do and for them to take note. In that regard, I commend my new clause to the House.

Liam Byrne: It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith). I will speak in support of new clause 1, which he tabled, as well as the new clauses tabled in the names of my right hon. and hon. Friends.

I welcome this debate and the new clauses and amendments that have been tabled, but I lament the fact that we have not been permitted a full debate on the treaty—something the right hon. Gentleman argued for very eloquently. We needed a debate today not merely on the three chapters of the CPTPP covered by the Bill, but on the full 30 chapters of the treaty, with all the associated annexes and bits of analysis and argument.

I do not want to detain the House for very long, because the Business and Trade Committee went to the length of writing and publishing a report earlier this year. However, I want to underline the point about the lack of scrutiny. Of course, it was the Government themselves, in the Grimstone rule, who said that no new free trade agreements would be ratified by His Majesty's Government without a full debate on whether we should agree to them. When I asked the Secretary of State on 23 January whether she would agree to a debate under the terms of the CRaG process, she said she would be "happy to support" such a debate. Her officials then wrote to the Clerks on the Select Committee to say that such a debate had been requested, only to be told by the Leader of the House that no time was available. The Leader of the House confirmed that in writing to me last week in a letter in which she said:

"it has not been possible to find time for a debate in Government time."

The House of Lords is having a debate on the treaty today on the recommendation of the International Agreements Committee, so why can't we? Are we second-class representatives in this House? Are we unqualified to have a debate on all 30 chapters of the treaty? Are we not qualified to speak, on behalf of the people we came into public life to represent, about how the treaty will affect their future? I think we are. I think we should have a debate on the full treaty.

And I cannot believe that we are out of time. Members will have seen the report in the *Financial Times* last week, which said that the working day in this Chamber "has been shorter on average this parliamentary session than in any other in the past quarter century".

Are we seriously saying that we have not been able to find time for a debate, which it is the Government's policy to support, on one of the only free trade agreements that His Majesty's Government have been able to bring forward since we left the European Union?

On Twitter, the Minister—I am a keen follower of the Minister on Twitter, he will be pleased to hear—said last week that there have been four parliamentary debates on the treaty, but I wonder if he is sure about that. When I asked the Clerks on the Select Committee to check that, they were left scratching their heads a little bit. They could not find all four that the Minister

referred to. We have to accept that there is no shortage of controversy in the Bill, not least because the Secretary of State herself resiled from the figures that describe the benefits of the treaty to the country.

Anthony Mangnall: I thank the Chair of the Select Committee for giving way. It is a pleasure to serve on the Committee with him. I thought I might just throw a bone in the form of cross-party support on this point. Having a debate is not just about pointing out controversies; it is about having the opportunity to justify and debate things about which our constituents care. These trade deals make a difference not only to the businesses, but to the services and agriculture sectors in our respective constituencies. That is why it is damaging not to have a debate: it fails to allow us the opportunity to persuade people that trade deals can be a force for good.

Liam Byrne: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right and I commend his contribution both to the Committee and to the report that we published on the CPTPP earlier this year.

There are a number of important new clauses and amendments not only about the future expansion plans of the CPTPP and what our policy on those might look like, but also, in the names of my right hon. and hon. Friends, about investor-state dispute settlement. This is important because in all the fanfare, arguments and passionate bits of literature and speeches offered by the Government about the virtues of the treaty, it was always positioned as a gateway to the fastest-growing economy on Earth that will represent a significant fraction of economic growth in the future. Of course, what was often missing from those eloquent descriptions was a recognition that the countries in the CPTPP represent only about a fifth, at best, of the Indo-Pacific region.

We are surely right to worry that there could well be a Government drive to expand the orbit of the treaty to a much wider group of nations. If the Government really want to take aim at the biggest economies on Earth, they may well encourage China to join. However, when I asked the Secretary of State whether it was her policy to agree to or block China's accession, she said that that was not something we could discuss on the Floor of the House or in the Select Committee. That is why safeguards are needed. We might even be so bold as to merely ask for a little bit of clarity on the Government's future strategy. That is why the amendments on the future pathway of the treaty are so important and why I hope we will have a vote on some aspect of that today, even if it is not on the new clause tabled by the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green.

I will talk briefly about new clause 3, which relates to ISDS. It is important, because His Majesty's Government have agreed side letters with a number of countries to take us out of the ISDS process. That is not an exemption or safeguard that we saw when it came to agreeing to the treaty, yet the treaty includes countries such as Canada—I think we are just about on fraternal terms with Canada at the moment; we may have failed to agree an FTA with it, but quite why is a matter of some dispute between the Canadian Government and the Secretary of State. Canada is home to some of the biggest pension fund investors on the planet and we know that those funds are especially litigious. Although the Minister was right, when he answered these questions

in earlier conversations, to say we have never lost an ISDS case, the reality is that many fear there will be a chilling effect on the regulations we bring forward because of a fear of the peril of ISDS procedures.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: My right hon. Friend is speaking very well on some of the new clauses I have tabled on ISDS. It is of course true that getting the side letters for all member states was good enough for New Zealand, so it was protected more—not fully protected, I grant him. If it was good enough for New Zealand, it should have been good enough for us. Is it not a sign that Ministers have lacked ambition, or is it a sign of complacency?

Liam Byrne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Perhaps it is because we did not want to overly annoy the Canadians, but the truth is that the talks with the Canadians have broken down—at a cost, by the way, to the UK automotive industry. In fact, UK cars will be hit on average by a £3,000 tariff in about a month or two, because of the breakdown of those talks. It is important for us to have a vote on why we do not have those procedures, why we do not have those safeguards and why we do not have those side letters.

Finally, I want to underline the point made by the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green. As a House, we must become far more skilled, far more ready and far more adroit at debating the kinds of treaties we will be asked to sign. Once upon a time, when the Berlin wall came down, we promised ourselves that we could look forward to a new world of free trade, and we hoped that that free trade could bring political progress and a democratic process—Wandel durch Handel, as the Germans liked to say.

However, that reality is now smashed; that era ended with the second invasion of Ukraine. We are now in new times, when we have to debate not just military security but economic security, and economic security questions are always freighted with dilemmas. We are a small nation and our adversaries are big, so we must always act with our allies, but not all our allies are good, and many of our friends would prefer not to pick a side. Our adversaries plan for self-sufficiency, but we cannot. We prefer open, free trade, but global supply chains are risky. We like markets to decide, but security always requires state action. We know that we need to work proactively to shape the long term, but democracies frequently entail a short-term change of Government, and too often our politics is reactive.

3 pm

There are no right answers to these dilemmas. Together, we will have to find ways of navigating them. Do we act alone or together? Should we be open or closed? Can we act in the short term, or do we need to think for the long term? Do we use carrots or sticks? Is this a broad canvas of action, or do we need a targeted approach? These are questions that are hard to answer, but unless we debate them in the House, we will not grow the skills and the experience to make good and wise decisions for the future. That is why we needed a debate on the CPTPP treaty under the CRaG process. Today's debate is important, but it is second best.

Sir Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne).

I rise to echo the comments made so eloquently and clearly by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith), and to add just a few comments of my own. I have always been in favour of the CPTPP, and, as I said from the Front Bench in 2019,

“It is absolutely essential, particularly given the rise of protectionism globally, that we commit ourselves to a rules-based system based on the WTO. Of course, we have abilities to augment that by other regional relationships, which is why we have had the public consultation and the debate in Parliament about the potential accession to the CPTPP”.—[*Official Report*, 6 June 2019; Vol. 661, c. 250.]

I have also always believed that the benefits of the CPTPP have been at least as much about geopolitics as about simple import and export numbers. As the Royal United Services Institute put it,

“Joining the CPTPP provides the UK with not just economic benefits, but the means to help define and defend a rules-based order in the face of China's diplomatic and economic heft.”

At a time of tense relations between China and the United States, the United Kingdom has joined a trade agreement in which neither is present, although the United States was instrumental in its creation—a point to which I shall return later.

The March 2023 integrated review refresh describes the Indo-Pacific as

“critical to the UK's economy, security and our interest in an open and stable international order. Developments there will have disproportionate influence on the global economy, supply chains”

—that was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill—

“strategic stability and norms of state behaviour.”

The CPTPP, in turn, is about a contribution to the stability of the global trade and investment system.

Within that debate, what do we perceive China's security threat to the UK to be? In their reply to a report from the Intelligence and Security Committee, in a section entitled “The Strategic Context”, the Government stated:

“China almost certainly maintains the largest state intelligence apparatus in the world. The nature and scale of the Chinese Intelligence Services are—like many aspects of China's government—hard to grasp for the outsider, due to the size of the bureaucracy, the blurring of lines of accountability between party and state officials, a partially decentralised system, and a lack of verifiable information.”

They also stated:

“The Chinese Intelligence Services target the UK and its overseas interests prolifically and aggressively. While they seek to obtain classified information, they are willing to utilise intelligence officers and agents to collect open source information indiscriminately—given the vast resources at their disposal...To compound the problem, it is not just the Chinese Intelligence Services: the Chinese Communist Party co-opts every state institution, company and citizen. This ‘whole-of-state’ approach means China can aggressively target the UK”

—and UK interests, wherever those interests are globally. Sadly, we have discovered that to our cost in many of our governmental institutions here.

The question, given all that, is this: could China actually be admitted to the CPTPP, and if it is theoretically possible, how likely is it? I think it instructive to look first at the experience of the World Trade Organisation, a brief that my right hon. Friend the Minister and I shared over several years of my extremely enjoyable time working with him at the Department for International Trade.

[*Sir Liam Fox*]

When China acceded to the WTO in 2001, the west saw it as promising and promoting economic and political reform. It was a time of great optimism that the Chinese communist system could be pulled in a direction that would be advantageous to, and in the interests of, the west. However, Jiang Zemin, the Chinese leader at the time, claimed that the motive of the United States in all this was to

“westernise and divide socialist countries”.

Thus the WTO itself was heading for a stalemate in its direction of travel almost from the point at which China acceded to it.

This has added to other WTO problems—and I mention that because we need to look at the CPTPP within the wider trading framework. The WTO’s problems have been compounded by its adoption of the concept of unanimity, while its rules talk about consensus. If consensus and unanimity meant the same thing, there would not be two different words for it in the founding documents. This has meant that virtually any country in the WTO now exercises a right of veto, which has prevented us from moving forward in what we perceived to be a process of genuine liberalisation of global trade.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: I apologise for interrupting my right hon. Friend’s excellent speech. The key was, we were told at the time, that the move would change China, and that persuaded the Government, but what we have found is that China is now changing the terms of the debate, because it has not changed at all—it has got worse. Is that not a very good reason why we need to debate these issues whenever we can?

Sir Liam Fox: My right hon. Friend is entirely right. As I observed at the time, President Clinton took the view that the treaty was the best hope that the west had of pulling China into a much more market-orientated, rules-based economy, where we could gain the benefits of a more liberal, global economy, but that is not how it turned out. We have had only one multilateral treaty since the WTO was created, the 2017 trade facilitation agreement.

There is a hierarchy of agreements that we can secure in terms of liberalisation. A multilateral agreement is the best, but given the effective veto that countries have, that is unlikely, and it is very unlikely to give us the benefits that we would like to see, especially the liberalisation of trade in services. The next best is a plurilateral agreement, the next best after that is a regional agreement, and then we are down to what some people would unkindly describe as the bargain basement of bilateral FTAs. All those are useful in creating a more liberal global trading environment. However, if China were to seek to join the CPTPP, it would need to commit itself to liberalisation in line with CPTPP requirements, which would require a reduced role for the Chinese state. If anyone who keeps an eye on current affairs thinks that the Chinese state is tending in the direction of a smaller influence, they are watching different news outlets from the ones that I am watching.

China could, of course, seek a bespoke agreement to join the CPTPP, but the UK has already set the precedent by joining on current terms. Even if China could join the CPTPP, could it be trusted to meet any of the conditions of accession? Although Chinese leaders have

declared their willingness to meet the conditions, many countries are extremely sceptical, given China’s behaviour as a WTO member. China has a poor record when it comes to complying with WTO rules and observing the fundamental principles of non-discrimination, openness, reciprocity, fairness and transparency on which the WTO agreements are based. China’s subsidies over capacity, intellectual property theft and protectionist non-market policies exacerbate distortions in the global economy, and—even more worryingly—China’s use of trade as a tool of coercive diplomacy has raised concerns further, especially given its behaviour towards Australia and Japan. This is not the sort of partner we should be wishing to join us in the CPTPP, unless there are previously unimagined changes in behaviour.

Finally, a word, if I may, beyond this Chamber to our US colleagues: I believe that the decision to leave the CPTPP by the United States was a mistake. It removed from United States policymakers a tool in its strategic ability to shape events in the region. UK accession provides an opportunity for the United States to seek to join this new grouping and gain greater direct influence over China trade relations with the fastest growing economic zone in the world. These are all reasons why we must keep a very close eye on what happens with China and our new membership of the CPTPP. We have gained a great deal; we cannot afford to have it thrown away, by ourselves or by others.

Mr Speaker: We now come to a maiden speech; I call Damien Egan.

Damien Egan (Kingswood) (Lab): It is with great pleasure that I rise to give my maiden speech as we speak to this Bill, which aims to boost international trade and economic growth. Stimulating growth and trade is vital to my constituents in Kingswood, as it creates new jobs and is ultimately about how we fund our public services.

As is traditional in a maiden speech, I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Chris Skidmore. I learnt during the campaign that there was a reason why Chris’s votes would go up every time he stood for election. Throughout the by-election campaign, people talked very warmly about Chris; he was described as being “a good man” and someone driven by values—a double-edged sword, some might say—but perhaps most importantly as someone who cared. I heard about some really complicated pieces of casework, where Chris had personally given a lot of his time to get people the help they needed, so I would like to place on record my thanks to Chris for his 14 years of service to the people of Kingswood.

Kingswood had four MPs before Chris. Roger Berry was a tireless campaigner—in fact, he still is—for disability rights. He brought forward the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill in 1993, which galvanised support for future legislation that made discrimination against disabled people illegal. Kingswood’s three other MPs were Rob Hayward, Jack Aspinwall and Terry Walker. On my second day here, when I got into my office, the first letter I received was from Terry Walker. If you are listening, Terry, thank you.

I have been asked by some Members, “So where exactly is Kingswood?” Kingswood lies on the eastern side of Bristol, and I would say that more people than not would say that they live in Bristol. It is a suburban collection of towns and villages that stretches from the edge of the city and extends into beautiful countryside.

Kingswood has an interesting story. In medieval times it served as a royal hunting ground: quite literally, the King's wood. In the 18th century it was a thriving home for workers from nearby coalmines, and it was at that time that John Wesley was encouraged to deliver his very first outdoor sermons—in Kingswood. I must be one of thousands of children over the years who at primary school was taken to the site of those sermons, Hanham Mount, where today a spiring green beacon illuminates the spot where Wesley once preached.

In the early 20th century, Kingswood hosted the largest motorbike factory in the world, the Douglas motorbike factory, where 25,000 motorbikes were made to support the military in world war one. In one of those quirky bits of history—this did catch me out in a radio interview—legend has it that Kingswood hosted an elephant burial when Nancy, who was part of a travelling menagerie, died of yew leaf poisoning. I am told that archaeologists are investigating.

Being elected in a by-election towards the end of a Parliament does focus the mind; you have to think about making your moments count. Indeed, Rishi could still call a surprise election tomorrow! So I thought, Mr Speaker, that as well as giving you a little bit of information about Kingswood itself, I would also share what the people of Kingswood told me during the campaign, which I hope includes issues that are pertinent to all Members, whichever party in this Chamber they represent.

3.15 pm

The first thing to say is that people told me that family life had become much harder. I spoke to parents who told me that they are stressed and exhausted. People are doing all the right things—working hard, putting in extra hours, paying the bills—but they told me time and again that they feel like they are just existing through life, and not living it. It is not as though people are asking for a lot, but when you work hard, you ought to be able to feel secure for the future. You should be left with enough money to enjoy life—to pay for meals out, order that occasional takeaway, plan nice trips for the children or book a family holiday. I am sure that no one here would think that was a lot to ask for, but I have to tell you, Mr Speaker, that for an increasing number of working people in Kingswood, those are now out-of-reach luxuries.

People told me that they feel that they are paying more, but getting less. We do not have a single NHS dentist accepting new patients, not just in Kingswood, but anywhere in the entire Bristol area, and it is so hard to get in at the doctors'. I spoke to a woman who had to call her doctor 117 times before she got through, only to be told, "We're full up today. Call back tomorrow."

There is a lot of sympathy for the challenges that the Government have faced—not just all the different Prime Ministers, but covid and Ukraine—and the pressure that those things have put on the public finances, but people want to see us doing better with the money that we have. People told me that they do not feel safe, and that they do not see enough police. Interestingly, I spoke to a long-serving police officer who said he was frustrated because increased bureaucracy means that he is sat behind his desk, when in his words, he "joined the police to catch criminals."

Bus cuts were mentioned, as whole areas of Bristol now do not have any buses. That is great news for our taxi drivers, who work very hard driving people all around the city, but of course not everyone can afford a taxi. The decline of the high street came up a lot in the campaign. Kingswood has changed so much since I was growing up, and it is sad to see. There is hope, though; the council plans some investment, which I hope really kickstarts the improvements that many of us want to see.

Also high up on the list of things that people mentioned were apprenticeships and opportunities for well-paid work. Kingswood used to be a hub for apprenticeships. My dad was an apprentice—one of 140 in his year, all from local schools—but his generation's grandchildren do not have the same volume of opportunities to go straight from school into the workplace, and we all miss out on skills as a result. When it comes to education generally, South Gloucestershire schools are the lowest funded in the country. Why?

Those are some of the concerns that were mentioned. It is obviously not an exhaustive list; I could have dedicated a whole speech to potholes. There were some national concerns too, including immigration, and real worries about how, in a rapidly changing world with growing threats to peace, we do all we can to invest in and support our armed forces. I spoke to soldiers who were looking for second jobs, and the wife of one told me that some of her husband's equipment is held together with gaffer tape.

A winter by-election is weeks and weeks of knocking on cold, wet doors—and many colleagues joined me. For me, it was a privilege to have so many real, honest, normal conversations, which were so far removed from the angry online echo chambers. It was a reminder that the social media bubble that has become so dominant does not reflect mainstream Britain and the everyday challenges that people face.

I hoped to give you a little flavour of Kingswood—not just the place, but the people—and I will leave you with this: there is a reason why Kingswood usually picks the winner at every general election. Kingswood is a representative voice of decent British people who work hard and play by the rules, love their family, and just want the best for their children. Our job is to make sure that the country to which they give so much gives them a good future in return.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Let us remain in the south-west. I call Anthony Mangnall.

Anthony Mangnall: It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Kingswood (Damien Egan), and may I congratulate him on his maiden speech? It is somewhat frustrating, as one of the younger Members on the Conservative side of the House, to find new Members turning up who look fresher, healthier and readier for the fight. He also managed to unify the House when talking about potholes; I do not think he will find any disagreement on that subject. He comes to this place with a huge amount of experience, not just from fighting other seats, but having been Mayor of Lewisham, where he did extraordinary work on community land trusts that Members from across the House have commented on and would like to follow in our constituencies. I am

[Anthony Mangnall]

sure that his family are somewhere in the Gallery and will be proud of his maiden speech. He has done very well.

I would like to make a few remarks about CPTTP, the tongue-twister that seems to have made many Members of this place fall sideways. We should start by recognising what the United Kingdom has managed to do over the last four years. We have recognised the global ambition of fulfilling our trade objectives. We have succeeded in joining CPTTP, but we have also secured deals with Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, as well as joining the Singapore digital partnership. I spend my life repeating the fact that we have made those deals; it is important that we recognise their true value, not just to GDP, but to businesses, the economy, the environment and business people across the United Kingdom and, indeed, the world. It shows that we are determined to fulfil our promise and commitment to sign deals to bolster our position in the world. Of course, negotiations are also under way with the Gulf Co-operation Council, Israel and others.

In joining CPTTP, we are signing a deal with the fastest-growing region in the world. Now that we have tariff-free trade relations, the UK is set to increase trade with the countries in CPTTP by £37 billion by 2030. It is a market worth £110 billion to UK trade. With growth at 8% between 2016 and 2019, UK membership is only expected to boost that figure. Conservative figures—I say “conservative” because I feel that they are underestimates—suggest that there will be a £1.8 billion increase to GDP and an £800 million boost to take-home pay for workers. Additionally, estimates are that trade with the 11 members will increase by an average of 65%, with the west midlands, Scotland and Northern Ireland benefiting most, so I look forward to hearing the SNP’s point of view, and whether it will support the Bill.

As has already been mentioned, the point of this deal is that it allows us to have tariff-free trade in goods. CPTTP has new product regulations, expands our role and opportunities for services, and ensures mobility for business people. Digital trade will be enhanced and intellectual property enshrined, with benchmarks created by the United Kingdom, and the CPTTP has sustainability at its core. However, I would like to focus my remarks on new clauses 1 and 4.

It has been my cause, war or campaign—however one wants to phrase it—over the last four years that Parliament should do better on our trade agreements. We should spend more time scrutinising and debating them. It is always a source of frustration that when we have debates on trade, so few people show up. The ability of this House to explain the value of a trade deal to our constituents, to justify its economic value and to talk about the potential security risk is diminished when we do not have opportunities on the Floor of the House to discuss the merits or demerits of any trade agreement.

I disagree with new clauses 1 and 4 not because I am being belligerent, or because the Whips have me under the cosh, but because we need to focus on reforming the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010. Parliament cannot opine on every single international treaty. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) made a point about whether accession to CPTTP should be

debated on the Floor of the House. There could be no limit to that, but he did not explain—I will let him intervene if he wants to—how he would get around the royal prerogative issue; international trade agreements are not in the hands of Parliament, but in the hands of Government Ministers. That was not considered in his remarks.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: I agree. I could have taken this even further, but my point is that the Foreign Office dislikes any idea of debate and discussion. However, we have a Trade Department, which needs to be imbued with the power to ensure that debate happens. I am completely in favour of just punching through the nonsense and the poor use of the prerogative.

Anthony Mangnall: I understand that, but I feel that punching through on this occasion would be the wrong approach. I agree with my right hon. Friend that the Foreign Office’s appetite for us debating these issues in this place should not matter one jot, because it is our right as parliamentarians to discuss free trade agreements and whether they work. Respectfully, I say that the mechanism for ensuring that we get better trade agreements, and can be reassured about their economic value and benefits to the British people and our national security, has to be achieved by upgrading the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) made an excellent point when he referred to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee report’s recommendation on enshrining a methodology to ensure that CRAg operates within 21 sitting days, and that a meaningful vote is held at the end of that period. If that were ever to take place, it would be meaningful, because it would delay the signing of any free trade agreement by 21 days.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point about the need to change CRAg; we mentioned that need in our report. Our report made it clear that a lot of changes do not necessarily need legislation, but they do need a change of approach from the Government. There should be a clear commitment made at the Dispatch Box that debates will always be called when there is significant interest in a subject, and particularly when there are commitments around new accession. If the Government made those commitments, it would be enough, but they are still not forthcoming. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Minister should stand at the Dispatch Box today and give those commitments, so that we can move forward with some certainty?

Anthony Mangnall: The hon. Gentleman and I served for a long time on the International Trade Committee, as it was previously known, and I should start my response to him by paying enormous credit to the Secretary of State, who came in front of the Committee a number of times, and who wrote to the Leader of the House to ask for time to debate CPTTP within the CRAg period. I am afraid that my ire and irritation at our not having secured that time must now be focused on the Leader of the House, but the hon. Gentleman is right to say there are simple steps that we can take to make sure that this House is properly briefed on these issues. One of them—I absolutely declare my interest—would be to give Privy Counsellor status to members of

the Business and Trade Committee. I do not think anyone would disagree with that suggestion. It would certainly be a very popular move, and when it has been mentioned in the Committee, it has been welcomed with open arms. I am glad that it has the approval of the House. But, in all seriousness, there has to be a set process and the CRaG mechanism allows us that opportunity if done properly. It is there and it must be reformed, regardless of who is in government. It is in the interests of the entire House to amend and implement CRaG.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: I fully agree with my hon. Friend's wider purpose, but I come back to the point that Lord Lisvane made very clearly, which is that we still do not have the ability to debate the entry of a security risk country. He pointed out that CRaG does not do that because of its nature. I agree with my hon. Friend's wider point that CRaG must be reformed, but we have a Bill going through the House at the moment and this is a better time to at least get a foothold in that debate rather than say that we will do it another time.

Anthony Mangnall: I really do accept the point that my right hon. Friend makes—how could I disagree when he is making that absolutely essential argument on national security. But what he is asking for might be viewed in very different terms by the other 11 members of the CPTPP. There are standards to join the CPTPP in the first place that would prevent China from joining unless it improved its act. He has talked about the lessening of appetites in places such as Australia for China to join. I am not sure whether that is the case, but there is a standard within the CPTPP that would prevent China from joining, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) has already remarked, we have a veto in this instance. I think this is more about ensuring that we have a debate and a vote in this place on the values of a trade agreement. If we are worried about a new accession to the CPTPP, it is for us to make that case to the Secretaries of State in the Foreign Office and the Department for Business and Trade, and for them to go back to the other 11 countries and make the case in that way.

3.30 pm

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I welcome almost everything that the hon. Gentleman—my hon. Friend—is saying, he and I having worked together a lot on this issue, but the reality is that other countries in the CPTPP have arrangements that allow their Parliaments to have deliberations on significant treaty changes and on the incoming of new members. We are talking not about the CPTPP arrangements but about our arrangements for authorising our Government to go ahead and agree. Surely he must agree that it would not undermine the CPTPP if we were to make our own arrangements on how we were to instruct our Government.

Anthony Mangnall: Forgive me if it sounds trite to say that I worry about mission creep, but if we did that on this, might we not also do it for the World Health Organisation, or for any other body that might be under suspicion of having some adverse state actor involved in it? I worry about how we go about this. I worry about Parliament always trying to have a say and slowing the process of how our trade agreements are signed and ratified. We need to be efficient and quick in the way we

do it, but we must also ensure that we have the opportunity for debate, as we have today in this debate on the merits of the three chapters in the Bill.

I want to end with a parting shot. As has been mentioned by the Chair of the Business and Trade Committee, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), we were told that we would have the opportunity to debate the full 30 chapters of the CPTPP within CRaG, and it is disappointing that we do not have that. The Government—the Secretary of State and the Minister—have done an amazing job in engaging with the Committee, but this is a serious disappointment. It lessens the progress that has been made to date on signing new trade agreements and ensuring that this place has a say on our future.

Sarah Green (Chesham and Amersham) (LD): I stand to speak to new clause 12, which stands in my name, and also to new clauses 11 and 13. I would like to begin by stating once again that the Liberal Democrats want to see an ambitious trade policy aimed at creating opportunities for British firms around the world and new jobs here in our country. The Bill and our accession to the CPTPP are a step in that direction. The point has been well made, in this House and in the other place, that the projections in the Government's own impact assessment are for GDP growth of just 0.06% by 2040, so although the UK's accession to the trading bloc can and should be welcomed, the cause for celebration is limited.

I would like to speak to three new clauses that aim to address some key issues with the Bill and the UK's accession. New clause 12 would require the Government to publish an assessment of the impact of the CPTPP's performers' rights provisions. We know the worries of our creative industries surrounding the Bill. The lack of reciprocal agreements for UK artists in CPTPP countries leaves our creatives exposed. The UK is rightly proud of our world-leading creative industries and we should also be proud of a world-leading intellectual property regime. We must be sure that this Bill and this trade deal do nothing to jeopardise that. There is a need for clarity and certainty in this area, and that is why I tabled new clause 12, which I hope Members will support.

New clause 13 would require the Government to conduct a review examining how the implementation of the treaty affects the costs faced by exporting and importing businesses in the UK. That report would have to consider the existing costs that those businesses were already facing as a result of trade regulations. We know that the stated ambition of the Government is that the deal will minimise red tape and trade regulations when trading with other CPTPP countries, which is a welcome goal. However, the British Chambers of Commerce has found that almost two fifths of businesses list regulations and red tape as a significant barrier to exporting. We need to be assured that our businesses will be supported to trade and flourish. With that in mind, it will be worth while, after our accession, to take the time to assess how the deal and the wider trade regulation landscape are affecting British businesses. That is the purpose of new clause 13.

It is clear that the CPTPP will likely grow over time as new countries join and accede to the deal, which will bring new opportunities but may also pose risks. The potential accession of China is one example, and the concerns regarding that possibility have been well discussed

[Sarah Green]

by colleagues in this Chamber and the other place. New clause 11 would require the Government to provide an impact assessment on the accession of countries that have made, and will make, a formal request to join the CPTPP. This will allow us to have a clear and informed vision of what the accession of each new country would mean for the UK. I believe this would be a reasonable and common-sense measure.

I finish by echoing what has already been said about parliamentary scrutiny. It is welcome that we are having this debate today but, in reality, we are debating a very limited and narrow Bill. We need proper parliamentary scrutiny of trade deals, and I ask the Government to ensure that it happens in future.

John McDonnell: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Damien Egan) on his excellent speech. He mentioned that he has been elected at the tail-end of a Government and that an election is coming soon. I reassure him that the diligence he has already demonstrated in this House and his constituency should secure his re-election. It is wonderful to hear a Member speaking for a constituency with its accent.

I will address amendment 2 and new clause 8, although I support virtually every amendment that has been tabled, which shows the weakness of the process by which we have examined this treaty. I have been involved in discussions with the Secretary of State and the Minister over a number of months on ISDS, and I am concerned about the contradiction between their refusal to secure a side letter with regard to this treaty and what happened with regard to Australia and New Zealand. The negotiating brief for the Canadian free trade agreement also had a specific remit to prevent an ISDS process. I have never got to the bottom of that contradiction.

Amendment 2 follows our lengthy debate about the scrutiny of treaties. I have not given notice to the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) that I will be referring to him in the Chamber, although I am not sure that we have to give notice ahead of praising, rather than criticising, another Member. I am a member of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, which he chairs, and he has become the 21st-century Walter Bagehot, with a solid mixture of Trollope. He steered our discussions on the formal process for examining treaties with immense skill, drawing on a range of evidence that led to consensus—there is almost consensus in the Chamber at the moment—and this is what our report says:

“CRAg has been an insufficient legislative tool to facilitate meaningful Parliamentary scrutiny of treaties... the current legislation provides only a passive role for Parliament and as such there is no opportunity for Parliament to express its explicit approval or disapproval of a treaty.”

That is a common theme of all the debates. We have to do better than this.

Having read the report, the worry is that the Government have not responded positively by trying to get some order, particularly on the early negotiating processes and the debates that should take place. The Committee's general view on this treaty, like the others, is that Parliament has been largely bypassed. We were offered no say on the Government's negotiating objectives at the earliest stage, which is important, and no oversight

of the negotiations as they progressed. Now we are refused a vote on the final terms of accession. This is not acceptable as a democratic process. The formal CRAg period, under which we can nominally have a say on the agreement, concludes this Friday, after a 21-day period. We are offered no vote or even a debate on the substantive terms of the CPTPP during this period, and accession is likely to receive our consent without any of us being given a single vote.

As I mentioned to the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith), I have tabled a prayer to try to secure a time extension to enable the Government to bring forward time for a debate. My view is exactly the same as his: we are debating a narrow, technical, implementing Bill and that is no substitute for a confirmatory debate and vote on the accession itself. I agree with the Chair of the Business and Trade Committee, who has raised this issue with the Government in correspondence over the past two weeks. It is preposterous for the Government then to say with a straight face that there is not parliamentary time to have such a debate, given our current sitting arrangements. Those who have been here for as long as me, or perhaps even longer, will know that there has not been a problem on parliamentary time in the past, as we have simply found the time and sat and gone through the business when it is so important.

My amendment 2 seeks to address that wrong by formalising a requirement for the Government to ask for Parliament's consent for the UK's accession to the CPTPP. That is a basic democratic point of principle. If the Government do not accept that, I come back to the urgings of Members from across the House and say that I hope the Government will take seriously the recommendations of the PACAC report for reform of the process overall. We are dealing with an undemocratic structure. The PACAC report's incredibly practical proposals are for a sifting process, a sifting Committee, the identification of treaties that require longer consideration and giving the House itself a proper process of democratic scrutiny and democratic decision.

I shall deal briefly with new clause 8, which stands in my name and deals with the labour chapter of the CPTPP. I have raised this issue before, and the point has been made by a number of colleagues, the TUC, in particular, and various other campaigning organisations throughout this ratification process. The labour provisions of the CPTPP are outdated and inadequate. This treaty will include a number of countries, some of which have been mentioned, with the prospect of others joining, where abuses of labour rights are widespread. Putting in place effective labour provisions is therefore vital in any treaty we undertake.

That view has been expressed across the House for a number of years now, but let me give some examples. In Brunei and Vietnam, independent trade unions are banned—they are not allowed legally to operate. In Malaysia, which has been mentioned in our previous debates, forced labour has been documented extensively. That issue has been raised in this House time and again.

In that context, it is crucial that the CPTPP's labour provisions are readily enforceable and are linked to the removal of trade preferences, to ensure that membership does not lead to a race to the bottom on labour standards, exactly as the right hon. Gentleman said. I agree with him on the fear about China, because union colleagues

of mine from Hong Kong, whom I have worked with for decades, are in prison at the moment purely and simply because they are trade unionists and have stood up for democratic rights.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: The point I was trying to make is that there is also an economic issue here. If China practises slave or forced labour, as it does on a wide scale, it undercuts all the reasonable labour. One good example is that the UK is desperately trying to get more solar arrays, but the polysilicon that is critical to those is mined in Xinjiang under slave labour conditions. No wonder everybody else is undercut, but we still pay for this.

John McDonnell: It is a point of economic principle that such things will occur if we do not have proper rights or regulations installed, or the appropriate sanctions when anything takes place. At the moment, those are not contained in the treaty. One member state can challenge another for failing to uphold labour rights, but, as we have seen time and again across various treaties, it is notoriously difficult to prove that such failure has affected trade. To challenge those labour practices, we have to demonstrate the effect on trade, but, under current provisions, that is almost impossible to do.

The International Trade Union Confederation has rightly pointed to the ability of states to buy their way out of issues via dispute settlement, as the amount of compensation has been calculated time and again as a fraction of the violation's impact on trade. So the sanctions do not work, and they will not work under this treaty.

3.45 pm

The ineffectual nature of the labour rights chapter is demonstrated by the fact that, since the agreement's conclusion in 2018, no Government have challenged another for abusing labour rights. It is not working. So again, if the Government are not going to accept this new clause, I just hope a future Government will consider the issue and that we will then be able to raise it with the CPTPP partner countries through the formal review process, so that labour protections can eventually be significantly strengthened. That may well come under a new Government after the election, but I can reassure the whole House that a number of us will not drop this issue. It will come back time. We will raise the importance of getting proper democratic scrutiny and, on issues such as labour rights, of ensuring that we protect both our own economy and workers themselves from the exploitation that has been evidenced so succinctly in various debates in this House.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: It is a pleasure to follow the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Damien Egan). What a great way of upstaging his sister a week after her wedding—after a by-election is forced, he goes on to win it. But I suspect that it was a happy moment for all the family, and it is a delight to have him here.

I have tabled two new clauses. I have sat on the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee and, in its previous iteration, the International Trade Committee, when we scrutinised the Bill almost, I felt, to death. The problem with scrutiny without any teeth is that words produced in Parliament all the time are

lost in the ether. The reality is that, unless there is debate in the main Chamber, there is not the right body of weight behind those words and those concerns.

It is clear to me that we need to change constitutional make-up of how we do trade deals. I support everything that PACAC has said, of course, but personally I would go further. I think we do need legislative changes to CRAg, despite the fact that we could make some changes through trust—that would be a good start. The reality is that, since we left the European Union—I know we are not meant to go on about that—this House has had less scrutiny over trade deals than we did before. It used to be that consent was required, which would go via the European Scrutiny Committee. That consent was required to be sent to the European Union before a trade deal could be signed off.

We know that in other places around Europe, legislators did hold back inappropriate trade deals. The EU-Canada free trade deal, for example, was held back by the Wallonian Parliament because it failed to address things such as workers' rights, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) mentioned. The deal was renegotiated and the Europeans got a better deal. We could have done that at any step of the way when we were in Europe, but now we are out of the EU, we are less able to do so and less able to hold our negotiating person to account. Our negotiating person at that point was the European Commission. Our negotiating people now are our Ministers and civil servants, but we are less able to hold them to account. We cannot set their negotiating mandate or stop a trade deal, as we were able to do before. Yes, we can delay it, and yes, this Minister is fantastic in coming to be held to account through questioning, but the hard stop that means that people listen to you rather than just having a nice debating club with you has now been lost. We need to reflect that changing world.

Mark Garnier: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He and I have discussed this at great length in two Committees that we have both sat on. I am hugely sympathetic to every point that he is making, but there is one counter-argument that has not yet been put forward. The position of our negotiators in striking these deals in the first place could be slightly weakened by the fact that they would then have to check back with the legislature on whether or not it will ratify. Were we to take the final decision away from our negotiators, they would not be able to negotiate such a strong deal. I put that forward not necessarily as a definitive answer, but as a counter-argument.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. Some people claim that that would happen, but others claim that it would strengthen our position. When the EU says, "This is our backstop," we know that it is not bluffing because the backstop has been set by the EU Parliament. Now, negotiators can say, "Well, we know that that is not really the backstop, because you can go away and cajole your Back Benchers to vote this through anyway," whereas in other systems, they can say, "I'm sorry, but the Senate will not approve this because the committee is holding my feet to the fire."

However, there are other ways of doing it. As other Members have mentioned, we could allow the matter to have Privy Council status and meet in camera, to allow involvement in negotiations. In multilateral processes,

[Lloyd Russell-Moyle]

other Governments embed parliamentarians in their negotiating teams. The Norwegians, for example, embed parliamentarians in their WTO negotiating teams in the day-to-day back and forth. Of course, in Norway, the WTO is dealt with by a different department from bilateral treaties, so there is a slightly different way of negotiating different kinds of deals. We can determine what kind of deal it is from the level of negotiation and whether Parliament is involved. If Norway were dealing with the CPTPP, parliamentarians would be embedded in that process, but if it were dealing with the Japan deal, they would not.

There are granularities of parliamentary overview and scrutiny, but almost all systems have developed them over the past 50 years as trade deals have basically become international lawmaking processes rather than dealing just with trade—they deal with all aspects of our life. However, we effectively paused our processes when we joined the European Union, and we have now reverted to where we were before joining. Although I accept that our process are now in the CRaG law, they have not evolved properly.

Let me address my new clause 2. Around 90% of the world's oil palm trees are grown in just a few islands in Malaysia and Indonesia. Currently, less than 20% of that palm oil has received certification for sustainable palm oil forestry. The CPTPP will remove tariffs from palm oil. Of course, the aim of removing tariffs is to increase trade, so it seems implausible to say that we do not think it will increase the amount of palm oil in the UK that comes from unsustainable forests. The same could be true of tropical woods. Two of the 11 forests that supply our tropical woods and are identified as in danger are in the CPTPP region, but they have no additional protection.

Anthony Mangnall: First, Indonesia is not part of CPTPP. It is also important to note that the Malaysians have introduced a certification and standard for more sustainable palm oil plantation. I am not saying that that is perfection—it certainly is not, there is a lot further to go—but it is a good example of how, by forming a trade agreement through CPTPP, we can raise standards, not lower them.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: The hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly sound point. That is why my amendment does not say that we should not join the CPTPP, or that we should disallow it for those purposes. It would require the Secretary of State to lay before Parliament a monitoring report on the level of unsustainable palm oil and forest products that are entering this country before we join the CPTPP, and to report regularly on those imports. If and when this House, or Ministers themselves, believe that action is needed, the data will be there to prove it. If we do not collect that data, we will not know, and we will be blind to the problem.

The same is true of our obligations on climate change and biodiversity. Personally, I would prefer a stronger environmental section in the Bill, but it is what it is. However, it should be noted that 119 pesticides that are permitted in CPTPP countries are not permitted in this country, 56 of which are considered to be highly harmful to human beings. Yes, we have standards for food, but there are no production standards, and there are no

standards for pesticides that are not food-based. The problems with some of those pesticides—the killing of bees and other wildlife—are not just about human consumption: sometimes, those pesticides are banned not because they harm human beings, but because they harm the fauna and flora around us. When we import goods that contain them, they can enter the food chain; even worse, they can enter the animal food chain, which is not regulated by the same food standards and therefore causes huge problems. We need Government oversight of those points to ensure that we do not end up damaging some of our crops through pesticides that we ourselves have banned.

Turning to new clause 3, I am particularly concerned about ISDS. At long last, the Government have agreed that we should withdraw from the energy charter treaty, primarily because in a changing world, we need to make changes to our energy policy to make it more green. Our continual inclusion in the energy charter treaty would bind us to ISDS agreements, which we have seen targeted at a number of European states that have made moves to increase their environmentally friendly sources of energy. That is now a danger to us: even though we have not lost an ISDS case, it is a danger to our future and to policymaking. If we have made that case for energy, I think the same case could be made for almost all our arrangements.

It is useful to note that our agreements with Australia, New Zealand and Japan—all of which are part of the CPTPP—did not include ISDS. In fact, the agreement with Japan included a clause to say that we would not enact ISDS unless we signed or entered into another agreement that includes it, so the very fact that this agreement includes ISDS triggers a number of ISDS courts in other agreements that we have signed, which I think is risky and dangerous. We need a report on the risks that ISDS poses to the UK, because we could have rogue investors who end up taking us to court even if it is against the national interest of the two respective states. Of course, citizens cannot access ISDS—it is not a global court where citizens who have been harmed can seek redress from a Government. Only corporations that have invested in a particular country can do so.

ISDS actually means that corporations that invest into Britain from outside have higher protections than a British corporation that invests in plants here. I think it is totally wrong that a British corporation is more vulnerable to changing policy than a foreign one. It should be a level playing field, but at the moment, a British corporation that has invested here has no recourse to ISDS if policy changes in Britain, but corporations from outside do—the Minister is frowning a bit, so I was just trying to explain the difference. There is also a well recorded chilling effect from ISDS that we must be particularly aware of.

Fundamentally—again, I go back to the thing that we are not meant to mention—under the European Union, at least there were open courts to which we appointed judges. ISDS means secret tribunals that do not always have British judges, so there is a problem there. If we are meant to be taking back control, surely we should be taking power away from secret courts and allowing sunlight to be the justice that we seek.

Apart from the matters covered by the two new clauses I have tabled, I think this treaty is a step in the right direction. We should support it, but I wish the

Government had negotiated as well as New Zealand and other countries that sought and won protections that, I am afraid, our Ministers failed to even bother seeking.

4 pm

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Like everybody else, let me start with a moment of consensus. It was a privilege to be present for the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Damien Egan). On my visit to his constituency, I did not get to see the beacon that he mentioned, but that is clearly an oversight on my part and I hope to rectify it at some point. May I be the first to congratulate his sister on her wedding? Brothers who usurp their sisters are brave men, and only being elected to this place is a justifiable reason for doing so.

I am going to contradict my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) in that I think we have to talk about Brexit in this debate, not least because the Government have talked about Brexit in promoting the benefits of the CPTPP, and the people of the UK deserve better. They need to understand what is being offered to them and what is being done to reflect their growing recognition of the severe damage that this Tory hard Brexit has done to the British economy and to British businesses.

I rise to support not only the amendments tabled by my Front-Bench colleagues, but the concerns that have been raised about democratic oversight and scrutiny of those who might join the CPTPP. I will also speak to new clause 9, which I have tabled. I am pleased to say that it has support from across the House, including among people who disagree on whether Brexit has been a good idea. When so much fantasy has dominated the debate, it is about time we had some facts.

New clause 9 refers to the very real experience of British business right now of the damage that Brexit has done. Research suggests that £140 billion has already been drained from the economy; those trading opportunities and business opportunities have gone. The average Briton is £2,000 worse off, and in my London constituency people are £3,500 worse off. British businesses are crying out for support and help with trade. Research from the University of Sussex last year showed that only 6% were positive about Brexit, and seven in 10 manufacturers reported problems with their supply chain. That is why it matters that we look at the CPTPP.

For the avoidance of doubt, I am here not to oppose joining the CPTPP, but to hold the Government to account. It is Government Ministers, as well as their chums and various right-wing think-tanks, who promoted the idea that we should not worry about the damage that Brexit under their watch has done to our economy, because programmes such as the CPTPP were going to replace all those trading opportunities and be the hallowed ground that British business could look to.

The Trade Secretary herself said:

“Our accession to CPTPP sends a powerful signal that the UK is open for business and using our post-Brexit freedoms to reach out to new markets around the world”.

She is one of the milder advocates for the idea that not only has Brexit been a roaring success, but that the CPTPP will add to those trading opportunities.

“It’s no exaggeration to say that CPTPP+UK is an equivalent economic power to the EU-28”.

said Shanker Singham of the Institute of Economic Affairs. Goodness me, what a claim to be making. I tabled new clause 9 because I think British business and this place deserve to know the truth about the relative merits of such partnerships and the challenges to our businesses and communities, particularly small and medium-sized businesses struggling with the impact of Brexit, as well as whether help is indeed coming.

The honest truth is that nobody wants to name consistently the impact of this partnership deal, not even the Secretary of State herself. Mark Littlewood, who is also from the Institute of Economic Affairs, has claimed:

“The benefits to Britain will likely be significantly greater than some official estimates driven by static economic models.”

The challenge to that argument is that, when we ask anybody who promotes it what the actual data might be—where the evidence is that this will be the help needed by British businesses that are being clobbered by Brexit, with all the rules, regulations and tariffs they are now facing—we get the Facebook setting response of “It’s complicated”. That is not good enough for British business.

Even the Secretary of State tried that model with the Business and Trade Committee, telling it that she disputed the idea that the results or the benefits to British businesses of joining the CPTPP would be small, but she could not give an alternative model or an alternative number to give people some crumb of hope that they might actually solve the problems in their supply chain.

All we are left with are the claims of greatness—claims that disintegrate on hard contact with the here and now about what is actually being proposed and what actual damage has been done by Brexit. Here and now, British businesses find that Brexit border taxes are increasing, although I note that today in a written ministerial statement the Government have decided to rewrite some of those Brexit border taxes, which are due to come in at the end of April. So that is great for British businesses! That is stability and planning, when even the Government do not know how much they are going to charge people. The CPTPP is supposed to reduce the tariffs and non-tariff barriers we now face as a direct result of having left the European Union, because after all it is about reducing tariff barriers.

Let us look at the data we have to hand and whether we can really judge this partnership as offering that salvation. It has been claimed again, this time by *The Daily Telegraph*, that the bloc will represent 16% of global GDP, “leap-frogging the combined EU.” It is currently 10% of global GDP—but you know the *Telegraph* and figures—compared with 14% for the European Union. It is said that the CPTPP member countries have a combined population of 500 million and a GDP of £9 trillion. That is fantastic; we can be part of trading with them—nobody would dispute that that would be helpful to British businesses. There is a small reference point to take into account, however. Although the EU is of a similar size with a GDP of £11 trillion, the total value of our trade with the EU is £557 billion. That is 45% of our total trade, but that trade is falling as a direct result of Brexit, because it used to account for 55% of UK exports.

That is because, for all the smoke and mirrors and all the bluster about the CPTPP, there is a simple fact: geography matters. We can fight many things in life but air miles and transportation costs are not among them.

[Stella Creasy]

Our ability to trade with our nearest neighbours easily and freely matters to British business far more than anything we could do with those further away. That is why the Government's own impact assessment tells us that the CPTPP might only make 0.06% of difference to our GDP, or £2 billion. That is in part because we already have trade deals with most of the countries from when we had them as part of the EU. So only a further 0.33%—not 33%—of total UK trade will come under the new trade agreements.

The reality in all this and the conundrum we face is that this trade partnership will only really be a big deal if more countries join. I am sorry the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Sir Liam Fox) is no longer in his place. He was disappointed that the United States of America were not part of the CPTPP. It will only be the game changer that people talk it up to be if more countries join. Then we would be looking at the Indo-Pacific region. Right here, right now, that is not what we are signing up to and that is not what is being offered to British business. That is why scrutiny and looking at who else might join matters, but it is also why new clause 9 matters. It is not fair to British business to suggest that help is coming when help there is none.

Membership of the CPTPP bears no comparison to EU membership. The sum it will generate is just one fiftieth of what the Office for Budget Responsibility estimates Brexit has already cost the UK economy. Indeed, it estimates that leaving the single market means that our GDP will be 4% less over the next 15 years, and some have estimated that GDP has already reduced by 5% as a result.

In 2022, the UK exported £340 billion-worth of goods and services to the EU. By way of comparison, we exported £64 billion-worth of goods and services to the CPTPP countries. New clause 9 is about being honest with British businesses about where those markets lie and where they should invest their time. It is also about understanding that free trade is not just about tariffs; it is also about regulations and the non-tariff changes we face. It is about understanding that this deal could lead to a lowering of food standards and problems with our food supply chain. It could affect our ability to sign a sanitary and phytosanitary deal with Europe that might help remove those silly Brexit border taxes which mean that in a couple of weeks our constituents are going to be asking us why there are food shortages and food inflation and loads of lorries queued up at Dover trying to get to Sevington. It could lead to challenges for our environment, too: my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) rightly raised questions about palm oil and deforestation. There is an absolute irony in those who championed Brexit and who now champion the CPTPP not seeming to understand what the investor-state dispute settlement provisions are and the lack of democratic accountability and lack of control we might have. I do not know who is taking back control under those circumstances, because it is behind closed doors.

Clearly, we could have been working on other deals as a country that would have made a bigger difference to British business. That is why the amendments and new clause are so important. Our constituents demand that we ask those questions and get those answers from

Government about the tariffs that are being retained and the impact that they will have, such as for British cheese producers. After all, Canada's dairy industry is being protected—no Wensleydale for Winnipeg. The Trade and Agriculture Commission has warned of the potential increased costs of products due to tariff reductions, because UK producers will be held legally to higher sustainable standards. It is also about the rules of origin and details around what content is allowed.

Nobody is disputing that it is helpful to have content accumulation, because it helps with those difficulties within supply chains. Ministers have made much about that, but the reality is that had they spent as much time on the pan-Euro-Mediterranean convention, we would have far greater benefits for British business. That convention binds together more than 60 bilateral trade agreements within the Euro-Mediterranean area. It is not just the EU; it is much broader than that. There are 23 contracting parties, each with free trade agreements between them and a single rules-based origin protocol.

British businesses and those struggling supply chains could have got much more help, had we looked at what would really benefit them and just admitted the geography at stake in all this. We have short-changed ourselves and we are short-changing the British public if we try to claim that the CPTPP is in any way compensation for the damage that Brexit is doing.

In challenging those on the right who claim that the benefits of CPTPP will far outweigh the problems of Brexit—their hope and intention is that UK accession will kill off any likelihood that we will ever be part of the EU customs union or single market, as in that article in *The Daily Telegraph*—and that we could not have dynamic alignment, we have to recognise that that is just not true. There is plenty of evidence that whatever we did, we could rethink, and thank goodness for that. When things are at stake for British business, it is only right that we ask those questions. There is a process for changing regulations as we join the CPTPP that can be reversed if we can do a deal with Europe and work out what is in the best interests of British business. The only way we can do that is if we have the facts, and that is what new clause 9 is about.

Whether Members agreed with Brexit or opposed it, they should support new clause 9 and that ethos of having the data. If I am wrong and the CPTPP is the light at the end of the tunnel for British business, let us prove it, stand behind it and celebrate it. Nobody wants to see British business struggling as a result of Brexit with no help in sight. Every Member in this House should get behind the idea that we need good economic modelling. We should understand the extent of alignment, what new trade regulations on carbon pricing might do for British business and what is happening to trade volumes as a result of these partnerships. Without the new clause, we will not get that data. We will still get the Facebook answer of, "It's complicated. We cannot really tell you." All the while, global Britain is going-broke Britain—it is gutted Britain, with businesses across the country facing reams and reams of paperwork because of Brexit, with no end in sight, because this Government will not put British business first and renegotiate with Europe for a closer deal.

I am sorry that new clause 9 has not been selected for decision. I understand why, but I hope that Members will join me in demanding better for British business

when it comes not just to trade deals, but to our relationship with Europe, because every manager of a small business in this country right now will be looking at all the paperwork, all the complications, all the further regulations and excessive costs and frankly the fact that the Government cannot even tell them what they will charge them on the Brexit border tax, and they will be coming to our constituency surgeries asking for help. We owe them the respect of having an answer.

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): May I say what a pleasure it is to follow the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy)? She makes an excellent case for rejoining the European Union. I could have scarcely put it better myself, and I hope her leader is listening. She makes some important points, any teasing aside, about the importance of economic data and of being able to model the impacts of the Government's decisions.

I rise to speak to new clause 10, which is in my name, but first I would echo a number of voices from various parts of the Chamber that have expressed regret that we have before us a narrow Bill to ensure compliance with the requirements of the CPTPP, rather than a debate on the substance and fundamental principle. That is something on which, collectively, we could do much better.

4.15 pm

The Scottish National party's concerns about the impact of the CPTPP relate to the long term. However, if positive impacts are hard to find now, it is important that any negatives be identified early and, where possible, mitigated. In Committee, the Minister stated that there should be a "biennial monitoring report", and a comprehensive evaluation report for the whole agreement prepared

"within five years of the UK's accession."—[*Official Report, Trade (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) Public Bill Committee*, 20 February 2024; c. 41.]

Although that is welcome, it may come a little late for any sectors that are immediately adversely affected.

We know from the various iterations of the post-Brexit agreement on trading arrangements between Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the European single market that even in the most carefully negotiated and meticulously scrutinised arrangements—and most were not—unforeseen adverse consequences can emerge that need to be addressed. That is why, in new clause 10, we call for what might be called an early warning report. It would, within six months, set out the impact CPTPP implementation has had on the UK's trade in goods and services and on GDP. If new clause 9 had been selected for a vote, we would have voted for it, to make available that baseline of data.

The Scottish National party finds merit in all the amendments. In particular, we would be happy to offer support for new clause 1 in the name of the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith), who is no longer in his place. It is fair to say that at times there appears to be a disconnect between the UK Government's trade policy and foreign policy. Surely there can be no doubt that the accession of other states to the CPTPP could present a risk to national security, to other trade, or to international relations objectives that His Majesty's Government might determine on. As such, the very least that Members are entitled to expect is a report by the Government, and a

vote in the House of Commons on the accession of any economy designated as either a threat or a strategic challenge in the integrated review, so that Members can express their view on that accession.

I listened with interest as debate ping-ponged across the Chamber on how we might ensure better scrutiny of trade deals. That is a valuable debate to have. Obviously, different viewpoints have been expressed, but the Bill was an opportunity—and through amendments, there is still an opportunity—to ensure that information is brought to the House, so that Members can at least express a view on trade deals, even if that view is not binding on the Government.

That brings me to new clause 4, which to some extent has stolen the thunder of new clause 1. SNP Members will be happy to walk through the Lobby in support of new clause 4. If successfully passed, we would expect the resulting reports to cover the information requested in new clause 1.

I turn to investor-state dispute settlements. Our concerns about their potential application in the absence of side letters of exemption are well known. As we heard from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), there are jurisdictions in the CPTPP's membership that have a number of pension funds and investors with significant financial interests around the world, not least in the UK. I listened carefully to what the Minister said in Committee about why he did not feel it necessary to have measures in place to deal with this issue, but I remain thoroughly unconvinced of his argument that because the UK has never been subject to successful action under ISDS, it is unlikely to be subject to it in the future. I assume that the Minister has never been run over by a bus, but that he still takes the suitable precaution of looking both ways before crossing the road. We should not take this risk and open up the UK economy to the full scope of ISDS. Had new clause 3 been selected for a vote, we would have been happy to support it; it would have allowed for monitoring of ISDS's implementation.

Finally, we support new clause 12 from the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sarah Green). Although the Bill is narrow, it introduces a number of measures that affect performers and the manner in which they can assert their rights. It is important to understand as quickly as possible the practical impact of any unforeseen consequences, so we think it prudent to add new clause 12 to the Bill, and are happy to support it.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to speak to new clauses 4 to 7 and amendment 1. I draw the attention of the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests in relation to BPI. Let me at the outset say what a particular pleasure it was to listen to the maiden speech of my new hon. Friend, the hon. Member for Kingswood (Damien Egan). His description of his constituents' comments to him during the by-election will chime with all on the Opposition side of the House. It is clear that he will be an asset to the House, and I think it is fair to say that south London's loss is undoubtedly Kingswood's gain.

We support accession to the CPTPP because of its geopolitical benefits and the benefits to trade, relatively limited though they are set to be. Given that the Conservative party has delivered a recession, a cost of

[Gareth Thomas]

living crisis and the worst growth rate in the G7, any uptick in trade and ultimately growth, however limited, would be welcome. There remain, however, a series of concerns about the Government's approach to the CPTPP and trade deals. Our amendments and new clauses seek to address the weak arrangements for parliamentary scrutiny of trade deals; the growing concern about the investor-state dispute settlement; and issues around performers' rights, environmental, animal welfare and food standards, and the help that businesses will be offered to exploit the benefits, however limited, of this deal.

On new clause 1, I recognise the concerns articulated by the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith), which were echoed by the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Sir Liam Fox), and I am sympathetic to the former's call for an enhanced role for Parliament. I am also sympathetic to new clause 11 from the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sarah Green), under which Parliament would require an assessment of the impact of any new country's joining the CPTPP. However, I think we need to go further than both those new clauses do. Labour's new clause 4 would require Ministers to publish such an impact assessment in Parliament and to give the House a vote on any new country joining the CPTPP. Given the security issues, the impact on particular sectors of the economy and on jobs in the UK, as well as the opportunities that an accession could bring, the British people surely have a right to expect this House to consider the merits, or lack of merit, of any new accessions to the CPTPP.

During the Lords debate, the Minister said that he thought that a new state joining CPTPP would trigger the CRaG process in the UK, but the CRaG process, as increasing numbers of Members across the House have largely come to agree, is clearly not fit for purpose; PACAC is the latest Committee to make that clear, in its recent report. New clause 4 provides the opportunity to reform part of that process. Let me refer to what was said by the Chair of the Business and Trade Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), and by the hon. Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) and my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy). We were promised by the Secretary of State and by the Minister in Committee that there would be a debate under the CRaG process, as opposed to there being just this small implementing Bill. We now know that the debate will not happen, so that is another broken promise on trade.

The impact of new countries joining the CPTPP will vary, but could be considerable in certain situations. It is only right that this country expects the House to consider those impacts carefully. I hope that the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green, and the hon. Members for Totnes, and for Chesham and Amersham, can be persuaded to support our new clause. It would achieve what they want in practice and go further. With the leave of the House, we will press our new clause to a vote.

On new clause 5, I hesitate to damage the reputation of my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell),

who made excellent speeches on the ISDS. Over the past 10 years, the marked acceleration in usage of the ISDS by large, litigious corporations to challenge Governments' climate-related or other environmental decisions has prompted concern at the highest levels in the US, in European capitals and at the UN, so much so that Governments across the world are increasingly excluding or revoking the ISDS provisions.

The problem with the ISDS is that it is secretive; it avoids perfectly effective domestic public legal systems; it discriminates against small and medium-sized businesses; it often prevents the voice of those with a genuine interest in the decisions from being heard; and it holds back environmental and other progressive public policy changes. Strikingly, the OECD could find no sustained evidence that the ISDS was key to securing and maintaining business investment. The Nuffield Trust's briefing for today's debate stated that the ISDS could enable companies to challenge some health regulations and NHS policies.

The US, Canada and the European Union have all taken steps to revoke the ISDS provisions in some of their major treaties. The average amount—this is just the published cases—that Governments have been forced to pay, from taxpayers' money, is about \$600 million for climate cases. It seems even more noteworthy that the UN Secretary-General's special rapporteur on environment and human rights expressed concern just last September that the ISDS was a significant threat to the net zero transition, the Paris agreement and tackling climate change.

Some in government clearly share some of those concerns, as they wanted to exclude the ISDS from the bilateral trade deal with Canada, and supported its abolition from trade with the European Union. The Minister was somewhat evasive in Committee. Initially, he tried to duck questions on why the Government wanted to exclude the ISDS from a bilateral trade agreement with Canada but were quite happy to leave it in the CPTPP for Canadian investors to use. Given that Ministers have signed side letters with Australia and New Zealand to disapply the ISDS between our countries in the CPTPP, it seems bizarre that they have not attempted a similar approach with Canada.

Just after Committee, the Government confirmed that they were pulling out of the energy charter treaty, in which ISDS arrangements play a major role, saying that it does not fit with net zero ambitions. The Minister might want to try again to explain why it is essential that we remain committed to the ISDS elements of the CPTPP. It is time for a clear-eyed assessment of the risk that the ISDS poses to our interests. With the leave of the House, the Opposition will press new clause 5 to a vote.

There continue to be significant concerns about the environmental impact of accession to the CPTPP, and the impact on food standards and on animal welfare. The CPTPP covers two of the 11 deforestation fronts expected to account for 80% of deforestation by 2030. A range of environmental groups are very concerned that when the UK joins the CPTPP, preferential access to our markets will be created as a result of the removal of tariffs on palm oil. That could increase demand for products from threatened zones and exacerbate the risk of further deforestation. Ministers still have not published—never mind presented to this House—deforestation due diligence legislation under section 17 of the Environment Act 2021, so it is difficult to accept Ministers'

claims that they are fully committed to our climate change targets, and to protecting important sources of global biodiversity.

On food standards, deep concerns remain that, despite their protestations, the deals that Ministers have negotiated, including the CPTPP, will allow into the UK ever more food produced to lower standards, particularly animal welfare standards. The whole House will remember the words of the former Environment Secretary, the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), who told the House that the Minister and his colleagues had given away

“far too much for far too little”.—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2022; Vol. 722, c. 424.]

when they negotiated the UK-Australia free trade agreement. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the National Farmers Union, in particular, have raised concerns that new tariffs negotiated with Mexico and Canada will leave farmers in the UK much more vulnerable to imported eggs, pork and chicken that are produced to standards that would be illegal in the UK. The Pesticide Action Network UK raised concerns acknowledged by the Trade and Agriculture Commission—concerns also raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle)—that more food produced using pesticides banned in the UK will be imported into the UK

4.30 pm

New clause 7 would require Ministers to publish a plan to help businesses benefit from the new trade deal. It is striking that the Office for Budget Responsibility, in its recent Budget analysis, made it clear that trade will make a negligible contribution to growth through to 2028 under Conservative party plans. We remember that the Secretary of State was appointed and within weeks exports began to fall. Then the Minister of State was reappointed to the brief and exports fell even further. Who could possibly have expected that to happen? Ministers have cut funding for trade missions led by business groups themselves, and cut funding for small and medium-sized enterprises to get to trade shows to open up new markets for themselves. The Government website for helping exporters is so poor that some firms use other countries’ websites to find where there might be opportunities. Ministers could and should be doing a whole lot better to support our businesses to take advantage of any benefits in trade deals.

New clause 7 would require Ministers, once the accession process is over, to publish a clear implementation plan to help businesses benefit from CPTPP. Preference utilisation rates for other trade deals certainly do not offer any grounds for complacency. Given that exports under the Conservative party have performed worse than every other member of the G7 bar Japan over the last decade, it was striking that the Chancellor had nothing to offer exporters and, strikingly, no mention of any plan to help British business exploit our coming membership of CPTPP in his recent Budget. For those reasons, I am sympathetic to new clause 10, tabled by the hon. Member for Gordon (Richard Thomson).

On amendment 1, as the Minister knows and as the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham set out, there remain serious doubts from industry about whether the changes the Bill allows for in relation to the UK’s copyright framework are actually required. We have had different explanations for the changes from Ministers.

At one point they were due to the CPTPP. On another occasion they were being made to comply with other international treaty obligations signed decades ago. What is clear is that the changes could have a significant impact on the ability of the music industry to support new British artists.

Because of those concerns, Ministers were forced to bring forward a consultation on the changes. The consultation will not finish until after the Bill has completed its passage through both Houses. In the worst-case scenario estimated by the Intellectual Property Office, the changes could cost over £100 million. It is likely that Royal Assent will have been granted before we know the outcome of the consultation process. Ministers were forced to bring this issue forward, which I have to say is just the latest example of, at best, a half-hearted approach to the scrutiny of trade issues by those on the Treasury Bench.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: My hon. Friend is making an excellent, excellent speech. [*Interruption.*] Well, he knows it anyway, but there is nothing wrong with praising. Is it not also a sign of how the Government, time and again, let down our creative industries? If it were steel or farming, Conservative Members would be in the ear of Ministers through their trade partnership committees, but creative industries are locked out of many of them and ignored. That is why Labour has put forward a plan to put creative industries at the heart of our economic development.

Gareth Thomas: My hon. Friend is generous in his description of my speech—I am grateful to him—and absolutely right about the importance of Labour’s plan for the creative sector.

Reform of the UK’s copyright framework should not be taken lightly, and it should only follow proper and well-considered consultation. Otherwise, we risk endangering our gold standard of protection for our vital creative sector. I gently suggest to the House that the reforms allowed for under clause 5 should not have been shoehorned into this Bill, and certainly not without a thorough consultation having taken place first. In that regard we are sympathetic to the merits of new clause 12, tabled by the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham. We will continue to scrutinise developments in this area, and we hope that Ministers will reach a final decision, after the consultation, that will not have the adverse impact that is feared by some outside the House.

As I have said, I share the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown in new clauses 2 and 3, and I therefore hope he will join us with enthusiasm in the Lobby later today. Similarly, I share the desire of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington for much greater adherence to the conventions of the International Labour Organisation. We raised this issue in Committee, and as I said earlier, I share his frustration—and that of other Members—that Ministers have not allowed the House a substantive debate under the CRaG process.

Liam Byrne: My hon. Friend, who is making an excellent speech, is right to underline the point about ILO obligations. In the 2022 Queen’s Speech we were promised an updating of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 that would have required much stronger action and transparency on supply chains in order to eliminate

[Liam Byrne]

forced labour. That measure seems to have disappeared, so we must insist on more robust action in our trade agreements if we are to wipe out the scandal of modern slavery.

Gareth Thomas: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Ministers will have heard his point; whether they will act on it remains to be seen, but I certainly hope they do. If we are lucky enough to be elected at the next general election, we will certainly work with the ILO to try to drive better adherence to its conventions.

Last but not least, I share the ambition of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow, who made a powerful speech, for a much more open dialogue on trade and the axing of more of the red tape, bureaucracy and barriers to trade with European markets thrown up by the poor negotiating skills of the last Prime Minister but two.

There remain, in particular, serious concerns about scrutiny of trade agreements and about the damage that ISDS provisions could do, so we will, with the leave of the House, press new clauses 4 and 5 to a vote.

The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands): I thank colleagues for their contributions to the debates on this important Bill. Let me begin with the new clauses relating to new accessions to the CPTPP: new clause 1, tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith)—who always demonstrates his passion on this important matter—new clause 4, tabled by the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas), and new clause 11, tabled by the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sarah Green).

As the House may know, there is no rule within the CPTPP that requires new applicants to be dealt with on a “first come, first served” basis. Rather, it has been agreed within the group that applicant economies must meet three important criteria—called the Auckland principles—and it is on those key principles that applications will be assessed. Applicants must: first, be willing and able to meet the high standards of the agreement; secondly, have a demonstrated pattern of complying with their trade commitments; and thirdly, be able to command consensus of the CPTPP parties. Those strong criteria will be applied to each accession application. It is right that we in the United Kingdom, as a new member of the CPTPP group, work within the principles of the group to achieve a consensus decision.

I remind the House that while the UK rightly participates in discussions on this topic with CPTPP parties, we will only have a formal say over an application post-ratification and entry into force of the agreement. It is therefore crucial that we ratify the agreement and become a party, so that we can work with CPTPP members decisively on each current and future application. With that in mind, it would not be appropriate for the Government to give a running commentary on individual applicants, not least because to be drawn on individual applicants now, ahead of the UK becoming a party to the agreement, could have an impact on our ability to achieve that important goal of ensuring that the CPTPP enters into force. I should also make it clear that our own accession process has set a strong precedent. The robust experience that the UK has undergone has reinforced the high standards and proved that the bar is not easy to meet for any aspirant.

Regarding the scrutiny of any hypothetical future accession, I can assure the House that any accession of a new party to the CPTPP would require an amendment to the terms of the CPTPP. Therefore, as with the UK’s accession protocol, our firm intention is that such a future accession would be subject to the terms of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010—the CRAg process. I assure the House that CRAg is applicable to plurilateral agreements such as the CPTPP. The Act makes no distinction between bilateral, plurilateral or multilateral treaties as outlined in section 25 of CRAg.

Liam Byrne: The Minister is being characteristically generous in giving way. We obviously sought a debate under CRAg for this treaty. The Secretary of State, who is now in her place, told our Committee that she supported that, but the Leader of the House then refused to make Government time available for that debate. What further assurances can the Minister give us that there would indeed be a debate if the treaty was changed in the way that he described?

Greg Hands: The Government’s position is unchanged. It is always the desire of the Government, as expressed by the Secretary of State in writing to the House and to the right hon. Gentleman as Chair of the Select Committee, to urge and to ask for there to be a debate, but that will always be subject to the availability of parliamentary time. In a little bit, I will discuss the opportunities that there have been to scrutinise the CPTPP, which have been manifold in recent years.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: I will give way a little later.

The Act makes no distinction between bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral treaties. In addition to Parliament being able to make its views clear through the CRAg process, let me remind the House that, as a dualist state, any legislation necessary to implement the treaty—such as alterations to tariffs legislation, to take a hypothetical example—would need to be fully scrutinised and passed by Parliament in the usual way. It is the long-standing policy of His Majesty’s Government not to ratify international agreements before all relevant domestic legislation is in place. Were Parliament to refuse to pass any necessary implementing legislation, ratification of an agreement would be delayed.

I thank my right hon. Friends the Members for Chingford and Woodford Green and for North Somerset (Sir Liam Fox) for their opening speeches. Both are strong supporters of the UK joining the CPTPP. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset, who is the former Secretary of State, initiated these talks back in 2017 with me at his side, and successive Secretaries of State have given maximum priority to doing so. I am now in my fourth stint in this role, and it is fantastic to see his and my vision in 2017 now nearing fruition and being very close to UK ratification.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green and I know that Parliament is perfectly capable of expressing a view on an international agreement and whether a country might join it, and the Government of the day would be very likely to take notice. In debates in this House over some years now, he has made clear his views on trade with China, has gained support and attention, and been effective in doing so. Indeed, he has

helped to achieve changes in policy in relation to supply chains in Xinjiang, and I agree with his support for Taiwan—a full member of the World Trade Organisation—as an important trade partner for the UK. We are positive about this kind of debate in the House.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), who chairs the Select Committee, mentioned the scrutiny that there has been in this House for the CPTPP agreement, and he doubted whether there had been four debates. I had a slightly nagging feeling that I may actually remember each of the four debates, so I went back and checked the four debates, which started with the very first one that I responded to in April 2021. There have been four debates in this House and in the other House on the CPTPP. There have also been two oral ministerial statements and 16 written ministerial statements, and five separate Select Committees have taken evidence from Ministers and senior officials on the matter. There has been a Trade and Agriculture Commission report and a section 42 report. This is not an under-scrutinised trade agreement—rather the opposite. As has always been clear, we want the CPTPP to expand to fast-growing Asia-Pacific economies. I also agree with the Auckland principles.

Liam Byrne *rose*—

Greg Hands: Of course I will give way—if the right hon. Gentleman first concedes that this has been a well-scrutinised trade deal.

4.45 pm

Liam Byrne: Not quite. I am grateful to the Minister for setting out the full history, but will he accept that the Secretary of State believed that we should have had a debate, under the CRaG principles, on the full treaty? This Bill covers only three of 30 treaties. It is a matter of disappointment to many of us in the House that even though the Secretary of State no doubt argued vigorously and passionately for the debate, the Leader of the House was unable to grant us time. That is not necessarily the precedent that we want to establish for further trade treaty scrutiny.

Greg Hands: Of course, the right hon. Gentleman was a Minister in the last Labour Government, and he will remember that there are the vagaries of time available. Making an application to say that we would like there to be a debate is not the same as those who run the parliamentary timetable agreeing to there being one.

Let me move on to the new hon. Member for Kingswood (Damien Egan), who made a very accomplished and well delivered maiden speech. He spoke fondly of predecessors whom I know and like, such as Roger Berry and Rob Hayward. He won a keenly contested by-election—I have been to a few by-elections in recent years, and I was grateful to be given a bit of time off and to not go to Kingswood. None the less, I have great admiration for those who win by-elections. I have seen at close hand that they are a different kind of contest.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of his support for free trade and for rewarding hard work, and expressed sympathy for the Government, who have faced the challenges of covid and Ukraine. I agree with him on all of those issues, and the Government do too. I look forward to his continuing the tradition of an independent-minded Member for Kingswood—but please do not tell the Labour Whips Office.

As ever, my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) spoke passionately about trade and CPTPP. He is always probing on those issues.

Various amendments and new clauses that have been tabled ask for additional impact assessments. Before addressing some of those amendments directly, I would like to reassure the House that the Government will publish a biennial monitoring report and a comprehensive evaluation report of the agreement within five years of our accession.

Amendment 1 and new clause 12 would introduce commitments to publish impact assessments on the performers' rights provisions in this Bill, and I will set out why we consider them to be unnecessary. The impacts of the rules depend in large part on how they are applied in particular cases through secondary legislation made under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. That secondary legislation may restrict or extend particular rights to particular countries. Wherever the Government intend to make significant changes to the secondary legislation, we will engage with affected industries and carry out an impact assessment. The Intellectual Property Office has done that recently with its consultation and its assessment of the impact of potential secondary legislation on the broadcasting and public playing of recorded music. A commitment to assess the impacts of the measures in this Bill is therefore unnecessary, and risks overlooking the effects of the secondary legislation.

I will now turn to new clauses 2 and 6, which broadly focus on environmental and other standards. I can provide assurance that the UK will continue to uphold our high environmental standards in respect of all our trade agreements, including CPTPP. As I have previously mentioned, the Government intend to publish a comprehensive ex post evaluation of the agreement within five years of the UK's accession, and I can confirm that this evaluation will include an assessment of the environmental impacts of our accession. In addition, the independent Trade and Agriculture Commission was asked to scrutinise the UK's accession protocol and produce a report. The TAC concluded in its advice, published on 7 December 2023, that

“CPTPP does not require the UK to change its levels of statutory protection”

in relation to the aforementioned areas.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: It is very welcome that there will be a five-year report. Will it include numbers on unsustainable palm oil and rainforest wood to ensure that we are not exploiting more than we are at the moment?

Greg Hands: That is exactly the sort of thing that I would expect the report to do. I must say that I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned the Government's record when it comes to palm oil, because 86% of UK imports of palm oil were certified as sustainable in 2022—up from 16% under the last Labour Government in 2010, when we took office. Deforestation related to palm oil in Malaysia has fallen by 60% since 2012, according to the latest available figures, and we will keep working with countries such as Malaysia to build on that work.

As soon as parliamentary time allows, the Government will be tabling their forest risk commodities legislation under the Environment Act 2021, which will make it illegal for larger businesses operating in the UK to use

[Greg Hands]

key forest risk commodities produced on land illegally occupied or used. The Government have confirmed that palm oil products would be included under the regulated commodities. Additionally, I once again refer to the report of the independent Trade and Agriculture Commission, which concluded that

“it is unlikely that CPTPP will lead to an increase in palm oil being grown on deforested land”.

Moving on to new clauses 3 and 5, relating to ISDS, the UK’s accession to CPTPP will benefit UK investors. I do not think the Opposition understand how business works. We support British businesses operating overseas. They create jobs in this country—jobs that the Labour party does not seem to like.

Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for progressing CPTPP with all his usual energy, because it will boost trade and be of huge strategic significance. It is an opportunity of Brexit that must be grasped. On investor-state dispute resolution, he is absolutely right that we must not give way to the naysayers. It will be overwhelmingly in the UK’s interest, given the protections for UK businesses and exporters and the certainty it will provide in the massive growth region of the Indo-Pacific.

Greg Hands: My right hon. Friend also played a really important role in getting CPTPP through. I remember our joint visit to Vietnam in 2021, when we argued for Vietnamese support. He is right to say that it is important to remember that the UK has never lost an ISDS case. Equally, it is important for us to protect UK businesses operating abroad. They provide jobs and secure livelihoods at home. I find it astonishing that the Opposition, as they lurch ever leftwards, seem to forget that the whole time.

I can assure the House that the UK already has investment agreements containing ISDS provisions with around 90 trading partners, including seven of the 11 CPTPP parties. The UK provides a welcoming investment environment with a non-discriminatory regime, strong rule of law and good governance. We are clear that, where we negotiate ISDS, we will not hinder our inherent right to regulate in the public interest, including in areas such as the environment and labour standards.

I turn to new clauses 7, 9, 10 and 13, which focus on the impacts that this deal will have on our businesses and our economy. The Government want UK businesses to benefit from the ambitious provisions in the CPTPP as far as possible after we accede, and we are working to raise awareness of the agreement and ensure that businesses have the knowledge they need to take advantage of the opportunities that CPTPP will present when it enters into force for the UK.

New clause 8, tabled by the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), focuses on labour standards. I notice that there is no official Labour amendment focusing on labour standards. Maybe Labour does not care about labour any more, but I know that the right hon. Gentleman does. The CPTPP labour chapter includes binding provisions on fundamental labour rights and on hours of work, health and safety, and minimum wages. It reaffirms CPTPP parties’ obligations as members of the International Labour Organisation

and requires that parties do not waive or derogate from their domestic labour laws in order to encourage trade or investment.

Amendment 2, also tabled by the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington, relates to the conformity assessment regulations referenced in the Bill. The amendment would allow changes to the conformity assessment regulations only following a motion to resolve against the ratification of the UK accession protocol first. I just think it would be unwise for us to pass an amendment to resolve against the ratification of UK accession in advance.

This has been a wide-ranging debate, and we have debated important issues. I particularly want to minute my thanks to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green, who has rightly raised important questions about our trade with China, and to other right hon. and hon. Friends who have supported the process of the UK acceding to CPTPP.

I do not want to tempt fate, but this might be my last chance to speak on our accession in this House before the UK formally ratifies joining CPTPP. I and, I believe, the whole Government passionately believe that CPTPP offers a great future for the UK, and I have seen our accession through from being a novel idea in 2017 to ratification, and hopefully accession, in 2024. Not many of us in this place have been able to do that over a seven-year period, and I am grateful to all my ministerial colleagues, successive Prime Ministers who have supported CPTPP and my excellent Department for International Trade and Department for Business and Trade officials for being with me on this very exciting journey.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the clause.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 4

REPORT: ACCESSION OF NEW STATES TO THE CPTPP

“(1) Before any decision is made by the Government on the accession of a new state to CPTPP under Chapter 30 of the CPTPP, the Secretary of State must publish a report assessing the potential benefits and impact of the accession of that candidate state on the United Kingdom.

(2) Both Houses of Parliament must be presented with a motion for resolution on the report under subsection (1).”—
(*Gareth Thomas.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

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

The House divided: Ayes 224, Noes 301.

Division No. 108]

[4.56 pm]

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Benn, rh Hilary

Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Bonnar, Steven
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Bryant, Sir Chris
Buck, Ms Karen

Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela (*Proxy vote cast by Owen Thompson*)
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Dalton, Ashley
 David, Wayne
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Dyke, Sarah
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John

Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kitchen, Gen
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osborne, Kate

Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Robinson, Gavin
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz (*Proxy vote cast by Dawn Butler*)
 Shanks, Michael
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheppard, Tommy (*Proxy vote cast by Owen Thompson*)
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John

Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Trickett, Jon (*Proxy vote cast by Ian Lavery*)
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Samantha Dixon and
 Gerald Jones

NOES

Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, rh Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Sir Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Brady, rh Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Sir Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, rh Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Sir Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, rh Claire
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Daly, James
 Davies, rh David T. C.

Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Sir David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Docherty, Leo
 Double, Steve
 Doyle-Price, Dame Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Francois*)
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Eastwood, Mark
 Ellis, rh Sir Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Sir Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sir Sajid
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Dame Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig (*Proxy vote cast by John Redwood*)
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, rh Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David

Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Sir Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Mr Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Saxby, Selaine
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, rh Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, rh Laura
 Tuckwell, Steve
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, rh Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
Tellers for the Noes:
Dame Amanda Milling and
Ruth Edwards

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 5

REVIEW: INVESTOR-STATE DISPUTE SETTLEMENT

“The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a review of the financial risk of the implementation of the Investor-State Dispute Settlement aspect of the Investment Chapter of the CPTPP, not more than 18 months after the day on which this Act is passed.”—(*Gareth Thomas.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

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

The House divided: Ayes 217, Noes 305.

Division No. 109]

[5.9 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur

Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Bryant, Sir Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela (*Proxy vote cast by Owen Thompson*)
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Dalton, Ashley
 David, Wayne
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Dyke, Sarah
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia

Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kitchen, Gen
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mather, Keir
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica

Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz (*Proxy vote cast by Dawn Butler*)
 Shanks, Michael
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheppard, Tommy (*Proxy vote cast by Owen Thompson*)
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn

Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Trickett, Jon (*Proxy vote cast by Ian Lavery*)
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel
Tellers for the Ayes:
Samantha Dixon and
Gerald Jones

NOES

Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, rh Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Sir Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Brady, rh Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Sir Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, rh Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Sir Simon

Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, rh Claire
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Daly, James
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Sir David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dineneage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Doyle-Price, Dame Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Francois*)
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Eastwood, Mark
 Ellis, rh Sir Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Sir Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sir Sajid
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Dame Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig (*Proxy vote cast by John Redwood*)
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, rh Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen

Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Morrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Sir Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Mr Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, rh Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, rh Laura
 Tuckwell, Steve
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, rh Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
Tellers for the Noes:
 Dame Amanda Milling and
 Ruth Edwards

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 10

REPORT ON ECONOMIC IMPACT OF IMPLEMENTATION OF CPTPP

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, publish a report on the economic impact of the implementation of the CPTPP.

(2) A report published under subsection (1) must include an analysis comparing the respective situation for each of the matters listed in subsection (3) prior to the implementation of the CPTPP with the situation post the implementation of the CPTPP.

(3) The matters which must be included in the comparative analysis contained in the report laid under subsection (1) are—

- (a) the UK's trade in goods;
- (b) the UK's trade in services; and
- (c) UK GDP.”—(*Richard Thomson.*)

This new clause would require the Government to publish a comparative analysis of the impact of the implementation of the CPTPP on UK trade and GDP.

Brought up, and read the First time.

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

The House divided: Ayes 218, Noes 305.

Division No. 110]

[5.21 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Dame Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Bryant, Sir Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela (*Proxy vote cast by Owen Thompson*)
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Dalton, Ashley
 David, Wayne
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Dyke, Sarah
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim

Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kitchen, Gen
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz (*Proxy vote cast by Dawn Butler*)
 Shanks, Michael
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheppard, Tommy (*Proxy vote cast by Owen Thompson*)
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Trickett, Jon (*Proxy vote cast by Ian Lavery*)
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel
Tellers for the Ayes:
 Peter Grant and
 Kirsty Blackman

NOES

Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard

Badenoch, rh Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Brady, rh Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Sir Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, rh Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Sir Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, rh Claire
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Sir David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinanage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Double, Steve
 Doyle-Price, Dame Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick

Duddridge, Sir James (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Francois*)
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Eastwood, Mark
 Ellis, rh Sir Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Sir Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sir Sajid
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark

Jenkyns, Dame Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Largan, Robert
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig (*Proxy vote cast by John Redwood*)
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, rh Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Patel, rh Priti

Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Sir Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Mr Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, rh Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, rh Laura
 Tuckwell, Steve
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James

Williams, rh Craig
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William

Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Young, Jacob
Tellers for the Noes:
Dame Amanda Milling and
Ruth Edwards

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 12

IMPACT ASSESSMENT: UK PERFORMERS' RIGHTS

“(1) The Secretary of State must publish an assessment of the impact of the implementation of performers’ rights provisions in the CPTPP.

(2) The impact assessment under subsection (1) must include—

- (a) consideration of the impact of performers’ rights provisions on qualifying individuals in the UK;
- (b) an assessment of the reciprocity of rights across qualifying countries;
- (c) consultation with such persons as the Secretary of State considers appropriate.”—(*Sarah Green.*)

This new clause would mean the Government must publish an assessment of the impact the performer's rights provisions in the CPTPP will have on qualifying individuals in the UK.

Brought up, and read the First time.

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

The House divided: Ayes 219, Noes 306.

Division No. 111]

[5.33 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Dame Margaret
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Bonnar, Steven
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Bryant, Sir Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas

Cherry, Joanna
Cooper, Daisy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crawley, Angela (*Proxy vote cast by Owen Thompson*)
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Dalton, Ashley
David, Wayne
Davies-Jones, Alex
Day, Martyn
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Duffield, Rosie
Dyke, Sarah
Eagle, Dame Angela
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Egan, Damien
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Fellows, Marion
Fletcher, Colleen
Flynn, Stephen

Foxcroft, Vicky
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glendon, Mary
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Dame Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Hanna, Claire
Hanvey, Neale
Hardy, Emma
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Kitchen, Gen
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Linden, David (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
Mather, Keir
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
McMahon, Jim

McMorris, Anna
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owatemi, Taiwo (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
Owen, Sarah
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reynolds, Jonathan
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz (*Proxy vote cast by Dawn Butler*)
Shanks, Michael
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Alyn
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Sarah
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Trickett, Jon (*Proxy vote cast by Ian Lavery*)
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Webbe, Claudia
Western, Andrew

Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa (*Proxy
vote cast by Marion
Fellows*)

Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira

Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
**Samantha Dixon and
Gerald Jones**

NOES

Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, rh Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Dame Karen
Brady, rh Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Sir Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, rh Sir Conor
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carter, Andy
Cartledge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, rh Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Sir Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian

Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, rh Claire
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Sir David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Docherty, Leo
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Double, Steve
Doyle-Price, Dame Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James (*Proxy
vote cast by Mr Francois*)
Duguid, David
Eastwood, Mark
Ellis, rh Sir Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Sir Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Grundy, James

Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alistair
Javid, rh Sir Sajid
Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkyns, Dame Andrea
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, rh Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kearns, Alicia
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Loder, Chris
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig (*Proxy vote
cast by John Redwood*)
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mayhew, Jerome

Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, rh Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morrissey, Joy
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Patel, rh Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Poulter, Dr Dan
Prentis, rh Victoria
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, rh Sir Jeremy
Quince, Will
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Roberts, Mr Rob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, rh Sir Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
Simmonds, David
Smith, rh Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stafford, Alexander

Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, rh Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, rh Laura
 Tuckwell, Steve
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa

Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig (*Proxy
 vote cast by Mr Marcus
 Jones*)
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, rh Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Noes:
**Dame Amanda Milling and
 Ruth Edwards**

Question accordingly negatived.

Third Reading

5.44 pm

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Kemi Badenoch): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I would like to thank Members across the House and noble Lords in the other place for the interest they have shown in this legislation throughout its passage. The Bill may be narrow in scope, but the underlying agreement it relates to and the benefits it could bring for British business, the economy and the British people are wide-ranging. By acceding to the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership, we will strengthen our ties with some of the world's most dynamic economies and gain greater access to the Indo-Pacific region, which will account for the majority of global growth and around half of the world's middle-class consumers in the decades to come.

Crucially, acceding to the CPTPP will mean improved market access for UK exporters in existing CPTPP parties, including Malaysia and Brunei—our very first free trade deal with these fast-growing economies. In turn, the partnership will simplify supply chains and cut costs for innovative firms based here in the UK, such as Wrightbus, a long-established family-owned Northern Ireland bus manufacturer, which will benefit from opportunities to import parts at lower tariffs from Malaysia. We have also agreed more liberal rules of origin with Malaysia, making it simpler for British brands such as Jaguar Land Rover to export British-designed, British-made vehicles to that market at lower tariffs.

However, our future accession will be good not just for British businesses selling their goods abroad but for consumers here at home. It could provide consumers with wider choice and cheaper prices at the supermarket checkout, on everything from Chilean and Peruvian fruit juices to honey and chocolate from Mexico. Inward investment in the UK by CPTPP parties will be encouraged when we accede, building on some £182 billion-worth of investment in job-creating projects in 2021 alone.

As hon. Members will know, the Bill affects the whole of the UK. Clause 3 and the parts of the schedule relating to Government procurement engage the Sewel convention, so we have sought legislative consent from the Scottish Parliament, the Senedd and the Northern Ireland Assembly. Let me reassure hon. Members that there has been regular engagement with the devolved Administrations before the Bill was introduced and throughout its passage at both Ministerial and official level. I thank the devolved Administrations' Ministers and their teams for working so constructively with us. It is in part thanks to their efforts that the Scottish Parliament passed a legislative consent motion in February. The Welsh Government published a legislative consent motion on 5 March and recommended that consent be granted to clause 3 and relevant parts of the schedule. Due to a mis-step during the moving and consideration of the motion, that legislative consent was not granted. I understand there are plans for a further Senedd vote on legislative consent for clause 3 and relevant parts of the schedule. However, in the event that a further vote is not scheduled in the Senedd before Royal Assent, the UK Government will proceed with the Bill without consent from Wales.

Members will know that the Northern Ireland Assembly was suspended when the Bill was introduced last November, which prevented us from seeking legislative consent at that time. However, my Department has engaged with Northern Ireland officials throughout this period, providing them with updates as the Bill has progressed through Parliament.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for her positive remarks about all the regions of the United Kingdom, which is good to hear. In her discussions with the Northern Ireland Assembly, has there been an opportunity to engage with the businesses in Northern Ireland that have been holding things together, and the Ulster Farmers' Union? The Secretary of State is always energetic when it comes to pursuing those matters, but it is important to have that reassurance.

Kemi Badenoch: The hon. Gentleman raises a good point, and he is quite right. My right hon. Friend Minister for Trade Policy has engaged with them. In fact, upon the return of the Northern Ireland Assembly, he wrote to the Minister for Finance at the earliest opportunity to request legislative consent. I am grateful that the Minister agreed with the Bill's devolution analysis and, in principle, to begin the legislative consent process. Nevertheless, we still face a challenging timeline and a pressing need for the Bill to complete its passage. That is vital to allow for secondary legislation to be made and for ratification of the UK's accession protocol. As such, we cannot delay passage of the Bill to allow the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly greater time to consider legislative consent. That would jeopardise all the current ratification timelines. I recognise that the legislative consent process is normally concluded before the last amending stage in the second House. Given the timing of the return of the Northern Ireland Assembly, that has been extremely challenging, but I believe it is still right that we allow the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly as much time as we can to consider our request. In the event that legislative consent is not granted by the Northern Ireland Assembly before the deadline for Royal Assent, we will still have to proceed. Failing to do so would compromise the commitments we have made in our accession protocol.

[Kemi Badenoch]

On Second Reading, I outlined the wealth of benefits that will come with the UK's accession to the CPTPP: the growth-spurring and business-boosting effect it will have on our economy. Since that time, we have had some spirited and worthwhile debates. I would particularly like to thank the hon. Members for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) and for Gordon (Richard Thomson) for the constructive manner in which they scrutinised the legislation. I commend those Members who sat on the Public Bill Committee, including my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) and the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Rupa Huq), who showed their great expertise as Chairs. I also thank the Minister for Trade Policy, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands) for expertly shepherding this legislation through the House with his consummate skill and good humour, and for delivering what appears to be a clean Bill. I will let Members review *Hansard* to see how many times my right hon. Friend reminded the hon. Member for Harrow West that he voted for CRaG. I think I heard that quite a lot throughout the debate.

It would be remiss of me not to mention a number of other Members by name for their valued input throughout the Bill's passage, including my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall), whose Second Reading speech and interventions made an excellent case not just for UK accession to CPTPP, but for the benefits of free trade more generally. I am also grateful to him for highlighting the scrutiny provided by the recent Trade and Agriculture Commission report on the UK's agreement to accede to the CPTPP—a report that stated that the CPTPP does not require the UK to change its levels of statutory protection in relation to animal or plant life, health, animal welfare or environmental protection.

On Second Reading, we also heard useful insights from several of the Prime Minister's trade envoys, notably my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier), for Gloucester (Richard Graham) and for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), as well as from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden). The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), as Chair of the Business and Trade Committee, brought a critical eye to bear on aspects of the underlying agreement, on which I hope he has now been reassured. My hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson) rightly championed the UK's high food and animal welfare standards that the Government will continue to protect, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) demonstrated his well-honed ability to probe legislation with regards to the future potential accessions of economies to the CPTPP. The Business and Trade Committee more broadly has my thanks for its engagement with, and scrutiny of, this important Bill.

This legislation will help to ensure that the UK meets its international obligations upon accession to the CPTPP. When the Bill achieves Royal Assent, it will mean that we have put the UK at the heart of a dynamic group of countries in the Indo-Pacific, providing new opportunities for British companies to sell more of their high-quality goods and services to a market of over 500 million people and a combined GDP of £9 trillion. With that in mind, and in the hope that it will therefore garner support from all hon. and right hon. Members, I am pleased to commend the Bill to the House.

5.52 pm

Gareth Thomas: We support the UK's accession to the CPTPP. Despite the concerns we raised during the Bill's stages, we have not stood in the way of its passage through this House thus far and we do not intend to divide the House on Third Reading. We recognise the geopolitical benefits and the economic benefits, limited none the less as they are likely to be in the near future.

In Committee, we outlined a series of concerns about the inclusion of provisions on the investor-state dispute settlement, and its implications for the NHS, the environment and workers' rights. We raised concerns about performer's rights and why on earth the Government chose to launch a consultation on the provisions after the Bill had already begun making its way through Parliament—talk about putting the cart before the horse. We also raised environmental concerns, probing Ministers about deforestation, palm oil, increased carbon emissions, the use of pesticides, threats to indigenous wildlife, and the undermining of the UK's commitment to combating climate change and preserving biodiversity.

The Secretary of State promised a debate on CPTPP under the CRaG process to the Business and Trade Committee. In Committee, we were also promised a debate on CPTPP by the Minister under CRaG, which has not happened. I say it gently to them both: sadly, it is one more example of Ministers ducking scrutiny of the trade deals they sign. It is almost as if they have something to hide.

We have been grateful in particular to the TUC, Chester Zoo, the World Wildlife Fund, the Trade Justice Movement, Transform Trade, the National Farmers Union, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Alliance for Intellectual Property for their help in ensuring that we fully understood the implications of the Bill. I am grateful for their generosity with their time and expertise.

One cannot help feeling that had the Government initiated a thorough consultation exercise much earlier in the proceedings, before the CPTPP was a done deal, we might have come out of the negotiations as less of a rule-taker and with a better deal for the UK. Better consultation with the nations and regions could have happened throughout the whole CPTPP process, but both the Scottish and the Welsh Governments lamented poor communication at key stages from Ministers. Hopefully lessons have been learnt, and we will all have to take the opportunity of the CPTPP review in 2026 to look at what more can be achieved.

I thank all the members of the Public Bill Committee. I particularly thank my fellow shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), for his invaluable contributions, help and support during the Bill's passage, but I also thank my hon. Friends the Members for City of Chester (Samantha Dixon), for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin), for Reading East (Matt Rodda) and for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) for their time and commitment to that part of the scrutiny process. I thank Members on both sides of the House, and those in the Lords, who—on Second Reading, in Committee and on Report—have joined in the hard yards, the necessary work, of scrutinising what is a key trade arrangement. I thank the Minister of State, too, for his particularly generous description of me in Committee as a “serial rebel”—which might surprise one or two—and I

thank both him and the Secretary of State for their other contributions, some of which have been helpful. *[Laughter.]* I hope that the dialogue, especially that on the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants and on performers' rights, will continue, and I thank the Ministers for their letters to me on those issues.

The UK's joining the CPTPP will not make up for the Government's failure to deliver a good trade deal with Europe, or the Conservatives' broken manifesto commitment that 80% of the world would be covered by new trade agreements—including a trade deal with India, which the Secretary of State herself said this month was highly unlikely to happen any time soon. We remain in the dark as to whether we will ever be tasked with scrutinising a UK-Canada trade deal, or whether negotiations are indeed ongoing, as the Minister says, or they are not, as the Canadians say. What we do know is that, while the Government have made some outlandish claims about the benefits of the UK's joining the CPTPP, it is likely, as the Office for Budget Responsibility has said, to lead to just a slight increase in GDP "in the long run". With exports having dropped last year and set to drop further this year, and given the three following years of anaemic growth in exports, even the smallest opportunity for growth is welcome.

The Bill is needed to incorporate the CPTPP agreement in domestic legislation, and that is something that we do not oppose. There are benefits to joining, and despite reservations, we certainly welcome the opportunities that will be opened up for some British businesses. For those reasons, as I have said, we will not stand in the way of the Bill's completing its passage tonight.

5.58 pm

Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak on Third Reading. I must admit that I had hoped we would be closer to the moment of interruption at this stage, because there is further business on the Order Paper relating to energy strategy, which I spoke about earlier in the Delegated Legislation Committee; but even I do not want to test the patience of the House by speaking for the best part of an hour.

This is a truly monumental moment for the United Kingdom. Having left the European Union, we are planting our flag around the world and making sure that we drive free trade. It is right to believe, on the basis of all the evidence, that free trade is good for this country, and good for prosperity throughout the world.

I feel an element of sadness about some of the trade agreements made when we were in the European Union, as it seemed that some of the poorest countries in the world were being deprived of a proper trading relationship. I refer to the trend whereby it is still only sub-Saharan African nations that truly are exceptionally poor; unfortunately, at times it felt as though those countries were being deprived of a lot of prosperity due to EU protectionism, but we now have the opportunity to branch out on our own in that regard. We should remember that a lot of African nations are our brothers and sisters in the Commonwealth. Of course I understand that World Trade Organisation regulations apply to everybody, but it is important that we try to factor in what we can do to get wealth to as many nations as possible, because that would be good for this country and for others around the world.

The hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) said that there was no consultation. Actually, the consultation journey started in 2018. I think it was initiated when my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Sir Liam Fox) was the Trade Secretary. My right hon. Friends the Members for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss), and for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan), and the person who really cemented the deal—the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, my right hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Kemi Badenoch)—have really taken us on that journey.

We should give the Prime Minister credit for his proactive approach to trade, and the red lines that he was prepared to draw for our farmers, recognising that we have some of the best farming and food production in the world. Those red lines are not about trying to be protectionist, but reasonable standards, the prosperity of our nation and ensuring a two-way street.

In my time as Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, this work really mattered. I am conscious of the discussions that have taken place, and I appreciate that it can seem frustrating that we are only involved after the trade negotiations, in ratifying the agreement, but I can assure the House that it was imperative that we got the balance right when it came to values and red lines. I again pay tribute to the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister for securing a really good deal.

It is important that we take advantage of this treaty. There are certainly far more agricultural attachés now. It is important that people do not just focus on what might be imported into this country and what that means for standards, because we have been very strong on the standards agreed in this treaty. In fact, we have more problem with the fact that there are not the same animal welfare standards across the European Union; we need to work on that as part of our ongoing relationship, and as part of our free trade agreement with the EU.

There are other factors of concern; for example, there is the fact that production costs are a lot lower in some of the 11 other member states of the treaty. We have the living wage, but we also have access to grants and things like robotic milking machines—something I never thought I would see, but which, as I saw at the Great Yorkshire Show last year, works exceptionally well. One of the key measures in the Agriculture Act 2020 was brought in to validate people's concerns. That is why I want to pay tribute to the Trade and Agriculture Commission, which produced a pretty hefty report after establishing its initial terms of reference. The process started in July 2023 and the report was published in December 2023, and was designed to cover issues of environmental protection, animal and plant life or health, and animal welfare. It is worth reading.

The key question that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State asked the commission was:

"Does CPTPP require the UK to change its levels of statutory protection?"

In all those areas? The report basically said, "No, we don't need to. In fact, WTO rules mean that we can keep our statutory protections in all these areas, and there is no impact on our ability to adopt statutory protections in the future and to maintain the ones we have." That really matters, because at the time, other nations—and, dare I say it, environmental groups here—were trying to bring lots of different elements into the discussion. As

[Dr Thérèse Coffey]

I said, I will not keep the House as long as I had originally intended, but I should like to mention Malaysian palm oil, and hormone-treated beef and similar; absolutely no way will the United Kingdom allow that sort of product into this country. We certainly made sure that was a red line.

I am conscious that Third Reading will be agreed, but I want to say a few extra things on issues raised by the National Farmers Union. It is really important that we take them seriously. We said that we would look at all the standards when we went into new trade deals, and the Trade and Agriculture Commission did a very thorough job, for which I commend it. The NFU would like us to go even further on domestic production standards. Importantly, we are now part of this global treaty, and we did not seek to require others to re-ratify the laws in their countries by adding elements. All the member states are already party to various international conventions on the environment, and it is important to note that we have new allies. As we take this step forward and try to increase trade, we need to make sure that we can share our learning and understanding, and show how it adds value. I genuinely believe that when we start to increase significantly the number of agricultural products that we send to other parts of the world through this treaty, it will show that those foods can be sold at a premium.

I was fortunate enough in my time in government to visit some of the countries in the CPTPP. Most recently, I visited Vietnam. Such visits are important for making sure that good standards are in place, and that those countries are our friends in the future. Several of the countries are already in the G20 or the Commonwealth, and we also have some new friends. It is important that we continue to respect that, because at times it feels as though we diminish what other countries do to take trade forward.

I did say that I was not planning to speak for an hour, much to the joy of people in this Chamber, I am sure. I fully endorse this treaty. It is good for our farmers and our country, because it means that we can reduce tariffs on a number of products, including those that can be onshored and put into our freeports, so that we can increase the value of our manufacturing. I wish this treaty well and, as I say, look forward to all the trade and prosperity that will come for the United Kingdom, but also for people around the world.

6.7 pm

Richard Thomson: May I take this opportunity to thank the Clerks for all the assistance that they have given throughout the scrutiny process, and to offer heartfelt thanks to the researchers who support my group for the help that they have given me throughout the passage of this Bill?

Those on the Treasury Bench will no doubt be delighted to hear that the SNP will not seek to divide the House on this Bill. We have never said that there could not be advantage from the CPTPP, but we could not be clearer that it offers a poor substitute for the trade deals that were left behind as a result of our leaving the European Union. Let us remind ourselves that, with the CPTPP, we have essentially swapped the four freedoms of the European single market—a market of half a billion consumers, right on our doorstep—for an agreement

with a combined economy of almost half the size on the opposite side of the world, which takes only 8% of our exports. It seems to be a bit like putting an Elastoplast on an amputation.

The Government's impact assessment, which I know is highly contested, even by the Government themselves, indicated that the long-term increase in trade will be worth £2 billion a year, or 0.06% of GDP. We are all aware of the parable of the hare and the tortoise, but I am not sure that many tortoises could live long enough to make up that ground. Whatever benefits do arise—at this point in time, they look distant and minimal at best—they will always and forever be less than we could have had in different circumstances.

Along with others, throughout the passage of the Bill, I have sought to warn the Government that they should find a way to quantify the impacts of CPTPP, and the risks right across a range of sectors that will be affected by it. We will remain vigilant, and will hold the Government to account, where the outcomes justify it. I suppose that I should not disturb the bonhomie that there has been, but one big question remains: will all those on the Front Bench be reunited to discuss any further trade deals before the Prime Minister has to call an election? I await the answer with bated breath.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

COMPANIES

That the draft Reporting on Payment Practices and Performance (Amendment) Regulations 2024, which were laid before this House on 10 January, be approved.—(*Suzanne Webb.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

That the draft National Minimum Wage (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2024, which were laid before this House on 31 January, be approved.—(*Suzanne Webb.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

ENERGY

That the draft Strategy and Policy Statement for Energy Policy in Great Britain, which was laid before this House on 21 February, be approved.—(*Suzanne Webb.*)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): As many as are of that opinion, say Aye. To the contrary, No. [*Interruption.*] The right hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey) has made her objection clear, but I will take it on the voices, so the Ayes have it.

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

AGRICULTURE

That the draft Fair Dealing Obligations (Milk) Regulations 2024, which were laid before this House on 1 March, be approved.—*(Suzanne Webb.)*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO INDUSTRY

That this House authorises the Secretary of State to undertake to pay, and to pay by way of financial assistance under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982, a grant or grants exceeding £30 million and up to a total of £75 million to BMW to support the production of electric Minis at Plant Oxford.—*(Suzanne Webb)*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Traffic Congestion and Road Safety in Rother Valley

[P002930]

6.11 pm

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): I rise to deliver a petition on behalf of my constituents in Rother Valley, calling on Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council to work alongside the Sheffield Mayoral Combined Authority to implement measures to combat traffic congestion and speeding in the village of Aughton and at the Ulley-Treeton crossroads. The petition, online and on paper, signed by over 2,300 of my constituents, demands action to combat congestion and poor road safety around the crossroads and in the villages.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the constituency of Rother Valley,

Declares that measures are needed to combat traffic congestion and speeding in the villages of Aughton and Guilthwaite; further that the Treeton Lane/Main Street/Pleasley Road and Ulley Lane crossroads require a road safety and traffic management scheme; and further that road safety measures are needed at the Robin Hood pub junction in Aston as expanding housing estates nearby are putting increased pressure on this junction, making safe emergence difficult and time consuming.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to call on Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council to work alongside the Sheffield Mayoral Combined Authority and that they consider the use of funding from the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements scheme to devise a package of improvements to Pleasley Road and Ulley Crossroads that promotes road safety and active travel, and supports public transport expansion to ease congestion.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002924]

Recommendations of the Infected Blood Inquiry

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): I rise to present two petitions this evening from the constituents of Linlithgow and East Falkirk. The first

relates to the recommendations of the infected blood inquiry. Infected blood seems to me to be the biggest single scandal in our lifetime. There was no mention in the Budget of providing compensation; that, I fear, was a missed opportunity. Just how long will the victims and their families have to wait?

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the constituency of Linlithgow and East Falkirk

Declares that people who received infected blood and who have suffered as a consequence have, along with their families, waited far too long for redress.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to implement the recommendations in the Second Interim Report of the Infected Blood Inquiry without delay.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

Pensioners' Personal Tax Allowance

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Day, would you like to speak to the second petition and then bring them both together? It seems a waste of energy to present them individually.

Martyn Day: My partner says that I need to lose a bit of weight, so she might disagree with that, but I think that is a sensible decision.

The second petition that I am presenting from the constituents of Linlithgow and East Falkirk relates to pensioners' personal tax allowance. I have said before that the deal that pensioners in the UK get is among the worst in Europe, and unfortunately this year's spring Budget has ignored the fiscal drag that pensioners are experiencing, by freezing the personal tax allowance until April 2028. This disproportionately affects many on lower incomes, including our pensioners.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the constituency of Linlithgow and East Falkirk

Regrets that the Chancellor's Spring Budget ignored the fiscal drag that pensioners are experiencing due to the policy on freezing Personal Tax allowance until April 2028; declares that this policy disproportionately affects pensioners who do not gain from cuts to National Insurance; notes this policy creates poorer pensioners who are already impacted by the cost-of-living crisis.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to consider the soaring costs of food and energy bills for pensioners when setting the Personal Tax allowance.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002931]

Music Education

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Suzanne Webb.)

6.15 pm

Sir Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): I rise to speak about the changes to funding for music education hubs. This Government have made an important and worthwhile commitment to a vision of enabling all children and young people to learn how to sing, to learn how to play a musical instrument and to have the opportunity to progress their musical interests and talents, including professionally, if that is what they want to do.

The 2022 national music plan published three key aims for music hubs: first, to support schools and other education settings to deliver high-quality music education; secondly, to support young people to further develop their musical interests and talent, including into employment in some cases; and thirdly, to support all children and young people to engage with a range of musical opportunities in and out of school.

By 2018, record numbers of children were learning instruments because of this Government's actions. As my right hon. Friend the Schools Minister will know, music education hubs have been funded nationally to the level of around £75 million to £80 million a year since their inception under this Conservative Government in 2012, which is sometimes referred to as the national music grant.

However, the national music grant, which funds the functions of the music hub leads, has risen by only 1% since 2012. During this time, the Bank of England inflation calculator shows inflation running at 37%. As I am sure the House understands, it has therefore always been a challenge for music hubs to maintain their exceptional levels of service up and down the country.

My Northampton North constituency is home to a great many talented young musicians and performers. I spy many Northamptonshire Members in the House today, and they will know the value of music in their constituencies.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the right hon. and learned Gentleman for securing the debate. He is right that music encourages us all, and not just in Northamptonshire. The Education Authority in Northern Ireland supports 689 primary and post-primary schools to provide musical learning to students. These are fantastic opportunities, but some courses cost £140, which is a disadvantage. In Northern Ireland we have a tradition of flute bands, pipe bands, accordion bands and brass bands, and they are associated with people who come from my tradition, as Members will know. Such bands also give opportunities for young people to learn an instrument. When it comes to music, we in Northern Ireland have the better part of the deal.

Sir Michael Ellis: I knew that the hon. Gentleman and I would be singing from the same hymn sheet. His melodious tones resonate daily in this House, and on this subject, as on so many others, we are in complete agreement. He will know, as will other Members, that I am a former Culture Minister, so that pleases me greatly.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): Music hubs have a vital role in providing high-quality music education to 87% of schools in England, as well

as providing support outside schools. The right hon. and learned Gentleman rightly says that music hubs have effectively been on standstill funding for a decade, during a time of increasing costs, staff pay, venue hire and utility bills. I am sure that he will be moving on to discuss that, but I wish to add to it by setting out that the threats to the financial security of music hubs are a real concern. These hubs are often the only providers of instrumental tuition—at no cost or in heavily subsidised form—in state schools.

We have what is starting to be considered a crisis in music education, given that the number of young musicians being taught at advanced level by music hubs has halved over the past decade, and sadly there are now 20,000 fewer state school bands, orchestras, ensembles and choirs than there were seven years ago, so this is a timely debate. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that by not addressing the funding issues, which I hope he is going to come on to, the Government risk losing music teachers, musicians and audience members, as well as failing to give children access to an activity that holds so many benefits for their academic, social and emotional development?

Sir Michael Ellis: I will be coming on to the funding aspect, but the hon. Lady speaks of the value of music and that is the point I am making.

Many schools serving my constituency and others in Northamptonshire offer tremendous music education. Northampton School for Boys, which borders my constituency and has a catchment area for Northampton North and Northampton South, regularly stages productions and concerts of the highest standard. Northampton School for Girls was the first specialist music college in the country. Malcom Arnold Academy has a strong music basis, as one can see from its name, with Ofsted having described the quality of music provision at that school as "exceptional". Children at Headlands Primary School are exposed to music education from a very young age, with weekly singing classes from reception. So this is characteristic of not only my constituency, but all the constituencies in Northamptonshire and, doubtless, elsewhere.

That strong sense of the importance of introducing children to music in Northampton North is rooted in the Northamptonshire Music and Performing Arts Trust—NMPAT. It was established as an independent charitable company in 2012, after functioning for 40 years as the local authority music service. In May 2012 it was designated as the Government's music and education hub lead for Northamptonshire, and later it became the hub lead for the county of Rutland as well.

The Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation has described the importance of music education in the following instructive terms:

"engagement in the arts and heritage enriches lives, unlocks creative potential, improves skills, changes behaviour, increases confidence, and should be available to all. In order to maintain vibrancy in the arts, it is critical that the next generation of diverse artists is nurtured and encouraged."

We have already heard from a representative of the Province of Northern Ireland, and I am so pleased that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is on the Front Bench. He is unable to speak from the Front Bench this evening, as is the Minister for Legal Migration and the Border, who is also present. I am sure that, as fellow Northamptonshire MPs, they will agree on the importance of music education.

NMPAT embodies that ethos wholly and fully, and, as a former Culture Minister, I strongly agree with it and understand it. The range of opportunities provided by that organisation is enriching and they are plentiful around Northamptonshire and Rutland:

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): My right hon. and learned Friend is making an excellent speech, and I congratulate him on securing the debate. Does he agree that NMPAT's reach across all of our constituencies in Northamptonshire is truly impressive? Last year it educated in music more than 53,000 children and young people, with its dedicated staff of 200 employees. Is that not an example that other music hubs should follow?

Sir Michael Ellis: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend, because he is absolutely right. There are 1,000 children involved in NMPAT's award-winning music and drama groups alone, and NMPAT is the biggest provider of music lessons in Northamptonshire, which includes his constituency. NMPAT currently teaches 15,000 children on a range of musical instruments and in a variety of musical styles in schools, through whole-class and individual lessons. It has 11 Saturday music and performing arts centres and three contemporary centres at venues across the county. The centres are open to everybody and they exist to provide an educational and fun environment for any person interested in the arts.

NMPAT has also had overwhelming success in the Music for Youth national festival, by regularly having groups featured in the top Royal Albert Hall Music for Youth Proms, and we are very proud of them. Annual orchestra tours to Europe are also organised. Later this year, the County Youth Orchestra in Northamptonshire and the County Youth Choir will be travelling to Zaragoza in Spain for a series of concerts. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) has pointed out, NMPAT interacts with 52,000 children every year, and that is just Northamptonshire and Rutland.

It is important to emphasise the reach and impact that NMPAT has in order to display just how important its services are. One of my own staff members here in Parliament, Callum Dineen, was a student in NMPAT for five years and has told me of the overwhelmingly positive effect that the organisation has had on his life. Through the opportunities it provides, NMPAT helps children to find the match that lights a creative fuse, and that cannot be underestimated. This fuse often burns throughout adolescence and into adulthood, igniting a love for the arts, which not only enriches those in our country now, but is passed on to future generations.

Hard work, an eye for detail and a drive to succeed are values taught at NMPAT, which translate into all other areas of life. Social skills and opportunities to make new friends through music are provided to children who might otherwise feel left out in school settings. It is for all of those reasons that I was so concerned when the chief executive of NMPAT, Peter Smalley, contacted me with his grave concerns about the future of his organisation, and he is watching this debate today.

NMPAT, as the music hub lead, has a turnover of £4.5 million. That includes £1.13 million of core hub grant from Government. Payments for services from parents and schools make up the majority of the remaining turnover. But, in the two years since the pandemic, NMPAT has used substantial amounts of its reserves

to rebuild, regrow, and restimulate activity across the two counties, to achieve levels of engagement and activity close to pre-pandemic levels. This was clearly only ever going to be a short-term option, and I am sorry to say that these reserves have now been exhausted.

In addition to the current funding challenge posed by the pandemic and the frozen national music grant, the organisation is now gravely concerned about the effect of losing a grant that covers increased employer contributions for the teachers' pension scheme, and that is the thrust of what I wish to raise today. That scheme was introduced in 2019, in common with other independent music services. This grant was worth £210,000 per annum to NMPAT, but it finishes in August of this year.

I am aware of a letter that my right hon. Friend the Schools Minister sent in response to correspondence sent jointly by the Independent Society of Musicians, the Musicians' Union and Music Mark in December last year, which addressed their concerns about this issue. The Minister acknowledged that

"incumbent and potential new Hub Lead Organisations have had over 12 months' notice of this intention so that this can be carefully planned for well in advance."

I accept that, and although this notice period was welcome, it has now been made redundant, I am sorry to say, by an additional announcement of the 5 percentage point increase to employer contributions, which begins in April—imminently. Although some support towards these costs has been intimated until September, the ISM, the Musicians' Union and Music Mark rightly say that hub lead organisations have had "no way of planning" for this additional change.

Interestingly, these further additional costs will be fully funded for mainstream schools and further education. Local authority music services that employ teachers will also receive support. However, NMPAT and other music hubs across the country are currently due to receive no assistance. This adds an additional annual cost of £240,000 to NMPAT's budget. For NMPAT, the resultant total annual cost of employer contributions for the teachers' pension scheme alone will be £1.15 million, which will be greater than its national music grant of £1.13 million. It is axiomatic that other aspects of NMPAT services will suffer severely if its national music grant is swallowed entirely by the new pension contributions, as is likely if nothing is done.

As a result, Peter Smalley and others have been forced to begin consultation with staff to take them out of the teachers' pension scheme and offer an alternative workplace pension.

Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con) *rose—*

Sir Michael Ellis: I give way to my constituency neighbour.

Andrew Lewer: My right hon. and learned Friend and I have both been strong supporters of NMPAT. I visited again recently and wrote about it in the local newspaper. The Department for Education has encouraged flexibility and autonomy in music partnerships. It is better for all schools to be covered and for teacher skills to be utilised. That works, but only if it is done fairly, and the challenge to that fairness has, as he eloquently describes, come through the teachers' pension scheme. Does he agree that it would be quite wrong for music partnerships not

[Andrew Lewer]

to be able to offer their teachers—those in state schools right across Northamptonshire, for example—the same pensions as their less peripatetic fellow professionals?

Sir Michael Ellis: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. As he rightly says, he has been a powerful advocate for NMPAT, and I am so pleased that he is here in support.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for giving way and for securing this important debate.

It is not just Northamptonshire that is impacted by these financial pressures on our wonderful musical hubs; West Yorkshire is, too. I am very fortunate to have Musica Kirklees in my neck of the woods. Its music director Nick Dolling has been in touch with me about this issue. Previously, it was led by the inspirational Thom Meredith, who produced a stream of talented young musicians for local brass bands, choirs, Slaithwaite Philharmonic Orchestra and many more, to the extent that we have the world-champion Lindley School choir, led by Alison North, in my neck of the woods. We also have the Mrs Sunderland festival and the Haydn Wood musical festival in Linthwaite. There is so much musical heritage, but the people involved are now worried about exactly the financial pressures that my right hon. and learned Friend has mentioned. May I just say that we in West Yorkshire are with him in this campaign? I look forward to hearing from the Minister.

Sir Michael Ellis: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right that West Yorkshire and counties up and down the country are affected in that way. I am pleased that he is here and in agreement.

This further disruption is demoralising for the workforce. That is the effect of what Peter Smalley and the other heads of hubs have had to do, because it carries the inherent risk of a talent drain and recruitment crisis. NMPAT is also undertaking a full internal financial review to establish where cuts and savings can be made. It is inevitable that some services currently being delivered will be lost, and that costs for parents and schools will rise, perhaps by as much as 20%.

It has become clear that this is a worrying time not just for NMPAT, but for music education hubs up and down the country. I am concerned not just for the hubs that are having to make difficult decisions, but for organisations that perhaps might not be fully aware of the details of the changes that are about to occur. Music hubs making cuts to their budget, which reduces services and outreach, is a situation that we should not allow to occur because of the important impact that music education has.

The Minister's predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Nick Gibb), said:

"I believe all children, regardless of their backgrounds, should have the same opportunities and that's why it's so good to see that our music hubs are reaching so many."

However, these changes are placing the viability of music hubs under threat. As a hugely successful music hub lead, NMPAT should be looking to expand the number of children it interacts with every year, not facing the unpalatable decision to make cuts to its services. I am

aware that the Department for Education has confirmed that there will be some funding to cover the employer pension contribution, and that a formula to agree allocations is being worked on. When the Minister replies in a moment, would he be able to provide more detail on that formula and on whether NMPAT can expect a grant to cover those costs?

It also strikes me that the savings made by this cost-cutting measure will be rather small. According to Music Mark, the cut to the teachers' pension scheme allowance will save His Majesty's Government only around £1.2 million, which the House may think is a modest sum in the grand scheme of things. Furthermore, I am told it has been estimated that treating music teachers in independent music hub lead organisations equitably with schoolteachers by providing a grant for their pension schemes would cost only around £2 million annually. Is the cost of the effects of this policy change on NMPAT and other music education hubs around the country worth those relatively modest savings?

Mr Hollobone: My right hon. and learned Friend continues to make an excellent speech. Perhaps we could hear from the Minister his thinking about the principle that my right hon. and learned Friend is highlighting: why should the Government fully fund extra employer contributions for teachers in schools who are delivering the Government's national curriculum, but not fully fund the extra contributions for teachers employed to deliver the Government's national plan for music education? Why is that such an important point of principle when the costs involved are so small?

Sir Michael Ellis: I am sure our right hon. Friend the Minister has heard those points. I am coming to my conclusion now, so hopefully he will have the opportunity to address them.

We must not forget that music is not just important to the welfare and wellbeing of so many of our young people—and indeed people of all ages—but a great addition to the economy of this country. According to UK Music, the music industry's contribution to the UK economy in 2022 was £6.7 billion, and our UK music exports generate £4 billion. Our country's great cultural offering is clearly enjoyed by many people at home and abroad. British music is famous around the world, and we should be encouraging young people to contribute to the UK's music economy.

As with any issue, I choose to look at this matter proportionally, and would argue that the benefits of scrapping this grant do not outweigh the impacts. I respectfully request that the Minister be willing to look again at this matter and provide assurances to Peter Smalley, NMPAT and other music education hubs up and down the country that His Majesty's Government will do all they can to support their important work, and that their outreach will not be adversely affected.

6.38 pm

The Minister for Schools (Damian Hinds): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Northampton North (Sir Michael Ellis) on securing a debate on this important subject, and on what is an unusually well-attended Adjournment debate. I thank all his colleagues—all our colleagues—from Northamptonshire for being here. My right hon. and learned Friend is a

former arts Minister, and I commend him on the great work he did in that role, including his very important work on public libraries as well as on music. I know that music is a subject very close to his heart, as it is to the hearts of so many of us in this place, including my own.

My right hon. and learned Friend mentioned my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Nick Gibb). As our right hon. Friend has often said, studying and engaging with music is not a privilege, but a vital part of a broad and ambitious curriculum. All pupils should have access to an excellent music education and all the knowledge and joy it brings. This is why music is part of the national curriculum for all maintained schools from the age of five to 14, and why the Government expect that academies should teach music as part of their statutory requirement to promote pupils' cultural development.

Music, like every subject, is generally funded by schools through their core budget. In the November 2022 autumn statement, we announced an additional £2 billion in each of 2023-24 and 2024-25, over and above the totals that had been announced at the 2021 spending review. In July 2023, we announced an additional £525 million this year to support schools with the teachers' pay award, and £900 million in 2024-25. The Government have continued to provide additional funding, over and above school budgets, to enable children and young people to access high-quality music and arts education. From 2016 to 2022 we invested £714 million, and we are investing £115 million per year up to 2025. Altogether, since 2016, this sums to close to £1 billion for a diverse portfolio of organisations over those years.

That sum includes £79 million a year for music hubs, as was mentioned by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Northampton North and by the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), who is no longer in her place. Hubs provide specialist music education services to around 87% of state-funded schools, and over £30 million a year goes to the music and dance scheme, which provides means-tested bursaries to over 2,000 young people showing the greatest potential in those art forms. It also includes a growing cohort of national youth music organisations, with new additions such as the National Open Youth Orchestra, which works with young disabled people, and UD, which runs programmes including Flames Collective, its flagship pre-vocational creative development programme. It was great to see Flames Collective perform with Raye at this year's Brits. As part of the refreshed plan, the Government continue to invest £79 million a year in music hubs, as well as providing an additional £25 million of funding for musical instruments.

On the teachers' pension scheme—the TPS, as it is commonly known—the Department for Education has secured £1.25 billion to support eligible settings with the increased employer contribution rate in financial year 2024-25. That will mean additional funding of £9.3 million for local authorities for centrally employed teachers, including those employed in local authority-based music hubs. The Department has published the details of the additional funding for mainstream schools, high needs and local authorities with centrally employed teachers. I can also confirm that the Department is committed to providing funding to cover the increase in employer contribution rates for existing non-local authority hubs for the current academic year—that is,

until August 2024—and officials are working to agree the precise amount. Further details, including funding rates and allocations, will be provided soon.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Northampton North will know there is a music hubs competition in progress. Following its conclusion, which is due to be announced next month, the Department will work with Arts Council England to set final grant allocations for the newly competed hub lead organisations that will take over from September. As part of that work, due consideration will be given to additional pension pressures due to the increase in employer contributions through the TPS.

We know that, while potential is equally spread throughout the country, opportunity is not. As part of levelling up, our plan is to provide an additional £2 million of funding to support the delivery of a music progression programme. This programme will support up to 1,000 disadvantaged pupils to learn how to play an instrument or sing to a high standard over a sustained period. Further details about the programme will be announced in the coming weeks, once a national delivery partner has been appointed.

We know that many schools across the country deliver first-rate music lessons to pupils and offer high-quality extracurricular activities as well. However, we are also aware that there are some areas where music provision may be more limited, and to address this a refreshed national plan for music education was published in June 2022. That plan clearly sets out the ambition of the Government up to 2030 that every child, regardless of circumstance, needs or geography, should have access to a high-quality music education—to learn to sing, play an instrument and create music together and have the opportunity to progress their musical interests and talents.

Mr Hollobone: I thank the Minister for his response so far. Encouragingly, he is moving in the right direction. Does he recognise that Northamptonshire Music and Performing Arts Trust has warmly embraced the publication of the Government national plan for music education, the title of which is “The power of music to change lives”? Is the Minister impressed by the reach of NMPAT to over 53,000 children across Northamptonshire and Rutland? Not many music hubs have that scale of reach.

Damian Hinds: I echo my hon. Friend's words about the power of music, and I join him in paying tribute to the great work of NMPAT. I do not have the statistics at my fingertips to assess where in the table, as it were, those thousands place it relative to others, but it certainly is a very impressive reach.

The expectations set out in the plan, starting from early years, are unashamedly ambitious, and informed by the excellent practice demonstrated by so many schools, music hubs and music charities around the country. As highlighted in the Ofsted “music subject” report published late last year, we know some schools do not allocate sufficient curriculum time to music. Starting this school year, schools are now expected to teach music lessons for at least one hour each week of the school year for key stages 1 to 3 alongside providing extracurricular opportunities to learn an instrument and sing, and opportunities to play and sing together in ensembles and choirs. We are monitoring lesson times to ensure that that improves.

[*Damian Hinds*]

Another weakness in some schools that was highlighted in the Ofsted report was the quality of the curriculum, in which there was insufficient focus on musical understanding and sequencing and progression. To support schools to develop a high-quality curriculum we published a model music curriculum in 2021, and, based on a survey of schools from last March, we understand that around 59% of primary schools and 43% of secondary schools are now implementing that non-statutory guidance. We want to go further in supporting schools with the music curriculum, which is why we published a series of case studies alongside the plan to highlight a variety of approaches to delivering music education as part of the curriculum. We are also working with Oak National Academy, which published its key stage 3 and 4 music curriculum sequence and exemplar lesson materials late last year, with the full suite of resources to follow in the summer.

While the refreshed plan rightly focuses on the place of music education in schools, it also recognises that music hubs have a vital role in supporting schools and ensuring that young people can access opportunities that schools on their own might not be able to offer. I join colleagues in paying tribute to the work of our music hubs across the country, including the organisations who lead them and their partners, who for the past 12 years have worked tirelessly to support music education.

One such organisation is of course the Northamptonshire Music and Performing Arts Trust, which I was pleased to hear my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Northampton North speak of in such glowing terms. I join him in thanking its chief executive, Peter Smalley, who I gather might be with us today. Just last week I had the privilege of seeing the work of another music hub in Surrey. I was very impressed by all that its partnership is doing to support schools to provide high-quality music and offer amazing opportunities to young people also beyond the classroom.

This year, hubs have continued their excellent work against the backdrop of a re-competition of the lead organisations led by Arts Council England. I recognise that that will not have been easy. As no announcement of which organisations will be leading the new hubs has yet been made, Members will understand that I cannot comment on the individual circumstances of any organisation currently in receipt of hub funding.

From September a new network of 43 hubs made up of hundreds of organisations working in close partnership will continue to build on the outstanding legacy of the hubs to date, and I offer my wholehearted thanks to everyone who has played a part in the music hub story so far. It will be exciting to see how the new hub partnerships develop and flourish with the support of the announced centres of excellence, once they are in place.

One area where hubs provide support to schools is in helping them to develop strong music development plans. This year we have invited every school to have a plan that considers how they and their hub will work together to improve the quality of music education. Our sample survey of school leaders last March showed that slightly under half of schools already had a music development plan in place. Of those, the vast majority—nine in 10—of school leaders intended to review it for this school year. Of those without a plan, nearly half reported intending to put one in place this school year. I hope it will not be long before every school has a strong music development plan that sets out how the vision of the national plan is being realised for their pupils.

The quality of teaching remains the single most important factor in improving outcomes for children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. We plan to update our teacher recruitment and retention strategy and build on our reforms to ensure that every child has an excellent teacher, and that includes those teaching music. Our strategy update will reflect on our progress on delivering our reforms, as well as setting out priorities for the years ahead. For those starting initial teacher training in music in academic year 2024-25, we are offering tax-free bursaries of £10,000. That should help attract more music teachers into the profession and support schools in delivering at least one hour of music lessons a week. The Government will also be placing a stronger emphasis on teacher development as part of the music hub programme in the future, including peer-to-peer support through new lead schools in every hub.

There is fantastic music education taking place across the country. Indeed, the opening remarks of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Northampton North did a better job at bringing that to life than I ever could. For my part, I offer and add my thanks to every music teacher in every setting for all that they do, but there is still a lot to do to make our vision for music education become a reality for every child in every school. I am confident, however, that our reforms are having an impact and will lead to concrete action that every school and trust can take to improve their music education provision. Through partnership and collaboration with hub partners, we will ensure that all young people and children can have access to a high-quality music education.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Following this excellent debate, I am going to go to a reception sponsored by Mr Speaker with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. It struck me that we have all the orchestras, sinfoniettas, musical theatre and musicians generally—all these incredible talents—and I wonder how many of them started their lifelong love affair with music by picking up a musical instrument in school. We are so fortunate.

Question put and agreed to.

6.52 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 19 March 2024

[JUDITH CUMMINS *in the Chair*]

Tutoring Provision

9.30 am

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): I beg to move,
That this House has considered tutoring provision.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Cummins. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting the debate, and I thank hon. Members in all parts of the House who supported my application for it. Unfortunately, it clashes with a meeting of the Education Committee, but the Chair—the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker)—and various members of the Committee have been very supportive.

This debate is about the Government's national tutoring programme and the 16 to 19 tuition fund, which will end at the end of this academic year. Like other hon. Members, I am really disappointed that no new money was announced in the Budget to allow it to continue. As a result, schools and colleges have two options: they can try to fund the scheme from their own meagre budgets, which would be hard to achieve given the cuts that they are already having to make, or they can scrap it altogether, which would be a travesty.

During the pandemic, children were
“at the back of the queue”

and “always overlooked”. Those are the words of Anne Longfield, who was Children's Commissioner during covid. Despite the remarkable efforts of our teachers and education leaders, who heroically adapted their lessons for online learning, we lost tens of millions of hours of valuable classroom time, and disadvantaged children were most affected.

Sir Kevan Collins, the Government's adviser, acknowledged that children needed £15 billion to bridge the educational gap created by the pandemic. When just a fraction of that was given, he promptly resigned. In a recent interview in *Tes* magazine, he recognised the value of tutoring and said that he had wanted to scale it up dramatically so that 5 million pupils would receive tutoring by the end of 2024. He was also clear that tutoring should be best managed and led by schools. He said:

“Schools know their children best.”

I could not agree more, but as we all know, the recovery programme for which Sir Kevan called was not delivered.

I have to be totally honest: I was not always a fan of how the Government's national tutoring programme was implemented. It encountered numerous challenges from ineffective outsourcing to tortuous application processes, tutoring shortages and—dare I mention the word—Randstad. Even the Education Committee, which was then under the chairmanship of the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), who is now an Education Minister, recognised in a 2022 report that

“a complex bureaucratic system for applications may have hampered some schools' ability to access...support”.

It further noted:

“Teachers and school staff know their pupils and know what interventions are likely to bring the most benefit.”

As Sir Kevan identified, the size of the tutoring programme also fell drastically short.

Despite all its failings, the tutoring programme managed to achieve some positive outcomes. When implemented correctly, tutoring has proved its worth time and again. It has helped pupils to catch up on lost learning and has shown many additional benefits such as improved confidence and school attendance. In the run-up to the Budget, more than 500 schools signed a letter to the Prime Minister, to the Secretary of State for Education and to the Chancellor, calling for more national tutoring programme funding. The letter was delivered to No. 10 by representatives of Action Tutoring, Tutor Trust and Get Further. I pay tribute to them for their amazing work in this area; several of them are watching from the Gallery today.

The Government responded that they would continue to support tutoring through pupil premium funding, but school leaders will be dismayed by that response. The pupil premium, which was established by Liberal Democrats in the coalition Government, was once a fund to support disadvantaged children, but since 2015 its value has eroded by 14% in real terms, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, and I think we all acknowledge that in recent years it has more often been used to plug gaps in school funding. The hon. Member for Worcester recognised that when he said:

“I'm not sure there is sufficient space in the pupil premium to support tutoring becoming part of the system.”

Why am I such a fan of tutoring? We are lucky that so much research has been done on the impact of tutoring. The Sutton Trust, Public First, the Education Endowment Foundation and others have all looked at it. This Government claim that they are led by evidence, so let us look at some. The Sutton Trust says that the attainment gap, which had been decreasing gradually throughout the early 2010s,

“stalled in the years before the pandemic. Since the crisis, the gap has widened considerably, with 10 years of progress now wiped out.”

It believes that tutoring is

“a key method of boosting learning”

for disadvantaged children. It also notes:

“The programme has had a considerable impact on levelling out access to tutoring, with 35% of working class Year 11 students receiving private or school-based tutoring, compared to 36% of students from professional homes.”

Work by the Education Endowment Foundation has shown the effectiveness of tutoring, showing an average impact of four months' additional progress over the course of a year with small-group tutoring. It also recognised the particular benefits that tutoring can bring to disadvantaged children:

“Studies in England have shown that pupils eligible for free school meals typically receive additional benefits from small group tuition”.

It stands to reason: allowing a teacher to focus on the needs of a small number of learners and provide teaching closely matched to that pupil's individual understanding will reap greater rewards than teaching a larger number of students. Small groups offer the opportunity for greater levels of interaction and feedback than whole-class teaching.

[Munira Wilson]

Let us take the example of Dylan, a typical student who has benefited from an Action Tutoring tutor. Dylan struggled with maths and was considered unlikely to meet the expected standard. His school set him up with tutoring, and he attended 16 sessions over a period of two years. As a result, he moved from a grade 3 standard to a grade 4 pass. However, the benefits were so much more than just getting the grade that he needed. Dylan said:

“Before I started my tutoring sessions, I dreaded maths because I didn’t enjoy it. But my tutoring sessions were amazing and really helped boost my confidence in maths. When I found out I passed my GCSE maths, I didn’t believe it. Dead serious, I literally was flabbergasted. I was like, what is even going on? I looked twice at it as I was just so flustered.”

That hope and excitement expressed by Dylan—that promise of being able to move on to the next stage of your life and pursue your dreams—is priceless.

Public First research shows the impact that tutoring has had on GCSE pass rates and overall grades in key subjects. Some 62,000 additional pass grades in GCSE maths and English were achieved as a result of Government-funded tutoring in the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years. Tutoring is an intervention with an impact on pupils right across the grade spectrum: it provided 430,000 grade improvements in total, with 220,000 in maths and 210,000 in English. The long-term economic impact on earning potential is significant, and so is the very real impact of strong foundations in numeracy and literacy on people’s lives.

We all know that under-18s in England must retake GCSE English and maths if they do not achieve a grade 4 pass. In 2023, that resulted in a staggering 167,000 students having to retake maths and 172,000 resitting English. When combined, that is the highest number of retakes in a decade. We are setting those children up for repeated failure unless different help and support is provided. Just 16.4% of students resitting GCSE maths in England passed with at least a grade 4 this year, and the pass rate for English was only slightly higher. That group of children need targeted help, support and time with a tutor in small-group sessions to get to the bottom of what they find difficult, with personal, structured work plans to boost progress. Targeted tutoring has been exceptionally effective in helping that group.

I was lucky enough to see the work of Get Further when I visited Southwark College last year. Sitting in on a few sessions allowed me to see tutoring at first hand. It was fascinating to see how tutors engaged one on one with pupils, helping them to unpack a maths question or discussing the meaning of a particular word in English. The children I spoke to all had aspirations and plans for the future, and they really valued the time they spent with teachers one on one or in a small group.

Aiden, at London South East Colleges, had twice missed out on a grade 4 at English GCSE. He was supported by a Get Further tutor, who helped him to understand things for the first time in a tailored small group and one-to-one setting. He said this about his experience:

“I was only aiming for a 4 as it was my third time retaking English and I wanted to get it over and done with. As I continued my tuition, I started to understand things I didn’t understand before and quickly improved. Now, I have a 6 and it’s all thanks to my tutor. I am so pleased with the grade I achieved and proud of how far I have come! In September, I aim to go on to Level 2

Health and Social Care and then move on to Level 3 or an Access to Higher Education course so that I can do Paramedic Science at university with awesome classmates who share what I aspire to be: someone who helps people at their highest and lowest moments.”

Tutoring can be truly transformational.

We should also acknowledge the many other spillover benefits that tutoring brings, which speak to many current concerns in our educational system. Some 85% of parents say that tutoring has had a positive impact on their child’s confidence, while 68% say that it has improved attendance. CoachBright recently published its impact report and has done interesting work on the relationship between tutoring and attendance. The results show that tutoring can reduce persistent absence by 11%. At a time when thousands of pupils are missing from school, tutoring can offer children and young people the opportunity to have a new trusted adult in their lives, giving them a new way to engage with their education.

The bottom line is that for every £1 spent on tutoring, £6.58 is generated in economic returns as a direct result of pupils achieving higher grades and having a higher lifetime earnings potential. The benefits are felt not just by those who receive the tutoring, but by our whole economy and society. The evidence is compelling, but there is also a strong political case for continuing tutoring: it is popular. Public First research found that pupils like tutoring: students were positive about their experiences and were willing to have more of it if available. Parents like tutoring: over three quarters of parents would support increased tutoring provision. Teachers like tutoring: they welcome the impact on academic attainment and the wider benefits such as pupil confidence, increased engagement in the classroom and reduced anxiety. This is a policy that is popular with pupils, parents and teachers. I have no wish to help the Government, but surely that sounds like a vote winner.

Liberal Democrats believe in tutoring, which is why we have said that we will offer a tutoring guarantee for every disadvantaged pupil who needs extra support, recognising that tutoring is most effective when we allow headteachers and college leaders to decide themselves how to run the scheme. I think tutoring is so important that I joined the Conservative Chair of the Education Committee and a former Labour Education Secretary—the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett—to try to convince the Government to maintain funding for the tutoring programme beyond the end of this academic year.

As we have heard from the case studies, tutoring can be a life-changing intervention. Those of us who are parents and are privileged enough to afford tutoring for our children do not hesitate to pay for it in order to boost their attainment and confidence. In the words of Lorraine Spence, whose daughter Naomi benefited from Get Further’s tutoring after she failed her maths GCSE:

“My daughter is now thriving at university but without the extension of this kind of funding, countless young people from low-income families will miss out on securing the gateway qualifications they need to unlock opportunities like this. Should tutoring return to being a luxury for the rich and a sacrifice for the poor? I urge the Government not to allow this to be the case. Instead, let’s make a more equitable educational system, where tutoring is accessible to all—and one positive legacy to come out of the pandemic.”

I could not agree more with Lorraine’s words. If the Government are serious about levelling up, I hope that the Minister will make a commitment today that he is

willing to do battle with his Treasury colleagues to ensure that funding continues both for the national tutoring programme and for the 16 to 19 tuition fund. Schools and colleges need that assurance urgently to plan for the next academic year.

9.45 am

Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con): It is a pleasure, as always, to see you in the Chair, Mrs Cummins. I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for securing this important debate. I want to say a few words in support of the Government's national tutoring programme, an outstanding initiative that has provided invaluable support, particularly for children whose education was impacted during the global coronavirus pandemic. I would also like to share my first-hand experience of the programme.

I am the Member of Parliament for Sedgefield in County Durham, and the programme has helped Dean Bank Primary and Nursery School, in Ferryhill in my constituency, to support some of the most disadvantaged students in the north-east. This is a school where 79% of students receive free school meals, and it is in the area that is the focus of my all-party parliamentary group for left-behind neighbourhoods. As it happens, it is also the school that I first attended. The school is based in one of the mining communities in my constituency, which deserve all the help they can get to stimulate social mobility and aspiration.

The national tutoring programme has brought about 430,000 grade increases and 62,000 additional passes in maths and English since it was launched. Indeed, Professor Becky Francis, chair of the Education Endowment Foundation, referred to tutoring as

“one of the best evidenced interventions we have to support disadvantaged pupils' attainment.”

Meanwhile, according to Public First data, a projected lifetime earnings boost of £4.34 billion can be ascribed to the national tutoring programme, based on the tutoring delivered in the two years from 2021-22 to 2022-23 for just £660 million.

Despite what that data does to illuminate the education, tutoring is not all about numbers. At Dean Bank Primary and Nursery School, 20 pupils have been supported in their maths and English since October last year; in a tiny primary school, that makes such a difference to their world. The school is supported by Action Tutoring, an education charity hugely supported by the national tutoring programme. The school's deputy head teacher, Will Haynes, has said:

“After the initial set-up period, the children had clearly gotten into it. They came into school, all excited, saying, ‘It's tutoring day today!’ It's going really well. It's quick and easy to set up the laptops each week. The children look forward to seeing their tutors.”

In the past, a disadvantaged but rural community such as Ferryhill would have struggled to get tutoring support, but thanks to the internet, that is no longer the case. I thank Action Tutoring and its brilliant volunteers for what they do; indeed, one reason I am here today is that one of my staff, Douglas Oliver, who is here today, also volunteers with Action Tutoring, and he has massively enlightened me about how important its work is. Action Tutoring's analysis shows that 65% of disadvantaged pupils pass their maths GCSE after attending at least 10 tutoring sessions with the charity. Action Tutoring

pupils were nearly 13 percentage points more likely to pass maths GCSE than other disadvantaged pupils nationally. Those are significant interventions. I could continue, but what I want to say is that Action Tutoring's work is indicative of so much of the valuable tutoring provided by volunteers and others. We must celebrate that work.

Pupil premium funding was introduced 14 years ago by a Conservative Government working in coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Although the Government gave something in the order of £400 billion of temporary support during the crisis of 2020 and 2021, it is vital that one small part of that support is renewed as the legacy of the pandemic endures for our youngest people. Of course, the Government live in a time of fiscal pressure following the shock of the pandemic and the illegal war in Ukraine, but we must continue to focus on education outcomes and the investment they afford us in our future. I hope the Government will look at the national tutoring programme as an option after this school year, because much needs to be done to look at how we embed tutoring for all students in the years ahead. Tutoring can stimulate aspiration in those furthest away from opportunity, and I encourage the Government to give it all possible support.

9.49 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It really is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Cummins. I look forward to you being in the Chair every time I am here. Thank you for being here and for your fairness.

I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for leading this debate on a very important issue. As always, I will try to bring a Northern Ireland perspective, not because the Minister has responsibility for Northern Ireland but because it adds to the debate. I will give some stats and talk about what we have done back home, and hopefully we can share those experiences for our betterment.

The hon. Lady and the Liberal Democrat party have done much work on children's education, and specifically on tutoring. She set the scene well and talked about what she and her party espouse and hope to achieve. She spoke about the benefits of tutoring, which were endorsed by the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Paul Howell). There is certainly a disparity across the United Kingdom, but we must ensure that children from all backgrounds can take advantage of good educational learning. It is great to be here to give a Northern Ireland perspective on this issue.

The Government set up the national tutoring programme in England in response to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on education. Those two and a half to three years really did change life for everyone. The programme provided subsidised, small-group catch-up teaching and mentoring for pupils impacted by covid. It is crazy to think about where we were just a few years ago and about how much school young people missed out on. Although teachers did their best, it was always going to be a difficult task, so it was important that we looked at different ways of providing education. The Government did that, especially for key worker parents.

The latest child poverty figures for Northern Ireland show that 82,000 children live in absolute poverty. Remember that we have a population of 1.95 million, so

[Jim Shannon]

those figures show the enormity of the situation and what we are trying to achieve back home—we are talking about almost one in every five children. Just under 100,000 children in Northern Ireland live in relative poverty. Adding those two figures together gives a sum of 182,000 living in absolute or relative poverty. Those figures worry me. They highlight not only the situation in Northern Ireland but the need for better one-to-one tutoring provision.

Key worker parents provided essential services, but their children had less face-to-face teaching at home, so it is likely that many of those children suffered due to that too. The hon. Members for Twickenham and for Sedgefield talked about a combination of issues, and I know that the hon. Members for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) and for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) will do likewise.

I always look forward to the Minister's response, because he tries to encapsulate our fears, concerns and questions, and gives us some encouragement as elected representatives. Funding for Northern Ireland was secured by the Halifax Foundation for Northern Ireland and the Charities Aid Foundation. That allowed for the creation of a free online tuition service for the children of key workers from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and for children with special educational needs. The combination of those two issues—parents who are away at work, and the education of children with special educational needs—is a massive problem. I have realised from all the debates we have here that the issues relating to children with special educational needs affect not just Northern Ireland but the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Ask a Tutor scheme really did make a difference, and I thank the Halifax Foundation for Northern Ireland and the Charities Aid Foundation for that.

The Government have said that raising children's attainment is at the heart of their agenda, and that is very true. Being able to obtain good tutoring services is one thing, but that must be deliverable across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I am a passionate believer in the strength of the Union, and I am sure everybody in this Chamber is of a similar disposition. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North spoke at my association dinner two weeks ago about the strength of the Union, and he enthralled that audience of true Unionists in Newtownards with his words. I put my thanks for that on record, and I am pleased to see him here.

Although it is fully understood that education is devolved, we need to ensure that the initial budget is there to support one-to-one tutoring in our schools. The Assembly is now up and working again, and the Minister for Education back home is my colleague Paul Givan MLA. I know him and I know that he will work hard on this issue, but there also needs to be the support from Westminster. I am sure the Minister will give us encouragement on that through his words, as well as his actions.

One of my staff members was tutored in maths through her fourth and fifth years of secondary school, and her sessions cost £32 for one hour each week. That was almost eight years ago, so I imagine that they cost at least another £10 to £15, which would make it quite

challenging for any person to afford that individually—it could cost over £200 a month, depending on how many sessions someone was having. Although there are people out there who will be able to afford that—that is fine, and those are the sacrifices we make—there are those who simply will not be able to. Giving consideration to those families should be made a priority, and that is the first of my requests in this debate.

We all want our young children to grow up and excel at school, and to have the best opportunities possible, and providing extra one-to-one tutoring sessions is an excellent way to ensure they do. I see that through the staff in my office and what they have told me, and we heard it in the introduction from the hon. Member for Twickenham, who explained why tutoring is important, and others have added to that message and will add to it in a minute.

I urge the Minister to engage with the devolved nations to ensure that we can all play a role in improving educational outcomes for young people in this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Isn't it great that we have that Union? Isn't it great that we can share these ideas? Isn't it great that we can do that for our children?

9.57 am

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Cummins. I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) on securing this incredibly important debate.

If I may, I will briefly thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for giving me a plug and saying why I might have a career in the diplomatic corps in the not-too-distant future, which may come as a shock to many. I appreciate that he invited me, and it was obviously a pleasure to speak to the fine people of Strangford and surrounding areas about our precious and important Union.

The issue before us is very important for me, and I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests: I was a schoolteacher professionally, working in both London and Birmingham before entering this place. My partner is also an employee of Teach First, which analysed elements of the programme and was involved in delivering some of the tutoring in the earlier days. Although she was not an employee at that stage, it is important to ensure that the record is clear.

The national tutoring programme plays a massively important part in ensuring that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular—those who are registered for free school meals, and those who are not yet registered but who are technically eligible—have the academic ability to attain the grades they deserve. For levelling up to mean anything, we have to get education right. In Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke, I can build every shiny building going and bring in every new job going, but what is it all for if kids from Stoke-on-Trent do not end up in those new high-skilled, high-wage jobs, in those buildings or in the new homes we are building in our local area?

Sadly, Stoke-on-Trent has remained in the bottom 20% for academic attainment and achievement for far too long. In the past, the Office for Students has ranked my constituency as the seventh worst in England for kids going on to higher education. Twelve per cent of

my entire workforce have no formal qualifications, which is 8% higher than the national average. The number of kids achieving level 3 and 4 qualifications—A-levels or college and apprenticeship qualifications—remains in the bottom fifth nationwide. That is not something that I want to see.

Sadly, the city has languished under a disastrous private finance initiative deal. This is not meant to be a party political dig, but it was administered under the last Labour Government back in 2000. There are 88 schools trapped in a PFI contract run by the council and are seeing huge inflationary increases in their costs. It is predicted that up to £100,000 in additional funding will potentially have to be found for the annual contributions that need to be made, leaving us scrambling. I collared the Minister in the voting Lobby last night to demand more funding, and that goes to the heart of the point. I appreciate that the Government will point to pupil premium funding, which is a superb initiative, but I agree with the Chair of the Education Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), who the hon. Member for Twickenham quoted: the reality is that the money simply will not be there.

There are huge inflationary increases in food and equipment costs, and with teachers' salaries going up, which the Government have covered in part but not in full. There are also additional costs in Stoke-on-Trent, where we have those increased PFI contributions. Those inflationary pressures, again, driven by covid and Vladimir Putin's illegal and immoral war in Ukraine, mean that schools are having to use every penny that they can find. They will not be able to continue the important tutoring scheme out of their own existing budgets because of the pressures that they are facing right now.

Stoke-on-Trent is exactly the area where that kind of intervention is absolutely necessary. I share the concern that at the end of this academic year, we will potentially see the end of the national tutoring programme as it is funded currently through additional Government support. I implore the Minister, and I will do everything I can with him, to lobby Treasury colleagues to demand that the scheme continues.

I will say this about the Prime Minister. Back in summer 2022, I supported my right hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) during the Conservative party leadership contest—it feels a long time ago, I know—because he had mentored me for a long time. I had a sense of loyalty to that, and I believe him to be a very good man. However, after he dropped out, I met all the leading contenders, including the current Prime Minister. When I sat down in the room with him for the first time and had a conversation about non-Treasury matters, seeing the fire behind his eyes when he talked about education was inspiring. It is so important, and it is something that sadly I had not heard enough of since the Blair years of “Education, education, education”, although I fear that that was more slogan and gimmick than actual delivery. Still, most importantly, at least it was on the forefront of the education agenda at that time.

Paul Howell: Does my hon. Friend agree that expenditure should be focused on initiatives like this programme, as opposed to the broader schemes that try to cover everybody from middle-income families to high-income families

and do a broad sweep across the bottom? These are the interventions that the Government should really be focused on.

Jonathan Gullis: I completely agree. I have huge problems with universal schemes because they are not a benefit if everyone is receiving them, in my personal opinion. Having universal free school meals for every child in primary school is not a good idea, because why on earth would my children be given access to a free school meal when I myself can afford it? I would rather see that additional funding for middle-class and higher-income parents who can afford it invested in children from disadvantaged backgrounds, so that we can have those well-funded breakfast clubs but also ensure that schools can invest further in such things as the tutoring programme.

We should not forget that the Education Endowment Foundation's own research says that small group tuition adds four months of progress on to students' lives. *Tes* reported that as of January 2024, 390,000 grade improvements in English and maths have been attributed to progress made due to the national tutoring programme over the previous two academic years. That goes to show the importance of the scheme, particularly for English and maths, and particularly when we still have an archaic system in place that means that people must get a pass in those subjects to be able to do an apprenticeship, yet they would not need that to do their A-levels. We have a two-tier system, despite having a major skills shortage in this country. We talk the talk about ensuring that apprenticeships are equal to an A-level, but there are these bizarre barriers in place that mean they are not.

I hope that the Minister will take back the idea of abolishing the requirements at the foundation stage, in order to allow people to get on to apprenticeships and study their English and maths while on those courses to get them up to grade. Of course, any responsible company will want that for their employees because it will improve the outcomes and productivity of the company.

The Government should be applauded for around 5 million tutoring courses that have begun since the inception of the programme, and the fact that they were bold and brave in going for it, despite the fact that Randstad is a dark stain on the Department's ability to procure. However, going back to what the hon. Member for Twickenham and I were calling for in those early days, it is vital to give the money to the schools and trust the headteachers in large part to deliver this particular programme.

The school-led approach is a much better system. Why? Teachers know who those pupils are. They know their backgrounds and their learning and support needs; they know their parents and have a relationship with them. Teachers are and have always been willing to stay behind after school. If we give teachers the opportunity to have a little more money in their pocket, bearing in mind they probably work double the hours they are actually paid for—I certainly used to do 60 hours a week as a bare minimum while on the frontline as a head of year—that could have a huge and positive impact for them. It could also have a positive impact on the many fantastic smaller focused third sector organisations that, again, have existed for a long time.

I hope we never see a repeat of Randstad, because that was an utter disaster. I was pleased to see that the Government were nimble on their feet and followed a

[Jonathan Gullis]

school-led approach; giving that money to the schools directly had a positive impact. I saw that in my albeit very brief time as Minister for School Standards between September and October 2022. During that time, I went on a number of visits to schools in the Black Country that were using that funding. I spoke with the pupils themselves, who said that without the programme, they would not have had the confidence to put up their hand in class to ask teachers questions when they did not understand what was being taught to them.

The national tutoring programme has given pupils confidence—sixth-formers interacting with year 7 and 8 pupils who are new to the school, to build that sense of collective responsibility and help one another. The older pupils learn important leadership skills, using their lived experience to impart the knowledge they have learned from their excellent and outstanding teachers. It all goes to show the power of the scheme. I do hope we will see that.

In February 2023, the National Audit Office said that in the 2021-22 academic year, only 47% of the pupils accessing the scheme were disadvantaged. Like myself, the hon. Member for Twickenham and many other Members present will be worried by that. The national tutoring programme was designed for disadvantaged pupils; it should not be supplementing the tutoring of children whose parents could afford private tuition if needed. While I want to ensure that every child has the opportunity, we need to find out from the Minister—I hope we will hear this today—what the Government have done since that report to really drive up the number of disadvantaged pupils to hopefully reach the 65% target that was initially given to Randstad as part of the contract. That is exactly the type of figure that we would like to see. I agree with Lee Elliot Major, the professor of social mobility at the University of Exeter, that it would be

“a national travesty if we fail to embed tutoring”

into our core schooling day in, day out. We therefore have that responsibility.

Schools Week reported that as of July 2023, there was a £240 million underspend in the tutoring programme over the 2021-22 and the 2022-23 academic year. Can I ask the Minister whether that money was reinvested back into the national tutoring programme to help to cover schools' costs, which are obviously rising in year in, year out, and to deal with the tutoring programme? That was something I requested within the Department while I was a Minister: for any underspend to go into the next academic year to give schools more cover and give them longer to get the programme up and running, build more trust with pupils and put things in place. That is important as well.

My final contribution is simple. If the Government do not want to go ahead with the national tutoring programme in its current form, I personally believe there is only one other way we can go forward. As any other hon. Member would, I will shamelessly plug my own research paper, which I did with Onward back in November 2020. It calls for not only an extended school day, which I have long supported, but a shortening of the school holidays over the course of an academic year—reducing the summer holiday from six weeks to four.

I support that for two reasons. First, childcare is extremely expensive; it is even more expensive now than when I wrote that report. It was estimated that that change would save the average family £133 a week based on costs associated back in November 2020, which will obviously have massively increased since then. I appreciate that the Government have done a lot in the childcare space with the new scheme providing 15 hours of free childcare as of April. I must confess that my own child, who is two years old, will benefit from it, and we have started the process of getting our code to give to our childcare provider.

The second and most important reason is that from research I have conducted, I understand that it takes around seven weeks for a disadvantaged pupil at the start of a new academic year to finally surpass where they were at the end of the previous academic year. That is seven weeks of lost learning, during which time disadvantaged pupils are unable to accelerate at the same pace as their better-off peers, which is simply unfair. Reducing that holiday to four weeks—I am happy to have a two-week October half term, which would be better for pupils and teachers in terms of rest and wellbeing, as well as trying to spread the cost of the school holidays throughout the year more fairly—would give those younger people a better opportunity.

There are other ideas in the pipeline. I have a research paper that I will happily send the Minister to have a look at and tell me what he thinks. Ultimately, I think it is the right thing. I appreciate that multi-academy trusts can do that of their own volition, and some do, but it should be driven nationally as well.

As I said, education is the absolute bedrock to levelling up. It is the bedrock to making sure that life chances can be achieved. I have no fiscal rules when it comes to education, because I believe that if we shove all the money there, we will have better outcomes on health and work, fewer people needing to use the welfare state, better home ownership, better wages, and less poverty in our country. Education is at the epicentre of achieving that, and we should therefore be pouring money into the sector. That 92% of my schools are now rated “good” or “outstanding”, compared with around 60% in 2010, and 75% of my kids are now reaching the necessary levels in phonics, compared with 53% when we inherited government back in 2010, shows that we have got it right, and that all the changes and hard work can go on to build something more.

I am so passionate about making sure that we get education right. It is essential that the people I serve—my masters and mistresses back in Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke; my Lord Sugars who will hire or fire me when the general election comes later this year—have every opportunity to make sure that their children can have the opportunities and ability to access the high-skilled, high-wage jobs I am bringing to my local area to improve their life outcomes. Stoke-on-Trent's achievement of the levelling-up agenda is driven through the education sector.

Please, Minister: we have to keep this tutoring programme on the tracks. If we do not, an extended school day and shorter school holidays are the alternative, in my opinion.

10.11 am

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mrs Cummins. I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for bringing forward this debate on tutoring

provision, and all hon. Members who have spoken very passionately on behalf of the children, families and school communities they represent here in Parliament.

I think we all agree that the scale of the challenge that many of our children and young people are currently facing is immense. We know that children and families have really struggled with the combined impact of years of reduced investment in our public services, compounded by the impact of the pandemic. Indeed, the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, which many have mentioned, has widened across all educational phases since 2019, so any limited progress made in the decade before was wiped out in a couple of years. The hon. Member for Twickenham also highlighted that issue.

We know that what happens outside the school gates reinforces the impact of what happens inside them. With the rising levels of child poverty, the cuts to youth services in communities and the dwindling support for children with additional needs, schools are increasingly becoming the frontline, with teachers having to buy food with their own money and wash clothes for families, and the increasing challenge of mental health issues.

It has now been four years since the enormous disruption and lost learning experienced by so many children began during covid. What was most concerning at that time was the lack of planning for children and for the inevitable impacts: no plan for learning from home in the early days; no plan for ensuring that all children had the equipment they needed; no plan for schools, teachers, or how to support children afterwards. So when the classrooms finally reopened after covid, it was not surprising to anyone that children found it hard to adjust. They had had little socialisation or interaction, and some had received barely any education at all.

I saw the impact on my own children. My youngest had only just started school when he found himself back at home being taught by two parents who had no teaching experience, two other children to try to teach and support, and two full-time jobs that they had to undertake from home. It was an incredibly challenging time for families everywhere, and in far too many households, particularly where less support was available, children paid a very heavy price. Kevan Collins was therefore commissioned by the Government to set out a long-term recovery plan for our children, but the Prime Minister, who was then Chancellor, opted out: he was simply not willing to make that investment in other people's children. Our country continues to pay a very heavy price for the decision he took then, and it will for some time to come.

The National Audit Office reported last year:

"Disruption to schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic led to lost learning for many pupils, particularly disadvantaged children."

It also reported:

"Left unaddressed, lost learning may lead to increased disadvantage and significant missing future earnings for those affected."

As a key measure to address that, the Government introduced the national tutoring programme, which was initially provided through tuition partners. As hon. Members have noted, there were many missteps, from a very low uptake at the start to schools struggling to find the tutors they needed to deliver the support, but as the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis)

highlighted, once the Government introduced the school-led tutoring element in September 2021, there was some success and take-up was higher.

Evidence gathered by the National Foundation for Educational Research showed that increasing the number of tuition hours

"led to better outcomes in maths and English."

Crucially, however, the foundation noted:

"Less than half of pupils selected for tutoring were from disadvantaged backgrounds."

As the match-funding requirements kicked in and Government funding went from 75% to 50%, schools that were trying to make the scheme work and that needed it the most found it ever more difficult to deliver. This year, many schools, especially those in the poorest areas, have used up almost all of their pupil premium and recovery premium funding to pay for tutors, leaving them little to pay for other interventions such as enrichment or training. Indeed, the benefits of the scheme risked being undermined by the way it was delivered because it was poorly targeted, so lots of children who needed the support the most were not able to benefit from it.

Tutoring was not mentioned in the Budget earlier this month, so it seems that the national tutoring programme is coming to an end. Just a few months ago, the then Schools Minister, the right hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Nick Gibb), stated:

"The Department has committed that, from the 2023/24 academic year, tutoring will have been embedded across schools in England."

However, without a specific budget for tuition, it is assumed that schools will need to use their main budgets to fund that support.

The Minister for Schools (Damian Hinds): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Catherine McKinnell: I will just finish my point.

As I was saying, it is assumed that schools will need to use their main budgets to fund tuition support, absorbing the costs into what is already a shrinking pot. It would therefore be helpful if the Minister set out the Government's vision of the national tutoring programme in the future. I was going to ask if he could do so in his response to this debate, but he is welcome to make an intervention now.

Damian Hinds: I will speak in a moment. I just wondered whether the hon. Lady is committing, in the event of her party coming into government, to having a separate line item for the tutoring programme over and above core school budgets.

Catherine McKinnell: The question that I am putting to the Government is how they envisage the future of the national tutoring programme. I would be grateful if the Government set out their vision. I will respond to the right hon. Gentleman's point, as I deal with it in my speech—

Damian Hinds: It will not be long until there is a general election. We do not know exactly when, but there will be a general election at some point in the months to come. If the hon. Lady is saying that she thinks the Government's course of action is a mistake, I am interested in hearing the alternative that she is setting out.

Catherine McKinnell: As I said, I am really interested to hear what the Government's vision is. Given that they have committed to ensuring that tutoring is embedded within the national school system, what is their plan for ensuring that that happens? We will inherit that plan from them, so I am very keen to hear the Minister's response to my question. I will set out Labour's costed plans in detail, but I am interested to hear how the Government will deliver on their pledge to ensure that tutoring is embedded within the national school system.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has found that schools funding in England is already not increasing as fast as the cost pressures schools are facing. That means that the poorest schools are likely to struggle the most to find the cash for tutoring, and that our most disadvantaged pupils will miss out. With access to tutoring seemingly diminishing, what is the Minister's plan for children to recover the learning they lost, which they have still not recovered from? I appreciate that he would like to move these issues on to the next Labour Government to solve, but given that this Government are currently in charge, I am sure that, like me, listeners to the debate are interested in hearing what this Government's plans are.

In government, Labour will consider how more tailored support could be most effectively delivered to ensure that children achieve what they need to in school. Crucially, we will look at introducing a range of measures to ensure that we close the attainment gap. We know that children's speech and language have really suffered since the pandemic, which has the potential to affect their educational attainment in the much longer term, so Labour has pledged to equip every school with the funding to deliver evidence-based early language interventions to tackle the problem.

We understand that quality teaching is key to unlocking children's potential, so we would use the funding available from ending the tax breaks currently enjoyed by private schools to hire 6,500 more teachers in our state schools, giving every child the teachers they need to benefit from a quality education.

Jonathan Gullis: It is a totally noble aim to bring more teachers into the system. Of course, the Government do an extensive work by providing grants for people taking specific courses; in some cases—science, for example, these are worth up to £20,000. What specifically is Labour's plan for recruitment of new teachers that the current Government are not doing? I have previously asked shadow Ministers similar questions, because I genuinely want to understand what will be done differently by Labour, bearing in mind that this Government are giving out tens of thousands of pounds to people simply for turning up to the training course, let alone then staying on, with the levelling-up bonus payments in education investment areas. I am keen to hear what the Labour plan looks like.

Catherine McKinnell: I appreciate the sincerity of the hon. Member's wish to talk about the challenge in recruitment and retention. Clearly, it is related to this debate today, in the sense that if we had all the teachers we need, would we need a national tutoring programme? Labour has set out quite detailed plans about how we will go about resolving the teacher recruitment and retention crisis, and we continue to have conversations with the sector to ensure that the money in the current

spending envelope for bursaries and incentives is spent as effectively as possible, because clearly there is a problem. The Government are seriously missing their recruitment targets. We have a range of measures, but I do not think it would be appropriate to go into the detail that the hon. Member wants me to go into today. However, I recognise the sincerity of his challenge in that regard and his recognition of the challenge, and Labour is absolutely determined to meet it.

We know that children's mental health is a huge challenge, so we will put a specialist mental health professional in every school and ensure that young people have access to early support. We will also invest in mental health hubs to ensure that young people can access mental health support where they most need it. We will offer free breakfast clubs in every primary school, to ensure that children have a softer start to the school day and the opportunity to learn, play and socialise. The evidence is clear that such clubs increase attainment and attendance; they will also put money back in parents' pockets and ensure a start to the school day that can help parents to get to work.

We recognise that there is no one fix, given the level of challenge in our system, but we will focus not only on taking a more targeted approach, so that children who need additional support the most get it, but on making sure that there is a wider network of support for every school community. That network will ensure that every child has the best chance of having the best start in life.

This is all about Labour's mission to break down the barriers to opportunity and to ensure that every child gets the firm foundation and high-quality education that sets them up for life. Because education is a priority for us, as it has been for every Labour Government, we will put it back at the centre of national life. We will prioritise our children, schools and families once again.

10.24 am

The Minister for Schools (Damian Hinds): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mrs Cummins. I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for securing this important debate today. I also thank everybody who has taken part: the hon. Member herself, my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Paul Howell), the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who brought the Northern Ireland perspective, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), who spoke for the Opposition.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North rightly spoke of the hard times of covid, which we all remember. Our home and professional experiences were indeed very difficult. They were also very difficult to plan for, because they were experiences that our country, like others, had not had before. I do not think it is right to say that people were slow to react. For example, I thought that what happened in respect of Oak National Academy was amazing and came together quickly. The work that teachers and headteachers did converting to virtual education and enabling home learning was remarkable, but there is no doubt that it was an incredibly hard time. International studies such as the programme for international student assessment show that the whole world, with the exception of only one or two jurisdictions, took a really big knock from covid. Almost every country took a serious hit in educational attainment from covid.

England held up relatively well. That is part of the reason why in the most recent PISA results, in mathematics for example, England was ranked 11th in the world. That is an improvement on recent times, particularly so if one looks back to the period before 2010 when England had been ranked 27th. We also saw improvements in reading and in science. In the progress in international reading literacy study 2021, primary school readers in England were ranked fourth in the world and first in the western world. However, none of that changes the fact that covid was a terrible knock to education here and elsewhere in the world.

Munira Wilson: Would the Minister give way?

Damian Hinds: Would she let me get going? No, sorry; go ahead.

Munira Wilson: The Minister and his colleagues talk a lot about the PISA scores, and obviously we cannot deny that evidence. He talked about the impact of the pandemic, but does he recognise that the attainment gap had been starting to dwindle? I noticed that he smarted when I mentioned that the pupil premium was a Liberal Democrat commitment that we delivered with the Conservatives in government.

Damian Hinds: It was in every party's manifesto.

Munira Wilson: Sorry, I was not wishing to make a political point. My question is: will the Minister recognise that the attainment gap was actually starting to widen again before the pandemic, and that the pandemic accelerated that trend? That is what we are all here to try to tackle through the tutoring programme.

Damian Hinds: Let us not pursue the thing about the pupil premium. That happened to be in both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat plans for Government ahead of 2010. The two parties worked well together in coalition, and that is a good thing that we should welcome. There had been progress on the disadvantage gap. It is also true, as I was just saying, that covid hit the whole world, but it also hit different groups of children differentially, and we are still seeing the effects of that in the disadvantage gap. I will come back to that.

Tutoring has been a key part of our recovery plan, and I thank everybody who has been involved in it: the tutors, the tutoring organisations, the teachers and teaching assistants, and everybody else who has made it possible. My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield mentioned the particular role and contribution of volunteers, and I join him in that. It is a very special thing to do.

The national tutoring programme is not necessarily what always comes to mind when the person in the street thinks of tutoring. A lot of it, as the hon. Member for Twickenham alluded to, is small group work; it is not just one to one. Although very important work has been done by outside tutoring organisations, most of the work on the national tutoring programme has been done by existing staff in schools. We have committed £1.4 billion to the four-year life of the national tutoring programme in schools and colleges, and invested in the 16 to 19 tuition fund.

For the second year of the programme—my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North referred to this—funding has gone directly to schools. That has enabled schools to choose the right approach for them and their children through the use of their own staff,

accessing quality-assured tuition partners or employing an academic mentor. We created the find a tuition partner service to put schools in touch with those opportunities, and also provided training through the Education Development Trust for staff, including teaching assistants who deliver tutoring.

Nearly 5 million courses have been started since the NTP launched in November 2020, and 46% of the pupils tutored last year had been eligible for free school meals in the past six years. That is the “ever 6” measure—a measure of disadvantage. The 16 to 19 tuition fund will also have delivered hundreds of thousands of courses.

The tutoring programme has been part of the wider £5 billion education recovery funding, which is made up of the £1.4 billion for tutoring, £400 million for aspects of teacher training, £800 million for additional time in 16 to 19, and nearly £2 billion directly to schools for evidence-based interventions appropriate to pupils' needs.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North rightly mentioned speech and language interventions. I can tell her that already two thirds of primary schools have benefited—211,000 year R children so far—from our investment in the Nuffield early language intervention programme. The evidence suggests that the programme assists children in making four months' worth of additional progress, while children eligible for free school meals make greater progress of seven months.

Covid hit the world, including us. It did not hit every discipline in exactly the same way. Some of us will recognise from our own time at home with children that some things were easier to do than others. Reading at key stage 2 and junior school held up pretty well during covid. Maths has now improved and the standard is now close to what it was in the years before covid. Writing is still behind, although we have had a 2% improvement since last year.

Big challenges remain. No one denies that the No. 1 issue is attendance. This almost sounds trite, but there is an obvious link between being at school and the attainment achieved. It bears repeating that even if there are difficulties in having many children in school, we really have to work on attendance. As well as the overall attainment effect of attendance, there is a differential factor between the cohort of pupils as a whole and disadvantaged pupils; in other words, there is a bit more absence in the latter group than the former. There is also a link—some studies say it plays a really big part—between attendance and the attainment gap, which makes it doubly important that we work on attendance.

As colleagues know, schools are doing many things brilliantly, as are local authorities and others, to try to get attendance back up to pre-covid levels. Obviously, every child needs to be off school at some time because of sickness—all of us were when we were children. That will always be true, but we need to get back to the levels we had before covid.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North alluded to specific things that we do around breakfast clubs. It is important to do them in a targeted way, and not just in primary school, as the Labour party plans to do, but in secondary school as well. There are issues around mental health support, which is why we are gradually rolling out the mental health support teams across the country. Again, we think that it is right to

[*Damian Hinds*]

have that in both phases—it is important at both primary and secondary school—and schools are also doing an immense amount of work.

Although the national tutoring programme was always a time-limited programme post-covid, tutoring will continue to play an important role and we know that the evidence shows that tutoring is an effective, targeted approach to increase pupils' attainment. Headteachers are best placed to decide how to invest their funding, depending on their particular circumstances and priorities, and that approach underpins our whole approach to the school system, in that we put headteachers in charge. I anticipate many schools continuing to make tutoring opportunities available to their pupils and we will continue to support schools to deliver tutoring in future, including through pupil premium funding, which will rise to more than £2.9 billion in 2024-25.

Schools decide how to use their funding, aided by the Education Endowment Foundation, which sets out good knowledge and advice on the best uses of funding for the education programmes with the most efficacy. I do not think there is a conflict between universal and highly targeted programmes. We target via the funding formula and then headteachers are best placed, armed with the knowledge from the EEF and others, to decide how to use that funding. The overall national funding formula has the disadvantage element, which next year will be a bigger proportion than has previously been the case. Then, of course, there is the pupil premium.

Jonathan Gullis: I have outlined in detail why I think schools need the additional funding due to the financial pressures they are under. However, if the Government are not seeking to do that—which, personally, I think is a mistake—is the Department for Education planning to somehow monitor how many schools continue to deliver tutoring and the percentage of disadvantaged pupils? Or is the Department simply not going to keep an eye on the ball after the funding ends and rely on headteachers, who will, as the Minister has rightly said, do things in the best interests of their pupils? Ultimately, that will leave us in this place with less knowledge about the spending decisions and whether the support is continuing and embedded, which was the aim of the programme when initially introduced.

Damian Hinds: It is absolutely appropriate to embed tutoring into schools' wider progress, because we know from our gold standard analyser the EEF and other studies that that approach has efficacy and achieves results, although obviously it depends on how it is done. As my hon. Friend puts it, we will keep an eye on the matter, but that is not the same as specifying that Mrs Smith the headteacher should do this but not that. We think Mrs Smith should be able to decide. We also have Ofsted inspections and the results are published as part of a system that is transparent but that also empowers schools, school leaders and trusts to make those decisions.

Munira Wilson: I completely agree with the Minister about giving headteachers and teachers autonomy. As a Liberal, I do not believe in things being controlled from the centre, and teachers know best, but the reality of the funding situation, as the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent

North (Jonathan Gullis) pointed out, is that many schools are setting deficit budgets for the first time ever. We can talk about how money has gone up in cash terms, but it has not gone up in real terms. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that schools' spending power has been reduced massively by inflationary costs.

I pointed out that the pupil premium has been cut by 14% in real terms. The tutoring fund underspent because many of the schools cannot match the funding that is available. The Minister may really believe that this is an effective, evidence-based intervention, but schools will not be able to continue without ringfenced, dedicated funding. I was told that last year when I went to visit Southwark College, which is dealing with some of the most disadvantaged pupils, who otherwise will have no life chances at all if they do not get the support they need.

Damian Hinds: On the subject of funding, including the pupil premium and the recently announced additional amounts for covering pension contributions, overall school funding next year will be £2.9 billion higher than it was in 2023-24. That will take the total to over £60 billion in 2024-25—the highest ever level in real terms per pupil.

We also remain committed to improving outcomes for students aged 16 to 19, particularly those yet to achieve their GCSE English and maths. That is a subject that came up earlier. I should stress that not having English and maths is not an impediment to starting an apprenticeship; the person just has to continue to study them while doing their apprenticeship.

I know that this subject stirs strong feelings in many people. We know that the workplace and life value of English and maths is immense, and that is why there is so much focus on those subjects as we develop the advanced British standard and in our design of the T-levels and some of the apprenticeship reforms. English and maths are so important for the futures of these young people, which is why in October we announced an additional £300 million over two years to support students who need to resit their GCSEs.

There is no rule that everybody has to resit a GCSE. Whether the person resits GCSE mathematics or takes a functional skills qualification depends on the GCSE grade that they got the first time around. The £300 million is part of what we call an initial downpayment on the development of the advanced British standard. As colleagues know, it will be a new baccalaureate-style qualification, bringing together the best of A-levels and T-levels in a single qualification and ending the artificial distinction between academic and vocational for good.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Twickenham for securing this debate, and to everybody who has been and continues to be involved in the national tutoring programme and the 16 to 19 programme. Tutoring can have a transformational effect on pupils' and students' attainment, and I am proud that the Department's flagship tutoring programmes have been supporting so many in catch-up following covid-19. I thank everyone who has taken part in this debate, all the schools and colleges that have participated in these programmes, all the tutors—including the volunteer tutors—who have delivered them, and of course all the pupils and students for engaging so enthusiastically.

10.43 am

Munira Wilson: I start where the Minister ended: by extending my thanks to all those involved in the tutoring programme, particularly the volunteers, including Douglas, who is here today and was namechecked earlier, from the office of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Paul Howell). The contribution that volunteers and teachers—who work extraordinarily hard, day in, day out—make to our children is invaluable. Thank you to all of them.

I also thank all hon. Members who turned up to participate today. I know that many others could not be here today, but they are also very strongly committed to the tutoring programme. The hon. Member for Sedgefield talked about the excitement that pupils often experience when they receive tutoring. That goes to my point about tackling persistent absence. We know that tutoring helps to bring down some of those absence levels. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) talked about the importance of extending these programmes right across our four nations, given the benefits involved.

I think this is a first for me: I strongly agree with the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis), and it is not very often I find myself saying that. Where I am in violent agreement with him is on something that I and the Liberal Democrats constantly point out. As a party, we see money spent on education and our children and young people as a long-term investment. I am afraid that the Treasury often sees children as a cost. We need to see them as part of our current society and also of our future society and our economy. Investing heavily early on will pay dividends and generate returns for generations to come.

As the hon. Member pointed out, levelling up starts here, with children. That is why I am so perplexed as to why the Government are not extending the programme. I know that the Minister said it was time-limited to start with, but given that the attainment gap continues to grow, and given the evidence that has been generated to show the impact, I am slightly surprised that we are not seeing a continuing commitment.

I am also disappointed that, following persistent questioning by the Minister, we heard no commitment from the Labour Front Bench to continue tutoring should there be a change of Government later this year or at the start of next year. Tutoring really does help tackle the attainment gap. I repeat my point to the Minister. He has said that it is a great intervention, but without the money, too many more children are going to be left behind.

Even if he may not have said so publicly right now, I urge the Minister to please go away and talk to the Treasury about whether money can be found to continue this important intervention, because our children really do deserve the very best start in life. We cannot just keep writing off those who do not have the same advantages as many of us. I speak as a parent who has invested in tutoring for my daughter. I want the child down the road who lives in much more challenging conditions, who does not necessarily have the support at home, to have the same benefit as my daughter, so that they can achieve great things, because every child has that potential.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered tutoring provision.

10.47 am

Sitting suspended.

UK Food Security

[Relevant documents: Seventh Report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee of Session 2022–23, Food Security, HC 622, and the Government response, Session 2023–24, HC 37.]

11 am

Judith Cummins (in the Chair): I will call Sarah Dyke and then call the Minister to respond. As is the convention for 30-minute debates, there will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge to wind up.

Sarah Dyke (Somerton and Frome) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered UK food security.

It is an honour to see you in the Chair, Mrs Cummins, and to open this important debate. The most widely accepted definition of food security is when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. That definition is built on four pillars: supply, access, supply stability and nutritional value. Food resilience is a critical aspect of ensuring food security and sustainability in the UK, and it needs to be incorporated into our agrifood systems.

The UK may score well on supply, with the Government food strategy observing that we produce about 75% of what we consume, but that number hides a range of self-sufficiency levels and some of the future problems that we will encounter. For example, the UK produces only 53% of the vegetables and 16% of the fruits that we consume. That makes our fruit and veg supply vulnerable to outside factors, as seen when a shortage of tomatoes hit the UK last February. When we consider that we import most of our fruit and veg from southern Europe, a region that will be heavily impacted by climate change, it is essential that we focus on putting in place the necessary measures now.

Food security is paramount to our national security. It is crucial that we take a holistic view of our food supply chain.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady for securing the debate. Coincidentally, back home in Northern Ireland, Ulster University has just revealed that one in 10 UK adults live in households classified as marginally food insecure—10% are reported as living in households with moderate or severe food insecurity. She is right to bring this matter to Westminster Hall. Does she agree that more could be done in our schools, to extend free school dinners universally, to ease off on parents and, more so, to ensure all children have access to one healthy and nutritious meal each day?

Sarah Dyke: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. I will come on to that later in my speech.

We must ensure sustainability in our food production, which encompasses the nutritional quality of food, its accessibility and the stability of supply. When we talk about the sustainability of food production, we must first look inwards at food being produced at home. British farming is facing a crisis. I hear daily from

members of my own family, neighbours and friends about the challenges that they are facing, and their concerns and anxieties regarding their business.

For that reason, I feel honoured to work alongside organisations such as the Farm Safety Foundation, which campaigns to raise awareness of the mental health crisis facing farmers and farm workers. The immense pressure that the industry has faced over recent years is taking its toll financially, physically and mentally. Many farms across the country are on the precipice, with 110,000 farms having closed their farm gates since 1990. Many farmers do not know whether they will survive the next 12 months.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The Environmental Audit Committee has said that the food system globally and in the UK has become too driven by price alone. That race to the bottom for the cheapest food results in a squeeze on farmers' incomes and results in the mental pressure the hon. Lady is talking about, as well as undermining food security. Does she agree that the Government must do more to ensure that UK trade policies support fair terms of trade for farmers here and abroad, rather than driving the import and export of cheap food?

Sarah Dyke: That is my very next point—the hon. Lady makes a very good one.

Unfair supermarket buying practices are leaving family farms teetering on a cliff edge. The current groceries supply code of practice is inadequate and rarely enforced. Nearly 70% of British fruit and veg farmers agree that we need tougher regulations to address the imbalance of power. Although our food system is structurally resilient, it is functionally non-resilient and it is not sustainable in the long term.

British farmers are receiving incoherent messages from the Government. On the one hand, they are told to engage more on sustainable practices, which is welcome, but on the other hand, this Conservative Government sign irresponsible trade deals with Australia and New Zealand that undercut our farmers on welfare practices and food standards. Good food security needs a trade policy that protects British agriculture.

We also need proper scrutiny of our trade deals. Even the former Environment Secretary, the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), did not have a positive opinion of them, stating that the UK's free trade deal with Australia was

“not actually a very good deal for the UK.”—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2022; Vol. 722, c. 424.]

We need to support the production of sustainable food at home and allow parity in the market. We should allow the system to put more emphasis on localism to provide a food system that is resilient and delivers a vibrant, cyclical local economy. I represent a constituency in rural Somerset, where people live next to local food suppliers, but their food is not always available to buy locally, despite the wishes of those producing it.

Polling by the Sustain alliance states that 75% of farmers indicated that gaining access to alternative, local markets gave them opportunities to demand a more competitive price for their produce, while keeping revenue local to create local jobs, and incentivise further investment on their farms. The current market limits

those opportunities, whether that be difficulties with planning applications, stopping the construction of farm shops, for example, or the restrictions with buyer contracts that prevent farmers from shortening the supply chain.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. I agree entirely that if we are to protect the consumer, we also have an interest in supporting and protecting the long-term sustainability of our food producers. On the point of planning, one of the biggest challenges we face is that, although we welcome the ability of farmers to diversify with farm shops or support renewable energy production on their land to some extent, there is a lot of pressure from developers to develop prime agricultural land for housing. Does the hon. Lady agree that more could be done, at national and local level, to support prime agricultural land for the production of food, rather than for housing development?

Sarah Dyke: I agree that there needs to be a balance between food production and housing supply. My view is that we need to ensure that housing is developed.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Further to the point that the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) made, many farmers in my constituency feel that, although rewilding is a fashionable concept, perhaps it goes a little too far, and we need to be more imaginative when deciding what can be rewilded and what should be kept and maintained in the same way, when not used for housing, for growing excellent British food.

Sarah Dyke: I agree that we need to balance food production with ensuring we protect our precious environment. Farmers obviously have a key role to play in that.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Before my hon. Friend leaves this topic, I think this comes to the heart of the matter. One of the biggest barriers, particularly for red meat producers, to putting produce into a local supply chain is the inability to get it slaughtered close to the point of production. Does my hon. Friend agree that ending the ever-increasing move towards larger, centralised abattoirs would allow a regrowth of smaller abattoirs closer to the point of production, which is better for animal welfare, carbon emissions and, ultimately, for producers being able to access that much more diverse range of markets?

Sarah Dyke: I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments. As the owner of a small flock of sheep—

Mr Carmichael: Fine Shetland sheep.

Sarah Dyke: Fine Shetland sheep, indeed. I do understand the challenges of accessing a local abattoir, not only a local one but one able to help with the services that small producers require. I will cover that in a minute, but I would like to make some progress.

I want to see changes in the public procurement system that provides schools, such as King Arthur's School in Wincanton or Ansford Academy in Castle Cary,

Frome College or Huish Episcopi Academy with the flexibility to source local produce, whether that be food or drink, and ensure that local provenance. Many schools do not have the flexibility to do that. That particularly resonates with regard to the 800,000 children living in poverty who are not eligible for free school meals as their households are in receipt of universal credit and have in excess of a £7,400 post-tax income.

Building awareness among children of where their food comes from now can sow the seeds of good food habits for life. The Liberal Democrats believe it is crucial that we extend free school meals to all children in primary education and all secondary school children whose families receive universal credit, but there is a threat to that. There has been a 12% increase in the number of large-scale industrial farms in the UK from 2016 to 2023. The intensive nature of those farms means that accessibility to local food and drink is likely to be diminished. Environmental standards will decline and the custodians of our countryside—the small family farm—will disappear.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I am sorry to interrupt and am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way in her excellent speech. Does she agree that one of the threats to the family farm is the fact that we have a range of new schemes being put out by the Government, many of which are commendable in themselves under the environmental land management schemes heading but which fail to protect tenant farmers? Baroness Rock's review includes 70 excellent recommendations, including that of a tenant farmer commissioner, which should be put in place to protect tenant farmers before many of them are kicked off their land by landlords exploiting new schemes. Is that not just morally wrong but extremely stupid because it reduces our ability to feed ourselves as a country?

Sarah Dyke: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, which I wholeheartedly support.

It is critical for long-term UK food security that we employ sustainable agricultural practices, which focus on appropriate food production that helps protect the environment, conserve natural resources and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, while ensuring an adequate and reliable food supply to meet the demands of the population. The Government's food strategy was described as "a waste of trees" by Professor Tim Lang. The Government should now not baulk at producing a robust land use strategy, which has been promised for more than a year but has yet to be seen. Can the Minister provide an update on that this morning? The Liberal Democrats will develop a comprehensive national land strategy, including a horticulture strategy to encourage the growth of the horticulture sector and effectively manage the competing demands on land.

I thank the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee for its recent report on insect decline and food security, which raised an important issue. The loss of biodiversity and pollinators will have a heavy impact on our ability to grow food in future. Around 40% of all insects are at risk of extinction. They are an integral part of our ecosystem and without them, we simply would not survive. Dung beetles, for example, fertilise and aerate soils, helping to maintain pasture that livestock

[Sarah Dyke]

is fed on. Indeed, it is estimated that dung beetles may save the UK cattle industry a whopping £367 million a year through the provision of ecosystem services.

One of the many things for which Somerset is famous is our cider. Pollinators are crucial to apple production, yet we have already witnessed their decline. Buglife's South West Bees Project report in 2013 focused on 23 bee species considered most at risk in the south-west. Twelve of the target species are found in Somerset. Sadly, however, six target species have already been lost.

The national pollinator strategy is due for renewal this year, and the Government must take the opportunity to redress our biodiversity losses. However, I do not have confidence that they will do so, because this is the fourth year in a row that the Government have authorised the emergency use of neonic pesticides, despite knowing the harmful effects on our wildlife. The Liberal Democrats oppose the use of these damaging pesticides and recognise how important it is to protect our wild pollinators, to stop further damage to our biodiversity and to protect UK food security in the long term.

That point brings me on to UK household food security. A resilient food system can help to stabilise food prices and minimise market volatility. According to the Food Foundation, the poorest 20% of households would need to spend half of their disposable income on food in order to afford the NHS's recommended healthy diet. That is clearly impossible for those people.

Food-related ill health is a growing issue in our society. Unless we take action to improve our food system, it is estimated that 40% of British adults will have obesity issues by 2035. That would mean increased costs, not just for our NHS but for our economy as a whole, given that we already have 3 million people out of work due to long-term sickness. We must therefore stem the tide of junk food, unhealthy food and processed food that is currently flooding our supermarkets, our screens and our high streets. Instead, we must actively work to promote locally grown whole foods such as fruits and vegetables. That is best for our health, for our economy and for our planet, but also for our farmers, who want to sell their produce to local people. That is how we can create a thriving food culture of which we can all be proud.

Household food security can be a particularly prevalent issue in rural areas such as my constituency. Rural communities are less likely than urban areas to have a glut of supermarket choices. They are therefore more reliant on smaller local supermarket stores. Research by Which? has found that those stores almost never stock essential budget-line items, which may result in higher food costs and household food insecurity. The major unfairness is that these communities are often side by side with those that are growing food.

As I have pointed out, farmers want to sell their food to local residents, but the food system prevents that. We must act now to make that a reality, as we will soon face a time when climate change disrupts our system with increasing regularity. If we are not prepared and ready to adapt, our farmers will suffer, and as consumers we will all suffer. By taking a holistic view of UK food security, we can ensure that we have a sustainable future that supports British farmers, supports our environment and biodiversity, and supports the growth of a healthy nation.

11.18 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Robbie Moore): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Cummins. I thank the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Sarah Dyke) for securing today's incredibly important debate. It has also been a pleasure to hear the interventions from right hon. and hon. Members.

UK food security is vital to our national security. Strengthening it by supporting our farmers and food producers is a top priority for this Government. Our high degree of food security is built on the supply of food from diverse sources—from domestic production as well as from imports through stable trade routes.

We produce 63% of all the food we need, and 73% of the food that we can grow or rear in the UK for all or part of the year. Those figures have changed little over the past 20 years. UK consumers have access through international trade to food products that we cannot produce here, or at least not on an all-year-round basis. This supplements domestic production and ensures that any disruption from risks such as adverse weather or disease do not affect the UK's overall security of food supply.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has well-established ways of working with the industry and across Government to monitor risks that may arise. The key forum is the F4, which is chaired by a DEFRA Minister and comprises the National Farmers Union, the Food & Drink Federation, the British Retail Consortium and UKHospitality; it covers the interests of the sector from farm to fork. This extensive, regular and ongoing engagement helps the Department to quickly prepare for and respond to issues that have the potential to cause disruption to food supply chains.

We also continue monitoring of the market through the UK agriculture market monitoring group, which monitors price, supply, inputs, trade and recent developments. We have also broadened our engagement with the industry to supplement our analysis with real-time intelligence as required. Domestically, the Government have committed to maintaining, if not enhancing, the level of food that we currently produce. That includes sustainably boosting production in sectors in which there are post-Brexit opportunities.

Food production and environmental improvement can and must go hand in hand. We are already seeing the benefits of our environmental schemes, which are supporting food production domestically and are delivering environmental benefits. For instance, actions through the sustainable farming incentive support the creation of flower-rich buffers that help pollinators, which in turn help to produce a better yields. Our soil management actions ensure that farmers are supported in the foundations of food security, such as the health and the resilience of soil.

The Agriculture Act 2020 imposes the following duty:

"In framing any financial assistance scheme, the Secretary of State must have regard to the need to encourage the production of food by producers in England and its production by them in an environmentally sustainable way."

We are seeing that through the roll-out of the environmental land management schemes.

Jamie Stone: Farmers in my constituency have made the point that when a carbon capture audit is done of a farm, the value of grassland in holding and storing carbon is underestimated. That should be looked at again in the overall audit of these farms, which could help in turn to support the growth of excellent beef on our farms.

Robbie Moore: Having been involved in the agriculture sector for my whole life before entering this place, I know just how important pasture and grassland are to carbon sequestration. When we are rolling out environmental land management schemes, it is important that the benefits of pasture land through carbon sequestration are taken into account. That is why the reforms that we have introduced, through coming out of the common agricultural policy, are so important to supporting a highly productive sector that is environmentally sustainable.

In addition to the sustainable farming incentive, the farming investment fund and the farm productivity innovation funding will further improve farm productivity. Our schemes will ensure our long-term food security by investing in the foundations of food production, such as healthy soil, water and biodiverse ecosystems. Backing our farmers is so important, which is why the Prime Minister and the Environment Secretary announced a range of measures at the National Farmers Union conference to boost productivity and resilience in the sector, including the largest ever grant offer for farmers in the coming financial year, which is expected to total £227 million.

Tim Farron: The Minister mentions the rolling out of the grant offer, which can be very valuable to many farmers. Is he aware that tenants cannot make those grant applications themselves? Does he agree with his noble Friend Baroness Rock that tenants and landlords should be able to make joint applications for capital grants so that our farmers can thrive and our tenants can remain on the land?

Robbie Moore: Baroness Rock's review produced a fantastic report with many excellent recommendations. My DEFRA colleagues and I are in close interaction with Baroness Rock and are working our way through her many recommendations. If we are rolling out schemes, it is vital that any innovation or productivity grants, along with any sustainable farming incentive schemes or others that fall under the environmental land management schemes, are available to all applicants to ensure that we can get the best out of the land that they farm.

Building on the recommendations made, the £427 million of funding for measures announced at the National Farmers Union conference doubles the investment going into productivity schemes, growing the grant offer from £91 million last year to £220 million this year. We have already awarded £120 million in grant funding to farmers through the farming investment fund and have committed £120 million to 185 projects as part of the farming innovation programme. The Government will also provide £15 million in funding to stop millions of tonnes of good, fresh farm food going to waste, by redirecting that surplus into the hands of those who need it. Together, these funds will support innovation and productivity and will improve animal health and the environment.

We will continue to work across Government to ensure that we carry out the commitments made in the UK food strategy and at the farm-to-fork summit in respect of the national planning policy framework. We want to ensure that this fully reflects our shared food security and climate and environment ambitions. The national planning policy framework sets out clearly that local planning authorities should consider all the benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land when making plans or taking decisions on new development proposals. This point builds on the intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter). Where significant development of agricultural land is shown to be necessary, planning authorities should use poorer-quality land in preference to a higher quality.

Food supply is one of the UK's 13 critical national infrastructure sectors. DEFRA and the Food Standards Agency are joint lead Government Departments, with DEFRA leading on supply and the FSA on food safety. We work closely with the Cabinet Office and other Departments to ensure that food supply is fully incorporated as part of emergency preparedness, including consideration of dependencies on other sectors.

In the Agriculture Act 2020, the Government made a commitment to produce an assessment of our food security at least once every three years. The first UK food security report was published in December 2021, and the next food security report will be published in December 2024. To ensure our continued food security, the Prime Minister has also announced that a food security index will be published annually—that has been welcomed by the sector—and will complement the three-yearly UK food security report. We are currently developing the content of the index, but we expect the index to present the key data and analysis needed to monitor how we are maintaining overall food security. Productivity, resilience and environmental sustainability are incredibly important to domestic food production and are a key element of our food security.

At the National Farmers Union conference, the Prime Minister also made an announcement about ensuring that we are giving internal drainage boards more support. We know how important lowland farmland is for producing food, which is why the £75 million of funding announced by the Government during the spring Budget and earlier at the NFU conference is so important to ensure that we can give our internal drainage boards the support that they need to mitigate flooding downstream as well as possible.

On health and wellbeing, I want to pick up on a point that the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome made about the Farm Safety Foundation. I know that James Chapman, the chair of the trustees, is doing an excellent job; he has been involved in the organisation since 2014, I believe. I wish him and his team well with the Farm Safety Foundation, as I know just how important that organisation is to improving not only farm safety, but the general health and wellbeing of our farming community.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome referred to the land use framework. I reassure her that the Secretary of State wants to ensure that food productivity is at the heart of the land use framework, which is why we are scrutinising it before it is released. Not only does it have to cover energy security, biodiversity offsetting, net zero and other measures, but we want to ensure that

[Robbie Moore]

food security is at the heart of it before it is released. Our food security is strong, but we are not taking it for granted; we will continue to work across the supply chain to maintain and enhance it.

I thank all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate. I assure them that the Government consider food security to be incredibly important and will keep it as a top priority for the DEFRA ministerial team.

Question put and agreed to.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended.

Nagorno-Karabakh: Armenian Refugees

[JULIE ELLIOTT *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered international support for Armenian refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Elliott. The southern Caucasus is a melting pot of cultures, religions and ethnicities. Over the centuries, these different groups have at times co-existed peacefully and at other times experienced turmoil and bloodshed. In recent memory, we saw the Armenian genocide of 1915 to 1923, when an estimated 1.5 million people were killed by forces from the Ottoman empire. As the Soviet Union began to collapse in the late 1980s, the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian enclave within Azerbaijan, officially voted to become part of Armenia. Azerbaijan sought to suppress the separatist movement, while Armenia backed it. This led to clashes and eventually a full-scale war. Tens of thousands died and up to 1 million were displaced, amid reports of ethnic cleansing and massacres committed on both sides.

The most recent hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan show that conflict is never far away. Although they have recently negotiated a peace agreement, tensions remain high, and if there is a peace it is certainly fragile. Just last year, a number of us gathered in Westminster Hall to raise concerns about the blockade of the Lachin corridor, the main supply route from Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh. At the time, several hon. Members highlighted the potential for starvation and humanitarian catastrophe. The supposed Russian peacekeepers were at best observers and at worst actively supporting the ongoing persecution of the local Armenian population.

Sadly, the outcome we most feared was realised last September when, after a nine-month blockade, the Azeri military expelled the Armenian population. This forced displacement of a people has taken place when the eyes of the world are turned elsewhere. As Armenia is a small country with a population of 3 million, the arrival of more than 100,000 refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as a further 40,000 refugees from the war in 2020, has had a significant impact on it.

I was a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation that visited Armenia last month. We met a group of refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, who described the events of the blockade and their eventual expulsion in harrowing detail. They described the so-called Russian peacekeepers travelling to Armenia—a privilege not afforded to the local population—and buying goods and supplies only to resell them to the starving people at massively inflated prices. They described the difficulty of acquiring medical supplies, fuel and even water. They described the violent end of the blockade, when the people were shelled out of their homes. We heard how the shelling started at 12.30 pm, when children were at school and separated from their parents. They described the chaos of people trying to locate their loved ones, and of people abandoning their home with just the clothes on their back.

The lucky ones had some fuel in their vehicles; the others just walked. The 40 km journey to Armenia took three days because of Azeri forces' continued bombardment

and because of obstructive bureaucracy by the Azeris at the border. The lack of water on the journey meant that many, especially the elderly, did not make it.

Many of the refugees are now staying with family members in border towns and in and around Jermuk, but every Armenian town has been impacted by the influx of refugees. The refugees are, of course, critical of Azerbaijan, but they are also critical of the Russian peacekeepers' failure to protect them.

A number of officials we met believe that the Russian forces had been directed by Moscow to foster instability, not peace. This seems to be substantiated by Kremlin rhetoric. Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov has insisted that Russia does not bear blame; he said that there was "no direct reason" for the exodus, merely that people were willing to leave. As an aside, non-intervention by Russian peacekeepers sets a dangerous precedent that international humanitarian law can be breached without repercussions, and opens up the risk of future Azerbaijani incursions into Armenia, for example to secure a path to its exclave of Nakhchivan.

When we met the mayor of Jermuk near the border, he described the triaging that had taken place and the intensive support, both practical and psychological, needed for these broken people. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees confirmed that, noting that the 100,000 refugees required critical support.

For many, this ethnic cleansing of a people has echoes of the Armenian genocide of 1915 to 1923. It is notable that while 34 countries, including the USA, Canada and France, have recognised the historic genocide, the UK has failed to do so. Several hon. Members have raised that point, including the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). In denying formal acknowledgement of the historic atrocity, the UK Government continue to delegitimise the collective pain endured by the Armenian community. A Foreign Office memo from 1999 is revealing as to the motivations behind the UK's position. It reads:

"Given the importance of our relationship (political, strategic, commercial) with Turkey...recognising the genocide would provide no practical benefit to the UK".

I would appreciate a response from the Minister on whether the failure to recognise the historic genocide is simply an attempt to appease a trading partner.

Let me return to the situation on the ground in Armenia. In October 2023, UNHCR launched a \$97 million emergency refugee response plan to provide urgent humanitarian aid and protection to the refugees and to those hosting them in Armenia. That support runs out at the end of this month, but not one refugee has been able to return home. Although there has been international support, for which the Armenian Government are grateful, far more is required. The US has committed \$28 million since 2020, the EU has provided €17.5 million since September, and France committed €27.5 million in 2023. The UK, to date, has committed £1 million.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Member is making an excellent speech outlining the scale of the crisis for Armenians who have left Nagorno-Karabakh and are now refugees. Does she agree that £1 million is woefully insufficient to support the Armenian Government in helping those refugees, and that we need to hugely scale up our support?

Carol Monaghan: I think it is important that we are not critical of the support that has been given, and £1 million is a good starting place, but I agree with the hon. Member. I ask the Minister what further financial and humanitarian support the UK will provide for the Armenian Government to support the refugees and their hosts in Armenia. Aside from providing aid, the UK Government have a moral responsibility to show leadership in the region. They must undertake all diplomatic efforts to foster dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan and help to create the conditions for a true sustainable peace that will allow displaced Armenians to return home.

In October 2023, the UK Government argued:

"It is vital that international humanitarian organisations have independent access...We therefore welcome Azerbaijan's decision last week to allow UN agencies into Nagorno-Karabakh, to complement ongoing efforts by the ICRC"—

the International Committee of the Red Cross. However, given that the Armenian population had been ethnically cleansed a month earlier, that seems rather futile.

In January 2024, the UK Government stated:

"We welcomed the two countries' historic joint statement of 7 December, in which important confidence-building measures were announced, aimed at reaching an historic agreement and securing lasting peace for the region."

However, there is little confidence that that peace agreement will be sustained.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): The hon. Member mentions a lack of confidence that the progress towards peace will be sustained. I have a couple of questions. First, does she welcome the bilateral agreements and discussions between the leaders and Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia towards that end? Secondly, can she explain why, or from whom, the lack of confidence is coming?

Carol Monaghan: First, any agreement that is reached has to be welcomed. Any steps forward have to be welcomed. As for who is concerned, the people we spoke to in the border towns who see Azeri incursions—who see the troops coming over the border—are the ones who are telling us that they do not have confidence in the agreement. That is because they are not seeing it being played out in real time in front of them.

Given the events of the past six months, I was concerned to read that in November 2023 Foreign Office officials were encouraging British business leaders to capitalise on lucrative commercial opportunities in Nagorno-Karabakh to support President Aliyev's rebuilding agenda. That is quite simply an abdication of the UK Government's moral and ethical responsibilities. It is also hypocritical. How can the UK Government condemn Azerbaijan's "unacceptable use of force" in Nagorno-Karabakh in September and then, six weeks later, encourage British commercial involvement in the region? Can the Minister provide clarity on the reasons for encouraging British businesses to exploit the tragic situation?

Despite limited attention from international media, the situation on the ground in Armenia remains critical. Urgent assistance is required for the refugees and for those supporting them. When we asked the refugees about their hope for the future, they responded that they simply wished to return home. The International Court of Justice has issued an order requiring Azerbaijan to "ensure that persons who have left...and who wish to return to Nagorno-Karabakh are able to do so in a safe, unimpeded and expeditious manner...free from the use of force or intimidation."

[Carol Monaghan]

Although the Azeri Government state that return is safe, the refugees were clear that this is impossible. They were starved, they were bombed and they were killed, so their hope to return cannot be realised, certainly not at the present time. My final question to the Minister is this: what representations has he made to the Azeri Government on the treatment of the refugees and on their safe passage back to their homes in Nagorno-Karabakh?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Julie Elliott (in the Chair): Order. I remind hon. Members to bob even if they have put in to speak, so that I am clear on who wants to speak.

2.44 pm

Sir John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): Thank you, Ms Elliott. I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) on obtaining the debate. She was a valuable member of the delegation from the British group of the IPU that I took to Armenia a few weeks ago. It is good to see all the other members of the group in the Chamber today; I suspect all of them will wish to contribute to the debate, with the exception of Lord McInnes, who I am sure is pursuing these issues in the other place. I thank the IPU for arranging the visit and Joe Perry for accompanying us. It is also good to see His Excellency the Ambassador here in Westminster Hall today; he has been hugely helpful.

I think we all felt that to be in Armenia at that time was extremely valuable. I have been to Armenia five times over the past few years, although that is a small number compared with the visits that Baroness Cox has made; indeed, she is known as the Angel of Artsakh because of her numerous visits. However, on a previous occasion I was able to visit Nagorno-Karabakh to talk to the Administration at that time. I did so because I believe that one of the most important things for us to do as Members of Parliament is to hear the arguments from both sides and see things for ourselves. I was very disappointed that the consequence of my simply going to Nagorno-Karabakh was that I was blacklisted by Azerbaijan; indeed, I believe that I am still blacklisted by Azerbaijan, simply for visiting Nagorno-Karabakh and holding those talks.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North West has described what I have to say were extremely moving meetings that we held with the refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh. Whatever the rights and wrongs, to listen at first hand to their reports of the suffering that they endured was a very emotional experience—particularly some of the tales about how, without being given any notice, they were dragged from their homes and forced to march to neighbouring Armenia, which took a number of days. Not all of the people who set out made it to Armenia; some died on the way.

I pay tribute to the people we met in Jermuk, particularly the governor and the mayor, for the way Jermuk has opened its doors and welcomed the refugees. They continue to give them support. However, 100,000 people have moved into Armenia from Nagorno-Karabakh and that has imposed enormous pressure, so I absolutely endorse the calls for us to give them support.

I will say just a little about the conflict that has been raging for many years between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. It is the case that Nagorno-Karabakh is within the borders of Azerbaijan, but it was populated by Armenians. It is also true that a number of Azeris had previously been displaced. However, I do not want to get into the arguments about sovereignty and the history behind them. We have a humanitarian need to support refugees.

We were also privileged to hear from the Catholicos of All Armenians—His Holiness represents all Armenians—about the impact of the conflict on the priests and the churches in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is also a matter of serious concern. The status of Nagorno-Karabakh has been the cause of repeated conflicts and tensions between two neighbouring countries for decades, although there now appears to be a possibility of resolving the conflict and reaching a peaceful settlement.

We were extremely privileged to have a meeting with Prime Minister Pashinyan, who expressed to us his wish to achieve a peace and the plan he is putting forward to achieve peace. One of the most remarkable things about the plan that is being advanced by the Prime Minister of Armenia at the moment is that it does not contain any territorial ambitions to regain control of Nagorno-Karabakh. That has been the subject of some criticism, as we heard from members of the opposition in Yerevan, but it is a realistic recognition of what has happened and an attempt now to try and attain a peaceful settlement.

There are still issues to be resolved, in particular the issue of the corridor connecting Nakhchivan to Azerbaijan. Those are both Azeri territories, but the corridor will go through Armenia, which—quite understandably—believes that any corridor through its own land must be controlled by Armenia, although they are open to negotiating free access to ensure that it is possible to travel easily between Nakhchivan and Azerbaijan.

However, despite the apparent opportunity that now exists to obtain a peaceful settlement—we heard repeatedly from Armenians their desire to do so—in the last few hours the Prime Minister has issued a statement saying that Armenia could be at war by the end of the week, because Armenians believe that Azerbaijan continues to have territorial ambitions not just to take back control of Nagorno-Karabakh, as it has done, but for Armenia itself. So it is a very fragile situation.

As leader of the UK delegation, I met members of the Azerbaijan delegation to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe when I was in Vienna a couple of weeks ago. They are absolutely adamant that they have no aggressive intent towards Armenia and that this is propaganda being put out by the side of Armenia. Yet even while we were in Armenia, four Armenian soldiers were killed in the continuing conflict around the border. We were also taken up to see territory that is undoubtedly Armenia but is still under occupation by Azerbaijan.

There are some serious issues to resolve, but given the expressions of willingness to reach a settlement that are being made by both sides, now represents an opportunity for anything that we can do to facilitate that—I will be interested to hear the Minister's view—because there are wider strategic issues at stake. Armenia is a former Soviet country. It has a Russian military base and has been seen to be closely allied with Russia. However, partially because of the feeling among people in Armenia

that they received no support from Russia when they were under attack, there is a real anger and a wish to break away and move closer to the west. That was something else we heard when we were there; indeed, Prime Minister Pashinyan has been quite courageous in already making clear Armenia's willingness to leave the Collective Security Treaty Organisation of Russia and its former satellites. His ambition to move Armenia closer to the west is in some ways not dissimilar to the decisions taken in Ukraine 10 years ago when it, too, decided that its destiny lay not with Russia but with the west and the EU. In the same way that we supported Ukraine in its ambition, we should be supporting Armenia in that.

I came back from Armenia in some ways encouraged that that was its clear decision, and that it saw its future lying in closer relations with this country. At the same time, a dangerous situation still pertains between the two neighbours. I think that there are opportunities to help resolve the situation that are perhaps greater than they have been for many years, so if there is anything that we can do, I hope we will work hard to achieve that.

2.52 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Elliott. Although this debate's title is primarily concerned with Armenian refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, there is a complex situation in a complex region, with multiple factors at play in some 4,400 square kilometres. Whether we call it annexation or occupation, the refugee crisis results from a struggle that struggles at the moment to gain attention in a world where we are becoming increasingly desensitised to conflict, be it Russia-Ukraine or Israel-Palestine. Yet we talk here of a European near neighbour—a democracy—that has a hostile neighbouring territory in Azerbaijan, with its aggressions and ethnically motivated crimes against Armenians.

The figures are grim, with 10 months of illegal blockading of food, fuel and electricity and the forced displacement of 100,000 people. My interest in the matter comes from my constituents. We have a vibrant and sizeable Armenian community and many members are hyphenated Armenians—Iranian-Armenians, Syrian-Armenians or Turkish-Armenians—underscoring that this is a country that has had pogroms, massacres and genocides for many years.

I was on the delegation in February with other MPs. That visit took in the Prime Minister, the President of the very handsome wood-panelled National Assembly, Opposition and Government people and, in fact, a Minister for Economy who had to resign hours after our visit. However, it was only when we got out of the embassies and the ministries and we got out to Jermuk in the snow-capped hills that the most memorable aspect of the visit took place. We got out of the cosy confines of the capital, Yerevan, and took in the ancient monastery on our route in the mountains, in a sign that that was the cradle of Christendom.

The atrocities we have seen—the destruction of churches and crosses, and the attempt to entirely delete Armenian culture through the renaming of towns and cities—are sickening. As the right hon. Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale) pointed out, during our visit four soldiers were killed. The most memorable aspect of our visit was the refugees we saw.

Jermuk, which is known as a bottled water brand with a reindeer as its logo, was once a fashionable ski resort and spa town, but it is now 80% deserted because of the decline of that former trade. Instead, it is readjusting to its new existence, accommodating the influx of Nagorno-Karabakh refugees.

We heard harrowing stories of human suffering—really touching stuff about people who fled on foot in the absence of fuel and took days and days to get over the border. We heard about the sadistic actions of the Russian soldiers, with their black market boiling sweets and all sorts of other horrific stuff. We spoke to the mayor and governor of Jermuk. Generations of these people have been beset by trauma, but they have integrated well and are grateful for what the municipality has been doing.

In this country, our voice should be stronger. In this Chamber in 2020, we debated the blockade of the Lachin corridor, but our weak response emboldened those actions. This was totally foreseeable all those years ago.

It has been pointed out that Armenia has an old elite that moved from a velvet revolution, and is turning away from Russian influence—I think it has been called the pivot away from the Kremlin. The transition has not been comfortable. The EU has granted candidate status to Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, but Armenia has had no such privilege. It also has no love from Russia, despite the fact that it is still a member of the CSTO.

We vowed to use our voices to raise the plight of the Armenians on our return. We laid flowers at the national genocide memorial—again, the very fact that there is a national genocide memorial is significant. The hyphenated Armenians of Ealing and Acton remind us of how wide the Armenian diaspora is: it is scattered throughout many countries, forced out by continuous persecution, genocide and displacement. Among the 20,000 Armenians in London, we have Ukrainian-Armenian communities. Ealing has long commemorated the Armenian genocide of 1915. We have an apricot tree at Ealing Green, which was upgraded this September to a more permanent memorial, but it has already been vandalised by, it is suspected, the Turkish Grey Wolves group, which protested its inauguration last autumn.

I have called for this Government to recognise 1915 as a genocide. Our closest ally, Biden, has done so, and yet there has been no budging from our Government. This timidity—this vacuum—encourages these actions by Azerbaijan, which has recently had an election whose result was entirely foreseeable, rather like the Russian election this weekend.

Ealing and Acton are richer for having the Navasartian centre in Northfield and the Hayashen centre in Acton, which have both done fundraising for Nagorno-Karabakh refugees, but what are our Government doing? It feels as if, in our post-Brexit world, we are desperate for trade deals. On the role of BP, I would like to ask the Minister how much oil pulls the strings of these relationships. People who did election observation in Baku said that they could smell the oil when they landed; it is all about oil. It is ironic that COP29 will be held in Baku—what an act of greenwashing. Yesterday at the all-party parliamentary group, we heard that the ground was being rendered infertile for flora and fauna by this scorched earth policy.

[Dr Rupa Huq]

I pay tribute to my Armenian communities, and I want to press the Government on aid. We know that the 0.7% commitment, which the manifestos we all stood on pledged to maintain, has been cut. Could there be a Homes for Ukraine-type scheme for refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh? We saw the trauma and the need for psychological help for people who have undergone this recent cycle of violence—and it is a cycle of violence. Ultimately, the people of Nagorno-Karabakh want to return to their land, to the places that they have lived in for millennia, even though we see attempts to wipe out territories such as Artsakh from the map.

While the eyes of the world might be elsewhere, we must be consistent in our principles. On Ukraine, we say that self-determination is right and destruction is wrong, so why can we not apply the same principles consistently here?

Shnorhavor. Thank you.

3 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) on securing yet another debate on Armenia and Armenians. We have spoken a lot in this Chamber and in the main Chamber. We have had my private Member's Bill—the Recognition of Armenian Genocide Bill—and others, and we had a debate on the Lachin corridor blockade at the start of the recent problem. I declare an interest as chair of the all-party group for Armenia and as part of a delegation that went to Armenia last Easter at the invitation of the Armenian Government. There is strong interest in the subject, not only among colleagues here today but in the overflowing Public Gallery, for which extra furniture has had to be provided. That does not happen often.

We had an alarming and sobering briefing yesterday from the former human rights ombudsman for Armenia, Dr Tatoyan. He gave us an update on the latest threat facing Armenia, as well as the chronology of what has happened in Nagorno-Karabakh over the past year.

I agree with everything that the hon. Member for Glasgow North West and my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale) have said, so I will not repeat it, but will highlight the origins of the issue. The recent conflict goes back to 27 September 2020 when Azerbaijan, emboldened by strong military support from Turkey and with equipment provided by Israel, among others, launched an unprovoked and large-scale military invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Over 44 consecutive days, Azerbaijan relentlessly assaulted Nagorno-Karabakh, resulting in the tragic loss of over 400 Armenian lives. Civilian infrastructure, including churches, schools and hospitals, became deliberate targets of Azerbaijan. There was a particular concern, as the hon. Member for Glasgow North West mentioned, about some of the Christian relics and monuments, because Armenia was, of course, the first Christian country. We do not have to go far in Armenia or Nagorno-Karabakh to see the history behind that.

The conflict ended in a ceasefire agreement on 9 November 2020 between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia, but the trilateral statement was heavily skewed against Armenia. Let us fast-forward to the end of 2022 and the blockade of the Lachin corridor, with bogus eco-protesters supposedly blockading that vital corridor

between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. Azerbaijan completely ignored all orders under international law and the International Court of Justice to clear the corridor. Instead, Azerbaijani soldiers replaced the protesters.

On 19 September last year Azerbaijan launched a full-scale offensive, piling into Nagorno-Karabakh, mercilessly reoccupying territory and driving Armenians out of the homes that they had been in for generations. They blockaded escape routes out of the territory, as we heard yesterday, and took a number of military and political prisoners—specific individuals.

Despite the Azerbaijani Government's having assured an amnesty, they took into captivity former Nagorno-Karabakh Presidents Arkady Ghukasyan, Bako Sahakyan and Arayik Harutyunyan. They remain in captivity. Other political prisoners of war include Ruben Vardanyan, Davit Ishkhanyan, Davit Babayan, Davit Manukyan and Levon Mnatsakanyan—*Hansard* will be relieved to know that I have provided details of those individuals.

What was the result of all that? Frankly, it was full-scale ethnic cleansing. The population of Nagorno-Karabakh used to be 160,000 before the 2020 war. Women, the elderly and sick people were evacuated during the initial bombings, and many never went back after the ceasefire in November 2020. The very sick and some students left Nagorno-Karabakh during the blockade. It is estimated most recently that after the attacks in September 2023, 105,000 Armenians left Nagorno-Karabakh, in a state of chaos, on blocked roads that took hours and days to negotiate.

It has been calculated that Nagorno-Karabakh is almost completely empty of its original population, with just 50 people remaining. Armenian sources report that those people who remained due to age or physical and mental conditions are even unable to use their mobile phones. That huge surge of people into Armenia has had an impact on the population of Armenia, which is not a large country of 2.8 million population. Just over 100,000 represents 3% of that country's population suddenly appearing on its doorstep.

It is also a country that lacks funds and a long-term plan, so it has been a really difficult set of circumstances to cope with. The Armenian Government have generously given one-off payments of \$250 to the refugees, followed by a \$185 monthly stipend. The average wage in Armenia is \$668 a month. A quarter of the Nagorno-Karabakhans were already living below the official poverty line.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North West mentioned that there had been pledges of support from the EU, but there has been a big delay in the disbursement of those funds and funds from other countries. The UK has so far pledged only £1 million, which is a good start but does not reflect the scale of a humanitarian crisis that has gone so under the radar because the world's attention, as we know, is on what is going in Ukraine and in Israel and Gaza. Those new arrivals from Nagorno-Karabakh include 30,000 children and 18,000 aged over 65. There are many men with limbs missing from war injuries and landmine explosions from the conflict. This is a population in above-average need of help and support.

What has Azerbaijan done? Azerbaijan is trying completely to remodel, rename and reculturalise—if there is such a word—the entire territory. In October last year, Azerbaijan renamed one of the streets in the city of Stepanakert after Enver Pasha, one of the architects

of the Armenian genocide. What more hostile, provocative act could there be? In March, just a few days ago, footage was aired on Azerbaijan television of various buildings and monuments in the capital Stepanakert, including its historic parliament building, being demolished for no good reason.

There are more than 4,000 Armenian historical and cultural monuments across Nagorno-Karabakh, among them churches, khachkars, burial grounds, historical cemeteries and bridges. There is a real concern about the future of the culture of Armenians left behind in Nagorno-Karabakh that could not be taken out of the country.

Carol Monaghan: When we were in Jermuk, we saw two khachkars—the posts with crosses—that had been removed from Nagorno-Karabakh. They were in pieces. We were told that there were many thousands that people could not take with them. The ones that we saw were more a thousand years old, and there will be many others left behind. It is real cultural destruction.

Tim Loughton: It is completely gratuitous, unnecessary cultural destruction. It is all about trying to erase the name, the culture, the history and the heritage of a people who have lived in that territory for many, many generations. After the 2020 invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Government of Azerbaijan blatantly issued a set of postage stamps picturing a man in a hazmat suit, effectively cleaning out Armenians from the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. That is ethnic cleansing, in any shape or form that one might describe it.

We have a number of asks for the Minister today. Notwithstanding our long-standing and important economic links with Azerbaijan, we have humanitarian responsibilities and a long-standing relationship with Armenia, Armenians, and the Armenian diaspora across the world and in the United Kingdom. Will the Government investigate whether ethnic cleansing under the UN definitions has taken place? If so, what are the implications of that? Will the Government press for investigation in respect of both political and military prisoners who are still being held by the Azeris?

What will the Government do to put pressure on the Azerbaijanis to withdraw from the 4,400-square-kilometre territory within sovereign Armenian boundaries that they are still occupying—some 30 or so villages? As we have heard, there is great alarm that they may make further military encroachments deeper into clear, sovereign Armenian territory in the very near future.

There need to be consequences for these abuses of international law. There need to be sanctions. I think the UK has a role to play in any peacekeeping force that could go back in to make Nagorno-Karabakh and the borders of Armenia safe, because this is a very fragile situation. We have a duty of care here. One of the duties of this House is to make the world aware of this ethnic cleansing and this huge humanitarian crisis—it may have been going on beneath the world's radar while its attention is turned elsewhere, but that makes it no less serious a humanitarian crisis—that is going on as we speak.

3.11 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Elliott. I thank the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) for securing a very important debate and for her clear and excellent speech setting out the plight of the refugees

from Nagorno-Karabakh. The debate is obviously timely, given the return of the IPU delegation to Yerevan—I think all of us have turned up to this debate. Our thanks go to the IPU, to Joe Perry and to our leader there, the right hon. Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale), for organising that visit. It is also timely because of the uncertainty about continuation of the UN aid that the hon. Member for Glasgow North West spoke of earlier.

It was poignant for me to visit two years on from the previous delegation. Then, we were warned many times, in stark terms, that while the eyes of the world were elsewhere, Azerbaijan would take control of Nagorno-Karabakh and Russia would stand by. Members of the APPG—I declare an interest—who were on that visit raised questions and debates and went to see the Minister about that; I remember a particularly feisty speech by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on it. And that was exactly what happened following the nine-month blockade, designed to drive the ethnic Armenian population out in a brutal way, which the European Parliament has described as ethnic cleansing.

That is why now we should heed the warnings from those we met in Yerevan just a few weeks ago, who told us that the risk of escalation is ever present—in fact, four Armenian soldiers were killed during our visit there. I am talking about the encroachment on 30 villages, which the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham referred to; the incidents on the borders; and the fear that Azerbaijan could use military force to impose the Zangezur transport corridor—supported by Russia—with references to Armenia as “western Azerbaijan”. It is a fragile ceasefire. I hope the Minister today will acknowledge that fear and do all he can, with the levers he has and with the relationship he has with Azerbaijan, to be a friend to Armenia.

The subject of today's debate is, rightly, the fate of those driven from their homes. Most of them have ended up in Armenia, although some are in Russia and Europe. We talk of 100,000-plus refugees—almost the entire population of Nagorno-Karabakh, as others have said—but we should also remember the 40,000 displaced in the 2020 conflict. One in 30 of Armenia's population is now from Nagorno-Karabakh; although the Armenian Government have tried to be generous with the payments the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham referred to and with housing, psychological support and employment, it is an enormous number of people to integrate and a long-term plan will be needed for those exposed and facing an uncertain future.

Like other hon. Members, I will never forget those refugees we met in Jermuk. We promised them that we would give them a voice, and we are doing so today. They were subjected to a nine-month blockade, lacking food, medicine, energy and fuel—surrounded and very isolated. We heard of those killed and injured by shrapnel, of those forced to walk the three days to Armenia—as fuel was only sold at inflated prices, if they could get it—and of those who died on that walk. We heard of mothers who boiled sweets to get sugar into their children, and reports of Russian peacekeepers who sold food at inflated prices, exploiting human misery. We also heard of the refugees' arrival with absolutely nothing but the scars they carried from that blockade—too fearful to ever return home, if ever they could.

[Jessica Morden]

We saw on our visit the generosity, led by the mayor and the governor, of the local authorities and communities that are trying to help. However, the magnitude of the problem is beyond what Armenia can cope with. International humanitarian aid has come, but more will be needed; 60 international and local organisations have helped, and Armenia has taken out a loan from the World Bank. The diaspora, including the community in south Wales—I thank them for their efforts—have also helped, but longer-term integration will require more, with housing and employment a priority.

Resolving humanitarian issues must be prioritised alongside diplomatic negotiations. It would therefore be good to hear from the Minister what more the UK Government can do with their international partners to address the plight of the refugees and the scale of the problem right now. We have already talked about the £1 million given in aid and how that should be increased. Could the Minister also explain what he knows about the UNHCR response plan? That plan sets out relief efforts until the end of this month. What happens next?

More generally, could the Minister explain what conversations the Government are having with the Government of Azerbaijan regarding the right to return for those who are displaced? With Armenia freezing its membership of the CSTO and significantly rebalancing its international relations, what practical steps is the UK taking to embrace Armenia's pivot to the west? I also join other hon. Members in asking the Minister about reports that the Government encouraged businesses to get involved in the rebuilding of Nagorno-Karabakh, exploiting what is a horrific situation.

I know the Minister has visited Armenia twice in recent times. With Armenia reliant on its neighbour for trade, energy and grain, what more can the Government do to build on the strength of those ministerial visits, and on strategic partnerships, to co-operate on energy projects, infrastructure, transport and defence? I also want to raise the issue of acknowledging the genocide in 1915. In Cardiff we have the first memorial to that genocide in the UK, and many of us join members of the Armenian community in their commemorations there.

I also join other hon. Members in raising the destruction of cultural sites and artefacts, particularly the khachkars that we saw when we visited the Catholicos. As the hon. Member for Glasgow North West said, we saw just two; they were absolutely beautiful and ancient, but we were told that there were thousands more that have been destroyed.

There has been a very good turnout for this debate, not least in the very busy Public Gallery. Will the Minister please recognise that, and acknowledge that we in this Parliament care about the refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, that we care about Armenia, and that we want our Government to actively help to strengthen our relationship with, and be a friend to, Armenia. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) said so well earlier, our voice in this place should be stronger.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Julie Elliott (in the Chair): Order. I call David Duguid, but I ask him to bear in mind that we have nine and half minutes left for Back Benchers.

3.18 pm

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): I will bear that in mind, Ms Elliott. I will start by drawing the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Member's Financial Interests, which includes my role as an officer in the all-party parliamentary group for Azerbaijan. My wife is from Azerbaijan, and I wish all my family and friends there who might be watching this debate a very happy Nowruz for tomorrow.

The history of the Karabakh region is a long and complicated one, as other hon. and right hon. Members have already said. It predates the formation of the Soviet Union, but for most observers and commentators—and for the purposes of today's debate—the history since the fall of the Soviet Union is most relevant. However, the stated history of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, including that stated in today's debate, does not always go right back to the start of recent hostilities that predated the fall of the Soviet Union. Separatist demonstrations, confrontations and skirmishes, as well as failed interventions by the Soviet leadership, took place at various times between 1988 and 1991. During that time, Azerbaijanis living in Armenia were also forced to flee from that country.

The conflict escalated into all-out war after Armenia and Azerbaijan attained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Often, when the history of this period is presented, it only goes back to when Armenian-backed forces were already in full occupation of the region, even though it was internationally recognised as the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan. However, what is not often reported—it has not been mentioned by hon. Members today, at least not yet—is that as a result of the occupation of Azerbaijan's Karabakh region, over 800,000 ethnic Azerbaijanis from that region also became displaced.

Jumping ahead, in 1994 a ceasefire was reached through Russian mediation, but skirmishes continued along what became known as the line of contact. During that time of ceasefire, there were a number of international resolutions. In January 2005, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe condemned ethnic cleansing against Azerbaijanis. In May 2007, the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation adopted a resolution considering the occupation of Azerbaijani territory as the aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan, recognising the actions against Azerbaijani civilians as a crime against humanity and condemning the destruction of archaeological, cultural and religious monuments in the occupied territories.

In March 2008, an OIC resolution further condemned the occupation of Azerbaijani lands by Armenian forces and Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan, ethnic cleansing against the Azeri population, etc. Also in March 2008, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 62/243, which demanded the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of all Armenian forces from all occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Finally—although this is not by any means an exhaustive list of the resolutions that were made—in May 2010, the European Parliament in Strasbourg adopted the resolution that the occupied Azerbaijani regions around Nagorno-Karabakh must be cleared as soon as possible.

In September 2020, a new war erupted in Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding territories, in response to which the United Nations called on both sides to

de-escalate tensions and resume meaningful negotiations. That war ended in November 2020, when a trilateral ceasefire agreement between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia was signed, according to which Azerbaijan regained all of the occupied territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh as well as one third of Nagorno-Karabakh proper, including Shusha and Hadrut.

Unfortunately, an identifying feature of this conflict has been the extensive use of landmines throughout the area, particularly along the contact line, as well as in the form of booby traps that were left behind by departing Armenian occupying forces. According to the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action, as a result of a survey that is still ongoing, it was initially estimated that over 1 million hectares of land in that area could be contaminated by approximately 1.5 million landmines.

From 1991 until the ceasefire in 2020, over 3,000 people—I think it was almost 3,500 people—were injured or killed by landmines in this area. However, even since that ceasefire in 2020, a further 346 people have been added to that number, as of 5 March this year. With landmine contamination accounting for some 12% of Azerbaijan territories, coupled with reports that Armenia was failing to provide reliable maps, the threats emanating from the mines will continue to disrupt the life and economic wellbeing of Azerbaijani displaced persons for decades to come.

I welcome the assistance that the United Kingdom Government have given up to now, not just to the specific mine-clearing efforts in Azerbaijan but towards the learning of valuable lessons during that operation, which will no doubt prove invaluable in other areas of conflict where landmines are being used.

Others have discussed the events of 2022 to 2023, which culminated in the return of occupied territories to Azerbaijan. At that time, there was an exodus of over 100,000 ethnic Armenians from the area, mostly to Armenia itself, which is the core subject of this debate. There is no doubt that the conflict itself and the return of occupied territories to Azerbaijan must have been distressing and destabilising for the people living in Karabakh. In some way, the desire to flee may be understandable, particularly given some of the propaganda and fearmongering that might have taken place with regard to the intentions of the Azerbaijani authorities. However, Azerbaijan refutes any accusation of ethnic Armenians being forcibly removed.

Various UN missions, including experts from UNICEF, the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Health Organisation and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, visited the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan twice in October 2023 and did not come across any reports of mistreatment with respect to ethnic Armenians or civilian infrastructure, including cultural objects.

Similarly, the UNHCR and the Red Cross, present on the ground throughout, have not—

Julie Elliott (in the Chair): Order. I did say that we had until 3.28 pm, and we have one more speaker.

David Duguid: You said nine and a half minutes.

Julie Elliott (in the Chair): Yes, between two people.

David Duguid: I apologise—I misheard. I will skip ahead to my conclusions, in that case.

Azerbaijani authorities have repeatedly and unambiguously confirmed their commitment to create conditions for Armenians to stay and reintegrate and to ensure the right to return for those Armenians who can apply for Azerbaijani citizenship. Their return should of course be respectful of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. As Azerbaijan sees it, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is over. With the exception of a few local incidents, the past five months have been the calmest period in the history of the former conflict going back to the late 1980s.

Azerbaijan and Armenia have never been this close to peace since they were neighbouring Soviet republics. I will not repeat the full extent of what has been done, but, as part of the confidence-building measures, Armenia supported Azerbaijan's bid to host COP29, while Azerbaijan supports Armenia's candidacy for COP Bureau membership. Both sides have been working continuously on the draft peace agreement throughout the past five months.

As I mentioned earlier, Azerbaijani and Armenian Foreign Ministers have met, as have their countries' respective leaders. All those meetings have appeared to be positive and constructive, and I would welcome the Minister's comments on how he and the UK Government view the progression of those talks. As Azerbaijan and Armenia engage in direct negotiations to reach sustainable peace, it is important that the progress of those negotiations, and therefore the future of the whole region, is not undermined by domestic or international political interference.

3.26 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) for setting the scene well. She spoke about the 100,000 refugees. Let us focus on what the debate is about: the refugees and the fact that they have been abused. They have been attacked, had their property stolen and had health and education issues. Their whole way of life has changed because of the aggression of Azerbaijan. We should be clear about what has happened and be under no illusions. I remember a former Member in this House, Stephen Pound, was a friend of Armenia, and he told me many times about stories that related to that. There is absolutely no doubt that Russia's aggression towards Armenia has had a detrimental effect on good people, who have been abused as a result.

As my party's health spokesperson, I want to speak about human rights. The relationship between human rights abuses suffered by minorities and refugee flows and internal displacement has been demonstrated time and again. The link between minorities and refugees was recognised in a resolution of the Commission on Human Rights in 2001 concerning persons belonging to national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities.

With your agreement, Ms Elliott, I will speak quickly about the issue of religious belief and ethnic minorities, because that is what I do in this House as chair of the APPG for international freedom of religion or belief. I do not know any of the people in the Public Gallery, by the way, but I am sure that some of those people have been disenfranchised for being ethnic minorities or for

[Jim Shannon]

their religious beliefs. Religious minorities as refugees face greater chances of human rights abuses and discrimination across the whole world. Human rights and freedom of religious belief march hand in hand; if one is taken away so is the other, and that is how it works.

As the conflict continues, the religious rights and actions for and against religious minority refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh must be addressed. I hope that when the Minister sums up, he will take on board that issue. I know that the two shadow spokespeople, the hon. Members for Dundee West (Chris Law) and for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), will do so. In addition to refugee rights in FORB, the UK must maintain relations and monitoring of the rights of freedom of religion or belief within Armenia during this conflict, because they have lost so much.

I will give an example. I am aware that on 7 February Yerevan's criminal court of appeal rejected an appeal by 20-year-old Baptist conscientious objector Davit Nazaretyan against a two-year jail term imposed in October 2023 for refusing military service. I am a Baptist as well, and I understand this issue for Baptist religious groups and other groups as well. Nazaretyan's applications for alternative civilian service were repeatedly denied. He is considering a further appeal and will not be required to go to jail until any further appeal is heard. The last known jailed conscientious objector was freed in 2021.

This will be my last comment. I give you my word, Ms Elliott; I certainly will not take eight minutes to put over my point of view. Freedom House reports:

"Article 18 of the constitution recognises the Armenian Apostolic Church as a 'national church' responsible for the preservation of Armenian national identity; 94 percent of the population identifies as Armenian Apostolic. Members of religious minority groups have reported some discrimination in the past.

In 2020, the National Security Service opened an investigation into Yazidi activist Sashik Sultanyan after he publicly stated that Yazidis experience discrimination in Armenia; international human rights NGOs criticized the investigation as retaliatory and unlawful. The case was apparently ongoing in 2023."

In conclusion, as someone who takes a deep interest in human rights issues and freedom of religion and belief, on behalf of all the people in the Gallery and the 100,000 who have been disenfranchised and discriminated against, I think it is time to stand up for those people and do the best we can.

3.30 pm

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Elliott. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) for securing this debate, which is long overdue. It is over a year since we debated the closure of the Lachin corridor and the impact of Azerbaijan's aggressive actions towards the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, also known as Artsakh.

In January 2023, the majority of those who spoke recognised the dire humanitarian situation emerging in the region. We understood the tactics being employed by Azerbaijan and we warned that without a sufficient response from the international community, there would be full-scale ethnic cleansing, which is exactly what

has happened. As I mentioned at the time, the president of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, made his desired outcome of the blockade clear when he said:

"Whoever doesn't want to become our citizens can leave, the road is open. They can go by the cars of the Russian peacekeepers, by buses, no one will impede them."

What a welcome that is. He wanted to force the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh to leave their ancestral homeland.

Nine months after that debate, we saw those words put into action after Azerbaijan violated the 2020 ceasefire agreement by launching a full-scale military offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh on 19 September. More than 100,000 Armenians—almost all the region's ethnic Armenian population—fled in fear of persecution, in addition to the 40,000 who had already fled in 2020. The Lachin corridor, which has been blockaded for so long, became the only escape route for those people fleeing on foot, by car or truck, by carriage or tractor—by any means necessary. They left behind their homes and belongings, their churches and cemeteries, and their businesses and schools. They were forcibly displaced from their land and became refugees.

A group of more than a dozen non-governmental organisations, including Genocide Watch, have issued a warning that all the conditions for ethnic cleansing are now in place. What assessment have the UK Government made of that claim, and will the Minister commit to supporting an independent fact-finding mission to establish what has occurred in Nagorno-Karabakh, and to support and promote justice for the victims in the coming months? Furthermore, what conversations is he having with Azerbaijani colleagues regarding the right of return for those who fled Nagorno-Karabakh, and what guarantees for the safety of those displaced would Azerbaijan be willing to provide, in line with the International Court of Justice order?

Armenia now faces an extensive refugee crisis. Within an estimated population of 3 million, one in 30 people in Armenia is now a refugee. Most of the refugee population arrived in Armenia suffering from the acute effects of the blockade, with medical workers reporting a high number of cases of malnourishment, dehydration and a lack of access to prescriptions. Armenia has been generous in providing resources to host refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, but the aid has been straining the state budget, and it is not clear how long the Armenian Government can sustain the payments. It is a huge burden for a country of some 3 million people, a quarter of whom already live below the official poverty line.

In October last year, the UNHCR estimated that the Armenian Government would need \$97 million to cover refugees' essential needs through the end of March. The Armenian Government have sought international aid, but the amounts received have been insufficient. France, the EU and the US have led the way in providing support. France has given €27.5 million in financial support, alongside the delivery of humanitarian aid containing 5 tonnes of medical equipment for the treatment of severely injured persons who have been forcibly displaced. The EU has given €17 million, while the US has provided \$11.5 million to address healthcare and other emergency needs.

The UK, meanwhile, has offered only £1 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross to meet humanitarian needs. That is a welcome start, but it is

not enough. More aid is needed to immediately tackle the ongoing refugee crisis caused by the mass displacement, so will the Minister commit today to providing more financial assistance?

Although aid is much needed, it addresses only the symptoms and not the cause of the crisis. Support and protection are required not just for Armenian refugees, but for Armenian human rights and, ultimately, Armenian sovereignty. Atrocities do not begin when the first family is expelled from their home, or when the first village is razed to the ground. Wars do not begin when the first shot or missile is fired, or when the first troops and tanks cross the border. More often than not, they begin with words. They begin with othering and dehumanising a group of people. They begin by rewriting history, as we heard from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid). They begin by laying claim to other people's territory.

Let us hear some of the words of the President of Azerbaijan in recent years. Early last decade, he tweeted:

"Armenia as a country is of no value. It is actually a colony, an outpost run from abroad, a territory artificially created on ancient Azerbaijani lands."

In October 2020, during the war, he made a public address in Azerbaijan in which he said, regarding the progress of the war:

"We are driving them away like dogs!"

A couple of years ago, he encouraged the Azerbaijani media to refer to Armenian settlements by Azerbaijani names, and has encouraged the use of the term "western Azerbaijan" instead of Armenia. All of that is historically incorrect and is hate speech. Those words are being put into practice.

In the Nakhchivan exclave of Azerbaijan, all Armenian cultural heritage has been destroyed, most notably the cemetery of Julfa, where thousands of centuries-old monuments were destroyed to make way for a military shooting ground—shocking, is it not? From the Google Earth satellite's view of the site, an Azerbaijani slogan has been carved on a hillside where the cemetery used to reside, saying, "Everything is for the homeland". Will Armenian culture and heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh suffer the same fate? More than 4,000 Armenian historical and cultural monuments are under the threat of total destruction. Can the Minister assure me of the steps that the UK Government are taking to preserve that cultural heritage?

Shamefully, the UK Government have also been caught encouraging UK businesses to participate in Aliyev's plans for Nagorno-Karabakh. One senior UK Government official encouraged business leaders to take advantage of the financial opportunities. He said that a

"huge western chunk of the country...needs to be rebuilt from the ground up".

Therefore, why are the UK Government not willing to condemn Azerbaijan's actions towards Armenia, but are instead willing to be complicit and participate in those actions? When the first prosecutor of the International Criminal Court issued an expert opinion explaining that Azerbaijan's impeding of food, medical supplies and other essentials in Nagorno-Karabakh represented

"the archetype of genocide through the imposition of conditions of life designed to bring about a group's destruction"?,

and when the ICJ considered it "plausible" that the Lachin corridor blockade produced a real and imminent risk to the health and life of Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh, why did the UK not take provisions to prevent this?

The renewed conflict demonstrates the failure of years of diplomatic efforts to prevent the persecution of ethnic Armenians. The lack of any condemnation, sanctions for wrongdoing and action to ensure a sustainable peace will only be taken as the green light for further acts of aggression. Indeed, in Syunik province, illegal incursions have been made on Armenian sovereign territories, with the establishment of armed outposts blocking roads, denying access to fields, places of work and places of worship, and intimidating and threatening civilians.

Azerbaijan continues to make territorial demands on Armenia and has ambitions to create the Zangezur corridor connecting Azerbaijan with its Nakhchivan exclave and to Turkey, cutting off Armenia's southern border with Iran. Any land grab from Azerbaijan is illegal under international law, and the UK has a duty to take a stand on that. Will the Minister make it crystal clear today that this is unacceptable? These are the next steps in creating what President Aliyev calls "western Azerbaijan", and it is, quite simply, akin to the Putin playbook in Ukraine being repeated by Aliyev in Armenia. We cannot, and must not, embolden this behaviour.

Throughout the world, the rules-based system is under threat by the actions of leaders who believe they can act with impunity. The flouting of international law is becoming more commonplace, and it is getting closer and closer to home. Whether it is Russia, Israel or Azerbaijan, the UK cannot pick and choose when human rights protections and international law apply depending on who it is allies with. If the UK is to play a credible role in the world, it must be consistent, and in this instance, it must support the rights of Armenian refugees and the Armenian people.

3.38 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairpersonship, Ms Elliott. I thank the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) for securing this crucial debate. We have heard typically powerful speeches from across the House, including from my hon. Friends the Members for Newport East (Jessica Morden) and for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq), the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), the right hon. Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale) and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

With such an unsettled global landscape, we must be absolutely clear not to lose sight of enduring geopolitical hotspots with the potential to lead to further human suffering and risk the escalation of wider tensions. Tensions in the Caucasus are a key example of that, and I am pleased that we are able to debate that today.

The situation in the region remains very serious. I remain in regular contact with both the Armenian and Azerbaijani ambassadors to the UK, and I have met the Foreign Ministers of both Azerbaijan and Armenia in recent times. We all want to see peace and stability in the region. Any return to the full-scale conflict of recent years would be an absolute disaster for the region and

[Stephen Doughty]

for all peoples. It is fair to say, as we have heard today, that this has been a profoundly challenging year for the people in the region and more broadly.

Last September, Azerbaijan launched a military incursion into Nagorno-Karabakh, which, at the time, was home to an ethnic Armenian population of 120,000 people. That was preceded by the nine-month blockade of the Lachin corridor, leading to shortages of food, fuel, medicines and basic provisions, which completely undid the social fabric of the enclave and led the UN to declare a humanitarian emergency in August 2023. I have raised that issue regularly with the Minister, publicly and in debates in the House.

We saw gas supplies cut off and electricity and communications damaged; I know that that was a concern to Members across the House. Nagorno-Karabakh became unreachable to the world and the implications of that period of such unimaginable insecurity and uncertainty continue, understandably, to reverberate throughout the population, now displaced, with lives altered irrevocably. No people should have to live in such conditions.

Last September, Nagorno-Karabakh came under direct Azeri control, and the ethnic Armenian population has now had to flee into Armenia. Although the ICJ issued provisional measures in November 2023, ordering Azerbaijan to allow ethnic Armenians to return “in a safe, unimpeded and expeditious manner”, they remain in Armenia.

I am pleased that efforts have since been made by both countries and by global interlocutors, include the EU, the United States and ourselves, to find peace and normalise relations. The situation remains very precarious. Any further deterioration would only compound the suffering experienced by the people, especially the refugees located around Yerevan and Syunik.

From reports in recent days, peace seems closer than ever, publicly at least, but we have to remain cognisant that, given the recent history, we will have to go much further to bring tensions down and to ensure that the territorial integrity of both Armenia and Azerbaijan is maintained. We have heard powerful testimony from colleagues who went on the recent IPU visit, and we must remember that there is always a tragic human face to conflicts such as these.

As Action Against Hunger highlights, Armenia now faces an extensive refugee crisis. One in 30 people in the country is a refugee. More than half of those refugees are women and girls, nearly one third are children, and nearly one fifth are elderly. Their whole lives have been uprooted.

There is a mental health crisis, too. Nearly 22,500 of those refugees are estimated to be living with a mental health condition. Clearly, it is beyond the capacity of any one Government to manage this crisis. Despite the many global crises we face, which we debate regularly in this place, including in the main Chamber, we cannot allow the Armenian refugees to endure the challenges of 2024 without adequate support and without a clear means of beginning to rebuild the lives that they lost in September last year.

I have a number of questions to the Minister, and I hope he will be able to provide some clarity. First, will the UK Government continue to play a constructive

and substantial role in brokering lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan? What recent discussions has he had with counterparts from both countries and other interlocutors? What were the outcomes of those discussions?

What discussions has he had with French and American officials, particularly about dealing with the impact on individuals who have been displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh? How can we work together to provide critical support to those refugees? We simply cannot return to the violence of 2020, when more than 6,500 people lost their lives and civilians had to live under the perpetual threat of conflict and violence. We need to work, of course, with European and regional partners to secure a return to dialogue more broadly and a peaceful settlement.

I hope that the Minister can provide some further clarity on the funding issues that colleagues have raised. In September last year, he and the Government announced £1 million for the ICRC to support its humanitarian response for those refugees. The FCDO said in February this year that it continues to liaise with the UN, ICRC and other NGOs to assess humanitarian needs in the region.

What have the results of those assessments been? What has that money been spent on? Indeed, has it all been spent? Is it the view that the £1 million payment is sufficient? In comparison, France announced in December that it was taking its total contribution to emergency appeals to €27.5 million. The EU has provided €17.5 million in humanitarian aid to assist those displaced in Armenia. I hope the Minister can provide clarity on the sufficiency and the assessments that have been made of our support.

An important issue was raised around the protection of cultural and religious heritage, not only in Nagorno-Karabakh but more broadly. What assessments of that has the Minister made? What discussions has he had with the Azeri authorities and with UNESCO and other bodies? The issue is of critical importance, and reference has been made to Armenia's critical role, particularly in the history of Christianity.

Nagorno-Karabakh and the wider region may seem remote to many, but I am afraid that it contains men, women and children who have been successively let down for years, and they need and deserve our focus and support. Will the Minister say a little about alleged extrajudicial killings, torture and abuse of prisoners of war? What assessment has he made of the individuals who are still held in prisons? Has he discussed the issue with his counterparts in Azerbaijan and elsewhere?

Will the Minister set out a wider strategy for the Caucasus, spanning diplomacy, aid and trade, and, crucially, atrocity prevention, humanitarian support and the upholding of human rights? Also, what assessment has he made of UK corporations in the region? That is an important point. We have a significant presence, and with that come particular responsibilities in relation to ethical practices.

We are clear, and I think there will be unity in the House on this, that Russia should have no place in the region's future and that it would actively seek—indeed, it is actively seeking—to impede progress towards peace, security and good governance. The last few years have demonstrated that Putin's vision for the region is for one that is less secure, less cohesive and weakened so that it remains in Russia's sphere of influence. What assessment

has the Minister made of Russia's engagement in the region, and what steps are being taken in concert with our partners to counter Russia's malign influence?

I note that Armenia has frozen its membership of the CSTO and is apparently considering leaving. What is the UK Government's view on that? Also, how can we support all countries in the region, and indeed across Europe, that are seeking to extricate themselves from Russia's malign influence? Finally, what is the official UK Government position on the right to return for ethnic Armenians removed from Nagorno-Karabakh? I referred earlier to the ICJ provisional judgments. I hope he can provide a clear answer on that issue.

The people of Nagorno-Karabakh cannot be forgotten. They are the human face—the huge human face—to this tragedy. The impact on individual lives, which many hon. Members here have heard about directly, has been immense. I hope the Government will continue to support those people in their plight, as well as working to bring about a lasting and enduring peace in this troubled region. The view of the official Opposition is that the UK has a critical role to play in the Caucasus, and I hope the Government can demonstrate that they are ready to meet the challenges.

Julie Elliott (in the Chair): We are now back on time. I call the Minister.

3.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Leo Docherty): I am pleased to be here to answer this important debate, Ms Elliott. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) for securing it and for highlighting, through reference to her recent experience of travelling in the region, the acute challenges facing those affected by September's military action in Nagorno-Karabakh. I appreciate her sharing her impressions of her time there.

I am grateful for the contributions of all other hon. Members, and I shall seek to cover off the questions and points raised during this afternoon's powerful and compelling speeches. I will begin by reflecting on the humanitarian situation, before turning to the topic of peace efforts. As colleagues have concluded this afternoon, lasting peace is at the heart of any long-term solution and any improvement in the lives and livelihoods of people in the region.

As hon. Members have eloquently set out, relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan are deeply complex. The plight of refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh is the most recent chapter in a 35-year conflict in which hundreds of thousands of civilians on both sides have been displaced from their homes. As we have heard this afternoon, Azerbaijan carried out a military operation last September that restored its sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh. As a result, nearly the entire ethnic Armenian population of around 100,000 people fled to Armenia, where they faced acute humanitarian challenges.

Although the UK fully recognises Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, we are also clear that the use of force is not an acceptable means of resolving tensions between communities. As we have heard this afternoon, that military operation followed a nine-month restriction of the Lachin corridor—the only road linking Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia—which

resulted in a dire humanitarian situation, including shortages of food, fuel, medicine and other basic supplies. The UK made it very clear bilaterally, as well as in the OSCE and at the United Nations, restricting access to the Lachin corridor and other supply routes was unacceptable, and we publicly called for access to be restored.

Dwelling on UK action as part of the humanitarian response, we continued to work alongside international partners in both countries to support humanitarian responses to the situation. Last September, as has been discussed this afternoon, we announced £1 million for the Red Cross's movement of life-saving medication, healthcare and other essential support for the most vulnerable people affected by the conflict. I have heard the calls this afternoon for an increased financial contribution, and I can say that we will of course continue to keep these issues under review. We should also bear in mind that we have contributed £1 million to regional de-mining since 2021. I have noted the views of colleagues this afternoon, and we will also keep that issue under review.

We provided further medical assistance to survivors in Armenia in partnership with the UK medical education database, including medical supplies given to the National Centre for Burns and Dermatology. We are committed to supporting Armenia as it provides for the refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, and we will continue to work with international partners and the Armenian Government to strengthen their capacity to support the refugees and the communities hosting them. We are also determined to support Azerbaijan to make safe its recovered territories for the return of its own displaced population, as well to ensure the integration of ethnic Armenians who wish to return. As I have mentioned, we have contributed £1.5 million to mine action in the region, which continues to have a very important, lifesaving effect.

I turn to the peace process. I intend during my peroration to answer all the questions posed. It is clear that the peoples of both Armenia and Azerbaijan have suffered greatly during this long-running conflict. That is why the UK Government have been a leading voice in urging peace and engaging extensively with both Governments. I thought my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale) summed up the current feeling when he said that there is a realistic recognition of the current situation and a quiet positivity about the possibility of peace, and I concur with that sentiment.

The UK stands by to be a partner for peace, and we will continue to engage energetically in diplomacy and to offer our ability to convene and encourage. In a nutshell, our role is to try to enable those two countries successfully to come together, settle and conclude a lasting peace.

Dr Huq: Would the Minister be able to address the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) regarding Russian influence? We hear of Russian peacekeepers, but is that not a contradiction in terms? Should there not be international border forces?

Leo Docherty: The hon. Lady is absolutely right: it is a contradiction in terms to refer to Russian peacekeepers. They are nothing of the sort, and we see the Russian role across the region as nothing but extremely unhelpful meddling; I may dwell on that at the end of my remarks.

[*Leo Docherty*]

To answer the question posed by the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) about our approach in the context of Russia's historical role in the region, it is clear that practical experience has revealed Russia to be an unhelpful and unreliable ally.

It is clearly incumbent on countries such as ours—I say this consciously that His Excellency the Ambassador is in the Public Gallery, and I am very glad to see him there—to offer the hand of friendship and partnership to Armenia. I am very pleased that during my last visit we undertook the first stage of the strategic dialogue that now exists between our two countries. It represents a thickening and deepening of an increasingly meaningful bilateral relationship that is good for both sides and for the region.

On the peace process, in calls with the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan last September, I urged both sides to return to dialogue and ensure unfettered humanitarian access to the vulnerable people and communities affected by events in Nagorno-Karabakh. The then Foreign Secretary reiterated that message last October when he spoke to various Foreign Ministers. As I mentioned, I visited Yerevan and Baku last November, where I met the leaders and Foreign Ministers of both countries, and I urged them to engage meaningfully in internationally mediated negotiations to reach an agreement and secure a lasting peace for the region. I was delighted that President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan met in Munich last month at the security conference, and that their Foreign Ministers quickly followed up with a meeting in Berlin at the end of February. We continue to engage energetically on the diplomatic front.

I am encouraged by both sides' openness to continuing their discussions and to recognising and welcoming the offers of international support. We, in concert with our allies in Europe and across the Atlantic, continue to stand ready to support them at every step of their journey towards peace. I again refer to the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon: there is a realistic recognition of the opportunity that lies ahead for both leaders to achieve a meaningful and sustainable peace, and we should be quietly optimistic about that. We will continue to offer support through our diplomacy as they do that important work in a bilateral context, which is something we should be quietly encouraged by.

Stephen Doughty: The UK will be hosting the European Political Community summit. Does the Minister see that as another key opportunity for the UK to play a role in finding peace?

Leo Docherty: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We are pleased that we will be hosting the EPC in July; it is a very useful convening moment and a good opportunity for leaders from the Caucasus to come together, in concert with other European leaders, to progress peace.

Let me turn to some of the other questions that were asked. On the preservation of religious sites, both Armenia and Azerbaijan are responsible for ensuring that the cultural heritage of all the peoples of the region is protected and preserved for the benefit of all. We take very seriously reports of the destruction of religious and cultural sites, and we support the work of international organisations undertaking observation missions to evaluate those. I am grateful that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) raised the important issue of freedom of religion, and I entirely agree with the sentiment he expressed.

Several hon. Members asked about prisoners of war and war crimes. We continue to encourage the return of all prisoners of war and the remains of the deceased from the conflicts. We were pleased that Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed to the release of 34 prisoners in December last year. We continue to call for—

Julie Elliott (in the Chair): Order. I remind the Minister to leave a moment or two for the Member who moved the motion to wind up.

Leo Docherty: To conclude, therefore, I reiterate that we stand by those affected by this conflict. We will continue to offer humanitarian support, and we will energetically offer our diplomatic support. We hope that, after many turbulent years, there is a real, meaningful and sustainable chance for peace in the south Caucasus.

3.59 pm

Carol Monaghan: I pay tribute to the Government and people of Armenia, who have ensured that the refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh have been given the food, shelter and support they require. I thank all those who joined us this afternoon in the Public Gallery, including His Excellency the Ambassador. Finally, I thank all Members who have participated in this really important debate. It is important that we shine a light on the troubled area of Nagorno-Karabakh and ensure that the people of Nagorno-Karabakh who are currently in Armenia are not forgotten.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered international support for Armenian refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh.

Baby Loss: Coroners

4.1 pm

Julie Elliott (in the Chair): I will call Tim Loughton to move the motion and then call the Minister to respond. As is the convention for 30-minute debates, there will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge to wind up.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered baby loss and the role of coroners.

I am afraid you have a double dose of me this afternoon, Ms Elliott. That is obviously far too much for the people in the Public Gallery, who have made a surge for the exits.

This short debate will be focused on my Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Act 2019, which has been going for quite a while now and remains unfulfilled in one part; that is the purpose of the debate. My Act started in the private Members' Bill ballot in autumn 2017. It had its Second Reading on 2 February 2018. It passed all its parliamentary stages in February 2019 and passed into law in May 2019, almost five years ago. There were four parts to this historically quite ambitious and complicated private Member's Bill.

The first part was that the names and details of mothers should appear on marriage certificates, now an electronic record. That came into being in May 2021, since when I have received many grateful thanks from mothers or the husbands of late mothers whose names could be now recorded on marriage records.

The second part was the extension of civil partnerships to opposite-sex couples, which came in on 31 December 2019 and became regulation on the last day of Parliament before the election in 2019. Since then, more than 25,000 happy couples have availed themselves of that facility.

The third part was for the Secretary of State to produce a report on the registration of pregnancy loss. A pregnancy loss committee was set up, and I sat on it. Within the last couple of weeks, baby loss certificates have become a thing and again have gone down very well.

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

Tim Loughton: So early? Of course—how could I resist?

Jim Shannon: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the four provisions that he brought forward, particularly the pregnancy loss one. It is something that probably all of us have to come to terms with in our family, and it is difficult. It is always a difficult topic to discuss, but the hon. Gentleman is right to bring it forward. As families, we can all feel for those who have lost babies during pregnancy. We feel for our partners, our wives, our mothers, our sisters, and all those who have lost as well. I commend the hon. Gentleman for bringing this forward.

Tim Loughton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who takes a great interest in these matters. This legislation, of which I am very proud, is designed to make a very painful situation for many parents who have lost babies that much more bearable, in so far as is possible.

I hope that there are parents who have benefited from that part of the Act, but there are still parents waiting to benefit, because the fourth part has yet to become a reality. That was the section of my Act that made a one-line amendment to the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 empowering coroners, if they see fit, to investigate stillbirths in certain cases. It also requires the Secretary of State to prepare reports, and yet we have not got a report. All we have is a factual account of the consultation, which opened on 26 March 2019 and closed on 18 June 2019. Its results were reported, after years of nagging from me, on 6 December 2023, barely three months ago. It took four and a half years for the Government to publish the results of that consultation, which is quite extraordinary.

I was given excuses all the way through. I have had meetings with Ministers, but part of the problem is that this is a joint responsibility between the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Health and Social Care. I feel sorry for my hon. Friend the Minister. He is not the normal Minister, but I know he will give me helpful information at the end of this debate. The measure had overwhelming support in reports from the Justice Committee and the Health and Social Care Committee, the latter when it was chaired by the now Chancellor, who was very supportive. So why is it taking so long? We were given excuses by the Health Minister—it was delayed because of coronavirus and then delayed because of changes of Ministers. All that has happened. But we have had some consistency among Ministers and we are well past covid, thank goodness. Why is it a problem that still needs to be addressed and why on earth has it taken so long?

It is a problem because, every day, 13 babies are stillborn or die shortly after birth. The Government have done much to increase safety in maternity departments, but it is still a problem. We still have a relatively high rate of stillbirths compared with other European countries. Even though it has come down by 19.3% since 2010, it remains a big problem and a source of great grief among parents, who go through the trauma of having carried a child, in some cases to term, only for that child to be born dead.

I will briefly revisit the reasons why this part of my Bill was necessary. In my speech back in those heady days when it was first proposed in 2018—I was very hopeful at that stage—I said then that I knew that, with my last measure in the Bill, we were pushing at an open door, as the Health Secretary had signalled his support for it at the Dispatch Box during a statement on stillbirths. I said that there appeared to be an anomaly in the law where coroners in England have the power to investigate any unexplained death of any human unless it is a stillbirth. That is because a baby who dies during delivery is not legally considered to have lived; if a baby has not lived, it has not died, and coroners can investigate deaths only where there is a body of a deceased person.

However, one in three stillbirths are of healthy babies who die at term. In some cases deaths occur because of mismanaged deliveries—there have been a number of high-profile cases involving clusters of such deaths well

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above the national average. That is why I was urged by my own coroner, Penny Schofield in West Sussex, the Coroners' Society and coroners around the country, as well as many birth-oriented charities, to bring in the measure.

Those reasons have, if anything, got even stronger because we have had a series of scandals in maternity departments over the last few years. We had the Ockenden inquiry into maternity care in Nottingham, where 1,266 families contacted the review teams directly to express concerns about the deaths of their children. Then we had the scandal around the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust, where the deaths of more than 200 babies and nine mothers were investigated. There was the East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust review, and some years ago there was the Morecambe Bay review of the unnecessary deaths of 11 babies and one mother. And only this week, we had the report in the press that one in seven maternity units has closed in the past decade, sparking warnings of a mounting crisis in healthcare for women, along with estimates of a shortage of midwives across England. Consequently, this issue is as live as ever, and it is as important as ever to get it right. What we absolutely need is trusted, independent scrutiny of why certain stillbirths have happened.

If I look at what the Government produced in their response—well, no, they have not produced their response; I will correct myself. If I look at what the Government produced in their factual report in publishing the results of the consultation back in December, I see that the ministerial foreword says that

“we are working to improve the information available to families regarding the investigative processes that may take place following a stillbirth.”

Hear, hear! It continues:

“It is essential that we get this right, given the emotional impact that losing a baby has on parents and others involved.”

That is absolutely right. However, it also says:

“Respondents both supported and were against proposals that coroners should have a role in stillbirth investigations”,

which ignores the fact that respondents overwhelmingly supported the proposals, and I will cite the figures that prove that.

The Government gave a factual summary of the consultation and promised further information and Government action later, with no timescale, which is the issue that I would really like the Minister to address. In addition, however, the way that the report was skewed meant that it dwelt too much on reasons why a change in the law was not necessary. Excuses were given, such as that

“the mandatory nature of the investigations could be distressing and intrusive”.

We are only looking to give the coroner the power to pick up a small number of cases—not every stillbirth that happens, but those where there are serious questions to be asked. Another reason was about

“the loss of parental control over whether a post-mortem examination would take place.”

It is important that the coroner makes the final decision on whether to investigate, because there are suspicions about some stillbirths—mostly those caused by the domestic violence of a partner, who effectively wants to hush things up.

Other reasons cited were the “potential for duplication” and the “impact on resources” for coroners and local authorities. This should not be a cost-based measure. Another reason was

“that there would be a significant increase in demand on paediatric pathology”,

but again, no figures are given for how many stillbirths would actually be investigated. We are talking here about dozens and not hundreds or thousands. Finally, there are extraordinary excuses, such as:

“Coroners are not best placed to identify and disseminate clinical learning”.

Well, they investigate an awful lot of adult deaths and are able to identify and disseminate clinical learning in relation to those cases; why should the same not be true of baby deaths? The Government seem to be talking down the ability and efficacy of coroners, which is slightly worrying.

Back in 2017, after I had published my Bill, the Government announced their intention to consider whether and how coroners could carry out stillbirth investigations at 37 weeks' gestation and over. I agree with that; I think it should apply to full term stillbirths. Then, the Government produced their consultation. I will skip ahead to the results of that consultation, in particular some quotes that were supportive of coroners being involved. A bereaved family member said:

“I feel it is important for parents to feel completely confident that the investigation is run by someone completely unbiased and impartial, especially when there is concern there may have been substandard care.”

I agree, and in anybody's judgment that person is the coroner. The Government gave the excuse in their report that

“coroners were not best placed to make these determinations and would need to rely on medical professionals”,

But why would that be any different from a coroner's role in investigating adult deaths over which there are question marks?

I have to say that the result of this consultation was pretty definitive. I will get to the actual figures. The number of people who responded to the consultation was 322. Of those people, 244, or 75.8%, replied in the affirmative to the question:

“Do you think coroners should have a role in investigating stillbirths?”

By a factor of three to one, people think that coroners being involved would be a good measure.

In answer to the question,

“Do you agree with the proposal about ascertaining how it was that the baby was not born alive?”,

86.7% of respondents said that coroners have a role to play and that there were questions that need to be asked.

In answer to the question,

“Do you agree that, as part of the findings, coroners should identify learning points and issue recommendations to the persons and bodies they consider relevant?”,

85.8% of people responded yes.

The fourth question that I would like to highlight is:

“Do you agree that no consent or permission from the bereaved parents, or anyone else, should be required for coronial investigation?”

That is a more contentious issue but, still, 63.9%—almost two thirds—said that they should be mandatory, even if the parents did not agree. That is important for the reasons I have just given.

The final consultation question that I want to flag up is:

“Do you agree with the proposal to investigate only term and full-term stillbirths?”

The response was 70.6% no. People were saying that the scope of coroners to investigate stillbirths should be even wider and begin earlier than being proposed. By any measure, this was a consultation that overwhelmingly backed the measures in my Bill and the changes that have been supported so widely in this House, in the coroners’ field and in the medical field by many people.

Finally, this is my question to the Minister: how much longer do we have to wait? I have been in this place for quite a long time, and I have never seen such a wide gap between legislation requiring consultation coming in and that being published, let alone the Government deciding what to act on. In a letter to me accompanying the publication of the consultation, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), said:

“Officials are also exploring mechanisms for improving existing processes to further address the aims of the coroners’ proposal. A further statement will be issued in due course.”

That chilling phrase, “in due course”, is one we hear so often from Ministers who have not got a handle on when they will do something that they know needs to be done. My question to the poor Minister who has been dragged here today, for whom I have every sympathy, is: please can we get on with this? There is no excuse for not doing so. The consultation has taken place. Everyone has said, “Yes, this is a pretty good idea.” The legislation also had overwhelming and unanimous support from both Houses of Parliament when it went through all those years ago.

Can we please now have a clear timetable for when we will get the Government’s formal response? I hope the response will be, “Yes, we agree, and we will now get on with it.” If it is not, all the people interested in this will urgently be owed an explanation of why this should not go forward in the way that has been suggested, given that the Government’s own consultation has shown such overwhelming support for it.

4.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Gareth Bacon): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Elliott. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) for securing this debate. I pay tribute to his work in shining a light on the important but complex and extremely sensitive issue of stillbirth, which, despite the experience and incredible dedication of our medical professionals, continues to touch the lives of too many families.

Bereavement is never easy, but to lose a child through stillbirth is a tragedy. The Government are committed to supporting parents through such a difficult experience and ensuring that they have access to the support they need. More than that, one of our highest priorities is to reduce the number of stillbirths and other adverse maternity outcomes. To help to achieve that, we are committed to ensuring that, wherever possible, lessons are learned and care is improved to prevent avoidable stillbirths in future.

To put that aim into context, the Government set the national maternity safety ambition to halve the 2010 rates of stillbirths, neonatal and maternity deaths, and brain injuries occurring during or soon after birth, by 2025. Also by 2025, we want to reduce the pre-term birth rate from 8% to 6%. We are making good progress, but we recognise that more still needs to be done to achieve that ambition. Since 2010, the stillbirth rate has reduced by 23% and the neonatal maternity rate of babies born after 24 weeks’ gestation has reduced by 30%.

Although we can demonstrate clear progress, it is vital that we continue to learn from the tragedy of every stillbirth. Concerns about the consistency and independence of those investigations have given rise to the calls for a more transparent and independent process, for which my hon. Friend continues to advocate so consistently.

The coroner, as an independent judge, investigates deaths for which, among other things, the cause is unknown, so it is easy to understand the proposal that their role should be extended to include the investigation of stillbirths. However, I want to take a moment here to emphasise an important point: at present, coroners do not have jurisdiction to investigate a stillbirth because, sadly, as my hon. Friend said in his speech, where there has not been an independent life, there has not legally been a death. A child born who is showing signs of life has had an independent life, so that child’s death must be investigated if the coroner’s jurisdiction is engaged. When there is doubt about whether a child was born alive, that is a matter for the coroner to determine, and it is open to anyone, including the bereaved family, to report a case to the coroner if they believe there is a need for such an investigation.

In 2016, the Government committed to consult on whether, and if so how, the coronial investigation of stillbirths should be introduced. The commitment was made as part of a fresh maternity safety strategy. Since then, a range of important safety initiatives have been rolled out, including a perinatal mortality review tool, which is now available in every maternity service in the UK. The tool enables trusts to review all stillbirths and neonatal deaths by setting out a set of questions and principles to guide trusts through a standardised review process. The tool’s secondary aim is to ensure local and national learning to improve care and ultimately prevent future baby deaths. Collation and analysis of the data from the tool and the production of annual national reports on the key themes arising from the reviews and recommendations are intended to improve safe maternity care and safe outcomes for babies.

In addition, the maternity and newborn safety investigations programme, established in 2018 and now hosted independently by the Care Quality Commission, provides independent, standardised and family-focused investigations for families, which also provide learning to the health system. Alongside those initiatives, the consultation on coronial investigation was taken forward in 2019, again as my hon. Friend said. We are extremely grateful to everyone who submitted one of the 334 responses to the consultation document, to the 63 people who attended stakeholder workshops and, in particular, to those respondents who shared their personal experience of the pain of stillbirth.

The findings of the consultation were complex, as my hon. Friend said. The majority of respondents were supportive of the proposal for coroners to have a role in

[Gareth Bacon]

investigating stillbirths, but many did not agree with the proposals for how that should be implemented. Some were concerned that bereaved parents would not be able to withhold consent to the investigation or any associated post-mortem examination, that the investigation could be distressing and intrusive, that the length of the investigation could delay closure for the bereaved family, that the process might not fulfil the parents' expectation of finding answers, or that they could feel like they were being blamed.

There were also significant policy and practical concerns, including the potential for duplication, friction and confusion between investigations by the coroner, the maternity and newborn safety investigations programme and the trust or health board, and the potential impact of that on clinicians' behaviour. There was also a concern that the safety initiatives introduced in 2018 would achieve the same policy objectives as a coronial investigation in any event.

Tim Loughton: I am grateful to the Minister; I understand the points that he is making and I appreciate his points about the distress that it may cause to parents, and about blame and everything like that. Whether the child was stillborn or lived for a couple of minutes makes no difference to that potential distress. However, in the latter case, the coroner would have the power to investigate, which could cause the same distress to the parents as doing so could the child had been stillborn. Why is there that distinction?

Gareth Bacon: I thank my hon. Friend for his points; I am reflecting the points made in the consultation. His point is well landed, and officials and my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) will have noted the case that he has just made.

In addition, there were concerns about the resource impact on the NHS and the locally funded coroner services. Crucially, there would be a significant increase in demand on already stretched paediatric pathology services, with a significant lead-in time to train new resource. Nevertheless, I note the comments that my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham made in his speech.

In any event, some respondents felt that coroners would not be best placed to identify and disseminate clinical learning points at a regional and national level. Although many acknowledged that coroners could deliver investigations into stillbirths, there was no consensus on precisely how they would do so and some strong opposition to the specific proposals that we put forward.

Given the importance and the sensitivity of the issue, it is imperative that we get the response right. That means carefully considering the issues identified by the

consultation and working through the complex questions that they raise. Work to publish a response was paused during the pandemic. Again, as my hon. Friend said, and as I have explained, the landscape of maternity investigations has changed significantly. One of the key questions that we are considering is whether the current maternity safety initiatives are already achieving, or have the potential to achieve, the overarching objective without the need for coroner investigations.

While the Government were developing and publishing their consultation proposals, Parliament passed the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Act 2019, which my hon. Friend introduced. As he has explained, section 4 places a duty on the Secretary of State to make arrangements for the preparation and publication of a report on whether, and if so how, coroners could investigate stillbirths. The Act also provides a power for the Lord Chancellor to make provision for coronial stillbirth investigations through secondary legislation if, following the publication of the report, that is considered appropriate. The fact that those provisions are on the statute book is a testament to my hon. Friend's commitment to the issue, and I can of course understand his frustration that it has not yet been resolved, which he has eloquently expressed today and on other occasions.

As I have said, we have to get this right. To that end, in December the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Health and Social Care jointly published a factual summary of the responses to the 2019 consultation. I have set out the key findings this afternoon, and the two Departments continue to work through their complex implications.

As an immediate next step, my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer)—he has now joined us—on behalf of the Ministry of Justice, and my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Care, have told me that they would be happy to meet my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham to share the latest thinking and discuss possible ways forward on the outstanding issues. I can confirm that by the summer recess, we will make a further statement that sets out the Government's position on this policy.

To conclude, let me reiterate my thanks to my hon. Friend for the opportunity to respond to this important debate, as well as my thanks to all others in attendance and to all those who have made some very valuable contributions to this issue along the way.

Question put and agreed to.

4.27 pm

Sitting suspended.

Child Trust Funds

[Relevant Documents: Sixty-Seventh Report of the Committee of Public Accounts of Session 2022–23, Child Trust Funds, HC 1231, and the Government response, CP 941.]

4.30 pm

Sir Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Child Trust Fund access for people seeking to manage the finances of others.

It is a pleasure to use this debate to highlight the ongoing issue of disabled young people's access to their child trust funds and to recognise the good will of the Minister and his Department, but to demand changes that would solve issues for the courts, CTF providers and, above all, the disabled young people and their families. We have the means to secure easy access to funds that rightfully belong to those young people—funds that could prove invaluable but which are being denied to them by a lack of information and processes that may be well-meaning in intent, but are Kafkaesque and off-putting in delivery.

It is a pleasure to move the debate under your chairmanship, Ms Elliott. I am delighted to see the Minister in the Chamber, as I know he is focused on the issue, as well as other hon. Members who have taken a real interest in getting a resolution on the issue.

I would like to pay tribute to my constituent Andrew Turner. Back in September 2020, Andrew found that his disabled son, Mikey, was locked out of his child trust fund. He simply wanted to buy an adapted bike with Mikey's money, and Mikey's life-limiting condition meant that time was of the essence. The child trust fund was Mikey's only financial asset. That should have been the start of a simple process in which a loving parent who looks after his disabled son can use that child's own funds to enhance the wellbeing of the child. Instead, Mr Turner found that he and thousands of others were required to go to court when the account matured. Such is the complexity that Mr Turner was independently advised that it would be easier and cheaper for him—I hate to say this—to wait until Mikey died, when a simpler process existed to reclaim the money. He was naturally deeply upset. He was also determined to do something about it, not just for Mikey, but others in the same predicament.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the right hon. Gentleman. As I said to him before the debate, I want to give the Northern Ireland perspective. In Northern Ireland, the responsibility for the management of the child trust fund account for a child when there is no person with parental responsibility is transferred to the Share Foundation, which deals with inquiries until the child turns 18. Does he agree it would be a good idea if the responsibility went to relatives in the extended family, such as grandparents, to ensure that they can provide guidance within a familial setting in relation to finances? That would be a simple way of doing it—letting the grandparents or the extended family look after things.

Sir Jeremy Quin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I will touch on the circumstances in Northern Ireland, but the fundamental point that unites many people in the Chamber is the desire to get easy

access for parents to ensure they do not go through a court process, incurring fees, going through bureaucracy and requiring the support of GPs and social workers, to access what in many cases is an average of about £2,000. It is just too much bureaucracy and work when it is rightfully the asset of their child.

I know many people in the Chamber, not just the hon. Gentleman, take a close interest in the matter and have far more personal experience than me, as parents of children with disabilities. They know that parents of children with disabilities have so much to do. Often that involves struggling to get what is rightfully theirs from Government. That is one area in which Mr Turner felt that progress could be made. The good news is he found a groundswell of support from parents and charities. I would like to thank in particular Contact for its support and Renaissance Legal for its tireless campaigning. There is support from child trust fund providers and, indeed, from the Minister, and yet four years on, we are still nowhere near where we need to be.

I would like to set out the scale of the problem. I will set out what I recognise the Government have attempted to do to mitigate the problem and, lastly, what I believe they should do to go further and largely to resolve it for most families with disabled children. Let us be clear: it is not a new issue. It is very apparent and has been well rehearsed—not only as a result of my constituent's brilliant campaigning. The Public Accounts Committee looked into the issue last year as part of its analysis of child trust funds. The PAC highlighted a wider problem with CTFs as a whole, but it drew particular attention to access for young people lacking the mental capacity to manage their own savings.

In these circumstances, a family or carer must gain legal authority to access funds that belong to the young person involved. To do so requires an application for a deputyship order to the Court of Protection in England and Wales. For England and Wales, the Ministry of Justice estimates that between 63,000 and 126,000 young people may not have the mental capacity to access and manage their matured CTF when they reach 18. All CTFs will mature between 2020 and 2029. Tens of thousands of young people will therefore be subjected to a prohibitively lengthy, costly and complex process simply to access what is rightfully theirs.

In relation to stand-alone CTF applications, there were just 70 court applications between September 2020 and May 2023, compared with about 27,000 accounts maturing over the same period. The Department, in its Treasury minute responding to the PAC, broadened the scope of applications to include not just stand-alone CTF applications but other assets. However, even on that basis, the number of applications for 16 to 21-year-olds between September 2022 and March 2023 was still only 312. Whichever statistic one chooses to cite, thousands of people are missing out on what is rightfully theirs, because we are not informing them of their rights, and if we do, the process is too complex and too costly for all but a few.

I know that the Minister is a decent man. He put aside time to meet Mr Turner and me on this issue, and I know that he has instructed the Department to engage. I know that he is keen to make it simpler for families and he has ensured that changes have been made. I acknowledge that the MOJ last year moved some of the application online, waiving the fees and creating a toolkit for parents. That is to be welcomed,

[Sir Jeremy Quin]

and I believe it was introduced with excellent intent. However, the process still involves completing 12 forms, including the duplication of a number of forms, and 93 pages. This includes requiring time-pressured GPs or social workers to complete a 21-page mental capacity assessment, which not all are prepared to do. With all the pressures on the families of disabled young people and the associated cost of becoming a deputy, is it surprising that they do not prioritise accessing what are, on average, funds of about £2,000? However, that is £2,000 that could and should be used to the benefit of the disabled child.

I know that the Minister and his team wish to help further, and there is a means to do so readily at hand, already in use and absolutely capable of being advertised and delivered on. It could help to deliver tens of millions of pounds—actuarial analysis suggests up to £73 million—into the hands of those who desperately need it. I thank the chief executives of two child trust funds, OneFamily and Foresters UK, for talking me through their proactive approach, which puts their customers first. Those two funds account for more than half of all CTFs. Very commendably, those providers recognise the problem and are applying a common-sense and pragmatic approach to its resolution. That is in effect using the Department for Work and Pensions appointee scheme—a tried and tested system to enable families to manage their child's benefit income. It provides adequate protection and is the obvious solution to unlock the savings of disabled young people.

Let us be clear: this is no free-for-all. The providers require evidence that the parent or guardian is a DWP appointee; they require identity checks and confirmation of the child's capacity. This process is available only in relation to funds under £5,000, and complex cases may still have to go through the courts. However, it has enabled the providers to meet the needs of hundreds of disabled children. There is a problem. Despite following a DWP process, and despite the knowledge that were a DWP appointee to be acting fraudulently there would be far more at stake than a modest child trust fund, this sensible route is frustratingly not officially sanctioned. The financial institutions are commendably going on risk to allow access to the funds. They know that there are far more affected families out there, but as responsible, regulated entities, they do not believe they can advertise their willingness to help in this pragmatic way, which combines existing safeguards with swift access.

Those two leading institutions and others with a similar proactive mindset assist 900 families a year—a significant multiple of the number aided through the court route—but thousands still need support. I therefore have three requests for the Minister that would help to resolve this issue. Will he engage with the DWP to extend the appointee scheme and officially include savings held in CTFs? Will he engage with the finance industry to formalise what is already a successful industry process, and in doing so enable it to advertise that route so that families can take advantage of a simple scheme? Lastly, will he help families to secure basic information about their CTF provider if the account has been lost?

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for his superb speech. He has approached this debate in an extremely constructive fashion, with a

common-sense, straightforward solution to the problem. We do not need to reinvent the wheel; we just need to apply common sense. Child trust funds are a wonderful advantage to many young people, but the most vulnerable are missing out. My right hon. Friend has outlined a way in which the Government can address the biggest part of this problem.

Sir Jeremy Quin: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend, who brings me, brilliantly, to my conclusion. I agree with him. Movement on those three issues will prevent thousands of unnecessary court applications, and reduce bureaucracy and cost for the parents of disabled youngsters. Above all, it would put to work funds that could make a real difference to young people who could really do with a little extra help.

4.42 pm

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Horsham (Sir Jeremy Quin) for securing this debate. I agree with everything he said. I hope there can be cross-party agreement today that we need to move forward at long last.

I also pay tribute to Andrew Turner and his family—particularly his son, Mikey—for the work they have done, but I am sure Mr Turner will agree that others have played a big role, including lawyers such as Philip Warford, journalists such as Jessie Hewitson, and Martin Lewis. Financial service companies have shown leadership, and Contact, other charities and families, many of whom are here, have campaigned. Their voices have come together, and I hope that the Ministry of Justice will listen.

I should declare an interest: I have a 16-year-old son, John, who has an undiagnosed neurological problem that means he cannot really walk by himself or talk, and has serious learning disabilities. He will never be able to manage his own personal affairs, let alone financial affairs. Although my wife and I, and many wonderful professionals, work to give him as much independence as possible, there is no way, when he reaches the age of 18, that he will be able to get the money from his child trust fund. I declare an interest, but I hope I have an insight into the issues that families face and the problems they have as carers. Just looking after their children on a day-to-day basis can be quite enough, without having to worry about lots of bureaucratic forms and having to go to the court of protection.

I have been involved in this debate for some time. I met Mr Turner in 2020, and I asked a question at Prime Minister's questions on 21 October 2020. The then Prime Minister said:

“I will do whatever I can to help”—[*Official Report*, 21 October 2020; Vol. 682, c. 1058.]

He made that promise nearly four years ago, and we are still here. Hopefully we can do a bit better today.

After that, I met the right hon. and learned Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), who was then doing the current Minister's job but is now Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice. I think I met him three times, and we discussed all the options. We have seen the work that has been done—the waivers, the so-called simplification of the forms, the digitisation—in an attempt to make this work. Sometimes, particularly when the Ministry of Justice proposed a consultation on the small payments scheme, I supported it. I did not think it was the best solution, but I was trying to be constructive, so I went along with it to try to make it work.

However, I am afraid that all the efforts have failed, demonstratively, by the statistics that the right hon. Member for Horsham and many others have shown. To date, the Ministry of Justice has utterly failed to solve the problem, so we need action. We cannot wait much longer. The number of young people and their families, and the amount of money, will just build up over time. The problem will not go away, unless one Minister—I am sure it will be the Minister present today—actually grasps it properly.

I set out initially believing that the DWP appointee scheme was the right one. Families are aware of it, and it has worked in Government and for much larger funds. The amount of money that a loved one gets through their disability living allowance or personal independence payment far outweighs the average amount from a child trust fund, but apparently it is not possible to use that scheme because of the difference between flows of money from DWP and savings and capital. For the life of me, I have never quite understood that distinction, but perhaps there is something in it. I will come on to what I think is behind the Ministry of Justice's objections.

In the spirit of being constructive, two solutions seem to be on the table. One is the proposal for a new, one-off order solution, which the right hon. Member for Horsham talked about. A family would still have to fill in a form, but it would be a one-pager. They would still have to go to the Court of Protection, but it would be a very simple process. I think it has been well thought through by campaigners, and different fund managers have been involved. I believe that Mr Turner wrote to the Ministry of Justice before Christmas. Unfortunately, he received an email from an official in December 2023, which stated that

“we are not able to consider any proposals for an alternative process for accessing CTFs at this time.”

That is not good enough, Minister. People are working hard to come forward with practical solutions within the remit of the Ministry of Justice, and officials are not even willing to see people who are trying to be constructive.

I think that the one-off order solution would work. The Minister might not be able to answer today, but I would like to ask him: would it require a change to primary or secondary legislation to get that solution working, or would the registrar of the Court of Protection simply have to change the administrative rules? It is probably as simple as that, and it would suddenly unlock the problem both for child trust funds and junior ISAs. That is one solution, which the MOJ would be in control of.

The right hon. Member for Horsham touched on another solution: working through the financial service companies, which have shown huge flexibility and taken risk upon themselves. That would not be an MOJ responsibility; I think the MOJ would have to talk to the Treasury. I think the Government have landed this problem in the lap of the MOJ and said, “You sort it out.” If the Minister went to the Chancellor or another Treasury Minister and said, “Look, we want you to say this, and we are happy for you to say it,” all the Treasury Minister would have to say is, “We are relaxed about fund managers of child trust funds or junior ISAs taking that approach, taking the risk upon themselves if anyone objects, and marketing, giving information and promoting the idea that people with DWP appointee

status can use the funds and transact them on behalf of their loved one.” That would be what we might call a market solution, but from my insight into how government works, that would require the MOJ to give the green light to the Treasury to make that statement.

Those are two simple, zero-cost solutions to allow vulnerable people to get their own money. After four years of trying, I urge the Minister to wake up and smell the coffee. Why might the MOJ object? I will put myself in his shoes and the shoes of the officials to work out what on earth is going on. The first issue might be the Mental Capacity Act 2005, the Court of Protection and their underlying principles. When officials and Departments have jurisdiction over an Act of Parliament, they can get jealous about how it has worked and not want to see any change. I get that—we have been there. However, democratically elected politicians must challenge the principle behind the Act, to test whether it has been taken too far, because in law there are other principles that apply, including proportionality and reasonableness. Surely those principles apply here. We are talking about small amounts of money for very vulnerable people whose parents and carers ain't got the time to go to court. They may phone up one person and ask, “Can you help me?” but if the financial service company or the court says, “Well, it is a bit complicated,” they just give up, because their young person is in pain, needs medical help and needs to go to the hospital. That is the reality of their lives.

Sir Jeremy Quin: First, on the specific point of proportionality, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the financial providers are talking about sums below £5,000, and the average child trust fund here is about £2,000? Secondly, tens of thousands of pounds would go through the DWP appointee scheme, which means that in comparison the child trust fund is a tiny amount of money. On the grounds of proportionality, the right hon. Gentleman is making an extremely good case.

Ed Davey: I strongly agree with the right hon. Gentleman. He might be interested to know that, while I am not an expert, I am told that principle 5 of the 2005 Act talks about the least restrictive option to achieve the best interests of the vulnerable adult. Can the MCA apply itself to itself, please?

I wonder whether there is another reason why the Ministry of Justice is sticking to the principle despite all the evidence and pressure. Perhaps it wants to get more people to go to the Court of Protection so that the judges there can help with the deputyships of those vulnerable adults as they turn 18. One can have a discussion about whether more families should ultimately go to the Court of Protection. However, when one reads the guidelines of the Court of Protection, it is clear that it rightly sees itself as a court of last resort for a family dispute about money or, more likely, for how a person should be cared for, who should be caring for them and where they should live.

Sometimes, if there is a dispute in the family, the court is necessary and the Court of Protection is brilliant at that. Sometimes, a vulnerable adult may have no loved one or family member, and then the Court of Protection rightly fills that vacuum. However, if families can come to an agreement among themselves, more often than not that will be better than having to go to

[Ed Davey]

the Court of Protection. We should make the Court of Protection available to more people. We could advertise and market it—people may want to think about that in due course.

My wife and I are old parents; my son is 16 and I am 58, so I am quite an old dad. I worry about when my wife and I die. My son does not have a degenerative condition, and he is going to live for quite a few years. Of course, we are thinking in due course of going to the Court of Protection or getting a family member such as his sister or one of his cousins to be there for him. The Court of Protection, as I say, has good reason to be there. No one is against it, but it should be used when it is needed.

Perhaps the Ministry of Justice thinks that it has no court backlogs and loads of judges who are just sitting there twiddling their thumbs, so we should give them more business. Come on! Please take the pressures off the system by adopting something simple. I do not like saying this, but there may be a reason why people in the judiciary and legal profession are keen to force people to go to the Court of Protection even when it is disproportionate. Perhaps it is vested interests. I really hope that that is not what we are dealing with, because it is not acceptable.

We are talking about people who are vulnerable, and parents and carers who are stretched to their limits. We are talking about small amounts of money. I urge the Minister to listen to us, and to go back to his Department and the Secretary of State and say that the officials and some of the judiciary from the Court of Protection need to be overruled on this. We need to act proportionately. We need to act in the best interests of thousands of young people who should have access to their own money.

4.54 pm

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con): I am pleased to speak in support of my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir Jeremy Quin), and it is a privilege and a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey), who spoke so well. I entirely agree with what has been said.

I had the pleasure of speaking a few weeks ago at a conference organised by the Share Foundation. Gavin Oldham is in the Gallery for this debate. Andrew Turner spoke at the conference as well and laid out all the practical challenges that we have heard. There was also a very good speech by Ruth Kelly, the former Labour Minister who had oversight of the child trust fund policy when it was introduced. It inspired me to recognise how often good Conservative policies are introduced by non-Conservative Governments, because I have a great respect for the policy.

Another speaker discussed the real genesis of the child trust fund, which was, of course, Tom Paine. In the 1770s and 1780s, he wrote about an approach by which Governments simply gave families a lump of capital as a means of sustaining them and ensuring that they developed the habits of thrift, industry and self-reliance that we all need. We might remember that in the 1990s, the then Labour Opposition were developing ideas around what they called asset-based welfare, which is a very good principle and one that I would not give to Labour entirely. We all share these ideas—[*Interruption.*]

4.56 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

5.42 pm

On resuming—

Julie Elliott (in the Chair): The debate may now continue until 6.15 pm. I call Danny Kruger to resume his speech.

Danny Kruger: Thank you very much, Ms Elliott—I shall resume, rather than start again. I was saying that the child trust fund has its roots in a very good British tradition: the principle of asset-based welfare. In the 1990s, there was a tussle about the approach to public services. On the one hand, there was what we have come to call new public management, which was about centralised and bureaucratic quasi-market systems based on individual entitlements and comprehensive services. On the other, there was asset-based welfare, which was about putting capital into families and supporting communities to develop their own collective responses to social challenges.

In the new Labour years, the new public management model won out, with the great and noble exception of the child trust fund, which is such a brilliant innovation. It is such an important principle that people should be trusted to manage wealth and to sustain their families directly. I regret that, in 2010, when the coalition Government came in, the child trust fund was abandoned—I was going to have a pop at the Liberal Democrats, who I am sure were responsible for scrapping it, but let us just blame George Osborne, because we can all unite on that. Junior ISAs were established instead, and that is also a very good principle.

I want to echo the points that were eloquently made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham and by the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton about the real injustice that families now endure. Back in the days when the child trust fund was created, not enough consideration was given to children without mental capacity to access and manage their own finances upon becoming adults. Something very wrong was done without anybody intending it and without it being properly thought through. I will not repeat the points made by my right hon. Friend, but we have a huge obligation to right that injustice.

It is worth pointing out that we have not just tens of thousands of young people locked out of money that is rightfully theirs and without the money or incentive to pursue a Court of Protection case to unlock it. There is also a significant disincentive to open a junior ISA for parents with a disabled child who are thinking about the long-term future and whether it will be possible to access that money. So we are inhibiting the principle of saving altogether.

The right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton and my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham made very good suggestions about a one-off order solution—I absolutely echo the case made there—and also about the DWP appointee scheme. The fact that we do that for benefits—as we have heard, those often account for much greater sums than the child trust fund—means that we should extend it. I also agree with the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton about relieving the pressure on the Court of Protection.

The principle of child trust funds is such a good and important one in terms of the welfare model that we should have. The injustice that we have at the moment—the complexity of the system and the fact that there are so many dormant accounts—does not apply just to the families who know about the money that belongs to their disabled children and who want to access it; many millions of young people do not know that they have the right to this money—that it is, in fact, rightfully theirs. I understand that about 6 million young people have accounts, worth around £2,000 each, that they are unaware of, and it is estimated that around 1 million of those young people will come from deprived circumstances. What an enormous injustice it is that all that money is sitting there in Government accounts that they are not able to access! This has been described as malign neglect; it will not be deliberate—nobody is actively trying to prevent young people from accessing money that is rightfully theirs—but, nevertheless, for reasons we have heard about, disabled children and young people more widely are not being given access to money that is rightfully theirs.

I echo the point made by campaigners, including Gavin Oldham from the Share Foundation, about having a default withdrawal policy whereby the system knows the bank details of young people who are registered with HMRC. I understand that about 60% of young people with child trust fund accounts that they have not yet accessed could simply be given the money. That should happen; there would need to be communications and an information campaign around that, but it is the right thing to do, not least because it would stop the outrage of companies charging a 25% fee for the benefit of informing young people of the fact that they have this money. That, I think, is the future model.

As a country, we should be proud of the principle of child trust funds. A lot of people are increasingly thinking that we need to develop approaches around asset-based welfare. I noticed that David Willetts, a former colleague of ours, is proposing something similar—a capital sum granted to young people at coming of age—and Gavin Oldham has suggested that inheritance tax receipts should be used to invest in child trust funds for the future. I think that this is an old idea whose time has come, and I hope we can fix the immediate problems we have and then think more broadly about how to extend this model more widely.

5.48 pm

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): It is a special pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Ms Elliott. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Horsham (Sir Jeremy Quin) for securing this debate on behalf of his constituent Andrew Turner. I congratulate him on his detailed speech, which outlined very clearly the challenge before us.

I also want to comment on the speech from the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey). I am grateful to him for sharing his personal experience of engaging with the system with his son, John. He demonstrated a special empathy for other parents of children with challenging disabilities. He offered solutions, and I remind the House of his most important statement: that people are just after their own money. He also spoke of the need for a simpler system.

That point was repeated by the hon. Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger)—I have just found out how to pronounce his constituency properly, so I hope I did it justice this time—who lamented the fact that we no longer have the children's trust fund, which was set up by the Labour Government. He tried to blame the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton, but it was the right hon. Gentleman's colleague in the Treasury—the same person who axed the hospital that was planned in my constituency. Health inequalities have widened ever since, and the hospital is not even on the Government's new list. The hon. Member for Devizes confirmed that there is consensus in the Chamber that we need action: he said, "Simply give them the money," which is a good thing for me to mention at the beginning of my speech.

Andrew's fervent campaign to bring about change stems from the challenges faced by his family, who have come up against tremendous problems along the way as they have tried simply to get access to the money they saved for their son Mikey. We heard about the distress faced by Mikey's family and others, and also about the deeply disturbing legal advice that Andrew received: that it would be easier and cheaper to wait until Mikey died, because a simpler process could then be used. I cannot find the words to describe the anguish I would feel in such circumstances.

Andrew has become an advocate for the many parents of children with disabilities who all too often come up against these barriers. I pay tribute to him and charities such as Contact for their hard work on this issue. I also thank the other parent campaigners—Nasreen Yasin, Claire Binney, Michele Creed and Ramandeep Kaur, as well as Rachel Dixon, John Roberts and their son, Joseph—for joining us today.

Under the fund introduced in 2005, every child born in the UK between September 2002 and January 2011 received up to £500 in Government vouchers as an incentive for their parents and guardians to open a savings account for them. That initiative was ditched by the coalition Government in 2011, when the junior ISA was created. Disabled children and those from low-income families received an additional amount to provide greater benefits in later life. The trust money was then locked away, and parents were able to add more to the account each year until the child turned 18. Again, as we have heard, parents of children who lack the mental capacity to manage their finances themselves when they turn 18 face making a deputyship application to the Court of Protection to access their child trust fund or junior ISA.

The Ministry of Justice estimates that between 63,000 and 126,000 young people may fall into that category, yet the Court of Protection approved only 15 applications in 2021. The Minister will be aware that Andrew wrote to the Lord Chancellor yesterday outlining the scale of the challenge. He highlighted that, since 2020, an estimated 31,488 disabled young people have been unable to access £72.4 million of child trust fund and junior ISA savings.

The Public Accounts Committee looked into this matter and highlighted reports of families finding the deputyship application process difficult, time-consuming and costly. Fees are waived if families are applying to access a child trust fund, but there are other barriers. The Committee heard that a six-page GP letter is needed as part of the process. The Down's Syndrome Association said in evidence that low awareness of banking safeguards among the parents it supports is also a barrier to

[Alex Cunningham]

accessing their child's trust fund. It explained that the fee waiver does not apply if the young adult is still in education, and that many families believe that they still need to pay for the services of a solicitor.

I recognise that the Government have considered measures they hoped would address the problem over the years, but the legislation and processes put in place to support individuals and their families should be much more accessible. We need closer working between the finance industry and Departments to find a workable solution to this ongoing problem. That would have the potential to significantly increase accessibility, helping many more families to access savings locked in child trust funds and junior ISAs.

I agree with the statement from Una Summerson, head of policy and public affairs at Contact. She said that implementing a less restrictive approach is in the best interests of disabled young people. Disabled young people must be allowed to enjoy their savings like everybody else, and continuing to promote actions that fail to address this issue will simply perpetuate injustice. There is an opportunity to bring common sense into the debate and to commit to a new approach.

Ed Davey: The hon. Gentleman has made a powerful speech, and I thank him for his kind comments. We all hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to tell us that the Government will look at the issue again and will make changes, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that if this Government fail to make changes, at the next election and in the next Parliament, it is vital that his party, working with others, makes those changes?

Alex Cunningham: Yes. Whichever Government are in power, they have to make the changes necessary to make it much easier for people to access the funds. I do not know what the mechanism will be, but I think we can all say that the next Government, of either colour, will deliver on that particular promise, but the Minister might get this sorted before we have that general election. Today might have been the last day the Prime Minister could have called the election, but we still have a few hours to go—bring that on!

The Government referred in their consultation response to clear evidence of the challenges in the current system, with the Court of Protection property and affairs application forms being too lengthy and complex, and the time taken between completing the application to the final order being made being too long and disproportionate for the sums involved. Instead of a wholesale change, however, the Government opted for incremental changes to the current court process. In 2023, the Ministry of Justice created a toolkit for parent carers on making financial decisions and implemented a new digital process for property and affairs deputy order applications, which was rolled out last year and is set to speed up the process. Users can complete some of the court forms electronically and can digitally submit remaining paperwork.

Sadly, Contact tells me that none of the Government's piecemeal changes has meaningfully simplified the court process or made it more accessible for families with no legal experience. The Government's strategy is not working. If their intended aim was to have a process that was as accessible as possible, it simply has not been achieved.

I hope that the Minister will outline the impact that those changes have had on application processing times, addressing whether future digitalisation of Court of Protection processes is planned, and outline exactly how the Government will remove those blockages to the funds once and for all. Let them have their own money!

5.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mike Freer): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Elliott. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir Jeremy Quin) for securing the debate and continuing the conversation we have had for some time. I was pleased to meet him and his constituent Mr Turner last May to discuss the issue, and I welcome the ongoing debate that we are having.

I will not tiptoe down memory lane, as colleagues have—I am not sure that revisiting the coalition Governments of 2010 onwards is particularly helpful to today's debate. What I want to do and what is important—and I am sorry if it is dry—is lay out the legal framework that is there to protect vulnerable people. I understand clearly that the actions of the vast majority of parents are well intentioned, and that they act with great honour and kindness looking after their child or young adult. However, my job is also to protect vulnerable people from any form of abuse, and that weighs heavily on any reforms that we take forward. I appreciate that people will disagree vehemently with me, but I have to take into account the fact that not every parent would act with the best of intentions when accessing the funds.

It is a well-established common-law principle that an adult must obtain proper legal authority to access or manage the finances or property of another adult. That includes, for the purpose of today's debate, a matured child trust fund of a young adult. People are understandably unaware of that legal principle, and it may be surprising to parents and carers who have been heavily involved in decision making for their young person prior to their turning 18. I want to iterate the steps that we have already taken to try to improve the process, particularly as regards awareness of what steps need to be taken as the young person reaches the age of 18.

Ed Davey: Before the Minister talks about reforms that have been made, can I bring him back to the point of principle that he outlined at the beginning of his remarks? I do not think anyone disagrees that there is an important principle, but there is equally a principle of proportionality that I mentioned in my speech. Can the Minister address that point? Where does proportionality arise in his thinking about the principles involved?

Mike Freer: I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that I am happy to have an ongoing conversation. In fact, this is the first time we have discussed the matter face to face since I took on my portfolio. Proportionality is a valid point, but what is the level of risk that the right hon. Gentleman is willing to take? It will be different from the one that I or the Government are prepared to take. The right hon. Gentleman or anybody in this room may be prepared to say that 10, 20, 100 or 1,000 young people could have their money accessed inappropriately. That is a proportionate risk that they are willing to take. My view is that I want to minimise that risk and that proportionality is not easily measured.

I am not a lawyer. I look to my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham and my legal friends to say that there may be a legal definition of proportionality. However, the definition of proportionality for those who are making decisions against those who are asking for change may be different. I am willing to see if we can bridge the gap, but my view is that I want to ensure that we can both improve access and that protections remain in place so that those who may not have the best interests of the young adults in mind do not get access to funds with total liberty.

Ed Davey: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer. It was direct and to the point, and he has given way again, which is generous.

When we look at the risk, we have evidence from the industry, which has looked at the case and many firms and funders have said that they are prepared to take on the risk themselves. Even though the Government are behind it, because the risk and the amount of money are so small, the firms have taken on that risk themselves. Is that not a lesson that the Minister should dwell on? If the MOJ is not prepared to act on that, would he at least go and talk to his colleagues at the Treasury and see if they can make a statement about the way in which the financial services could take on that risk and how the Government would support that?

Mike Freer: I am always happy to discuss with any provider and certainly the provider I have spoken to. No provider has beaten a path to my door saying, "We think you have got it wrong and our risk assessment is right." Any organisation is entitled to make their own risk assessment and accept the consequences if they get it wrong. That is their decision. As for my risk assessments, perhaps I am being over-cautious. I am willing to be challenged on that and I appreciate that people have a different view, but I want to ensure that I take the least risk regarding vulnerable adults.

I will talk briefly in the time left about the work we have done with the Investing and Saving Alliance to try to improve accessibility and knowledge. Given the time, I will have to skip over the part of my speech about the legal framework of the Mental Capacity Act 2005. I think everyone in the room is probably aware of the methodology of applying for the deputyship that gives people access or the ability to act on other people's behalf. I will not go through that in any great depth.

We have heard that the court process was cumbersome, which is why we looked at how we could change that. We consulted on what kind of different system we could put in place, but there was not a consistent view from the consultation on how we should reform access to the funds. In fact, if we go into the consultation, many people wanted to add safeguards to a new form of access that actually made the system even more cumbersome than the one we were trying to reform. That was a difficulty, as we did not get a common view on what checks and balances needed to be in place. We talked not just to parents, but to charitable organisations, the legal and finance sectors, groups representing the elderly and so on, and we heard that it was too complex. The big message that came out was that people were not really aware of what they had to do or when they had to do it.

I think that the first ask from my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham was whether we would extend appointeeships to cover child trust funds. We are working with the Department for Work and Pensions to extend the availability of information. I am more than willing to go back to the DWP and talk about whether its process is suitable for child trust funds. It is a very different process: it is about accessing regular payments rather than lump sums, so there is a different quantum at risk. It would take primary legislation to access the DWP-type processes—we double-checked that today. It is not a quick fix, but it is certainly one that I am more than happy to go back and have another look at.

I want to ensure that we are streamlining the processes. Can we take the paper out? Can we use more digital processes? We have seen that the time has reduced from 24 weeks to 12 weeks. We will continue to liaise with the President of the Court of Protection to monitor performance and see what more can be done.

A key issue is that people often do not know what they have to do until the child turns 18, and then they are locked out. We have done two things; I apologise if this sounds a little disjointed. I sat down with TISA, the major provider of child trust funds, and we agreed that as part of its normal maturity mailing, it will include advice and information about how to access and use the Court of Protection to get the relevant legal powers in place. We are taking early steps to educate people as to what they need to do before the person turns 18. That comes alongside the toolkit, which, as hon. Members have noted, provides practical guidance on how to access and navigate the legal process.

My right hon. Friend's second ask was about making people aware of how to find lost funds. We are doing more work to provide information. People can use the "Find my child trust fund" service on gov.uk. We can continue to do more to raise awareness of that.

Alex Cunningham: It is a good idea that providers are prepared to write out and provide additional information. I welcome that, but it is not going to solve the problem. Does the Minister agree that it is no good just having a one-off? It will have to be done on a regular basis, as more young people become mature and approach the age of 18.

Mike Freer: The shadow Minister pre-empted me. This is a regular communication strategy: TISA will continue to notify those who are heading towards maturity of what they need to do to access the fund once they turn 18.

I have also been working with the Department for Work and Pensions on accessing its client bank. We have agreed with the DWP that we will contact the cohort of parents and carers who receive personal independence payments and who may lack the mental capacity to access their child trust fund. We have an agreement in principle that we will do a mailing—not a one-off, but a constant mailing—so that people in this cohort, which we think is particularly relevant to child trust funds and difficulties of access, will become aware in advance of what they need to do. One of the big messages from the consultation was about the lack of understanding and knowledge of the steps until it was too late.

[Mike Freer]

I appreciate that hon. Members have said, “Give them the money.” I get that. As I mentioned at the start of my speech, the vast majority of parents act in the very best interests of the child. I am not a parent, so I cannot possibly understand the role of a parent having to juggle all the demands of everyday life while having a child who needs additional support. I accept that my knowledge is limited, but the risk of just one parent not acting in their child’s best interests, but accessing those funds inappropriately, weighs very heavily on me.

I accept all the points about proportionality, and I am happy to have a conversation about where the line on risk is drawn. Broadly speaking, where I am coming from is improving education, improving access and improving knowledge, but I cannot in all good conscience say that I am going to throw open the accounts and give unfettered access without some checks and safeguards to ensure that the very small minority do not have the ability to abuse a young adult. However, I will commit to following through with colleagues at the DWP to see whether there is anything we can do to copy or piggyback on their approach and make the system more accessible.

6.10 pm

Sir Jeremy Quin: I am grateful for the Minister’s candour. We have heard what he has to say. Like the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey), I am keen to work with the Minister, and I know that he has put changes in train to improve the situation. I was pleased to hear what he said about mailing, and we will

certainly work with him to see how it can be improved. I know that his intent is absolutely genuine and that he has genuine worries about ensuring that any scheme is safe for all, but this is about proportionality. There is a concern that thousands of young people may miss out because of the Minister’s genuine concern about what could be a very small number indeed.

I come back to the point about the DWP appointee scheme. If fraud is at work, which is always a risk when the Government are distributing or giving access to money in any form, there are far bigger fish to fry than the child trust fund. Trying to avoid that tiny risk prevents access for many thousands of people. We should be able to find a more effective yet secure way through. I urge him to keep reviewing the issue.

I was pleased to hear the Minister say that he will talk to the DWP about the process. I understand his point about primary legislation, but ultimately if primary legislation is required to ensure that we can right a wrong and get fairness, I am sure that it would not be a controversial bit of legislation—and what on earth are we here for? I look forward to ongoing discussions with the Minister and to finding a solution that works for all these disabled young people and their families.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Child Trust Fund access for people seeking to manage the finances of others.

6.12 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 19 March 2024

BUSINESS AND TRADE

Post Office: Horizon Inquiry Participation Costs

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Kevin Hollinrake): In October 2023, I announced our intention to provide funding of up to £150 million, plus any contingency that may be required, to support the Post Office fully participating in the Post Office Horizon inquiry and to support the delivery of redress to postmasters.

Since then, those costs have increased and the Government have decided to provide access to contingency funding, and award a further £40 million to ensure Post Office can continue to deliver this important work. The Government remain determined to address the wrongs of the Horizon scandal.

In accordance with the Subsidy Control Act 2022, the Department for Business and Trade’s assessment of the funding’s compliance with the subsidy control principles

was previously referred to the subsidy advice unit. A report was published, which concluded that the Department had “conducted an assessment which considers the subsidy’s compliance with the subsidy control principles in line with the Statutory Guidance”.

[HCWS355]

Simpler Corporate Reporting

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Kevin Hollinrake): Yesterday, the Government announced our first set of intended regulatory changes as part of our commitment to make the non-financial reporting framework smarter, simpler and better for business. These changes focus on reducing regulation on small and medium-sized companies, ensuring that reporting requirements are proportionate, so that those companies can focus on their growth and delivering for their customers.

The Government intend to lay legislation this summer to lift the monetary thresholds that determine company size by 50%, in order to take account of inflation and to reduce burdens on smaller businesses, a change that we are able to make following the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union—see table. Overall, the effect of these changes is that 5,000 large companies would be reclassified as medium-sized and access more proportionate reporting; 13,000 medium-sized companies would be reclassified as small companies, enabling them to benefit from exemptions to statutory audit requirements as well as the ability to file simpler accounts; and 113,000 small companies would be reclassified as micro-sized companies, which will allow them to file simpler accounts—a benefit for more than one in every four businesses that are currently classified as small.

2 of 3 out of:	Micro		Small		Medium		Large	
	Old	New	Old	New	Old	New	Old	New
Annual turnover	nmt* £632k	nmt £1m	nmt £10.2m	nmt £15m	nmt £36m	nmt £54m	£36m+	£54m+
Balance sheet total	nmt £316k	nmt £500k	nmt £5.1m	nmt £7.5m	nmt £18m	nmt £27m	£18m+	£27m+
Average number of employees	nmt 10		nmt 50		nmt 250		251 +	
*nmt = not more than								

The Government will also remove several low-value, obsolete or overlapping requirements from the directors’ report, and from the directors’ remuneration report and policy; make it easier for companies to issue digital annual reports; and fix some technical issues in the audit regulatory framework that have been identified following the assimilation of EU law into UK law.

In total, these changes will deliver a deregulatory saving of around £150 million per year to UK companies, with small and medium-sized companies set to benefit by approximately £145 million per year.

The regulations will directly benefit both preparers and users of annual reports and accounts. They will remove low-value and duplicative information and make annual reports shorter, more navigable and better focused. Preparers of annual reports—UK businesses up and down the country—will have more time to spend on

running their business. Users of reports—investors and shareholders—will be able more easily to access relevant information to support effective decision making.

By refining the framework and delivering deregulatory cost-savings for business, the Government are taking action to strengthen the UK’s business environment and our international reputation as a great place to do business.

And the Government intend to go further. The Government intend to consult later this year on amending the definition of a medium-sized company for company reporting so that the threshold on the maximum number of employees to be classified as a medium-sized company is increased from 250 to 500. It will also consult on exempting medium-sized companies from having to produce a strategic report and on exempting smaller public interest entities from audit tendering and rotation

requirements. This will further reduce the bureaucratic burden on companies that are the lifeblood of the UK economy, meaning that they would not be subject to the more stringent reporting and accounting requirements faced by large businesses. I will update the House on these further proposals in due course.

[HCWS354]

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Football Governance Bill

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stuart Andrew): I wish to inform both Houses that the Government have today introduced the Football Governance Bill into Parliament, marking a critical milestone towards the establishment of an independent football regulator.

Football is a defining part of our national identity, with clubs bringing fans and communities together week in, week out. It is a multibillion-pound industry with a truly global footprint, and we are committed to securing its future growth. But in recent years it has become clear that there are systemic issues at the heart of our national game that the industry has failed to resolve itself, despite repeated calls for reform. The consequences of these issues can be catastrophic.

The collapse of clubs like Bury and Macclesfield Town, the devastating impact of the pandemic and the failed attempt by some English clubs to join a breakaway European super league have all demonstrated the financial issues in the game and the need for more accountability to fans.

This legislation is the next step in our ongoing commitment to safeguard the future of football clubs for the benefit of communities and fans. It follows the Government's White Paper, "A sustainable future—reforming club football governance", published in February 2023, which built on the fan-led review of football governance's recommendations and set out a comprehensive plan to introduce an independent regulator.

In developing the Bill, we have taken the time to carefully consider the full range of recommendations set out in the review and we believe our policy will legally achieve the proposed outcomes while ensuring a proportionate approach.

Introducing an independent football regulator will strengthen the governance and financial resilience of football clubs to protect the national game and clubs' links with their communities and fans. The regulator will not intervene in or seek to change the sporting fundamentals of the game we love—it will ensure a more sustainable future, with fans at its heart, for generations to come.

The regulator's primary purpose will be to ensure that English football is sustainable and resilient for the benefit of fans and the local communities football clubs serve. It will achieve this by:

- Operating a licensing system, where all clubs in the top five tiers of the men's English football pyramid will need a licence to operate.

- Establishing a new, strengthened owners' and directors' test to make sure a club's custodians are suitable and to protect fans from irresponsible owners.

- Setting a minimum standard of fan engagement and requiring clubs to comply with new FA rules on club heritage, giving fans a veto over changes to the badge and home shirt colours, as well as the strong existing protections for club names.

- Requiring clubs to seek regulator pre-approval for any sale or relocation of their stadium.

- Preventing clubs from joining breakaway leagues that do not have the support of the fans or that threaten the heritage or sustainability of English football.

- Having a backstop power to intervene in the distribution of broadcast revenue when the leagues fail to reach an agreement—subject to certain thresholds being met.

- Establishing a compulsory "Football Club Corporate Governance Code".

The regulatory regime will be designed to be proportionate and, as such, the regulator will not adopt a "one size fits all" approach. Instead, it will tailor any intervention to the specific circumstances it faces and in doing so will avoid placing unnecessary regulatory burdens on clubs. The regulator's approach will be advocacy-first: aiming to work constructively with clubs and then leagues to resolve issues wherever it can. Only where this has proven ineffective, or in the most urgent cases or serious instances of non-compliance, will the regulator have powers to intervene more directly or strongly.

This legislation also recognises that English football is a source of significant importance to fans and communities across the country. It will establish a new regulatory framework in a way that ensures the regulator must seek to minimise adverse impacts on financial investment in English football or on club competitiveness, and minimises the impact on sporting outcomes in general. This will balance the need for change to secure the long-term future of our national game and the need to restore fans' place at its heart with the importance of ensuring continued global success.

In developing these proposals, we have undertaken significant engagement with a broad range of stakeholders and experts. This has included regular meetings with the Premier League, the English Football League, the National League, the Football Association (FA) and the Football Supporters' Association (FSA), as well as official and ministerial-level meetings with clubs across the football pyramid. I want to thank all who have engaged with us throughout the entire process, and helped us shape the Bill.

We will continue to work and engage with industry, fan groups and across Parliament as the Bill progresses to ensure we can deliver on urgently needed regulation. Alongside the legislation, the Government have established a shadow regulator, which will act as a forerunner to the regulator with responsibility for set-up activity and preparatory work for the regulatory regime.

I would welcome the support of colleagues across both Houses as we take this important legislation forward.

[HCWS358]

Telegraph Media Group Ltd: Acquisition

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lucy Frazer): On 26 January 2024, I issued a public interest intervention notice (PIIN) in relation to the anticipated acquisition of Telegraph Media Group Ltd

(TMG) by RB Investco Ltd on the grounds of the need for accurate presentation of news and free expression in newspapers.

The PIIN triggered a requirement for Ofcom to report by 11 March on the media public interest considerations and the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) on jurisdiction and competition issues. I issued a statement on 12 March to confirm that I had received those reports and undertook to set out my “minded to” decision on the next step in this process: whether or not to refer the merger to a fuller phase 2 investigation.

On the basis of the regulators’ assessments, I can now confirm that I am minded to refer this merger to a phase 2 investigation on the grounds of the need for accurate presentation of news and free expression of newspapers.

The CMA has found that arrangements are in progress or in contemplation which, if carried into effect, will result in the creation of a relevant merger situation; a finding that is a prerequisite for me to be able to refer this matter for a further investigation at all. However, it does not believe that it is or may be the case that this merger has resulted, or may be expected to result, in substantial lessening of competition within a market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services.

Ofcom has found that it is or may be the case that the potential merger situation may be expected to operate against the public interest, having regard to the specified public interest considerations. In particular, it considers that International Media Investments (IMI), a majority partner in RB Investco’s parent company, may have the incentive to influence TMG in a way that could potentially act against the public interest in the UK by influencing the accurate presentation of news and free expression of opinion in *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph* newspapers.

I will be publishing both the CMA and Ofcom reports in due course, copies of which will be deposited in the Library of both Houses. I will also publish the letters to both parties setting out my “minded to” decision.

I am now required by legislation to allow the parties the opportunity to make representations to me before I reach a final decision. I have given them until 9 am on 25 March 2024 to respond.

I will aim to make a further statement on any decision I may come to as quickly as possible.

The pre-emptive action order I issued on 29 January 2024 will continue to apply to the merging parties and related entities until a final decision has been taken on matters described in the January PIIN.

In the meantime, given the ongoing quasi-judicial nature of this process, I am unable to comment substantively on the matter of this case.

I had also issued a PIIN on 30 November 2023 in relation to the anticipated acquisition of Telegraph Media Group Ltd by RedBird IMI, which was then RB Investco’s parent company.

The CMA has found that arrangements as described in the November PIIN are no longer in progress or in contemplation. I accept the CMA’s findings on this matter and this PIIN now ceases to be in force.

[HCWS357]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Brook House Inquiry: Government Response

The Minister for Countering Illegal Migration (Michael Tomlinson): The Government are today publishing their response to the Brook House inquiry. The Government are grateful to the chair of the BHI, Kate Eves, for her review and welcome this important contribution to ensuring the safety and welfare of those in detention. The response has been laid before Parliament as a Command Paper, CP 1041, and copies are available in the Vote Office and on gov.uk.

This inquiry, in which the Home Office was a core participant, was in response to an investigative current affairs documentary broadcast in September 2017, which included covert footage of abuse of detained people at Brook House immigration removal centre by a small number of contracted service provider staff. The inquiry was established on 5 November 2019 and published its report on 19 September 2023. The inquiry formally closed on 31 January 2024.

The aim of the inquiry was to establish the facts of what took place and ensure that lessons were learnt to prevent those shocking events happening again. The Government expect the highest standards from contracted service providers.

The Government wish to highlight the significant improvements that have been made since 2017 to uphold the welfare and dignity of those detained across the estate including strengthening safeguards, promoting a culture of transparency and improving the oversight of contractors’ performance. The Government are confident the measures taken so far in responding to the BHI have gone a long way to addressing many of the key concerns raised, and will continue to reflect on the findings from the inquiry ensuring that they are fully embedded into the development and implementation of new and emerging policy initiatives.

[HCWS356]

Petition

Tuesday 19 March 2024

OBSERVATIONS

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Labour's Clean Air Act

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that clean air should be a fundamental human right and has the potential to save millions of lives; notes that Labour's Clean Air Act would establish a legal right for citizens to breathe clean air and abide by World Health Organisation clean air guidelines; further declares that Labour's Clean Air Act would place tough new duties on Ministers to ensure air quality guidelines are met to bring in accountability for the Government; and further declares that Labour's Clean Air Act would grant new powers to local authorities to allow them to take urgent action on air quality.

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to urge the Government to formally enact Labour's Clean Air Act and take further steps to address the air pollution national health emergency in the UK.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Afzal Khan, *Official Report*, 31 January 2024; Vol. 744, c. 953.]

[P002903]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Steve Barclay):

The Government would like to thank the petitioners for raising the issue of air quality and the impact of air pollution on public health.

The UK is compliant with its 2020 domestic and international emission reduction commitments. This includes emissions of ammonia (with the inclusion of an approved adjustment), NMVOCs—non-methane volatile organic compounds—nitrogen oxides, PM_{2.5} and sulphur dioxide.

There remain a number of isolated NO₂ limit value exceedances, which is why Government have committed £883 million of funding under the NO₂ programme to bring these locations into compliance in the shortest possible time.

Latest published figures (up to the year 2022) show that emissions of most air pollutants for which we have reduction targets have reduced significantly from 2010 to 2022, with emissions of nitrogen oxides down by 48%, sulphur dioxide down 74%, non-methane volatile organic compounds down 19%, fine particulate matter down 24%, and ammonia remaining stable (-1% change).

However, the Government absolutely recognise that there is more to do to protect people and the environment from the effects of air pollution, including from transport, wood burning, industry and agriculture. This is why we are taking the significant and wide-ranging action to drive improvements to air quality as set out in our Environmental Improvement Plan 2023, which includes:

Preparing to consult on improving our regulatory framework for industrial emissions to better reflect our priorities for the environment and to support businesses in innovating and delivering net zero.

Reducing ammonia emissions by using incentives in our new farming schemes.

Challenging local authorities to improve air quality more quickly by assessing their performance and use of existing powers, while supporting them with clear guidance, funding, and tools.

Continuing our review of how we can improve air quality communications to the public.

This action is supported by the Environment Act 2021, which, among other important measures, makes sure that local authorities have the necessary powers to tackle emissions collaboratively in their local area to improve air quality. Since 2010 we have awarded more than £53 million to English local authorities through the annual Air Quality Grant scheme to support delivery of more than 500 local projects to deliver targeted pollution reduction measures in their area. As a result of our collaboration with local authorities, they have access to a wide range of options as they develop plans to address roadside pollution in a way that meets the needs of their communities, both pedestrians and road users.

We have also set two ambitious new targets for fine particulate matter under the Act: a maximum annual mean concentration of 10 g m⁻³ by 2040, and a population exposure reduction target of 35% by 2040 compared to 2018. We have focused new targets on fine particulate matter, as it is the pollutant which causes the most harm to human health. Our dual target approach will improve public health by tackling areas where concentrations are highest, as well as driving action to reduce exposure for all, maximising public health benefit. We have followed an evidence-based process, working with internationally recognised experts, to set air quality targets that are stretching, achievable and specific to our national circumstances.

As part of our commitment to tackling the health impacts of air pollution, the Government have funded a series of pilot projects that investigate how health professionals can effectively deliver air quality information to patients and carers through a 'Clean Air Champions' model, with the latest project involving recruitment of a cohort of 40 GPs across the UK.

The Government also make a wide range of information available to the public through the UK-AIR website, including forecasting, the latest local measurements from our nationwide monitoring networks, and health advice informed by the work of the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants. We are working with the Department of Health and Social Care and the UK Health Security Agency to undertake a comprehensive review of how we communicate air quality information to the public to ensure that people, and vulnerable groups in particular, have the information they need to protect themselves and understand their impact on air quality.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact the Secretary of State about this important issue. I hope you are reassured that the Government are committed to tackling air pollution, and that action is already being taken at both national and local levels to ensure that our air is safer to breathe for all.

ORAL ANSWERS

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PETITION

Tuesday 19 March 2024

	<i>Col. No.</i>
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS.	5P
Labour's Clean Air Act	5P

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
Tuesday 26 March 2024**

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Trade (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) Bill [Lords] [Col. 837]
Not amended, further considered; read the Third time and passed

Petitions [Col. 903]

Music Education [Col. 905]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall
Tutoring Provision [Col. 229WH]
UK Food Security [Col. 251WH]
Nagorno-Karabakh: Armenian Refugees [Col. 260WH]
Baby Loss: Coroners [Col. 285WH]
Child Trust Funds [Col. 293WH]
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Written Statements [Col. 43WS]

Petition [Col. 5P]
Observations
