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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Friday 24 May 2024

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: Before we begin today's business, I would like to pay tribute to Dame Eleanor Laing and Dame Rosie Winterton—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—who have both indicated that they will not be seeking re-election to this House.

Dame Eleanor has been a Deputy Speaker for more than a decade and succeeded me as Chair of Ways and Means when I was elected Speaker. Hon. Members may not be aware that as well as her role presiding over the Chamber, that office comes with a wide range of other responsibilities, including convening the Panel of Chairs, responsibility for Westminster Hall, and all the other things that I delegate that I do not want. [*Laughter.*] Thank you, Eleanor, for doing all that and for the service you have given.

Dame Rosie became a Deputy Speaker in 2017 after serving as Opposition Chief Whip through the 2010 Parliament. She has used her deep knowledge of the inner workings of this place to great effect in the Chair and has given us tip-offs when we needed them.

I should like to put on the record my personal gratitude and, I am sure, the gratitude of all Members to them both for their service to the House during their long and distinguished parliamentary careers. I know we will keep in touch, but I cannot thank them enough for all the help and support that they have given me. I personally thank you both for what you have done. We have achieved a lot during a difficult time.

I will share one thing with the House. The one thing I said I would never, ever get involved in was saying what women should wear in the Chamber—that was beyond me. The dress tsar was Eleanor. The rules were Eleanor's and enforced by Eleanor. I will never want to take up that role, so I can only thank her for choosing what women should wear. Any complaints, address them to Eleanor!

I thank them both for what they have done. Nigel, you will stay on, so we will say nothing about the other Deputy. I just want to say—it is on the record—thank you both. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Do enjoy your further careers—I am sure you will—and let us hope you are not too far away in the future.

Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Well, I am not sure we should take one, but I have to give in to Dr Thérèse Coffey.

Dr Coffey: I want to thank you, Mr Speaker, for all that you have done in this Parliament. It has been an extraordinary one, given the situation we went through with covid. The way this Parliament continued to function was truly innovative, recognising the challenges of the time.

Many people are standing down. I am not one of them, Mr Speaker—I hope to be re-elected to this House—but I am conscious that today is the opportunity for valedictory messages. The point of order that I am really trying to make is to understand how today's final debate will work. I hope that there will be an opportunity for everybody to speak, with priority given to those making valedictory speeches, but that there will be a chance, too, for constituency MPs who want to raise issues. I would be grateful for your guidance on when the debate is likely to start and finish.

Mr Speaker: I wish I could give an answer to that. Unfortunately, I am not in control of the Lords. Maybe it would be helpful if this House was. [*Laughter.*] As information comes through in real time, we will update the House. We have some things to get through. You are absolutely right that preference will be given to those Members who are standing down. I think we will have more time than we would expect. It does not look like an early finish for Members today. Who knows, but I think we could be running until after 6 pm, so there will be time, but, as I say, I will give preference to those who are stepping down.

Let me say to those Members who are stepping down: thank you for being part of this Parliament. Thank you for what you have done. We are going to lose some good friends. On both sides of the House, experience is leaving, and that is sad for all of us, but I wish you well in the next part of your careers.

BILL PRESENTED

SOLENT FERRY REGULATOR BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Bob Seely presented a Bill to establish a regulator of ferry services operating in the Solent; to make provision about the powers and duties of that regulator; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 5 July, and to be printed (Bill 231).

Sanctions

9.39 am

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): I beg to move,

That the Sanctions (EU Exit) (Miscellaneous Amendments and Revocations) Regulations 2024 (SI, 2024, No. 643), dated 14 May, a copy of which was laid before this House on 15 May, be approved.

In recent years, the UK has transformed its use of sanctions. We have deployed sanctions in innovative and impactful ways, including in our response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We have taken a rigorous approach, carefully targeted to deter and disrupt malign behaviour, and to demonstrate our defence of international norms. This statutory instrument covers several measures that will strengthen our sanctions regimes across the board and allow us to continue the work already being implemented across Government. I will run through each measure in turn.

First, in October 2023 the Government added a new type of sanction, the director disqualification sanctions, to the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018. This instrument uses that power to amend the UK's autonomous sanctions regimes, which will mean that the Government can apply it to individuals designated under these regimes. It will be an offence for a designated person subject to this new measure to act as a director of a company or to take part in the management, formation or promotion of a company. This will further prevent those sanctioned from deriving benefit from the UK economy. It is an important addition to the UK sanctions toolkit. This instrument provides Ministers with the flexibility to apply the new measure on a case-by-case basis. The Government will ensure that the measure is targeted and operates alongside the UK's full suite of sanction powers.

This instrument also enables the Government to issue licences to persons to allow them to undertake activity that is otherwise prohibited. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has been working closely with the Department for Business and Trade, Companies House and the Insolvency Service on the implementation of this measure.

The SI will also clarify the sanctions enforcement remit of His Majesty's Revenue and Customs. HMRC has well-established responsibilities for enforcing trade sanctions in its capacity as the UK customs authority. In recent years, however, the scope of trade sanctions has evolved beyond import and export prohibitions, to include matters that are outside HMRC's customs remit such as sanctions on stand-alone services.

Last December, the Government announced the decision to establish the Office of Trade Sanctions Implementation, within the Department for Business and Trade, in order to enforce these new types of measures under the civil law. Once it starts operating, OTSI will also be able to refer serious offences to HMRC for criminal enforcement consideration. HMRC will continue to have both civil and criminal enforcement responsibility for sanctions within its customs remit. This legislation is needed to clarify the sanctions measures for which HMRC is solely responsible for enforcing and those which it will investigate on referral from OTSI or another civil enforcement organisation.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): The sanctioning of the shadow fleet is an issue of great importance to the Foreign Affairs Committee, so I thank the Government for introducing this really important legislation. May I also thank you, Mr Speaker, for your support of the Foreign Affairs Committee during this Parliament, and put on the record my thanks to an incredible Committee that it has been an incredible honour to chair? I thank in particular my Clerk, Chris Shaw, who is truly incredible, as well as the rest of the Committee, who have been wonderful. On behalf of the Committee, I also thank the Government for all they have done on Ukraine, showing the leadership that means that Ukraine is still standing and fighting.

Will my right hon. Friend the Minister confirm that this is not just about tackling money and profits going into the Russian coffers, but about violations of maritime law, and that is why today's sanctions are so very important and why the Government are showing yet again that we will always stand by Ukraine?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention and, indeed, for her very kind words towards those who do a huge amount of work behind the scenes to enable us to bring forward a rolling level of sanctions legislation, which has continued to degrade Putin's ability to fund his war. We believe that sanctions across the piece have taken some £400 billion out of his capabilities. It is a continuum, and today's legislation continues that. She is absolutely right. The sanctions will continue to be tools that help us in many ways to keep ahead of those who wish us harm and who wish to support Putin in his illegal war in Ukraine, and to continue to hunt them down and to restrict their capacity.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister and I have worked on various things over the years. Those of us in all parties who are passionate about sanctions are still extremely worried about certain significant people in this country. A recent article in *The Times* suggested that a hereditary peer in the House of Lords is a main channel of Russian money helping certain political factions not only in this country but in the United States. Is it not about time that we did something about the upper House, which seems to have a small group of pro-Putin Members?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The hon. Gentleman has, as he says, been an incredible champion and supporter of all the work we have been doing cross-party to keep ahead of the sanctions. I know it is frustrating, but as I always say, people should pass evidence of any sort about individuals they consider are supportive of or enabling Putin, his regime or any military activity to the teams in the FCDO, which look day in, day out at being able to bring forward a package of evidence that would withstand judicial review. We stand ready. I will never comment on what we are taking in and what might come next, but the teams are working flat out to look at the evidence wherever they can. That is a continuum. I say that not only to Members of this House but more widely to those out on the frontline or working with businesses; where they see areas in which they believe that is happening, they should bring the information to us.

Mr Sheerman: Will the Minister accept some evidence I have about the Earl of Oxford and Asquith that I think should be urgently considered by all of us careful and worried about sanctions?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: If the hon. Gentleman would like to write to me later today, I will make sure that the team looks at the information as soon as possible.

Mr Speaker: Order. I know it is the final day for the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), but we still have rules in this House about being critical of Members of another House. Could he still use that caution, even on his last day in the House?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

This legislation is needed to clarify the sanction measures for which HMRC is solely responsible for enforcing on those it would investigate on referral from OTSI. It will therefore establish a consistent approach to the enforcement of trade sanctions. It will facilitate HMRC and OTSI working in close partnership so that they can robustly enforce all trade sanctions against Russia and other target countries using civil and criminal powers.

On the financial sanctions side, the statutory instrument also includes new obligations for persons designated under the Belarus regime to report any assets they own, hold or control in the UK or worldwide as a UK person to the relevant authorities. The measure is another step in improving the transparency of assets owned, held or controlled in the UK by designated persons and will strengthen the ability of HM Treasury's Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation—OFSI—to implement and enforce UK financial sanctions.

Importantly, the measure will act as a dual verification by enabling the comparison of disclosures by designated persons against existing reporting requirements that bite on firms such as financial institutions. Under the new requirement, the Government will be able to penalise those who make deliberate attempts to conceal assets to escape the effects of sanctions. An equivalent reporting obligation was placed on designated persons under the Russia regime in December 2023. The extension of this requirement to Belarus ensures alignment between the Russia and Belarus regimes, which is particularly vital given the frequent overlap of the Belarus and Russia sanctions regimes and the co-operation between the two states in relation to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

We have also included several sanctions on Belarus on the export of so-called battlefield goods, which include goods such as electronic equipment, integrated circuits and firearms and aerospace technology. These new measures prohibit the import of Belarusian aluminium into the UK—both the metal itself and aluminium products. Aluminium products are a sector of strategic importance to Belarus and have been its top export to the UK. Although the UK nexus with the Belarusian economy is limited, the signalling impact of our sanctions on Belarus is, and will remain, important. We keep these sanctions under constant review and reserve the right to introduce further measures so that the Lukashenko regime continues to feel the consequences of its lack of respect for human rights and its support for Putin's war.

Finally, we are also revoking the Burundi sanctions regime. That will remove an empty regime from the statute books. The decision in 2019 not to transpose

into UK law designations under the original 2015 EU sanctions regime reflected the improved political situation in Burundi. We do not have the same level of concern about the widespread political violence in Burundi that led to the original decision to impose the regime, so we have made no designations under it. As we set out in the recent UK sanctions strategy, the Government keep their regimes under review and respond to changing circumstances. We are committed to lifting a regime out of a specific measure or revoking a designation when the original objective is no longer served by its continuance.

To conclude, sanctions continue to play an important part in the UK, which continues to build on its already impressive sanctions capability. In the years since the landmark Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018, our approach to sanctions has evolved considerably to respond to the changes in the world. We will continue to work on sanctions to meet any new challenges. I commend the regulations to the House.

9.50 am

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): May I echo your comments, Mr Speaker, about the Deputy Speakers who are, sadly, stepping down at the snap general election? I also thank the Minister for setting out the purpose of the regulations, for her general cross-party working, and for her assurance that the Security Minister and the Treasury are looking at such sanctions, because they need a cross-Government approach. I also echo her comments about the excellent work of officials at the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation.

Labour supports the necessary and common-sense steps being taken in the statutory instrument. We will not seek to divide the House on it, although it might have been nice to have considered it last week, rather than this morning, from the point of view of one's nerves. As a party, we have consistently supported the Government in expanding the UK sanctions regime as it relates to a variety of countries, but particularly Russia since the unlawful and barbaric invasion of Ukraine.

We have also been candid and honest where we think that Ministers are not going far enough or have acted too slowly in holding global actors to account, or where there are considerable loopholes in our regimes that they continue to exploit. When it comes to the integrity of our sanctions regime, we have made it clear that Labour will work assiduously with partners and allies to counter the plethora of threats posed by actors across the world, will ensure proper enforcement, and will bring about the seizure of Russian state assets for the purpose of supporting Ukrainian reconstruction.

Before turning to the measures, I will raise a more general issue that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), the shadow Minister for Europe, has brought to our attention on several occasions. On the enforcement of monetary penalties for breaches of the UK sanctions regime, the OFSI website shows that only one penalty has been issued against the Russian regime since the start of the war in Ukraine. Can the Minister elucidate whether that is the case? Is the website out of date, or is there another reason why our enforcement is woefully low—in comparison with the USA, for example? I hope that she can supply clarity on that.

[Catherine West]

Labour supports the measures. They will prevent a designated person being a director of a company or overseeing the promotion, formation or management of companies, which is a necessary step in dismantling the ecosystem of illicit finance in which designated persons skirt sanctions and retain access to their wealth.

I ask the Minister for clarity on one point. Concerns have been raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House about the issuing of licences that grant designated persons dispensation to become exempt from given provisions. Can she clarify whether there will be ministerial oversight of the granting of those licences? Will the Treasury, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Department for Business and Trade work in lockstep to ensure cohesion and co-ordination when it comes to their granting? Last year, revelations came to light regarding a licence issued to none other than Yevgeny Prigozhin that allowed him to sue a UK journalist. That is what can happen when licences are issued without proper scrutiny. I hope that the Minister can provide clarity on their granting.

We also support the measures relating to the mandate of His Majesty's Revenue and Customs on Belarus, as well as the new reporting obligation on persons designated under the asset freeze to disclose the value and nature of any funds or economic resources that they own, hold or control in the UK. We also support the prohibition of export from the UK of items critical to Russian weapon systems and military development, in addition to certain aerospace goods; the prohibition of Belarusian aluminium imports; and the ban on the provision of ancillary services.

Why has it taken so long to bring in those prohibition measures? It seems unconscionable that well over two years since the onset of the war in Ukraine—do not forget that the House's Belarusian concerns were raised before then—UK items that could be used in Russian weaponry are making their way via Belarus to the frontlines, potentially aiding and abetting Russia's war effort against the people of Ukraine. We understand that any sanctions regime is a work in progress, but we cannot continue to countenance UK exports filtering through to Putin and the cronies who facilitate his war machine, especially given the situation in and around Kharkiv at present.

I thank the Minister for setting out the measures, though, as I said, they could have come earlier. I hope that she can provide clarity on the concerns that I raised. Labour will continue to support further expansion of our sanctions regime, but it is becoming ever clearer that the actions that we take today will have lasting ramifications. In devising such actions in the next Parliament, we will strive to be even bolder, swifter and more ambitious.

Mr Speaker: We come to a maiden speech. I call Chris Webb.

9.56 am

Chris Webb (Blackpool South) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. When it was announced that I was the winner of the Blackpool South by-election at 5.15 am on 3 May, I called on the Prime Minister to hold a

general election and give the rest of the country the same chance that my constituents had to vote for change and elect a new Labour Government. I thank the Prime Minister for taking me up on that, although I had not expected to be back out on the campaign trail quite so soon. I ask the whole House to join me in showing solidarity with my amazing—and now long-suffering—wife Portia, who has been at my side throughout with our amazing three-month-old son Cillian, who has brought so much joy and laughter to our lives.

Mr Speaker, I am grateful for this opportunity to stand before you, at short notice. It was the last opportunity to do so before a general election; had I not taken it, I risked a lifetime of being an answer to an obscure pub quiz question. I relish getting back on the doorsteps and speaking with fellow residents.

I thank my predecessor Scott Benton and his staff for all their work and support of local residents. I also thank Gordon Marsden for his personal support and tireless work in Blackpool South during his 22 years of service. Gordon is still fondly remembered and recognised for his huge contribution to my constituency and his pursuit of everyone having access to lifelong learning.

I would not be here today without two teachers who inspired and supported me as a young student with undiagnosed dyslexia. They helped me get to Hull University and on the road to this Chamber. Stephen Conway and Ken Winstanley, I thank you. I would also like to pay special tribute to Anne Hoyer, a Labour giant on the Fylde coast who we sadly lost last week.

The first Blackpool constituency was created in 1885, a decade after the opening of the railway began to bring an influx of visitors to our town. In 1945, a separate Blackpool South constituency was created; it became clear that it had an identity of its own. It is home to the famous pleasure beach, Blackpool tower and three piers. It has beaches with golden sands and, locals would argue, the best ice cream to be found anywhere at Notarianni's, which has served tourists and locals since 1928.

I am a child of tourism, my mum having moved to Blackpool to become a redcoat in the 80s, but I am also a child of public service. My dad was a Blackpool postie who wanted to help and support fellow workers in Royal Mail, and then those in BT and others throughout the Communication Workers Union. Thanks to the last Labour Government, my mum was able to retrain for free and became an early years teaching assistant at my primary school—her dream job. Before them, there was my paternal nan, Val Harman, a scout leader who dedicated her life to inspiring young people; my paternal grandfather, Brian Harman, who was a local independent councillor and who, at 83 years old, is still heavily involved in his local community centre in Burntwood; and my paternal grandfather, Dougie Webb, who served in world war two, fighting fascism in Europe and Africa, and who once guarded Winston Churchill at Chequers—all of them public servants.

While I was tracing my paternal grandmother's history, I was amazed to find out how deep my family's public service roots go. I discovered that my 14th great-grandfather, Edmund Moody, saved the life of Henry VIII. The King, out hunting with his hawk, tried to reach over a ditch with a pole, which broke. Edmund, a footman of the King's, leapt into the water and saved him from drowning. Sadly, the £6 a year pension and the land that he received as a reward did not stretch far enough to

help his descendant, my nan Margaret Webb, who had a tough life growing up in Liverpool. I was raised not on stories of brave footmen who saved kings, but on the stories of my nan and her sisters, who wore newspapers for shoes and battled TB during wartime without an NHS.

Through grit, determination and the welfare reforms of a progressive Labour Government, my nan and granddad were able to move into one of the first council houses built in Blackpool in the '50s, in Grange Park. She went on to run a small business in Blackpool's famous Abingdon Street market. Having grown up without proper healthcare, she knew the value of our NHS and how vital it is that we protect it. I will make it my mission in this place to do so in her memory.

Since the pandemic, Blackpool has seen record numbers of visitors rightly returning to our beloved seaside town, which has so much to offer, but while tourism recovery is central to our town's future, it is time to focus on the recovery of our communities beyond the prom. After years of austerity, and now during the cost of living crisis, all too often, the town that I am proud to call home is recognised as being at the sharp end of statistics for poverty, crime, mental ill health, low life expectancy and more. I will work tirelessly for those communities—hopefully in the next Parliament, too—and I hope to prove that politics has the power to change people's lives.

My heartfelt thanks go out to the people of Blackpool South, who put their trust in me on 2 May and elected me as their Blackpool born and bred Member of Parliament. My hometown's motto is "Progress". The town that pioneered municipal street lighting, electric tramways and modern tourism for the working classes has continued to forge ahead, even with deep spending cuts. Blackpool South now has a Labour MP. Under what I hope is an imminent Labour Government, I will fight to make sure that progress is possible for everyone in Blackpool, inspiring the next generation.

With economic stability, families in Blackpool South, where a third of children live in poverty, will not have to choose between heating and eating. Cuts to NHS waiting times will mean that those in Blackpool South, where people are twice as likely to die from heart disease by the age of 75 as people in wealthy areas, will be able to see a doctor when they need to. Hundreds more police on the streets will mean that in Blackpool, where weapon and knife offences have increased by more than 400% since 2015, safety will be restored to our communities.

But those painful statistics tell only half the story. Anyone from Blackpool will tell you to look behind the headlines, and beyond the bright lights of the illuminations, to find the real story of our town. It is alive with grassroots creativity and culture, has a thriving LGBTQ+ community, and a wealth of fascinating lives that could only have been lived in Blackpool. It is a story of community resilience, and of people who, with very little themselves, are always willing to give to someone else who has less. We have a wealth of community organisations and charities working hard to improve lives in Blackpool South. For their dedication to the town, I would like to thank Counselling in the Community and its inspirational founder Stuart Hutton-Brown; Blackpool Food Bank; Fylde Coast Women's Aid; Reclaim Blackpool; Skool of Street; Blackpool Street Angels;

Boathouse Youth; the Friends of Stanley Park; the St Peter's Church soup kitchen; and many others too numerous to mention.

In closing, I would not be standing here today without the support of our good friend and my mentor, Tony Lloyd. Tony was an incredible northern Labour parliamentarian who we sadly lost at the start of this year. "For me, politics is all about people," Tony once told me. "It's that sense of human solidarity that matters. If it's not about making people's lives better, don't be a politician." I am sad that he is not here to see me take my seat, but I will honour Tony's memory by serving my constituents in the same way that he served his, with people at the heart of my politics.

10.4 am

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): I rise to speak briefly on sanctions, but before I do so, I congratulate the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Chris Webb) on an excellent maiden speech. It is my privilege to give my final speech on the back of such a brilliant first speech. Although I am sure that those in Conservative central office will have other ideas, I hope it is the first of many speeches he gives in this House.

This place matters in terms of the way the UK competes with our adversaries and those who challenge us all around the world. It is not just what the Government do through the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, our embassies and other Departments. It is important that Parliament shows its resolve. As any colleague in the House who has had the pleasure of travelling to do the Government's business overseas will know, we are routinely beaten up by Ministers in foreign countries for things that are said on these Benches. Therefore, the resolve of the House to give resolute support to the Government of the day on our foreign policy is enormously important. We do that through not just the employment of our military, with whom it has been my great pleasure to work during the past four years, but the way we pull all the levers of government to achieve effect, through both hard and soft power, all around the world. Therefore, at the back end of this Parliament, these are important measures before us today and it is right that they are being put through with cross-party consensus.

My personal circumstances mean that I cannot be here later today, Mr Speaker, so I hope you will indulge me if I say one or two quick thank yous as I draw my parliamentary account to a close. As I segue from the strategic and the international, I wish, first, to thank all of those ministerial colleagues with whom I have had the pleasure of serving over the past four years, as we have gone through an incredible period of challenge to our nation. I have served alongside many who have made me a better person, through all their expertise and all that they have been able to teach me, but none more so than my right hon. Friend the Member for Wyre and Preston North (Mr Wallace). I have worked alongside him in some of the darkest moments our nation has faced in generations, during the pandemic, the Kabul airlift and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and that will stick with me as one of the proudest times of my life. It was a great honour to serve alongside you, Secretary of State.

I also wish to thank my partner, family and friends, particularly my children, Charlie and Tilly, for all their love and support over the past nine years. I thank my

[James Heappey]

staff, both in my constituency office and here in Westminster. I thank those in the Wells Conservative Association for their support and kindness. I thank my constituents for sending me here; whether or not they voted for me, representing them has been a huge privilege.

As you know well, Mr Speaker, our public discourse is changing for the worse and there is a toxicity to it now that means it requires real bravery to come to sit on these Benches. You have been a great protector of this House and of those who have the courage to sit on these green Benches, to speak up for their opinions and their constituencies, and to try to make a positive difference for those they represent and our country at large. Thank you for your leadership and guidance during this very difficult Parliament. Thank you for all your support—and for the occasional bollocking when I have gone for too long at the Dispatch Box.

I thank all colleagues, on both sides of the House. When we have disagreed, it has always been with courtesy and respect. Not enough people beyond this place see that that is the way the affairs of this House are mostly conducted. Most of all, I wish all good fortune and success to all those who will arrive here in July—in particular, my successor in the new seat of Wells and Mendip Hills—having been returned to represent their communities and to make a difference on behalf of this country, in what will be incredibly challenging times. It has been a great pleasure and a real honour to serve here.

Mr Speaker: It is a sad day. I call the Scottish National party spokesperson.

10.9 am

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Chris Webb) on his maiden speech. Normally after a maiden speech, we stand up and say “I am sure the new Member will be a doughty campaigner for his constituents,” and I am sure he will for a week! I wish him all the best and hope he is returned to this place. I also send best wishes to his son and his wife Portia. Being the spouse of a politician is probably the worst job in the world. It is incredibly difficult and I cannot imagine the rollercoaster she has been on in the past few weeks, so I send my solidarity to her particularly as she is dealing with the joys and otherwise of having a very young child to look after. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman.

If you do not mind, Mr Speaker, I would like to offer some brief thank yous; I will probably be speaking on the tribunals measure later, but now would be a more appropriate time for this, given the mood of the House. I thank a few of my colleagues who will no longer be in this place after the election. First, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), who during my time as deputy leader was the Chief Whip of the SNP. He was my confidante and my rock. We had many late-night sessions planning parliamentary mischief, not least in advance of the SNP walk-out that I think a number of people will remember very well. I appreciate everything he did for me during that time.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant), who is probably not someone who will be remembered for setting the heather on fire in this place,

but he has done absolutely everything that has needed to be done and everything asked of him, he has dealt with some incredibly technical legislation and he has always been there with words of advice whenever they were needed. I also thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie), who has been in this place for a long time; he will be stepping back from frontline politics but I am sure not from the SNP. He has similarly been a huge source of advice and, although we have had some very good-natured disagreements, I have huge respect for everything he has done, particularly for the SNP as a whole, and I have no doubt he will carry on doing that.

On a very personal note, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black), who has been one of my closest friends in this place and whose departure I have not quite reconciled myself with and I am not sure I will ever get over. I will miss her incredibly; I intend to come back to this place and she does not. I will miss her a huge amount.

On this specific debate and the sanctions regime, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) is not here today but has done a huge amount of work, as I am sure Members across the House will recognise, particularly on issues such as beneficial ownership and Scottish limited partnerships. We have concerns in relation to sanctions and this legislation represents a good step in closing some of the loopholes that friends and colleagues have been raising. In 2022, about 1,300 Scottish limited partnerships were started, only four of which were started by Scots. We have been campaigners on Scottish limited partnerships and have massive concerns still about the SLP regime and the fact it is used for money laundering in significant numbers. Despite their being called Scottish limited partnerships, they are technically nothing to do with Scotland, which is why we need Westminster to take action. It would be great if whoever is in the next Government could crack down on the abuses in SLPs.

We are pleased with some of the action taken on beneficial ownership but we do not think we are there yet. We need to ensure that #the sanctions regimes and everything associated with them are applied appropriately. If we do not know who actually owns something, it is very difficult to say that they cannot own it.

Progress is being made on the Companies House issues that we have mentioned before, but again, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central would make it clear that things have not gone far or fast enough in the reform of Companies House. Again, that is about transparency. When the Minister was speaking, she very much stressed transparency in the sanctions regime, and I am pleased with any moves that improve transparency. Clearly, we will not be opposing the SI today—I think it is a good thing—but there is still more to be done to ensure that sanctions regimes work appropriately, so that those people who should not be able to have directorships or ownership, or to money launder or make money through the UK, because we have designated them as responsible for or aiding war crimes or human rights abuses, cannot do so. There is more to do to increase that transparency so that those people can be cracked down on.

Lastly on sanctions, we are still concerned that the UK Government have been too slow to increase the number of individuals who have been sanctioned. Other

jurisdictions have significantly higher numbers of individuals who have been sanctioned, particularly from areas such as Russia. I appreciate the number of statements that the UK Government have made and the number of actions they have taken, particularly around Ukraine and the hard work that has been done to support its people, which I know is appreciated by people in the Ukrainian Government. However, I still think more could be done to ensure that this place is saying to Russia, “Your actions are inappropriate, and we are going to hit you where it hurts financially by increasing the number of individuals who are sanctioned—who are subject to those financial penalties and the inability to move money or have companies in these islands.”

I thank the Minister for bringing this SI forward today, and make clear that the SNP is absolutely supportive of it. Following the election, we look forward to significantly more work being done to tighten those loopholes and increase the number of individuals who are subject to sanctions.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Sanctions (EU Exit) (Miscellaneous Amendments and Revocations) Regulations 2024 (SI, 2024, No. 643), dated 14 May, a copy of which was laid before this House on 15 May, be approved.

Coroners

10.17 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Gareth Bacon): I beg to move,

That the draft Coroners (Suspension of Requirement for Jury at Inquest: Coronavirus) Regulations 2024, which were laid before this House on 2 May, be approved.

Before I address the purpose of the statutory instrument, I would also like to congratulate the new hon. Member for Blackpool South (Chris Webb) on his maiden speech. His efforts to avoid being the subject of a pub quiz, honourable though they are, may be slightly forlorn: I cannot recall too many occasions on which an hon. Member made their maiden speech on the same day that Parliament rose for the next election, so I suspect that he may still be the subject of pub quizzes into the future.

This instrument is an important part of the Government’s ongoing support for coroner services in their continuing recovery from the covid-19 pandemic. It extends for a further two years the disapplication of the statutory requirement for any inquest into a death involving covid-19 to be held with a jury, which will have practical benefits for the coroner service. Although the real-time impacts of covid-19 have diminished, they are inevitably delayed in the coronial context, as inquest backlogs—some of which were built up during the pandemic in order to manage wider pressures—continue to be worked through.

Natural covid-19 deaths would not normally be reported to the coroner. However, where the cause of death is unknown or suspicious or has occurred in state detention, covid-19 may be suspected as a contributing factor. Save for the provision that we are seeking to extend, section 7 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 would require any inquest into such deaths to be held with a jury, because covid-19 is a notifiable disease.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): As the Minister may be aware, I had two tragic cases in my constituency involving an inquest. Does he not think it is about time that we modernised the whole system and gave it more resources? If somebody has lost a loved one, waiting for five or six years and never getting resolution is not good. Is it not about time that we looked at the process and the training and did something a bit faster for people?

Gareth Bacon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, and I will take this opportunity to say farewell to him. His leaving will be a loss to the House. He makes a good point. The proposed measures will combat some of what he talks about, but there is a wider possibility for review as time moves on. We want coronial inquests to be carried out and expedited as quickly as possible.

As part of covid-19 easements, the Coronavirus Act 2020 removed the requirement for inquests into such deaths to be held with a jury, and the resulting resource pressures on coroner services, throughout the pandemic. To support continued pandemic recovery in the coroners’ courts, Parliament sanctioned the replacement of the 2020 emergency measure with a provision in the Judicial Review and Courts Act 2022 to amend the 2009 Act, so that for the purposes of jury requirement and inquests

[Gareth Bacon]

relating to notifiable disease, covid-19 does not count as a notifiable disease. That does not prevent the coroner from calling a jury in a covid-19 related inquest; they retain the discretion to do so, as with any other inquest.

The 2022 Act provision includes safeguards to ensure that covid-19 inquests are not treated differently on a permanent basis. Any extension is limited to two years, is subject to parliamentary approval, and must be justified by an assessment of the impacts on coroner services, were the provision to expire.

To evidence the need for extension of the provision, the Ministry of Justice asked all coroners in England and Wales to estimate their usage of the disapplication provision since June 2022 and to assess the impact on their case management if it is not extended. The response rate was only around 11%, but even among that small number of coroners, it was estimated that this provision has removed the requirement for a jury in around 530 inquests over the past two years. Without it, even that small sample would have increased the annual number of jury inquests across England and Wales—typically around 470—by about 50%. About half the respondents predicted a significant impact for their case management if this provision is allowed to expire. This is because, as the Liverpool and Wirral senior coroner put it,

“For each day of listing for an inquest without a jury, it takes a week’s listing with a jury”.

That wider context is important. Parliament is concerned about the impact of inquest backlogs on the bereaved, as the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) highlighted. The extension of this measure for a further two years will support coroners in their continuing efforts to reduce those backlogs, thereby promoting the Government’s objective of putting the bereaved at the heart of the coronial process. That should mean that, subject to any assessment closer to the time, I do not expect any future Justice Minister to need to seek Parliament’s agreement to a further extension from June 2026.

10.22 am

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): May I, too, put on record my thanks to you, Mr Speaker, and to the Deputy Speakers for looking after our interests during this Parliament? I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Chris Webb) on his brilliant maiden speech. We learned that his wife is called Portia. That is quite appropriate as we are discussing a justice Bill, given that Portia gave one of the most famous speeches on justice in “The Merchant of Venice”:

“The quality of mercy is not strained;

It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven

Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed;

It blesseth him that gives and him that takes”.

I am glad he aptly reminded us of his wife’s name during the course of his speech. I congratulate him, and I am sure we will be seeing each other again soon—without being complacent in any way about the electorate.

We will not divide the House on this measure. Given the state of the backlog impacting the coronial system, this is a sensible measure and the Opposition will not contest it today. However, it is worth discussing very

briefly the reasons for the backlog and the Government’s complete inability to get a grip on any aspect of our justice system.

After 14 years of Conservative rule, we have significant and, in some cases, record high backlogs across the whole of the courts and tribunals system. Victims and their families are waiting years for answers and for justice. It has become the “Department of Justice Delayed”, and we all know what that means. Labour will work at pace to tackle the backlogs that are grinding our justice system to a halt, and to restore public confidence in the justice system, but we do not seek to divide the House on this measure.

10.24 am

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Mr Speaker, I hope to catch your eye later in today’s proceedings in order to thank you and others, but now I will confine my remarks to this measure and to congratulating the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Chris Webb).

This is a sensible measure, and I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Minister, who is my constituency neighbour—at least for a couple more days—in his place on the Treasury Bench. He will know that the Justice Committee published a substantial report on coroners some time ago, and that we recently did a follow-up. This measure is wise and sensible, but there are broader issues that need to be tackled in the coronial system. I hope that either my hon. Friend the Minister—if we come back into government—or any future Government will look again at our report, because the one thing that we have not done and that we need to do is tackle the root problem of the coroners system, which is that it is piecemeal and sits outside the rest of the normal judicial framework.

I hope that a future Government will revisit our recommendation that we should move to a national coroners service. That would ensure greater consistency and that the same service is provided to bereaved families right across the country, which is currently not the case. It would be a small investment but would do the right thing. There is, of course, a role for juries, particularly in important matters. I welcome the changes that the Government have made to the representation of families at inquests, but, again, I hope that we can go further, particularly where state agencies and public bodies are concerned.

This is a sensible measure in the right direction, but I hope that we will grasp the nettle and have a proper national coroners service—something that has been recommended overwhelmingly in the evidence to the Justice Committee and championed by both Chief Coroners with whom I have had the pleasure of working, His Honour Judge Mark Lucraft and the recently retired His Honour Judge Thomas Teague. Both have done a fantastic job as Chief Coroners, and I want to pay tribute to both of them.

10.26 am

Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con): May I begin by echoing the comments by the Chair of the Justice Committee, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill)? In doing so, I pay my respects to him for his leadership of

the Committee over the best part of a decade—we see so much change and churn in this place. I pay tribute to him for his knowledge, his experience, his humanity, his enthusiasm, and his ability to get things done on the Justice Committee, of which I have been privileged to be a member for the last 18 months, and to bring positive change to many aspects of the justice world. I have no doubt that, whatever he does next in his professional career, he will continue to make great waves for those who are touched in some way by the justice system.

As my hon. and learned Friend said, part of the Justice Committee's work has included looking at the coronial system—first, in 2011 and, more recently, last year. We have looked at all aspects of the coronial system, not least the impact that covid has had on its ability to function in the way that we would all want. The Minister is right to take a pragmatic approach by providing some breathing space and capacity within the coronial system, so that many of the cases that need to move through the courts in a timely and compassionate way are able to do so. As has been alluded to, there are, of course, many other issues that need to be addressed.

Unfortunately, due to the sudden end to this Parliament, the report that the Justice Committee was on the very cusp of producing for the Government will now be in the form of correspondence that has gone to the Department. I hope that it will be looked at carefully in the next six weeks by Ministers, who will still be in post, as well as by officials, who, whatever hue the next Government happen to be, can put it straight on to the table of the next Minister—hopefully, it will still be my hon. Friend sitting on the Front Bench—so that we do not lose any of the momentum that, hopefully, the report will be able to achieve.

Mr Sheerman: I agree with what the hon. Gentleman, my Select Committee colleague, has just said about the Chair of the Committee, the hon. and learned Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill). Everyone knows that he is a good friend of mine. We co-chair the all-party parliamentary group on miscarriages of justice, and he has been a brilliant champion against such miscarriages. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that the hon. and learned Member will be missed dreadfully by the House of Commons. Indeed, what will the House do, with Bob and me both standing down?

Edward Timpson: The hon. Gentleman, my friend, was my first Select Committee Chair back in 2008, when I joined the Children, Schools and Families Committee—a baptism of fire, as it turned out. I have been fortunate enough to serve under a number of excellent Chairs over the years. I wish him well in whatever comes next in the varied and colourful life that I am sure lies ahead of him.

Some of the detail behind this statutory instrument needs the continued attention of Ministers and the Ministry of Justice. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst touched on the need to look at the potential unification of the service, the funding model, how it is resourced—we do not want to imperil the rule of law by making the service unworkable—potentially the need for an inspectorate so that we know how well the service is functioning and, as the Minister rightly said, ensuring that we put bereaved families at

the very heart of the process. I hope that this measure will be part of enabling many of those changes to take hold in the ensuing years.

Mr Speaker, as you will know, this is my second time around in Parliament—often called a retread, unfortunately—but, unlike Arnold Schwarzenegger, this time I will not be back. This is the last time I will be standing up in this place, so I want to take the opportunity to thank you and all your team for your support and friendship over 14 out of the past 16 years. I also thank my staff up in Cheshire, in Eddisbury, and in Crewe and Nantwich my previous seat: Roz, Dan, Lynn, Joel, Amy and quite a few others who came before them, including Sean, who has recently got on the candidates list and I suspect has a reasonable chance of finding a seat, as we still have about 100 or so that have yet to find a candidate. If he is selected, I wish him and his campaign extremely well, as I do my own candidate successor, Aphra Brandreth, who will be standing in the new seat of Chester South and Eddisbury. She is a first-class candidate. I very much hope that she will be able to join colleagues here after the general election.

Sir Robert Neill: With characteristic modesty, my hon. Friend has not mentioned his own very significant contribution on the Justice Committee and as a Minister, and the contribution that he and his family have made to the justice system. Everybody knows the work that he, his brother and his father do to deal compassionately and humanely with those who go through prison. They and he are absolute role models. I am deeply grateful to him for his friendship and support, and we wish him all the very best for the future.

Edward Timpson: I am extremely grateful to my hon. and learned Friend. I probably ought now to declare my interests, which are on the register, not least my brother's chairmanship of the Prison Reform Trust. They are there for all to see. It is true that there is clearly a gene in the Timpson family that makes us want to reach out beyond our own family to help others, whether that is through fostering or helping ex-offenders into work. That is something that, beyond Parliament, I want to continue to do.

Finally, I congratulate the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Chris Webb) on an excellent maiden speech. It took me back to mine in 2008, a nerve-racking moment, but he delivered his superbly. I wish him and his family all the very best. I had a very young child when I first came into Parliament, and actually I had another young child when I came into Parliament again—it is obviously a route to success in this place.

I want to thank my own family: my late mother Alex and my father John, for all the inspiration and guidance that they have given me, my wife Julia, and my four children, Sam, Elizabeth, Lydia and Nell. I hope that they will see a bit more of me now, and I hope that is the right thing to do.

Question put and agreed to.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wish to raise the statement that the Prime Minister made to Figen Murray, the mother of Martyn Hett, who was murdered in the Manchester Arena bombings. She had walked 200 miles from Manchester to London to mark the

[*Dame Diana Johnson*]

10.51 am

seventh anniversary this week of that terror atrocity. The Prime Minister rightly met Figen, at 1 o'clock on Wednesday this week. As you know, Mr Speaker, Figen has been campaigning for Martyn's law for several years, and in fact she gave evidence to the Home Affairs Committee during our pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill. We published our pre-legislative scrutiny report in July 2023, and we have not had a response from the Government despite there usually being a requirement for a response within two months.

The Prime Minister told Figen at lunchtime on Wednesday that the Bill would be rushed through Parliament before the summer recess—that was at 1 pm, as I understand it. Have you had any explanation, Mr Speaker, from the Prime Minister about why he would say that when four hours later he called the general election—clearly, no Bill could be rushed through before the summer recess—and about the fact that he misled Figen Murray?

Mr Speaker: First, we must be careful in the language that we use. I have no knowledge or information about what conversation took place. I will not speculate on what happened, and I know that the right hon. Lady would not expect me to speculate. However, she has put it on the record, and I think we will leave at that for now.

I will now suspend the House. The Division bells will ring to warn Members five minutes before the House returns.

10.36 am

Sitting suspended.

On resuming—

VICTIMS AND PRISONERS BILL: MONEY

King's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(b)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Victims and Prisoners Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by a Minister of the Crown.—(*Mike Wood.*)

Question agreed to.

VICTIMS AND PRISONERS BILL: WAYS AND MEANS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(b)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Victims and Prisoners Bill, it is expedient to authorise the making of provision under the Act in relation to income tax, corporation tax, capital gains tax, stamp duty or stamp duty reserve tax in connection with a transfer of property, rights or liabilities by a scheme under the Act.—(*Mike Wood.*)

VICTIMS AND PRISONERS BILL: ORDER OF CONSIDERATION

Ordered,

That proceedings on consideration of Lords amendments to the Victims and Prisoners Bill shall be considered in the following order: Lords amendments 35, 46, 32, 33, 47, 54, 98 and 99, 106, 1 to 31, 34, 36 to 45, 48 to 53, 55 to 97, 100 to 105 and 107 to 143.—(*Mike Wood.*)

Victims and Prisoners Bill

Consideration of Lords amendments

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I must draw the House's attention to the fact that financial privilege is engaged by Lords amendments 33, 44, 56 to 60, 63, 64 and 142. If those Lords amendments are agreed to, I will cause the customary entry waiving Commons financial privilege to be entered in the *Journal*.

Clause 15

GUIDANCE ABOUT INDEPENDENT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE ADVISORS

10.54 am

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Edward Argar): I beg to move amendment (a) to Lords amendment 35.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss:

Lords amendment 35, and Government amendments (b) and (c).

Lords amendment 46, and Government amendment (a).

Lords amendment 32, Government motion to disagree, and Government amendment (a) in lieu.

Lords amendment 33, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 47, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 54, Government motion to disagree, and Government amendment (a) in lieu.

Lords amendments 98 and 99, Government motions to disagree, and Government amendment (a) in lieu.

Lords amendment 106, Government motion to disagree, and Government amendments (a) and (b) in lieu.

Lords amendments 1 to 31, 34, 36 to 45, 48 to 53, 55 to 97, 100 to 105, and 107 to 143.

Edward Argar: It is a privilege to open this debate and bring the Victims and Prisoners Bill back to this House, slightly larger and more robust—a description that I fear, after nine years in this place, could apply to my physique too. A series of amendments were made in the other place that we believe strengthen the intentions behind the Bill.

At the outset, I express my gratitude to the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), and to the usual channels for their work in a very short timeframe to ensure that we are able to proceed with the Bill today. It is a pleasure to serve opposite the shadow Minister. He knows not only the huge respect but the fondness I have for him. Notwithstanding the six weeks of to and fro that I suspect we may have during the election, I want to put it on the record that I genuinely wish him very well for the future.

On Report in the House of Lords, we strengthened measures on victims to make it clear that compliance with the code is not optional and to bolster measures to

hold agencies to account for its delivery. We also introduced measures to give a stronger voice to victims of offenders whose conditional release is considered by the mental health tribunal, to make it clear that victims who have signed non-disclosure agreements can make disclosures to much-needed support services without fear of legal action, and to raise the threshold for the disclosure of counselling notes for victims so that they can now only be disclosed where they are of substantial probative value.

We also tabled an amendment in the other place yesterday to create a new ground within article 17 of the UK general data protection regulation specifically for the victims of stalking and harassment to request deletion of personal data related to false allegations. The amendment will help protect victims from further distress caused by the retention of such data. I put on the record my gratitude and tribute to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) for raising the issue and campaigning on it, and to my friend the noble Baroness Morgan of Cotes for pursuing it in the other place.

I turn to Lords amendments to part 3 of the Bill relating to infected blood. I am grateful, and I know this country will be grateful, to the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson) for her tireless campaigning in seeking to expose and tackle this national scandal and ensure that those who have been victims of it receive the support and compensation they deserve.

The Lords amendments do three crucial things. They impose a duty on the Government to establish a UK-wide infected blood compensation scheme within three months of Royal Assent; they establish a new arm's length body named the Infected Blood Compensation Authority to deliver the compensation scheme; and they impose a duty on the Government to make interim payments of £100,000 to the estates of deceased infected people where previous interim payments have not been made.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I am grateful to the Minister for all the work that he has done on the amendments, but could I ask him about the final group who have received not a penny—the parents who lost children and the children who lost parents? The Government have announced an additional £210,000 for those who were infected, to be paid within 90 days. There is no timescale for payments to people who have not received anything yet. Can he help the House understand when the payments will be made?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady, and I know that the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) has raised similar questions previously. I know that the right hon. Lady and others are in correspondence with my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

The questions raised are complex and detailed. My understanding is that Robert Francis will be spending June having those conversations with communities and with victims and families, so that he can work out the detail of the answers to those questions from the basis of what those families and communities want to see, rather than a Minister or anyone else pre-empting that. One of the key lessons that I and, I hope, the Government

[*Edward Argar*]

and this House have taken from the work the right hon. Lady has done is the need to listen to those affected, and that is what Sir Robert will be doing. I do not want to pre-empt that from the Dispatch Box.

Dame Diana Johnson *rose*—

Edward Argar: I suspect that the right hon. Lady will want to enlarge on the point in her speech, but of course I will let her come back now.

Dame Diana Johnson: I am grateful. I just gently point out to the Minister that Sir Brian Langstaff told the Government in April 2023—over a year ago—to get on and make these payments. I have to say that work could have been undertaken in that period to get to the point where payments could be made quickly, and it is very regrettable that that has not happened.

Edward Argar: I entirely note, and the House and country will have heard, the points made by the right hon. Lady. She participated in the statement by the Prime Minister and the subsequent statement by the Minister for the Cabinet Office, which set out the work that he has undertaken at pace to make things move forward. What we see in this Bill is a hugely important step forward, and I look forward to Robert Francis working at pace to ensure that the views of those affected are genuinely reflected in the detailed answers to the questions that the right hon. Lady has posed.

11 am

The Government amendments demonstrate our absolute commitment to delivering long-overdue justice to the victims. Too many people, whether they are infected or affected, have seen their life chances taken away, watched loved ones die needlessly, and endured the most terrible stigma, none of which should ever have happened. I can only hope that, with the inquiry's report published and with our firm commitment to compensate those touched by the scandal, the infected blood community know that their cries for justice have finally been heard. As I have said, a lot of that is a tribute to the right hon. Lady's work.

The Government have also tabled amendments to make reforms to provisions on those serving imprisonment and detention sentences for public protection. We will be further reducing the qualifying period to two years for those who were convicted when aged under 18. We will also allow the Secretary of State to have discretion to decide that recall should have no effect on the two-year automatic licence determination period, as well as requiring that an annual report be laid before Parliament on the support for those serving these sentences. I am grateful to Members of both Houses for the constructive way in which they have engaged with the Bill, and I am delighted that we will be able to complete its passage ahead of Prorogation.

I will set out the detail of the motions that we are bringing forward today in response to those outstanding issues. In respect of Lords amendment 35, we are seeking to amend the measure on the issuing of guidance about victim support roles in clause 18. Victim support roles operate across different settings, some of which are

devolved. The Senedd did not grant legislative consent for this measure as previously drafted. I am therefore tabling an amendment so that the duty to issue guidance applies to England and reserved matters in Wales only. I have consequently removed the requirement to consult Welsh Ministers on any guidance issues. I am grateful for the constructive discussions that have taken place in relation to the important principles that sit behind this clause, which aim to improve the consistency of support services provided to victims. I am confident that we can continue to work together so that victims have that consistency across both countries.

Lords amendment 46 is a technical amendment to move the clause on child victims of domestic abuse to the right part of the Bill.

We have accepted the principle of Lords amendment 32, which will place a duty on relevant authorities to co-operate with the Victims' Commissioner when requested. We heard the strength of feeling that a response to the Victims' Commissioner, as they do their important work, should not be seen as a favour. Instead, there should be clear and open co-operation as an integral part of enabling the independent scrutiny that victims deserve.

The Government's amendment makes a few minor changes. First, it extends required co-operation further than to simply assist the commissioner in monitoring compliance with the victims code. Instead, it requires co-operation in relation to any of the Victims' Commissioner functions, which include promoting the interests of victims and witnesses. Secondly, it adds important safeguards to make clear that any co-operation must be not only practical but appropriate. This protects against potential interference with activities that are rightly independent, such as the exercise of prosecutorial discretion. Thirdly, it future-proofs the clause by putting this duty on the agencies that deliver services under the victims code, rather than including a specific list of bodies, which may become out of date.

Lords amendment 33 seeks to require training to be provided to those with obligations under the victims code. Of course, agencies should and do have training in place to deliver the legislative duty to act in accordance with the code, but that training must be tailored to the specific function that each person is discharging, and agencies are best placed to do that. We consider that in placing an additional burden on the Secretary of State to implement a strategy for training, this amendment would be costly and inefficient. It would not be proper for an amendment from the Lords to place financial burdens on public authorities. We also consider that the more effective approach, as has been committed by the Government in the other place, is to include a requirement for agencies to report on the adequacy of their co-training as part of evidence in delivery of code entitlements. This gives us a route to identify and address ineffective training if it has led to non-compliance with the code.

Lords amendment 47 seeks to establish an immigration firewall and prevent the police from sharing with immigration enforcement data relating to immigration status. We disagree with this amendment because it would be inappropriate to impose a blanket restriction on the use of personal data in the circumstances to which the amendment relates. It would not prevent the perpetrator from informing immigration enforcement about the victim's immigration status and would impact on the ability to investigate crimes and support victims.

Lords amendment 54 seeks to place a statutory duty of candour on all public authorities, public servants and officials after a major incident has been declared in writing by the Secretary of State. The Government share the desire to see an end to unacceptable institutional defensiveness, but we cannot accept the amendment in the current form, because it would not sit neatly on top of the existing frameworks; it is not well suited to replace what already exists for major incidents and beyond; it does not take into account the nuances of different professions in the spheres of the public sector; and it could entail significant legal uncertainty.

This is a complex area, so we believe that it would be unwise to rush forward with an amendment, but we have tabled an amendment in lieu to require a statutory review to determine whether additional duties of transparency and candour should be imposed on public authorities and public servants in relation to major incidents. The review will need to be completed by the end of the calendar year, and following its completion, a report will be laid before the Government. It will be for whichever Government are elected in six weeks' time to determine what to do with that.

We are also bringing forward an amendment in lieu of Lords amendments 98 and 99. The Government amendment will ensure that those convicted of controlling or coercive behaviour who are sentenced to at least 12 months' imprisonment will be automatically subject to management under multi-agency public protection arrangements, or MAPPA. That will ensure that we effectively manage and target the most dangerous domestic abuse offenders.

A previous amendment was tabled in the other place to add domestic abuse and stalking perpetrators to those who qualify for automatic MAPPA management. Although there is a legal definition of domestic abuse, a specific domestic abuse crime does not exist, with the exception of controlling or coercive behaviour. Therefore, although well intentioned, the amendment would still have required criminal justice agencies to decide case by case whether a defendant was eligible for MAPPA management. Consequently, the amendment would have not achieved the intention of reducing or eliminating any scope for local discretion.

There are already provisions in place requiring offenders on licence to live only at an address approved by probation. Further, all offenders released on licence are subject to standard conditions for the duration of their sentence. There are numerous additional licence conditions that can be imposed to address specific risk factors. Licence conditions allow for information on perpetrators to be collected and used to manage risk. The amendment would therefore have little impact on public safety but would result in significant resourcing pressure for police forces.

Offenders who perpetrate other forms of domestic abuse, such as threats to kill, actual and grievous bodily harm, attempted strangulation, putting people in fear of violence, and stalking, including stalking that involves fear of violence, serious alarm or distress, are already automatically managed under MAPPA if sentenced to 12 months' custody or more. Adding the additional offence of controlling and coercive behaviour will ensure that the most harmful domestic abuse offenders will be automatically covered by the arrangements. The changes will mean that those offenders will automatically be managed in the same way as those convicted of sexual,

violent and terrorist offences. That is crucial, as controlling or coercive behaviour is a known risk factor for domestic homicide. Treating those offenders in the same way as the most violent offenders is critical to improve the safety of domestic abuse victims.

Lords amendment 106 would permit the Secretary of State to re-release recalled IPP—imprisonment for public protection—prisoners, and mirrors the power of the Secretary of State to re-release recalled offenders serving determinate sentences. That is now referred to as risk-assessed recall review, or RARR. That is an executive power and it will be for the Secretary of State to decide if or when to use it. The amendment also enables the Secretary of State to impose licence conditions on a recalled IPP offender's licence if the Secretary of State uses the power to release them on licence. We agree that that is the right approach, but we have tabled Government amendment (a) in lieu to make that change, together with further measures relating to release that come under the scope of the clause.

Government amendment (b) in lieu extends the eligibility of the home detention curfew scheme to offenders serving sentences of four years or over. The original aim of the scheme was to help suitable lower-risk offenders who have been in custody to reintegrate in society in a controlled manner. As sentences have become longer, it is important to revisit whether eligibility for HDC continues to allow all those who may be suitable, and whose rehabilitation may benefit from the scheme, to be considered as originally intended. That means looking again at whether offenders who were excluded solely due to sentence length or old curfew breaches, rather than due to any assessment of risk, should be considered in the usual way for HDC. Since HDC was introduced, sentences have grown longer, and they should no longer be the sole determinant of whether someone is eligible to be considered for HDC. A four-year sentence length or an old curfew breach are very blunt measures of whether an offender is lower risk or suitable for HDC.

The amendment increases the number of offenders eligible for HDC, but does not extend the range of offences that make an offender eligible for it. All sexual offenders and serious violent offenders are excluded from the scheme, as are those subject to Parole Board release. Those convicted of offences that are often associated with domestic abuse, such as stalking and harassment, are also excluded, as are many other people, including category A prisoners. There is also a robust risk assessment to ensure that offenders are released only if there is a plan in place to manage them safely in the community. In every case, that includes a curfew backed up by electronic monitoring. Finally, Lords amendment 46 is a technical amendment to move the location of the clause headed "Child victims of domestic abuse" to the right part of the Bill.

I would like to take this opportunity to put on record my gratitude to the Clerks, the shadow Minister and all my officials who have worked on this important piece of legislation: Nikki Jones, Katie Morris, Donna Bromyard, Elizabeth Bates, Isla Scott, Emily Halliday, Claire Anderson, Tomos MacDonald, Anna Webb—there are a few more, Madam Deputy Speaker—Alex Brown, Gaby Perrot, Liam Walsh, Aodhbha Bassani, Jess Cowan, Michael Rimer, the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel drafters, Joel and Camilla, and my amazing private secretaries, Ben Street and Amelia Prusinski. They have done an amazing job on this legislation.

As I have said to the House, this Bill has the central objective of ensuring that victims are treated as participants in the justice process, rather than bystanders. The Bill delivers significant, positive changes by strengthening victims' rights and the role of the Victims' Commissioner, providing protections for victims, and creating an independent public advocate—I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) for their work on that. The Bill creates an arm's length body to finally move things forward in respect of compensation for infected blood scandal victims, has measures for reforming the parole system, and brings forward reforms relating to IPP prisoners. The Bill has been a long time in the making; getting it into law will be a major step forward in strengthening the voice in our criminal justice system of victims of crime and of major incidents.

This is my last time at this Dispatch Box in this Parliament, and my last time speaking in this Chamber as the Member of Parliament for Charnwood, because the seat that I have been proud to represent for nine years is being abolished in the boundary changes, although I hope to be returned as the Member for the new Melton and Syston constituency in the general election. May I take the opportunity to thank all colleagues? I particularly thank my constituents in Charnwood and my fantastic staff, Steph Bradshaw and Fred Seaman, who do so much for my constituents, day in, day out. With that, I commend these measures to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the shadow Minister.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): This is the last time that I intend to speak from the Dispatch Box in any Parliament. Actually, I have one more statutory instrument to do, so that may not be quite true.

Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you very much for calling me to speak. I thank you for your service to this House in many different capacities over the entirety of my parliamentary career. I hope it does not cause offence in any other quarters if I say that you are my favourite Deputy Speaker, and I am sure that others share that opinion. That is in no way casting aspersions on the quality of your colleagues, but we have known each other and been friends for many years. I wish you good fortune in whatever you do after you leave this place.

I extend equal thanks to the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) for the way he conducts himself as a Government Minister. The way that he deals with colleagues from across the House—with shadow Ministers, Back Benchers and others—is exemplary. He is a class act in that regard, and a model of what many of us should aspire to. I have been a Minister, and I know what a difficult job it is, and what a difference it makes to have a Minister in a Department who takes Parliament, and what Members of Parliament say, seriously; does their best to accommodate opinions and measures suggested by other Members of Parliament; and does not think that the Government have a monopoly on wisdom, or on measures when they bring a Bill to this House. The Minister is prepared to engage in debate and consider amendments, and I thank him for the way in which he conducts himself in this place.

As she is in her place, I will mention the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Nickie Aiken). Some Members may be aware that many years ago she was a pupil at Radyr Comprehensive School when I was a teacher there, so I did not think that she would leave the House before me.

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): Or be a Conservative!

Kevin Brennan: Indeed. I was obviously a lousy teacher, as she ended up a Conservative Member of Parliament, but I wish her well in the future as she leaves this place. I also send my well wishes to the Chair of the Justice Committee, the hon. and learned Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill), who is a friend from across the House, and who conducts himself in a manner that we can all aspire to.

11.15 am

As we stand here at this critical point, we are reminded of how significant the Bill is. I am pleased that the Government have come to their senses and given the British public the opportunity to go to the polls and have their say on who will run the country, but that should not come at the expense of victims. That is why we welcome the discussions, held through the usual channels, that allowed us to arrive at what we have today.

We will support the measures outlined by the Minister. Victims have waited for over eight years, and eight Justice Secretaries, for legislation addressing the failures and injustices that they face. Supporting victims is a priority for Labour. In the spirit of bringing forward the overdue changes to our criminal justice system and beginning the work of trying to restore public confidence in it, we are pleased to support the Bill. We have strived to be collaborative throughout, and I think the Minister has acknowledged that. We recognise the Government's willingness to negotiate in the final hours of this Parliament.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the exemplary efforts of my predecessors, who did most of the heavy lifting on the Bill before I took on this role: my constituency neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin), and my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves). I also extend my thanks to the Minister for the cordial and constructive approach he has taken throughout the Bill's progress.

The Labour party is resolute in its commitment to putting victims back at the heart of the criminal justice system, and we recognise the importance of not only listening to them, but going further and delivering robust support to them, empowering them and enhancing their rights. On the duty to collaborate with the Victims' Commissioner, it is heartening to know that the hard work conducted in opposition does sometimes get recognised and is used for the benefit of the public. The success of Lords amendment 32, which introduces a duty to collaborate with the Victims' Commissioner, is a perfect example of the effort exerted by the Opposition paying off.

Labour has been clear that it is imperative that we strengthen the powers of the Victims' Commissioner. Although we sought to go further than we have been able

to while in opposition, we recognise that the new duty on justice agencies to co-operate with the holder of the commissioner role is a useful start. We remain committed to recognising the significance of the Victims' Commissioner and the desperate need for that office to be strengthened. It is long past time for the system to be truly accountable for the needs of victims not being met, so we are glad that we are taking this step towards having a fully empowered Victims' Commissioner. We have listened to the calls of previous commissioners and victim support services and will continue to do so. We are firmly committed to further strengthening to commissioner's powers, should we have the privilege of sitting on the Treasury Benches in a few weeks' time.

On part 2 of the Bill and the provisions concerning the victims of major incidents, we were pleased to see, through Lords amendment 54, that our colleagues in the other place understood the importance of the introduction of a duty of candour for public bodies. I thank my colleagues in the other place for their hard work, and particularly Lord Ponsonby, our Front-Bench representative, for his evidently persuasive contribution when moving the amendment. I welcome the statutory review that the Minister announced, which is provided for in the Government amendments.

Labour is committed to introducing a statutory duty of candour. It is as simple as that. And we are absolutely committed to ensuring that public authorities and officials co-operate with official investigations in the wake of public disasters, as they should if they are to act in the public interest. In the wake of several high-profile and devastating miscarriages of justice, this is more important than ever. Only then can we ensure that we end evasive and obstructive practices following state-related deaths.

Although, to date, we have been dealing with a Government who have dragged their feet a bit on this issue—I hope the Minister does not mind my saying that—we have at last had the opportunity to secure agreement in the Bill, and it now remains only to finalise the all-important last details of how that duty of candour will work in practice. Labour will work on that from our earliest days in government. If we win the election, we will make this change.

On the infected blood scandal, it would be remiss not to refer to my constituent Sue Sparkes, who visited the House this week. She was at first, it could be described as, elated by Sir Brian Langstaff's report, but she then described to me how she became deflated as the Government made their statements to the House regarding compensation.

I am in complete agreement with my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson), whom I worked with on this issue for many years, long before I took my current role. She is absolutely right in what she said. I remember both she and I a year ago from the Back Benches calling on the Government to get on with the design and payment of these compensation payments to the victims. I, too, am very sad that that work has not been done in the meantime, it would appear.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way with his typical generosity. Does he agree that it is now important to move quickly? The Cabinet Office needs to meet and engage with the infected and affected community to

make sure the compensation payments are right, and to ensure that the community is represented on the compensation authority board.

Kevin Brennan: The hon. Gentleman is right, as he often is. I completely endorse his remarks. I thank him for the £50 he will pay to charity after losing a bet with me that there would be a referendum on Scottish independence by the end of this Parliament. I put that on record, not because I do not trust him but because I said that I would send him the name of the charity after today's debate. He is a man of honour and a man of his word, so I know he will pay up.

On a serious point, I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution on this important issue. His background in the trade union movement means that he will always be thoughtful about the essential job of helping the weak against the strong, which is what we are trying to do in this place.

I should also pay proper tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North. A few months ago, her amendment to hold the Government's feet to the fire on this issue caused them to suffer possibly their only defeat in this House during this Parliament, which is quite an achievement.

To echo Sir Brian Langstaff, we must tackle the lack of "openness, transparency and candour" that has left victims suffering for decades. We welcome the movement towards this important milestone, and we look forward to seeing victims get the financial redress they deserve sooner rather than later.

I should say that Les, the husband of my constituent Sue Sparkes, died in 1990 as a result of receiving infected blood.

There has been a lot of discussion and work, involving colleagues from all parties, to recognise the considerable concern surrounding sentences of imprisonment for public protection. IPPs are and were a stain on our nation's criminal justice system, and we have acknowledged our role in the past. It is right that IPP sentences were abolished, and we share the concerns that lie behind many of the proposals suggested by colleagues, both here and in the other place, in relation to these sentences and prisoners.

We have continually sought to work on this issue constructively and on a cross-party basis, wherever possible, which is why we are pleased to support multiple Government concessions on this matter, including Lords amendments 103 and 107, agreeing to a new annual report and provisions for those sentenced to detention for public protection. I pay tribute to our colleague Lord Blunkett, who has done a great deal of work, perhaps to underdo some of the things he might have been responsible for many years ago.

Progress for those remaining on IPP sentences and on licence in the community is pivotal. We want to ensure that any solutions proposed are robust and assessed with public safety properly in mind, as the Minister rightly said. In government, Labour will work at pace to make progress and will consult widely to ensure that our actions for those on IPP sentences are effective, in their interest and based on the evidence in front of us.

On the MAPPA issues in the Bill, we are glad to have agreed on an overdue and important change in the arrangements in place to protect victims and the public

[Kevin Brennan]

from the terrible blight on our society that is domestic abuse. When the Bill passes, offenders sentenced to more than 12 months for the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour will now be automatically included in the multi-agency regime that exists for violent and sexual offenders. That follows strong support in the other place for more rigorous safeguards in such cases, where too often we see women in particular left to face repeating and escalating patterns of abuse within the relationships where they should be most safe. Labour has big ambitions in government to tackle violence against women and girls in particular—far beyond the commitments in the Bill—but we are nevertheless proud to have put this marker down and to support this measure.

Labour's commitment to reforming the criminal justice system to ensure that victims are more than just bit players is unwavering. We are pleased to have supported and helped to improve the Bill. Our essential additions, from empowering the Victims' Commissioner to introducing a duty of candour for public bodies, have highlighted our commitment to the rightful place of victims at the centre of the justice process.

We welcome the Government's movements in the right direction on pivotal issues such as IPPs and on the Infected Blood Compensation Authority, notwithstanding the remarks I made about the slowness of movement to get compensation out to victims. I thank the Minister for his openness in accepting some of these changes. I look forward to the Bill's conclusion—very shortly, I hope—and hope that the Act will be a step towards a new era of transparency and advocacy for all victims of crime.

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

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Madam Deputy Speaker, as we leave the House together, may I start by wishing you the very best for the future? I remember, as a keen young Opposition spokesman, being your shadow when you were Local Government Minister, and I could never have had a more charming or skilful opposite number. I learned a lot from that.

I see sitting behind me two of my oldest friends in politics: my hon. Friends the Members for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) and for Cities of London and Westminster (Nickie Aiken). We have been around the block—literally—in various local government campaigns in London over many years. It is a certain irony that we have all decided to depart at the same time; that will probably be cause for a good lunch at some point. I have not forgotten that I owe the Minister one as well.

I pay tribute to the Minister for his approach. I totally agree with the shadow Minister, to whom I am also grateful—he has been a good friend in relation to this and to issues about the performing arts and music, which we have both championed in this place—as well as the SNP spokesman.

The Minister has been exemplary in his approach. We are fortunate in the team of Ministers that we currently have at the Ministry of Justice, including him and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and Lord Chancellor—although he is not here today,

his name is on the amendments—who is a quite exceptional lawyer, a quite exceptional Lord Chancellor, a star in this Chamber and somebody whose integrity and commitment to the legal system will be long recognised.

These are improvements to the Bill—I am glad about that. May I also thank the Ministry of Justice officials? I have dealt with many of them over the years. I am sorry that they have had to put up with some of the things that the Justice Committee has lobbed at them over that time, but there has always been a great, constructive spirit. In that context, I particularly welcome the fact that the Government have taken on board a number of the Select Committee's recommendations in relation to our pre-legislative scrutiny of what was then simply the Victims Bill and became the Victims and Prisoners Bill, as well as some, although not all, of our recommendations in relation to IPP prisoners; more on that in a moment.

The scrutiny of the Victims Bill was particularly led by the right hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), who served as my deputy on the Committee before she was rightly recalled to the Opposition Front Bench. I thank her too for the support she gave me on the Committee and the particular work she did for her constituents and for a better and fairer approach for victims in these cases. I also congratulate the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson), whom I first met when we were both elected to the London Assembly in 2000, for the exceptional work she has done in relation to infected blood. We can work cross-party on these matters and she has performed a great service.

11.30 am

In relation to some of the remaining parts of the Bill, I am glad the Government have moved on the matters set out here. The co-operation with the commissioner is good news and I think we all know that the duty of candour is valuable and to be welcomed; perhaps it could go further, but let us accept it is a step in the right direction.

The use of public protection and powers in relation to the recall of prisoners and the extension of home curfew are sensible measures. Home curfew is important. I will say it yet again, because I may not have another chance to do so: we need to be more intelligent as a society in the way we use imprisonment, which is expensive, and the way we use it at the moment is not always effective. Alternative tools in the sentencing box, including the use of home detention curfews, enable us to get a better approach to balancing punishment, which is legitimate, with rehabilitation, which is what we have to aim for if we are to reduce reoffending. If we want to reduce the number of victims of crime, we want to reduce reoffending. Home detention curfews and other measures are a valuable step towards doing that. They are by no means the whole answer, but any advance is to be welcomed.

I regret that in the wash-up we do not have the Sentencing Bill, because that would have taken many more valuable steps towards a more balanced and rational approach to sentencing policy. I hope whoever is in government after the general election will return to the issues in the Sentencing Bill, not least because many of them had cross-party support.

The campaign on IPP prisoners has attracted massive cross-party support both here and in the other House. Our Committee took compelling evidence on it, and in particular I want to thank those who championed it in the other place, including my good friend Lord Moylan, and Lord Blunkett. I wish the Government had gone further and introduced the resentencing exercise proposal put forward powerfully by Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd, the former Lord Chief Justice; I still think there is merit in that.

I would like to end by paying tribute to someone who, sadly, cannot hear the words because yesterday I was at Middle Temple for the memorial service to the late Lord Brown of Eaton-under-Heywood, one of the most exceptional men I have ever met. He was an exceptional lawyer, one of the last of the Lords of Appeal in Ordinary—the Law Lords—and one of the first of the Supreme Court. At an age when many would be putting their feet up, he was regularly in the House of Lords until a month before he died. He regularly championed the case of IPP prisoners, and coined the phrase

“stain on our criminal justice system”.—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 7 September 2017; Vol. 783, c. 2074.]

Those were Simon’s words. He will be pleased, up wherever he is, to have heard the words from the Minister that there will be movement, but I hope that one day we will return to the Simon Brown memorial amendment, the resentencing exercise amendment. That exceptional person, who inspired me and many others, and his family will deserve that, because if it is possible to be both a lawyer and public figure and a great human being, Simon Brown epitomised that, and that is something we can perhaps all learn from.

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

Chris Stephens: It is a pleasure to follow the Chair of the Justice Committee, the hon. and learned Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill), and I wish him all the best for the future and thank him for the work he did as Committee Chair. One of his memorable moments in the last few months was to chair the Committee sitting in which I and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) were pushing the issue of the Horizon postmasters in Scotland and what that meant for us. That was a very intelligent session, with many legal experts, and he chaired it in an exemplary way that allowed the debate to continue. I have always found him to be one of the more interesting Members of the House, when it comes to discussing such matters, and very fair. I wish him all the best.

I also wish you, Madam Deputy Speaker, all the best for the future. Like the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), I am going to name you as my favourite Deputy Speaker. You always used to tease me that I have a glint in my eye before I am ready to speak in the Chamber, and I would always be coy when you suggested I was going to be speaking next. I genuinely give you my good wishes, and thank you for all the kindness you have shown me as an individual and all the encouragement you give all hon. Members of the House in carrying out our duties, both to our constituents and here in the Chamber.

What an amazing week it has been. It was suggested that this Bill might not make the wash-up. If that had been the case, there would have been an almighty furore from the infected and affected community. I think pressure was applied by Members in this House, Members in the other place, and indeed the campaigners, to ensure that we got the Bill over the line. I am going to confine my observations to the amendments relating to the infected blood compensation scheme and setting up the Infected Blood Compensation Authority, which I welcome. I also welcome, as I did earlier in the week, the excellent appointment of Sir Robert Francis as head of the authority and of the compensation board.

Like many other Members, I am here to fulfil a constituent commitment, in particular to Cathy Young and her two daughters, Nicola and Lisa. It was one of my first constituency cases: Cathy Young came to see me at Darnley community centre. I had known a bit about the issue—in Scotland we had the Penrose inquiry, which was untidy to say the least—but I got more and more interested, and more and more passionate, because it was a clear injustice. As the hon. Member for Cardiff West suggested, I am a great believer that when it is time for an election, you do not shy away from it, but I do think that some of the events of the past couple of days have been a pity.

On Monday, when my constituent Cathy Young was down here in London, along with her daughters, I think some people in the Government knew that the general election was going to be called two days later. I do not believe that the Paymaster General did, but when he was on his feet delivering a statement about what the compensation scheme would look like, I believe that some people in the Government knew that the election was going to be called the very next day. We are in an unfortunate position, in that there are now a lot of questions that need answered and clarified before Parliament is dissolved. I am going to raise some of them in my speech, because we do seem to be in a bit of flux, which is a pity. I am going to take this opportunity on behalf of my constituents and the infected blood community, who have taken Members of this House to their hearts, as we have taken them to our hearts.

First, according to the scheme and the discussions that have taken place with the Cabinet Office, it looks as though the parents of a deceased infected child will receive the same amount as those of a living infected child. That does not seem right to me, and I think it needs to be clarified. There is also no mention of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease infection among all this paperwork.

A lot of clarity is needed on the confusion between what is a widow’s payment and what is an estate payment. The expectation appears to be that widows will distribute the money paid as an estate payment, but unfortunately that might be difficult, given the sad reality of life that some families do not speak to each other, for all sorts of reasons. It is suggested that widows would receive £16,000, which seems to be less than they receive at present. The Government are also suggesting that the support scheme payments will end, which is leaving a lot of people distressed and very worried about losing those monthly payments. We need clarity and more discussion with the infected and affected blood community to ease some of those concerns.

[Chris Stephens]

We also need clarity about individual heads of loss for the infected, because, frankly, we all seem to be in the dark. The uplift for psychological effects has also been omitted. Will that be covered by the injury impact award? At the moment that is not clear, so that is something else that we would want to discuss. There needs to be a discussion about what psychological support services there should be going forward, because this has been a difficult and emotional week for many people. Lastly—this is very important—if people accept the interim payment of £210,000, does that mean they are accepting all the compensation values that are currently on the UK Government website?

It seems to me that we need a lot of clarity and a lot more discussion. I welcome the fact that the authority has been set up and that this place has forced the Government to move on the issue. This has been the House at its best—just as many Conservative Members voted for the amendment tabled by my good friend the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson) as did Members in other parts of the House. This is a collective, cross-party attempt to address this injustice. I hope that those questions will be answered, either in writing or in discussions with the infected and affected blood community, because we are all here to make sure that they get the justice they so richly deserve. Any further delays will mean justice denied.

Dame Diana Johnson: It is a real pleasure to follow my friend the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens). I want to say a big personal thank you to him for all his excellent work over the years on the issue of infected blood, and for the important role he has played in the all-party parliamentary group on haemophilia and contaminated blood, to get to where we are this week.

I also want to comment on the remarks of the Chair of the Justice Committee, the hon. and learned Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill). I am very sad that he is leaving the House. I have looked up to him as an excellent role model for how to chair a Select Committee with grace and charm, but also with steel. He has not shied away from the effective scrutiny that is so vital to the functioning of this House through the Select Committee system. I wish him all the very best for what he goes on to do next.

As we are talking about Select Committees, I wonder whether I could also pay tribute to the members of the Home Affairs Committee, some of whom might not return to this House. I wish them all the very best for all the work they have done as Select Committee members. I also pay tribute to the work of the Clerks and the staff of the Home Affairs Committee over the past two and a half years that I have had the great honour and privilege of chairing it. In particular, I want to mention Jo Dodd, our current Clerk, David Weir, who was our previous Clerk, and Mariam Keating, the second Clerk, who stepped up when we needed her to during an interregnum between our first Clerks. I thank all of them.

The remarks that I want to make about the Lords amendments are very much in the spirit of what has been said about the infected blood scandal. As the hon. Member for Glasgow South West said, what a week this has been. We started on Monday with the report from

Sir Brian Langstaff, which followed six years of evidence heard by the independent public inquiry, which was absolutely damning about the role played by doctors, the NHS and the state, and a vindication of all those who have campaigned over the decades. Finally, we have the truth.

11.45 am

There were a lot of ghosts in that room in Westminster Central Hall. A lot of people who should have been there were not. I want to pay tribute to someone I got to know, Nick Sainsbury, who lived just outside Hull and had been a pupil at Treloar's boarding school. He was a haemophiliac and had been infected with hepatitis C and HIV as a young boy. He spent his life campaigning to try to find out what had happened and to get justice. Very sadly, he died last year, before the final report was published and before he could see the start of justice for those who have been infected and affected.

I also want to pay tribute to my constituent Glenn Wilkinson, who started all this off for me back in 2010, at a time very similar to this. A general election had just been called and I was holding my final surgery as an MP, and he came to see me—although I have since learnt that he was so disillusioned with everything that he almost did not come to see me. I said, “If I am re-elected in the next Parliament, I will try to help you.” That is what started my 14-year journey, working with Glenn and so many others on this campaign.

Finally, I want to say a big thank you to Caroline Wheeler, the political editor of *The Sunday Times*, who has relentlessly used her position as a journalist to shine a light on this issue. She has written a book, and throughout all of this she has been making sure that politicians cannot forget what happened and cannot forget this search for justice.

Let me now turn to the Lords amendments. I thank Members of the other place, and the Ministers and shadow Ministers, for all the work they have done, but I want to remind the House how we ended up with this section of the Bill. On 4 December last year this House defeated the Government, with 246 votes to 242. Why did that happen? It happened because in April 2023 Sir Brian Langstaff had produced his second interim report, in which he said that in all conscience he could not wait to tell the Government that they needed to start to pay compensation. He said that

“wrongs were done on individual, collective and systemic levels”, and that people were dying. We know that currently people are dying at a rate of one person every three and a half days. Parliament defeated the Government—and I am very proud of this Parliament for doing that—because the Government were not doing what they should have done. Parliament made them act and put this provision into the Bill. That is what started the whole process, and it is important to note that it was cross-party.

Do I need to curtail my remarks, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am conscious of the fact that the debate must finish at 12.51.

Dame Diana Johnson: I absolutely agree with everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South West has said about the questions that still need to

be answered. One point that I want to raise concerns Sir Robert Francis and the engagement that will take place in the next few weeks. Legal representation is needed so that people can engage fully with that process and ensure that they are feeding in the issues about tariffs, which have caused a great deal of concern and worry. We also need to get on with providing psychological services in England. We have them in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but we now need them in England, and I hope the Minister will take that message back. The other key issue is that of support payments.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I want to associate myself with everything that has been said about infected blood. I also want to call to the attention of this House the cross-party working on Lords amendment 45, particularly by Baroness Morgan, Baroness Finn, Baroness Brinton, Baroness Thornton, Lord Ponsonby and Lord Russell, to protect victims of malicious harassment.

I thank the Minister and his team; he knows that this has been an issue that many of us have been vexed about because we have been victims of it ourselves. He has been patient, and he recognised that we could not simply say, “This won’t happen again,” and that we needed to put something into law. In that sense, I pay tribute to all the lawyers and experts on stalking who have assisted us, and we cannot let the Bill go through this place without acknowledging the work of the victims’ commissioner for London, Claire Waxman, who is sat in the Gallery this afternoon and who has tirelessly fought for victims legislation.

I have a few questions about Lords amendment 45—I would not be taking part in the debate if I did not. The amendment is about stopping harassment. At the moment, even if somebody who makes malicious complaints is convicted, it is not clear to many data controllers that because the records have been created by a process of malice, they should be deleted. As a consequence, victims find themselves being pursued based on those records, and the amendment would give people a direct right to request a deletion.

The Minister will know there is a concern that some of the exemptions could be broad. Will he commit to giving clarity on when those exemptions cannot be used for malicious complaints, as was done in the other House, and to giving protection to victims who are targeted in this way? Many of us in the public realm will be targeted; we have an election coming up, and we know that this will happen. Many of us want to face public scrutiny, but our families should not have to pay for the price for it, which is what so often happens with these records. Could the Minister commit to providing formal guidance?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am afraid the Minister will not have time to sum up, but I am sure that he will be in touch if there is anything he wishes to add.

One hour having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the Lords amendments, the debate was interrupted (Order, 23 May).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair (Standing Order No. 83F), That the amendment be made.

Government amendment (a) made to Lords amendment 35.

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

Government amendments (b) and (c) made to Lords amendment 35.

Lords amendment 35, as amended, agreed to.

Government amendment (a) made to Lords amendment 46.

Lords amendment 46, as amended, agreed to.

Lords amendment 32 disagreed to.

Government amendment (a) made in lieu of Lords amendment 32.

Lords amendments 33, 47 and 54 disagreed to.

Government amendment (a) made in lieu of Lords amendment 54.

Lord amendments 98 and 99 disagreed to.

Government amendment (a) made in lieu of Lords amendments 98 and 99.

Lords amendment 106 disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) and (b) made in lieu of Lords amendment 106.

Lords amendments 1 to 31, 34, 36 to 45, 48 to 53, 55 to 97, 100 to 105 and 107 to 143 agreed to, with Commons financial privileges waived in respect of Lords amendments 44, 56 to 60, 63, 64 and 142.

Ordered, That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing with their amendments 33 and 47;

That Edward Argar, Scott Mann, Aaron Bell, Paul Holmes, Chris Elmore, Andrew Western and Chris Stephens be members of the Committee;

That Edward Argar be the Chair of the Committee;

That three be the quorum of the Committee.

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—*(Joy Morrissey.)*

Committee to withdraw immediately; reasons to be reported and communicated to the Lords.

Energy

11.59 am

Robert Largan (High Peak) (Con): I beg to move,

That the draft Energy Act 2023 (Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2024, which were laid before this House on 13 May, be approved.

This instrument is technical in nature. It uses the power in section 330 of the Energy Act 2023 to make various amendments as a consequence of the passing of that Act. The majority of the amendments relate to the independent system operator and planner, or ISOP, while most others relate to the governance of the gas and electricity codes. There are other minor amendments to the provisions relating to the hydrogen levy, competition in onshore electricity projects, and heat networks.

The ISOP will be an expert and impartial body, with responsibilities across the electricity and gas systems, to provide progress towards net zero while maintaining energy security and minimising costs for consumers. With roles across the energy system, the ISOP will help to plan and deliver the integrated system needed to ensure our energy security, net zero and affordability goals. It will be independent not only of other commercial energy interests, but from the operational control of the Government, meaning that it will be in a position to use its expertise to advise the Government and Ofgem on the critical decisions ahead.

Two types of amendments are needed to give the ISOP a stable legislative footing. The first is to reflect its public nature—a shift from the current ownership by National Grid—by, for example, adding the ISOP to the list of organisations to which the Freedom of Information and Public Record Acts apply. The second reflects the fact that, unlike the current electricity systems operator, which holds a transmission licence, the ISOP will hold an electricity system operator licence and a gas system planner licence. That will require updates in energy legislation to ensure that reference is made to the new ISOP licences, which will ensure continuity. Examples include updating the Energy Act 2013 so that the ISOP can continue the ESO's current work as the contract for difference counter party. It is worth noting that none of these changes will come into effect until the ISOP is created, and current legislative reference will remain whilst the ESO continues to operate the electricity system.

Changes will also be made in legislation in relation to code governance reform. The Competition and Markets Authority has previously highlighted concerns regarding certain aspects of code governance. Under the new system, the existing code administrators and industry planners will be replaced by code managers, who will be selected and licensed by Ofgem. Those code managers will be directly accountable to Ofgem, and their responsibilities will include making recommendations and, in some cases, decisions on modifications to the codes.

This statutory instrument enacts the necessary consequential changes across legislation to reflect the new governance framework and licensing regime. An amendment to the Gas (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 is made to ensure that the right primary legislation is in place should the Government decide to introduce the hydrogen gas shipper levy in Northern Ireland. I commend the regulations to the House.

12.3 pm

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): I will start my brief remarks with a few words about my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead), who would ordinarily be speaking to this motion and is standing down at the election. I appreciate that “brief remarks” and “few words” are not phrases that we would usually associate with my hon. Friend, but there is a good reason for that. He is one of those parliamentarians who have a really deep knowledge of his subject and are completely across his brief. He has campaigned on these issues for many years in this place, and has played a vital role in informing Labour policy for the future. Whenever I met stakeholders during my brief tenure in the energy and net zero team, it was very clear that he was widely respected by everybody in energy and net zero, as well as across this House. We wish him all the very best for the future. Parliament will miss his expertise and his commitment to tackling climate change.

Turning to the motion, we do not intend to object to this instrument, as the measures are generally consequential to elements of the Energy Act 2023, which we supported. The creation of a new body, ISOP, now the National Energy System Operator, is essential to managing and planning the expansion and operation of our energy system as we transition to net zero. Labour called for the creation of this body as a “system architect”. We have been encouraged by the early steps the current Electricity System Operator has made in preparing for its new role. We therefore agree that establishing its legislative basis fully is an urgent priority, and I am glad we have managed to address that in the wash-up.

We also have no objections to the new governance framework for gas and electricity codes. We support establishing the Ofgem-licensed code manager role, as it is a sensible improvement to the current system, given the importance of gas and electricity codes to the smooth technical operation of our energy system. Other miscellaneous amendments in this statutory instrument include those made as a result of the Energy Act's provision to regulate heat networks and create heat network zones. Heat network regulation has for too long been a blind spot, and some consumers have had to pay significantly higher bills as a result. So I emphasise again how important these new regulations are, and I hope that we can make sure they are in force as soon as possible in the next Parliament, whatever composition it might have.

Finally, Madam Deputy Speaker, let me say that you are my favourite Deputy Speaker. I thank you for your service to this House and to the people of Doncaster, and for the great support you have given to me in my nine years here and to many Labour colleagues. We all wish you all the very best for the future.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the Scottish National party spokesperson.

12.6 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Please accept my apologies for not putting in to speak on this measure, Madam Deputy Speaker; you will understand that it has been a hectic couple of days and I therefore hoped that my bobbing would be sufficient.

Obviously, the SNP is not going to oppose this measure. We support the need for energy reform. When we look at the inflation figures, we see that they are so heavily influenced by the cost of energy. Market reform has been overdue for quite a long time, particularly in respect of heat networks, given, as the Opposition spokesperson mentioned, the increase in their amount. In my constituency, we have Aberdeen Heat & Power, an incredible and well-embedded heat network that supplies a significant number of council properties in the city. I would go as far as to say that it is one of the leading heat networks, because of the sheer number of properties it is able to supply. It gives cheaper energy to those properties, which is incredibly important.

We have made the case, as have significant numbers of campaigners, on things such as standing charges, particularly for electricity and gas; we have raised the concerns about the energy price cap and the fact that it does not give a reduction in that respect. We are aware that in October we are again likely to see an increase in the energy price and that people who have managed to find things a little easier over the summer may find them even more difficult this winter, because of the potential for increases. We will continue to make the case—the Minister would assume that I will—that Scotland has the power when it comes to energy but we do not have the powers to make the changes that we would like to see to ensure a fairer deal across these islands when people pay for electricity and gas. I am talking about the prices people are paying in their homes when those bills come through the door. We are seeing higher levels of standing charges in Scotland and of charges for organisations looking to connect to the grid. Frankly, we do not think that situation is fair and we would like to see changes made. However, we are pleased to see that the Government are moving towards reform and

that this SI has been included in the wash-up process—it is good to see the Government prioritising it. I appreciate that the Minister has pushed for it and has taken the time to move it today.

12.8 pm

Robert Largan: Let me briefly sum up. First, let me associate myself with the remarks made by the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) about you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and about the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead). As a Whip standing in as a Minister, I do not think I would be revealing any secrets to say that he has sometimes been a source of frustration for those on the Treasury Bench. However, we could never doubt his level of detailed knowledge and his commitment to public service, and we wish him the very best in the future.

I also thank the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington and the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) for indicating the support of those on the Opposition Benches for these regulations. The hon. Gentleman will not realise this, but many years ago he was my local councillor when I lived in south Manchester, and I always enjoyed getting his leaflets through my door.

As I have said, while broadly administrative in nature, these changes will be vital for the creation of the ISOP for energy code reform and the continued development of the energy sector towards net zero.

Finally, these may well be my final few words in this House. This is, as they say, it. Serving in this place is an honour and a privilege that few experience. I have done my best. It is all that anybody can do.

Question put and agreed to.

Tribunal and Inquiries

12.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Gareth Bacon): I beg to move,

That the Tribunal Procedure (Upper Tribunal) (Immigration and Asylum Chamber) (Amendment) Rules 2024, (SI., 2024, No. 588), dated 1 May 2024, a copy of which was laid before this House on 1 May, be approved.

This statutory instrument forms part of the Government's preparations for the implementation of the Illegal Migration Act 2023, which I will hereafter refer to as the IMA. The SI delivers the tribunal procedurals necessary to implement the new appeals regime for suspensive claims already approved in Parliament, in sections 44 to 49 of the IMA. The rules have been drafted to give effect to the timing set out in the IMA. Exceptionally under the IMA, in order to provide for swift implementation, section 50 provides that the Lord Chancellor, instead of the Tribunal Procedure Committee, is responsible for making the first set of rules for the upper tribunal, immigration and asylum chamber for the purposes of suspensive claims under sections 44 to 49 of the IMA. This reflects Parliament's recognition of the importance of implementing the Act rapidly to tackle illegal migration.

As the Lord Chancellor's power to make rules has now been spent with the laying of this SI, the Tribunal Procedure Committee retains its rule-making powers and will be able to amend or replace these rules as it deems appropriate under its usual procedures. We have kept the TPC fully informed throughout our work in preparing the draft rules, and we also understand that the TPC will review these rules as part of its priority to keep all nine sets of tribunal procedurals and employment tribunal procedurals under constant review.

Before I conclude, this is the last time I will address the Chamber from the Dispatch Box as a Justice Minister this side of the election. On that basis, and I hope you will indulge me, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank all of the officials and special advisers that I have worked with in my time as an Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice, particularly Harry McNeill Adams, Andrew Spence, Molly Parsons-O'Connor, Claire Fielder, Christina Pride, Catherine Elkington, Tim Coates, Amy Rees, Ross Gribbin, Gemma Hewison and Jenny Pickrell. I would also like to thank the excellent special advisers Sally Rushton, Rupert Cunningham and Hannah Galley. Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my private secretaries, who have worked tirelessly to keep me organised and on the straight and narrow: Charlotte Hewitt, Andrea Benjamin, Imogen Jailler and Naomi Hartley.

I also thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. You have been a beacon of fairness and good humour in the Chair throughout my time in this House. I wish you well in your retirement. You will be much missed by this House, and the House will be the poorer without you.

To conclude, these rules will come into force on commencement of the duty to remove under section 2 of the Illegal Migration Act. The Lord Chancellor laid this SI on 1 May in preparation for that, having already laid the Civil Legal Aid (Remuneration) (Amendment) Regulations 2023 and the Civil Legal Aid (Financial Resources and Payment for Services and Remuneration) (Amendment) Regulations 2023 late last year. By doing

so, the SI will be in place should the decision be taken after the election to proceed with the swift implementation of the IMA.

12.14 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I can see that I am not your only fan in this Chamber, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sure that I speak for everyone in saying that we wish you well in what you do. We are also joined by the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). We thank her for exemplary public service in her time in this place. I also pay tribute to my dear friend, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), the Mother of the House, who has had an extraordinary career as a Labour politician. She was briefly—all too briefly, in my view—the leader of the party. I thank her for her service to the Labour party, to Parliament and to our country.

The statutory instrument governs one of the few parts of the Prime Minister's so-called signature immigration legislation to have actually been enacted—the Illegal Migration Act 2023. Most of the key clauses, including the duty to remove those who arrive without permission, have not been enacted because the Government know deep down that the Act is a bit of a sham. It was the second of three Acts designed, but failing, to tackle the small boats chaos under their watch. We opposed that Act because we warned that it would not work, and the Government's reluctance to enact any of its key provisions shows that we were right.

The provisions in the statutory instrument govern the appeal procedure relating to removals under the Act, but no such removals are occurring, as the duty to remove has not even been enacted. The truth is that the Government have lost control of our border security. They have allowed criminal gangs to take hold of the channel and they have allowed dangerous boat crossings to soar. They have lost control of the asylum system, allowing decisions to collapse and the backlog to rocket to a record high with record numbers of people in asylum hotels, which costs the taxpayer an eye-watering £8 million a day. Meanwhile, yesterday's statistics show that they have let returns and enforcement crumble too, with returns of failed asylum seekers down by 35% compared with the last Labour Government.

We will strengthen our border security and fix the asylum chaos. We will crack down on the criminal gangs and their supply chains to stop the boats before they reach the French coast. We will set up a new border security command, backed by new resources and counter-terrorism style powers, to bring those gangs to justice. We will clear the backlog with new fast-track procedures for safe countries and end asylum hotel use to save the taxpayer billions of pounds. We will also strengthen enforcement with a new returns and enforcement unit.

We do not intend to divide the House, but the British public will have their say on 4 July. It will be a choice between gimmicks from the Tories and strong border security and real grip from Labour.

12.16 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I made a comment yesterday, but I would like briefly to thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your time in the Chair.

Whenever I have made a request, you have either granted it or given me a very good reason why it was not a reasonable request, which I really appreciate.

As SNP Members have laid out on numerous occasions, we have many issues with the UK Government's immigration policies, especially the Rwanda policy. We fundamentally disagree with the decision-making processes that are happening and with the ideology. From the SNP Benches, we can say on behalf of the people of Scotland, "This is not being done in our name," because they fundamentally disagree with this.

Hon. Members will know what happened on Kenmure Street, Glasgow a couple of years ago. The people of Glasgow, on behalf of the people of Scotland, stood up for one of our own who was being taken away. It does not matter to us where that person was born. If somebody wants to come and be part of Scottish society—if they want to come and live in our country, bring their skills, talents and culture, and contribute to Scotland—that is welcome in Scotland. This policy is not being done in our name.

I understand that the statutory instrument is part of the Government's preparations in relation to the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024, which we disagreed with at every stage. It is disappointing that Labour Members are using the same rhetoric and playing the same game as the Tories on this issue. They are talking about small boats at every opportunity, but they should be talking about the issues that actually matter to people. They are fundamentally misunderstanding the public view in Scotland.

People in Scotland do not wake up every morning and worry about the small boat crossings—that is not the biggest issue. They are worrying about the cost of living crisis, the NHS and their daily lives. They support immigration policies that allow people to come.

One of the good things about the general election being called is that the changes to graduate visas cannot be implemented. The Migration Advisory Committee report said that the graduate visa should continue, but understandably we had no faith in this Tory Government allowing that to happen. The changes relating to dependants will have a significant impact on so many places, particularly when it comes to universities, a number of which might actually go under as a result of the decisions being made by the UK Tory Government. We have a history in Scotland of opposing Tory immigration policy and opposing crackdowns that simply demonise innocent people who are trying to escape unimaginably bad situations. We have fought against dawn raids; we have had the Glasgow Girls; we have had a huge amount of civic action against taking our people away.

The shadow Minister mentioned the immigration backlog. It would be much better if the UK Government focused on ensuring that the immigration system works, and that people who have applied for visas get a decision within a year, or a year and a half—or even, thinking about some of the casework I have faced, within three years. It would be much better if they did not randomly move people from hotels in Aberdeen to hotels in Glasgow, while also moving others from hotels in Glasgow to hotels in Aberdeen. It would be much better if they did not move people in Aberdeen who are waiting for an operation to London or another place in England with absolutely no notice, and no justification apart from the fact that they get free legal advice in Scotland.

Given that the law and the legal systems are different in the two countries, people who are moved to England have to restart their asylum case from scratch.

Our long-held position is that we oppose the Conservatives' rhetoric and ideology on immigration, and we oppose the Rwanda policy in particular, so we will divide the House on this motion and vote against it. *[Interruption.]* It is the last day of the Parliament; we are not going to compromise our principles simply because that would be more convenient for the Labour party. We are going to stick by them, act consistently with all the positions we have held previously, and vote against the motion.

12.22 pm

Gareth Bacon: First, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), who has been my shadow for what feels like a lot longer than seven months. I am not completely convinced by his claim of strong borders under Labour—I am sure that the electorate will sort that out in the next few weeks—but he has been extremely decent in his dealings with me.

Kevin Brennan: I apologise—I should have thanked the Minister for the courteous way in which he has dealt with the Opposition spokespeople. I do thank him for that.

Gareth Bacon: For the benefit of the people in the Strangers' Gallery, I should say that it is not normal for politicians to be so nice to each other across the Dispatch Box. It gets a lot worse than this normally. I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his words.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Will the Minister give way on the topic of being nice?

Gareth Bacon: I am really not sure that I should sully—no, of course I will.

Sir Robert Neill: I appreciate that this is perhaps one of the most contentious bits of legislation that we have to deal with in the wash-up, but I want to thank the Minister for the constructive approach that he has always adopted towards the business, and in particular for the way that he has engaged with the Justice Committee, which I have chaired, on a number of difficult issues over his time in post.

Gareth Bacon: I am extremely grateful to my hon. and learned Friend, my constituency neighbour, for his kind words. I have known him for more than 25 years. If the House will indulge me, I first met him when he defeated my wife in the selection for the Bexley and Bromley London Assembly constituency. We overcame that particular bump in the road very swiftly, and he has very much been a guiding light and mentor for me in the quarter of a century that has elapsed since. He is somebody who I have consistently looked up to—perhaps not physically, but certainly in every other sense.

I am grateful for the opportunity to close this debate. There will be a lot of valedictory speeches, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) will lead off on those, but I would like to personally mark this point. Many hon. and right hon. Members are retiring from the House today, as is inevitable when an

[Gareth Bacon]

election comes around. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). She has been an exceptional public servant over her 27 years in this House. Taking into account her local government experience in the London Borough of Merton, her public service extends for more than three decades. In my humble opinion, she personifies all that is best about public servants, with her selflessness and her devotion to duty and to the people she seeks to represent. The House will not be the same without her—or without you, Madam Deputy Speaker—and I wanted to get that on the record.

I am grateful for the contributions to this debate. The measure is a key element in the implementation of the Illegal Migration Act 2023. As I said in opening this debate, it is being considered today so that we can ensure that it is ready for IMA commencement after the election. I note the comments from the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman). I disagree with them profoundly, but that will be no surprise to her, because she disagrees with my position profoundly, and that is perfectly okay, and we will obviously contest this matter in a Division.

By laying this statutory instrument before Parliament, the Ministry of Justice has complied with the Lord Chancellor's statutory obligations under section 50 of the IMA and ensured that the appropriate rules and procedures are in place for when the duty to remove commences. I commend the measures to the House.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 135, Noes 10.

Division No. 160]

[12.27 pm]

AYES

Aiken, Nickie	Colburn, Elliot
Aldous, Peter	Collins, Damian
Allan, Lucy (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones</i>)	Costa, Alberto
Atkins, rh Victoria	Courts, Robert
Bacon, Gareth	Crouch, Dame Tracey
Bacon, Mr Richard	Davies, Dr James
Baker, Duncan	Davies, Mims
Baron, Mr John	Davis, rh Sir David
Baynes, Simon	Davison, Dehenna
Bell, Aaron	Donelan, rh Michelle
Bhatti, Saqib	Duddridge, Sir James
Blackman, Bob	Duguid, David (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones</i>)
Bradley, rh Dame Karen	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Brady, rh Sir Graham	Dunne, rh Philip
Brine, Steve	Ellis, rh Sir Michael
Browne, Anthony	Eustice, rh George
Bruce, Fiona	Everitt, Ben
Buchan, Felicity	Fabricant, Michael
Burghart, Alex	Fell, Simon
Butler, Rob	Fletcher, Katherine
Carter, Andy	Frazer, rh Lucy
Cartlidge, James	French, Mr Louie
Cash, Sir William	Grayling, rh Chris
Chalk, rh Alex	Griffith, Andrew
Churchill, Jo	Halfon, rh Robert
Clark, rh Greg	Hammond, Stephen
Clarke, rh Sir Simon	Hancock, rh Matt
Clarke, Theo	Harris, Rebecca

Hart, Sally-Ann	Philp, rh Chris
Hayes, rh Sir John	Pow, Rebecca
Hinds, rh Damian	Prentis, rh Victoria
Hoare, Simon	Pursglove, Tom
Hollobone, Mr Philip	Quince, Will
Holmes, Paul	Richardson, Angela
Howell, John (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones</i>)	Rowley, Lee
Huddleston, Nigel	Russell, Dean
Hudson, Dr Neil	Rutley, David
Hunt, Jane	Selous, Andrew
Hunt, Tom	Sharma, rh Sir Alok
Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil	Simmonds, David
Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Smith, rh Chloe
Jones, Andrew	Smith, rh Julian
Jones, rh Mr David	Smith, Royston
Jones, rh Mr Marcus	Solloway, Amanda
Kawczynski, Daniel	Spencer, Dr Ben
Kearns, Alicia	Stewart, rh Bob
Largan, Robert	Stewart, Iain
Lewer, Andrew	Stuart, rh Graham
Lewis, rh Sir Brandon	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Lewis, rh Sir Julian	Tomlinson, rh Michael
Loughton, Tim	Tracey, Craig
Malthouse, rh Kit	Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Mann, Scott	Tuckwell, Steve
Mayhew, Jerome	Vara, rh Shailesh
McPartland, rh Stephen	Vickers, Martin
Metcalfe, Stephen	Villiers, rh Theresa
Mohindra, Mr Gagan	Walker, Sir Charles
Morris, Anne Marie	Walker, Mr Robin
Morris, David	Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Morrissey, Joy	Warman, Matt
Mumby-Croft, Holly	Webb, Suzanne
Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Whately, Helen
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew	Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Neill, Sir Robert	Wood, Mike
Nici, Lia	Young, Jacob
Nokes, rh Caroline	
Offord, Dr Matthew	
Percy, Andrew	

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mark Fletcher and
Mark Jenkinson

NOES

Blackford, rh Ian	Nicolson, John (<i>Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows</i>)
Callaghan, Amy (<i>Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows</i>)	Thomson, Richard
Crawley, Angela (<i>Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows</i>)	Whitford, Dr Philippa (<i>Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows</i>)
Dorans, Allan (<i>Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows</i>)	
Fellows, Marion	
McLaughlin, Anne (<i>Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows</i>)	

Tellers for the Noes:
Kirsty Blackman and
Chris Stephens

Question accordingly agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That the Order of the House of 23 May (Business of the House (23 and 24 May)) be varied as follows:

After paragraph (15) insert—

“The motion in the name of the Prime Minister on matters to be raised before the forthcoming dissolution may be proceeded with until any hour, and may be interrupted by proceedings on Lords Amendments, Lords Messages or any Motion moved by a Minister of the Crown.”—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Valedictory Debate

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House has considered matters to be raised before the forthcoming dissolution.—(*Mr Marcus Jones.*)

Several hon. Members rose—

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

12.44 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): This is my last speech. The House of Commons records show that I have spoken in this Chamber 9,880 times. [HON. MEMBERS: “More!”] I have to say that, when you discover that the Prime Minister was only two years old when you were first elected, you realise it is time to move on. Every time I have spoken in this Chamber, I have had a profound sense of how important this House is, and what a great honour and privilege it is to be a Member of this Parliament. Through good times and bad, I have felt that great sense of privilege and responsibility to my constituents. The thing about being an MP is that you are your constituents’ one and only MP, and it is down to you to be standing up for them, speaking up for them, and on their side through thick and thin. I thank my constituents of Camberwell and Peckham for being on my side through thick and thin as well.

I pay tribute to all the staff I have worked with over the years. Even my brilliant members of staff cannot calculate how many times I have voted during those 42 years—many thousands of times—but I would say two things about that. First, for the first 15 years, between 1982 and 1997, I voted assiduously every night, sometimes even through the night, and did not win a single vote. Opposition is undoubtedly public service, but we would rather be in government, and I profoundly hope that the person who I hope will be elected as my successor to Camberwell and Peckham, Miatta Fahnbulleh—I think she will make a great contribution to the House—will sit on the Government Benches.

Secondly, I have never voted against the Whip. That is not because I cannot think for myself or because I am stupid or supine; nor is it because I think my party has always been perfect—far from it. Indeed, I fought for change from within my party, but I recognised that I was a Labour candidate. I was elected as a Labour Member of Parliament, and I have been proud to be that, proud to be one of the team of Labour Members in my constituency and all around the country—that great Labour family.

Towards the later years of my time in this House, I have had the great joy of working much more cross-party and of chairing Select Committees. I pay tribute to my colleagues on those Select Committees for the very important work that those Committees do. I also thank the House of Commons staff: the Clerks who do such excellent work, and all those who work in this House, whether that is the security people who keep us safe, the caterers or the cleaners, many of whom are my constituents. They are all part of our democracy, and we should be grateful for their work.

Latterly, it has been a joy and a pleasure to work with women from all sides of the House—I see some of the sisterhood sitting on the Conservative Back Benches.

That has been a huge change for the better. Although it was as long as 42 years ago that I first came into this Chamber, I remember so well coming in—I was elected at a by-election—and standing at the Bar of the House. It was just ahead of Prime Minister’s questions. I remember looking at the serried ranks of men on all sides of the House, standing there in my red velvet maternity dress and feeling completely out of place. Of course, I was out of place in a House of Commons that was only 3% women and 97% men. To those people who look back through rose-tinted glasses with nostalgia and talk about the good old days in the House of Commons, I would say that the House is better now: it is more representative. The women who are in this House now—it is now 30%, up from 3%—also know that it is not that we are doing them a favour, letting them be here. They are a democratic imperative, to make this House of Commons representative. They need to have their voices heard; they will not be silenced. They are an essential part of a modern democracy.

People sometimes ask me, “What would you say to a young woman now, given all the difficulties, the threats, social media and so on? Would you really encourage her to go into politics?” I say, “Absolutely, yes. Although it is hard, if you feel that you can make a change—and you can—it is really important that you come into this House of Commons.” At times it has been hard for me, but I do not regret a single day of being here.

When I was first introduced to the House 42 years ago, my husband, Jack Dromey, was sitting up in the Public Gallery, beaming down his 100% support on me, as he always did. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] Obviously he is not here today, but my three children are in the Public Gallery, beaming down their 100% support. I am so grateful to them for that.

In a few hours’ time, these Benches will be cleared and the House will fall silent until July. Then, they will be absolutely packed with new, freshly elected MPs from 650 constituencies across Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland. Those Members of Parliament will hold our democracy in their hands; they will hold in their hands the future of our country. Now it is time for me to pass that responsibility on to them. So, no pressure.

12.51 pm

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): It is indeed a great pleasure to follow the speech of the Mother of the House, who has a longer record in this Chamber than I do. I pay tribute, in particular, to the way she has championed the cause of women in this place, and women’s issues more generally, throughout her time in the House. It has been a pleasure latterly—perhaps in our early days we did not work together quite so well—to champion those issues together.

While I am talking about women in this House, may I take this opportunity to say to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the Chairman of Ways and Means, my right hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Dame Eleanor Laing), what a pleasure it has been to have you both in that Chair, and to thank you for the good humour and kindness—but also firmness when necessary—with which you have dealt with our proceedings? I wish you both all the very best for the future.

I would like to give a few more thanks before coming to some remarks to be made before the Dissolution of Parliament. First, I want to thank my Maidenhead constituents, who at seven general elections over 27 years

[Mrs Theresa May]

have elected me as their Member of Parliament. I have always put great store by the relationship between a Member of Parliament and their constituents, and I consider my Maidenhead constituents to be the best of British. They are hard-working, they are entrepreneurial and they are compassionate. In all my 27 years, I have been struck by the enormous effort that they have put into helping others and the voluntary work they do around the constituency. I have been delighted to represent this magnificent constituency. I will be the only Member of Parliament for the constituency, because I was the first and the boundaries are now changing, so there we are—that is my place in history.

I also thank my Maidenhead Conservative association, including all the officers over time and all the activists. We all know how those who deliver the leaflets, knock on the doors and raise the funds are an important part of our democracy and our politics. I also join the Mother of the House in thanking the House of Commons staff, both those who are seen and the many who are unseen and unheard. I thank in particular the police and security staff who keep us safe. It was brought home to us on the sad day of the Westminster Bridge attack, when PC Keith Palmer lost his life, that there are those who are willing to put themselves forward to ensure that we can be safe and that this Parliament and this part of our democracy can continue.

I would like to thank my staff in my office, of whom I have had a number over the years. Currently, they are Cameron Bradbury, Ryan Loveridge, Emma Willis and, in particular, Jenny Sharkey, who has been with me for 23 years, through all the thicks and thins of my time in Parliament. I say a huge thank you to them. Most members of the public do not realise the enormous job that the staff of Members of Parliament do, and the significance of their role, but we owe them a great debt.

My final thanks, before moving on to other comments, are to somebody I think I should describe as my best canvasser-in-chief—he is quite a good leaflet deliverer as well—who has been alongside me and supported me for every one of those 27 years in this place, and for my time standing beforehand and as a councillor in the London borough of Merton, who was also there when I was Prime Minister, in the evenings, when he had to make the beans on toast and pour the whisky when the day had not gone quite as well as I had expected. That, of course, is my husband Philip. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]

It will be a great wrench to leave this place. I wanted to be a Conservative Member of Parliament from the age of about 12. I was always a Conservative; I have never been a member of another party. I have always been a Conservative in the room, and I will continue to be a Conservative in the room. Being in this place is a huge privilege, but it also brings with it significant responsibilities, and I want to take a serious moment to comment on some of those responsibilities.

Our responsibility, first of all, is to democracy. Democracy has raised living standards and led to the betterment of people in so many parts of the world. But sadly, democracy today, I fear, is under threat. While it is easy to answer the question, “What is the greatest threat to democracy?” by saying, “Well, an autocratic state like Russia or China,” actually, we should never

forget the dangers to democracy from within. The most recent United Nations human development report showed that, for the first time ever, more than half the global population support leaders who may undermine democracy. There is polling evidence that an increasing proportion of young people do not think democracy is the way to run a Government.

We, in this mother of Parliaments, should do all that we can to show the value and importance of democracy, because it is democracy that enables people to have the freedom, to be the best they can be, and to do what they want to do, rather than what the state tells them they must do. So we have a real job, both politicians continuing in this House and politicians leaving, to ensure that we do everything we can to maintain democracy. Sadly, we saw in 2021, in the 6 January attack on the Capitol—that great bastion of democracy—that our democracy is actually more fragile than we had thought over the years. So I urge everybody to champion that cause.

This place is also important because it enables us to be a voice for the voiceless. Earlier this week I was able, as were a number of Members of the House, to attend the funeral of the late Frank Field. He was a man who spent his life in this place giving voice to the voiceless, ensuring that truth was told to power, and we should never shy from doing that. It is important, powerful as this place is, and powerful as they may feel they are, that MPs should always recognise there are those who do not have that power. MPs should be there for everybody and should give that voice to the voiceless. There has been work on a number of issues across the House to do just that over the years, and I am pleased to have been able to help in some of that work.

My final comment about responsibility is about the job of being a Member of Parliament. I think it is the best job in the world. Of course, it has its frustrations. It particularly has its frustrations when you are in government and people, on your own side, do not vote for your legislation. [Laughter.] Three times! But there we are. We get over these things, we carry on and we come back. But it is a really important job, and the key to it is to represent constituents. I worry—I have said this elsewhere, and I will say it here in this Chamber—that too many people in politics today think that it is about them, their ambitions, their careers, and not about the people they serve. Being a Member of Parliament is a public service. We are here to serve our country and our constituents.

I have enjoyed my time—although, as I have indicated, it has had its up and downs. I spent 13 years in opposition, and I say to all Members on the Conservative Benches: “You do not want to do that. Go out there and fight to ensure that a Conservative Government are re-elected.”

I wish all the very best to my successor in the new Maidenhead constituency, and to all those who return to this Chamber after the election. I ask only that they remember the importance of our democracy, that they can be a voice for the voiceless, and that their job here is not to advance themselves but to serve the people who elected them.

1 pm

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): It is a great privilege to be able to speak today as the longest-serving Labour Member of Parliament. I made

my maiden speech on 3 July 1979, and here we are heading for a 4 July general election. I have been here a darn long time—nearly always on the Back Benches, although, in the mists of time, I sat on the Front Bench for 11 years under various Labour leaders.

I have had the privilege of doing a range of jobs in this House. I have been thinking back in order to give advice to Harpreet Uppal, who will be the Labour candidate in Huddersfield and would be coming to this place for the first time. I was thinking this morning what advice I would give new Members, and it echoes some of the things said by the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), who has been a good friend of mine over the years. We can be friends across the political divide. She might remember that when she stood down as Prime Minister, I said, “Do not just disappear; stay on the Back Benches.” And she has done, because, as she had said, it is a wonderful thing to do.

I was so privileged to be elected in Huddersfield. I had had a hard time. The first seat I fought was Taunton, against Edward du Cann, and surprisingly I did not win—although I think I was the last Labour candidate to come second there. However, when I arrived in Parliament, I felt that I was representing the classic town—I cannot say the average town—of Britain.

I am an economist. I was at the London School of Economics with some very difficult people—one of whom is sitting right in front of me here. I learned to use the tools of the economist to assess the sort of job that I was going to do. The first thing that I did as a young Member of Parliament was to assess, as far as I could, the strengths and weaknesses of my constituency. Indeed, I raised some money to get Terence Conran to come to Huddersfield and assess the future of its once-vibrant manufacturing industry. We knew that there would be fewer manufacturing jobs, that the world was changing, and that, in order to maintain the high-quality, well-paid jobs that Huddersfield had had for 100 years, we had to have a diverse economy that did other things. One of the great things that his report said was, “Make sure that you expand that polytechnic into a university, because that is the future for the skills that this country needs.”

I had Sir John Major in my constituency recently, giving the Harold Wilson lecture. I reminded him that, thanks to him and Ken Clarke, another old friend of mine, Huddersfield transcended from having a polytechnic to having a university, which is absolutely crucial. I think all Members are aware of just how vital universities are in the towns and cities of our country. Indeed, the only partially political thing I will say today is that we urgently need to address the threat to the long-term stability of the higher education sector in our country. When I chaired the Select Committee on Education and Skills, we produced a very good report on the challenges for higher education worldwide. It became clear that we have to invest in the future of our universities and ensure that they have the diverse income streams they need be viable. We are at a critical point. It is now for all parties to assess that and do something radical about it, because it is so important.

I want to refer also to the role of a Member of Parliament in Parliament. Let us get the message out more, as the former Prime Minister did, about what a wonderful job this is. I am well known on these Benches

as a bit of a troublemaker—the Speaker and Deputy Speakers sometimes have a really interesting expression on their faces when they are not quite sure what I am going to say on a particular topic. After my 10 years as a Select Committee Chair, I decided that I would just do Parliament—that I would be here, raise the issues and campaign. Much of the success that I have achieved has come not from just doing the party political job.

The House might not know that, as a young university teacher, I was involved in a head-on crash as I was coming back from our second daughter’s baptism, when someone on wrong side of the road drove into our family car. I thought at one stage that my wife was dead, but she actually was unconscious, and we all survived—the children, myself and my wife. When I got into this House, I was determined to make sure that wearing a seat belt would become the law of the land. It had been defeated 13 times, but we worked together on an all-party basis. My only successful private Member’s Bill was one that banned children from being carried in the front seat of a car without a restraint. Ken Clarke more or less helped me with that, although I think only on the basis that I would stop pushing for mandatory seatbelts.

It was a difficult job. As many people know, back in the day, Margaret Thatcher was against it and Michael Foot was against it, and the Whips would try to stop it happening. We had to bounce the legislation out of the House of Lords at a critical time, the night before the royal wedding of Charles and Diana. Because of the public holiday, a lot of people thought, “What a lovely weekend. We’ll get away on Thursday and we won’t have to come back till Tuesday,” so we hid our all-party troops all over the House, and when the Lords amendment came back down here, we managed to get seatbelts.

A wonderful friend of mine in the World Health Organisation said the nicest thing that anyone has ever said about me, at a conference three years ago, just before covid: “Barry Sherman, with his obsessive interest in transport safety, has probably saved more lives worldwide than any other politician on the planet.” That is rather nice—I do not believe it, but it is nice that it was said.

There was a time where people said that all-party groups were dangerous or disreputable. Some of the best things that I have done in this House have been on a cross-party basis: campaigning on the environment, campaigning for educational change and campaigning for clean water—all the things that we are passionate about. I spent my life as a social entrepreneur looking for people who want to do a little conspiracy—not 36 barrels of gunpowder in the basement but a conspiracy to do something that needs doing. The only criteria I used, and still use, were to attract people with experience, knowledge, passion and courage. We can do that on an all-party basis, and we have. I hope more of that will happen in future, because it is essential to this House that we identify what needs to be done and use those sorts of little plots and plans to make things happen.

We also need to involve people from outside—I am looking at the Chairman of the Justice Committee, the hon. and learned Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) when I say that, because when we started looking at miscarriages of justice, we found there was a whole world of senior King’s counsel, probation workers and others who wanted to work with us to do something about the real inadequacies of the

[Mr Barry Sheerman]

justice system. The hon. and learned Gentleman and I have become friends over the years, campaigning on a number of things in the justice sector.

By representing a constituency, we learn so much about its problems. If we are doing our job, year in and year out, we learn about child poverty, unemployment and employment. We learn what is happening in the economy. By looking at our constituency, we can see what the need will be not just tomorrow and the next day but over the next five or 10 years.

I sometimes get irritable, and I do not want to criticise too many people who are or have been Members of this House, but people waft in here and have a go at being a Minister or shadow Minister. They think, “I have done that,” and off they go to do something else. I do not believe that is the right spirit. Being a parliamentarian is a sacred trust. Once a person is elected, they have a sacred trust and responsibility to the people who live in their constituency, and they should make them their priority. Members should not try to become famous or try to find a nice little niche somewhere. Their primary responsibility is to their constituency and its future welfare. I am sure that Harpreet Uppal, who will very likely replace me on 4 July, will carry that standard.

I will now say something about the bigger issues. Like my fellow Members who attended the London School of Economics, I have always sought “to know the causes of things”, which is the LSE’s motto. Why is this happening? What has changed socioeconomically?

I have been in the House when really good things have happened and when absolutely disastrous things have happened. I am a totally committed European, but I have not always been. When I was a very young candidate for a council in south Wales, somebody asked me to speak to the local women’s Labour party because the local Labour MP was much too enthusiastic about Europe, and I spoke against Europe. And then I grew up. I saw the huge benefits of being linked with Europe, both for our common defence and for the future of our economy.

My constituency has a high level of exports in top-quality fashion, womenswear and menswear, and top-quality engineering. Everything top quality in Huddersfield depends on the export market, and we have had some very severe cutbacks since we left the European Union. Huddersfield is like everywhere else. Two of the Kirklees constituencies just voted to remain, and two constituencies just voted to leave—the picture was very mixed.

I finish by saying that not only should we all be looking to our constituencies, listening to the voices of our constituents and campaigning, but we should not get too depressed about life. Many Conservative MPs are desperately envious of me, because I was taught at the London School of Economics by Michael Oakeshott, who some people regard as one of the greatest conservative philosophers. I did not only his history of ideas course, but his special subject: for two years, a group of eight of us studied Machiavelli—what a privilege. Because I was interested in the history of ideas, I used to lecture on the subject, and I was always absolutely struck by the work of Thomas Malthus, who was the rector at Bath. He wrote the theory of population, which held that so many people were breeding so quickly that the country would not be able to feed its people, suggesting that it

was the end of the civilised world. As I lecture on Malthus, I think about the present concern with global warming and climate change, which is the existential challenge that we all face.

I want to end on this note: I am an optimist. Malthus was wrong, because he underestimated how clever human beings are. We revolutionised agricultural production with the crop rotation system. We developed fertilisers. We invented not only canals, but railways. We transported goods and people. We changed the whole basis of the Malthusian project. Today, there is the existential challenge of climate change and global warming—it is going to happen. I recently helped to launch “Here Comes the Sun”, a book on this issue by Professor Steve Jones, and the fact of the matter is that that challenge is coming, but we humans are clever. Through our universities, businesses and Members of Parliament, we will get the answers so that our planet does not start to fry and life does not end. That is my message today.

It has been a privilege and an honour to be here. I have wonderful staff in Yorkshire and wonderful staff here. I have given hundreds of young people the chance to get into politics through all the internship programmes that we have had with the LSE, Cornell University and so on. Thank goodness that I have had the chance to be here all these years. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker; thank you, fellow parliamentarians. I love you all.

1.17 pm

Mr Ben Wallace (Wyre and Preston North) (Con): We do not have time for me to share all my anecdotes about my experiences during my 19 years of being a Member of Parliament. I could tell the House about my trip to Iran with Jeremy Corbyn and Jack Straw, which was like something out of Monty Python—I turned out to be the most pro-European of the three, and it was a certainly an extraordinary experience—or about the touching and important time when, as the Security Minister, I joined the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) on a visit to a mosque in her constituency. She has campaigned against antisemitism for years and years, and she has represented the very best of Labour’s position on Jewish communities and the Jewish members of her party for many decades. As an MP, those kinds of things touch you and go with you in your memories.

I would first like to thank my family. The people who make the real sacrifices for us to be in this House are not us; they are the wives, the husbands and the children, who put up with bullying, separation and all sorts of concerns. In today’s world of social media, they put up with hate as well. Without them, none of us could be here at all.

I will mention the staff in my office. I am very privileged that Zoe Dommett has worked for me since three weeks after the day I was elected 19 years ago. Some of us have colleagues who seem to get through staff like a rotating barrel but, luckily, Zoe, Alf Clempson, Susan Hunt and Una Frost have worked for me for many years. Alf Clempson was my sergeant in the Army, and he is still working for me today.

I turn to the staff of the House. Without the Clerks, the waitresses, the maitre d’s and the Doorkeepers, none of us would be able to do our jobs. Long after the debates have got interesting, they still have to hang around this

House when many of us can go home or elsewhere. They are absolutely key. They do everything for all of us, without judgment or party political bias, and, in my experience, they are never anything other than polite and supportive. I thank them all the way.

I was going to list all my civil servants—not all 240,000 from the Ministry of Defence. I have been very privileged in this House to serve in government and to govern. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) for giving me the chance to be her Security Minister. Our job is to represent all our constituents, but it is to govern on their behalf as well. That is a true privilege and it is also luck.

I used to see colleagues who would think it was their right to govern and that only they were the special people. We are chosen by Whips and Prime Ministers, often at random, but we are not special, not “the one” and should never take it personally. We may have months or years—although, let us face it, in the past few years in this Government, it could be weeks. I felt incredibly lucky to govern on behalf of my constituents and the constituents of this Government, alongside the team that is the Government—that is what it is: a team. I never voted against the Government—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] There are the Whips. Luckily, the smoking ban legislation never made it or I might have been voting against that part of the Bill, so my unblemished record will remain.

It is a team; we should not forget that what allows us to govern are our civil servants—hundreds of them. My private offices and my private secretaries put in hours and hours, unknown, unnamed and often blamed by some colleagues and the media for things not going right. If it does not go right in government, it is because the Minister is not governing right, is not a good Minister, is not doing the extra hours needed, is not making themselves clear and is not taking an interest in how they govern. We govern not just by brand, declaration and policies; Ministers govern by using process, the right people and policies, and by communicating. Those who are good govern across the House as well.

The House was at its best during discussions about Ukraine. It was at its best when I worked with colleagues in all parties, including the then leader of the Scottish National party at Westminster, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), and when I could sit down and talk to the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) about secrets and threats to our constituents. It was at its best when we had a Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead, who knew security, and took the hours and days needed to read the intelligence and treat it with the severity it needs.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman is making an outstanding speech. I thank him for the role he played as Defence Secretary and the courtesy he showed to Members across the House, including the Leader of the Opposition, the then leader of the Liberal Democrats and myself. He was gracious enough to ensure we were briefed on a bi-weekly basis, because there are times when the House must come together over matters of national security. What an example the right hon. Gentleman set, and I thank him for the role he played during that time.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Wallace: One of the lessons I learned when I was first elected to the Scottish Parliament in 1999—it was a bit like being behind enemy lines for a Conservative; there were 13 of us out of 123—was that it was a surprise who was nice or helpful. I remember Dennis Canavan, a former Member of this House, who never quite made it past the Tony Blair vetting system to be a Labour Member in the Scottish Parliament, and who was hard-left in definition, was extremely supportive and kind to me as a new Member of Parliament. Members never know where they might get support, and they should be open to it. It is amazing how people’s politics are often separate to their kindness or their need for support for what they want to do.

We are all in this House to do the best job for our constituents, who are the people I would like to thank finally: my constituents in Lancaster and Wyre and then in Wyre and Preston North. I won a seat in 2005 and I won in opposition. I remember sitting in the Cabinet of Liz Truss and realising I was the only member of the Cabinet who had been in opposition. When I stood down last September, I was the last Minister appointed by David Cameron who had continued to be a Minister throughout. I have served five Prime Ministers, which I think is a record, although probably self-inflicted by the Conservative party. Nevertheless, to serve five Prime Ministers as a Minister uninterrupted is not only an experience but shows the times of change we are living in.

I do not think any party is going to be insulated from those types of changes. Our public, our discourse, our media and the social media pressures are changing our society and not for the better. People are not wanting to take time in making decisions; people are trying to do things at a rush. There is a lack of stability in our society, there is disinformation, there is division, there is aggression, and I fear very much, as someone who has studied the threat every day for seven and a half years both as a Security Minister and a Defence Minister, that we are moving into a period where the world is less stable, less secure and more anxious—and that is also the case here at home on these beautiful shores. It saddens me, because as a young man and indeed as Defence Secretary I often or sometimes would have to inflict violence on behalf of the state to defend others. It is no easy thing to do and we should never celebrate it, but we have to do it to keep ourselves safe. Yet I always think of the victims or the consequences of those actions that we take.

People do not realise that the sole authority in Government for the use of lethal force lies with the Secretary of State for Defence and that it can be vetoed by a Prime Minister. They are the only two who in the end make decisions that often affect people’s lives and deaths and that send people into harm’s way on behalf of the state. That is a very important responsibility and I know that whoever, from whichever party, does that job next will be well supported by the men and women of the armed forces and the civil servants and the security services, who absolutely put sacrifice and duty first and should be an inspiration to us all.

At Sandhurst I was taught the motto “Serve to lead”: that the way we lead people, whether our troops or the public, is to give up ourselves, to sacrifice ourselves for

[Mr Wallace]

their service, and that means sacrificing our ego and sometimes our ambition and, sadly, sometimes costs our private life as well. Ultimately, if we in this House do not realise that duty and service are how we serve this country, I do not know who else will. We must maintain those standards and maintain that principle for eternity, because as my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead said, across the world people are not believing in democracy or the rule of law, and people look to Britain. When going around the world as Defence Secretary or Prime Minister or Foreign Secretary or representing the Opposition, we learn that people look to Britain still for tolerance, for democracy, for the rule of law. We must recognise that that is part of our DNA and our core.

I am sad that we will have another general election, although of course that is the nature of this wonderful democracy. It will be my sixth general election, but I will not be fighting it, and I know that across this House many of our colleagues of different parties will lose their seats through no fault of their own. They will have done everything in their time here: they will have served their constituents, sacrificing family time; they will have done their very best. They will have tried to answer the email from the impossible constituent, they will have put up with threats, and they will lose their seat because on polling day someone will decide they do not like their Prime Minister or their leader, and that is the way of things. People should not take it personally, and I say to colleagues present who may not return to this House that, in my experience, “If the boundaries don’t get you, the electorate one day will. Don’t take it personally—you are loved by all of us and you will remain so.”

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you: thank you to this House, which I used to dream about joining when I was a young boy at school. Politics was the only A-level I actually enjoyed; I was inspired by a teacher. I got a D in it I am afraid to say; my children laugh at that whenever I tell them. Nevertheless, politics is about people and when we forget that we are in trouble and the worse for it.

The final thing I would say as an election is approaching—we are almost already in it—is that I always tried to make sure that defence was a core part of Government, not a discretionary spend stuck on the end. We hear, in all parts of the House, lines such as “Defence does not win elections.” Well, it can lose them. I live in the north-west of England and I am not trying to be party political, but loyal, patriotic Labour voters rejected the Labour party in 2019 because they felt that the leader at that time did not care about defence and about them. Defence matters. It is not an add-on after health and education.

When we come to writing our manifestos, let us please include investment in defence. Let us ensure that it is core, and let us not allow leaders to say things like “when economic conditions allow”. We do not say that about health, and we do not say it about education. Having read so much intelligence for so many years, I am frightened to think that by the end of this decade, if our armed forces and our security services are not match-fit for the threat that is coming our way, we will have only ourselves to blame. It is our children who

might have to go and fight for us, and they deserve to be as protected as possible, with the best equipment and the best allies.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Before I hand over the Chair to Nigel Evans, I hope the House will forgive me if I indulge myself slightly by taking this last opportunity to thank everyone for the kind remarks that have been made over the past day or so about my stepping down.

I was deeply touched by what Mr Speaker said this morning, and I thank him for all the support he has given me over the years, as well as my fellow Deputy Speakers. It has meant so much. We have had some difficult times in this Parliament, and Mr Speaker’s leadership and that of his team have essentially got us through it. Despite those pressures, however, we have managed to have quite a lot of fun and laughs, and it has been a great team to be part of.

It has been a privilege to be in this Chair and to witness at first hand the work that Members of this House do on behalf of their constituents and on behalf of the country. Yes, it can get a bit argumentative, and yes, it can get rather passionate sometimes—as I witnessed recently myself—but that is the price of our democracy, and, as others have said, we are lucky to have it. I am proud to have been able, as Deputy Speaker, to play a part in that.

I also want to thank, once again, all the staff of the House for—as others have said—making the House work so effectively. I thank the excellent Clerks for their wise and calm advice, and, of course, I thank the utterly magnificent Doorkeepers who look after us all so well. This really is water in my glass, by the way; it is not gin and tonic, as someone suggested to me yesterday.

Like others, I have been extremely lucky to have had a brilliant team in my constituency office, and excellent advisers here in Parliament. I have also been very lucky with my local Labour party, whose members have worked so hard and so diligently over the years. I wish all right hon. and hon. Members well for the future, whether or not they are standing for election again. Finally, I want to thank the people of Doncaster: I have been honoured to serve as their representative in Parliament for 27 wonderful years.

1.34 pm

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): Let me start by thanking you, Madam Deputy Speaker. You have been the fairest, most tolerant, most patient and most wonderful Deputy Speaker—as, indeed, have the others—and I think we should all thank you for the calm and disciplined manner in which you have conducted what have sometimes been very difficult debates.

I also acknowledge the right hon. Member for Wyre and Preston North (Mr Wallace) for being incredibly kind to all hon. Members when he was Security Minister and we faced challenges. I was always astounded by the amount of time that he was willing to spend with us individually to support us through those difficult times. I hope that he carries on being a strong voice, in a

different capacity, to ensure that we do the most important thing that we can do as a Government, which is defend the British people.

I acknowledge the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), who is no longer in her place. She and I were both candidates in Barking in 1994. I beat her, but I have a wonderful video of us both, she as Essex girl, me as rather harassed mum. She quickly transformed herself from Essex girl to Maidenhead woman, and then had an incredibly successful career here. I thank her.

I made my maiden speech from this position. I remember it well; I was absolutely petrified that I was going to stutter, but I got through it. My husband and four children were here watching me. I did the usual thing of sitting down and listening to a couple of speeches, then we all went to have a cup of tea and some scones. I came back for the wind-ups and sat up in the corner. Suddenly, I heard the mighty voice of Betty Boothroyd admonishing me for having sat in the wrong place, because I did not have a clue that the protocols of the House meant that we had to sit where we had given our speech when we came back for the wind-ups. I felt really told off, but I realised that that was the role of the Speaker.

Another early experience that I must share with the House reflects the challenges that many hon. Members face in balancing our responsibilities as Members of the House and our roles as parents and carers at home. It happened early in my career, when Tony Blair had just been elected as leader of the Labour party. I knew that if I sat behind him at Prime Minister's questions, the good burghers of Barking would think that I was really working hard. To do that, I had to bag my place about half an hour before it started, so I sat down feeling pleased with myself and waited for it to start.

In those days—this is so long ago—we did not have phones but pagers, and as PMQs started and Tony made his first contribution, my pager suddenly went off. It was my 15-year-old daughter saying, “Mum, ring home. Emergency.” She was supposed to be revising for her GCSEs, so I thought, “Goodness, has the house caught fire? Is she going to tell me she's pregnant?” I had no idea what it was. I gave up the seat, rushed outside, picked up the phone and said, “What is it, Anna? What's happened?” She said, “Oh nothing, Mum. I just wanted to see whether you had your pager on silent.”

That may be enough of the funny reflections, but perhaps I will mention one more—the time that my dental bridge fell out as I was giving an impassioned speech on transparency in British tax havens. I suddenly thought, “What on earth's happened?” I was rescued by my true friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), to whom I will always be indebted. She immediately intervened, which meant that I could sit down and sort my mouth out before getting up to continue my contribution.

As other hon. Members have, I want to thank everybody. I thank all the staff in Westminster who make our lives easier, safer and more effective. It is only now that I am about to leave this place that I realise how well we have all been looked after by everybody here. From those who keep our rooms tidy and clean, to those who provide endless food and drink, keep us safe, support us in Committees and the Chamber, make sure that we stick by the rules and record the words that we speak, we

have the most brilliant team of people, who put up with a lot, on whom we are all very dependent, and to whom I express my heartfelt gratitude and thanks.

I thank, too, all the staff who have served me. I have not managed to hang on to anybody for 30 years, but I have had endlessly wonderful staff supporting me, both here in Westminster and in the constituency—and of course I thank all my constituents in Barking, whom I love deeply, and the party that has supported me down the years.

I also want to thank the very many Members of this House, both in my party and across the Chamber, from all the political tribes, who have shown friendship down the years and displayed willingness to work together across the House to achieve changes that we all believe will make Britain a better country. So often, politics is portrayed as poisoned, polarised, personal and painful, and sometimes it is, but the best work we do in this Chamber, in Select Committees and through all-party parliamentary groups happens when we come together and find consensus, and when a shared ambition and approach bring us to a collective solution that we can all support. When we work together, we achieve much more lasting changes that really will make the world a better place.

As I leave this position, I would like to share one reflection with the House. We are living through a period of increased and increasing mistrust of politics and politicians. When I first became an MP, I was always really proud to tell people I met that I was an MP. For me it was not a job, but a vocation. I am sure that many of us in the Chamber share that feeling. Like most people who seek election, I just wanted to play my little part in making the world a better place, and in equalising life chances in every community, but things have changed in the last few years. I do not know whether others feel the same, but now I often feel that I have to apologise to people for being an MP. We are too often distrusted as a group, and our efforts are ridiculed and mocked.

It is not that people are apathetic about politics. It is that they are angry about politics. They feel that we do not listen, that we exist in our own bubble here in Westminster, that we are in it just for ourselves, that we put party before country, and that we put self-interest before our constituents' interests. That may not be true, but that is what people feel. We all know here that politics really does matter. It matters a lot. It matters in every family and every community. I know that; we all know that. From my very first campaign as an MP, to change the rules governing the prescribing of a particular painkiller whose side-effects had a life-changing impact on a constituent, to the recent campaigning I have done for smarter regulation to turn the tide on dirty money, politics matters. What we decide here can make a difference. My fear is that the anger that people feel will turn to apathy, and people will not use their democratic right to vote in the general election. A low turnout could well be the main headline from this coming election.

Of course we need to clean up politics and stop the abuse that has become too commonplace in too many ways, from Ministers not abiding by the Nolan principles to money—too often dirty money—buying access, peerages, honours and contracts. We must also go back to our basics: the basics of listening to our constituents, responding to their needs and not ours, and reflecting their priorities

[*Dame Margaret Hodge*]

in the work that we do here. I hope that the next group of Members of Parliament, when they are elected on 4 July, will take all that really seriously, and see rebuilding trust in politics and democracy as a prime objective that they have to meet during the next Parliament.

Leaving is bittersweet. I have already signed up to piano lessons, and I am hoping to spend a bit more time with my too many grandchildren, who have not seen enough of me, but I also know that this has been the privilege of my life. Being a Member of Parliament, meeting and mixing with so many talented, generous, warm, committed and principled people, has been a pleasure, a joy and a privilege. I will miss it like mad, but I wish everybody really well.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Thank you, Margaret. We will miss you like mad, too. We love you.

1.45 pm

Matt Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con): I was not expecting to speak today, as I did not know there was a slot today for valedictory speeches. During yesterday's statement, I spoke about the importance of the NHS, and said that that would be the end of my contributions, but I saw Mr Speaker last night, and he explained that some time would be given over to valedictory speeches today. Having had the Conservative Whip restored this week, I am delighted to say that many, many colleagues have said, "You should say something and reflect."

I start by saying what an honour it is to follow the right hon. Member for Barking (*Dame Margaret Hodge*), who taught me an enormous amount when I was a new Member of Parliament and I served on her Public Accounts Committee. It was our Public Accounts Committee in theory, but as she was Chair, it was very much her PAC. I undertook to read every word of every draft report, because she was brilliant at occasionally —[*Interruption.*] She is laughing, which I take as an admission of guilt; she knows what I am going to say. She would occasionally stick in a sentence that put the boot into the Government, but she would put it on about page 29, hoping that nobody else in the Committee would notice. I took it upon myself to read the detail, and I learned that from her.

I have, of course, found serving in this House to be the privilege of my life—I am sure we all feel that. I agree strongly with the words of the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (*Mrs May*), and the former Defence Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wyre and Preston North (*Mr Wallace*), about the importance and value of public service. Politics, no matter how difficult it can be, is public service, because in a democracy it is the only way to translate the will of the people into the governance of the nation. We are the channels through which that should happen, and I want to thank some people who have helped make it happen for me.

I want to thank the people who got me into politics in the first place, particularly Dr Michael Hart, who is also the man who spotted my dyslexia, and Nick St Aubyn, the man who suffered most from my dyslexia. I was his agent in the 2001 general election, when he was the Member for Guildford. Let me retell a terrible story. He

had written his election address and I had put it into a very early version of PowerPoint. He had written this lovely phrase, "I want to unite the community". I thought it was great, so I put it into the headline. It was only when 42,000 copies of the election address had been delivered that he picked a copy up from his doormat and said, "Matt, why have you written, 'I want to untie the community'?" He took it very well, but unfortunately he lost the seat, and I did not speak about my dyslexia for 20 years after that because of the shame it brought me. He also forgave me, which was a truly heroic act.

I thank my staff here, particularly Helen Dudley, who retired a few years ago, and Elizabeth Hitchcock. I thank the countless others who have supported me in my office here in Parliament, but those two have always held the thing together. Especially in times in government, when it is hard to give as much time as one would want to one's constituency duties, they really have taken action. Both of them were preferred to me in West Suffolk and did a much better job than I could have done. I thank all the civil servants with whom I served and worked so closely, but I also want to put in a word for special advisers. Let me give one short story about why special advisers are such a valuable and important part of our political system. In the pandemic, Members might remember that during the vaccination programme there was an interval—a gap—between two doses of the vaccine being given. I cannot remember how long it was—it might have been 12 weeks. One of my political special advisers spotted a tweet from an American statistician saying that, because the first vaccine had a much greater impact than the second, if we reduced the number of weeks between the first and the second being given, we would save many lives. He spotted the tweet and brought it to me. I took it to the clinical leads, Professor Whitty and Professor Van-Tam, who ran the maths and verified it. We spoke to the regulators and, despite this being novel, within nine days the information spotted in a tweet by an American statistician became Government policy, announced here, and that was followed throughout the world. That alone is calculated to have saved 10,000 lives in the UK.

There are many more staff I would like to thank, including my three agents in West Suffolk over the years: Dorothy Whittaker, Lance Stanbury and Bobby Bennett. And, like the former Defence Secretary, I also thank my family, in particular my children, because the impact of the scrutiny of politics, especially when people make mistakes, has a huge impact on them, and they have put up with a lot.

It is in the nature of politics that people do not see what a team effort it is. Many people have said that today. What will I miss most? The single unambiguous answer to that question is that I will miss colleagues the most. In difficult times, the support of colleagues, both on this and the other side of the House, has been incredibly powerful. I will also miss the opportunity to contribute to national debates. The single vote that I regret not having taken part in is that on assisted dying, which surely will come and which I have come to support very passionately.

Politics is also noisier and harder than it was 14 years ago, when I first came to Parliament. The nature of social media has made it more difficult, and the nature of the world has, sadly, made it more dangerous. Even through this, one of the things that I have tried to

promote is the power of technology as a force for good. The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) and I have campaigned on that together over the years. Yes, we must ensure that technology is harnessed for the benefit of humanity, but by God, we must make sure that harness it we do. We cannot stand in the way, and the UK is at its best when we are at the forefront and when we harness the power of modern technology. My prediction is that, over the next 14 years, the impact will be far greater not just on the economy but on society and politics than it has been even over the past 14 years. We are living through the slowest rate of change of our lives. It is only going to get faster, and I hope that this place is ready for that.

I cannot finish without a word on the NHS and the role it plays in our national life. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead asked me to be Health Secretary she said, “We need to improve the tech in the health service. Could you do that?” For 18 months, I thoroughly enjoyed myself trying to improve the tech in the health service. Then, of course, the pandemic struck. For one last time I want to say thank you to all of those who rose to the occasion and did so much to get us through, delivering the necessary safety measures, including the shielding programme, which is not mentioned as much as it should be, protecting those who were most vulnerable. And, of course, the vaccine programme was without doubt one of the country’s finest achievements in peacetime. I want to thank the colleagues with whom I worked incredibly closely and who helped make that happen; some of them were heroes of the pandemic too.

I leave by saying this. I think it is impossible for a political party—those aspiring to govern—to win without some of those lodestars. It is impossible and wrong to win without being on the side of the future and trying to represent the youth of our country who are coming through. They may see things differently from how we do; I say that even as a 45-year-old. It is impossible to win or to deserve to win without a true love of the NHS. I am proud to serve a Prime Minister who is from an NHS family. That true love is important because the people believe it and it is true.

Finally, it is impossible to win unless we truly want to serve our country. I believe that everybody comes into this place wanting to make their country a better place. I have tried my hardest to do that for 14 years—to reach out, to try to do things differently and to try to embrace the future. It has been a honour and a privilege, and I thank you.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Thank you, Matt, and thank you NHS.

1.56 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): It is a real privilege to speak in this debate and listen to all the reflective speeches from right hon. and hon. Members right across the House. It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock). I do not know whether he recalls the engagement we used to have when he was at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. I actually regret that he moved on to the health portfolio because at the time we had had an important meeting about support for Gaelic broadcasting.

He was generous in recognising the strength of the argument that I had put about increasing that support. What happened? He left, and the moment was gone.

I cannot help reflecting on my engagement with another Government Minister, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), when he was the Secretary of State responsible for agriculture. We were having some debates about support for Scottish agriculture. It was a typical, feisty Scottish debate. There was a lot of passion, and perhaps some surprise among the officials in the room. But it ended up with the right hon. Gentleman asking me to come with him to the Treasury to make the case. I thought, “Hang on! You’re the Government Minister—you’re supposed to be doing this.” But I am glad to say that in that case we were successful in getting the convergence uplift money to Scottish crofters and farmers. That is a good indication of when this House is at its best—when Members of Parliament across the House can come together and we can achieve decisions for the benefit of our constituents.

It is an honour and privilege for every Member to serve in this House, but for me there is something particular about representing a remote and rural constituency—the largest in the United Kingdom: at 12,000 square kilometres, it is the same size as Northern Ireland. Engaging with constituents is so important. My one regret about the election coming this early is that I have had to postpone my summer surgery tour. Those who know the west highlands—I can see smiling around the Chamber—will be aware that that is a three-week tour, visiting many islands: 32 different places to hold constituency surgeries. I spent yesterday unravelling all my plans for that, and I wish my successor every success.

My last constituency engagement was on Tuesday, when I was up in the Isle of Skye celebrating 50 years of the Gaelic college in the presence of the Duke of Edinburgh. I am glad to say that the college continues to flourish. But we all have the important role of representing our constituents. Many other right hon. and hon. Members have talked about the importance of coming here to serve. We all do that because we believe in public service—we all believe that we are here to try to make our constituents’ lives better. But of course we come from different political persuasions. In my and my party’s case, although we respect this place and the job we are here to do, our aim is, as Winnie Ewing famously said, not to settle down but to settle up and make sure that we advance the cause of Scottish independence.

When we come out of this Chamber and pass through those doors, we leave the arguments behind, because in the end we are all here to do the same job of representing our constituents. Members on the opposite Benches are not our enemy; they are our colleagues. We should remember the importance of having respectful debate and dialogue. Like other Members, I regret the polarisation we see in society and the toxicity of our social media. Each and every one of us, including those in the media, has a responsibility to ensure that we show appropriate leadership and get to a better place. As was said earlier, young people need to feel encouraged to come into Parliament and politics and must not be put off. I am sad to say that many people today will question whether they want to serve.

I was elected to the House in 2015, making my maiden speech on 28 May 2015. It was one of my shortest speeches, at only 11 minutes—though I will not attempt

[*Ian Blackford*]

to detain the House too long this afternoon. I quoted Donald Stewart, the first SNP Member of Parliament to be elected at a general election, who said:

“If I stray into controversial matters, they will, in a sense, be impartial controversies, since as a Nationalist Member I shall be in controversy with both sides of the House from time to time. For that reason, if I stray I hope that it will be less objectionable to the traditions of the House.”—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1970; Vol. 807, c. 1345.]

I can remember giving my maiden speech, and I have to say that, when the 56 SNP MPs arrived, we were made to feel very welcome by many colleagues across the House, not least by the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), who I see is in his place up at the back. Having given my maiden speech on the second day, and with the SNP having to respond early to every debate, we found very quickly that we were being asked to speak on subjects I knew little about. I will not say what the subject was, but I took some advice from the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole when I asked him, “Andrew, what am I supposed to do?” He said, “Ian, it’s easy. Just attack us.” That was the best advice I was given, and I hope I have been true to it over the last nine years, but in a constructive manner.

The right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), who is no longer in her place, spoke about never having voted against the whipping advice. Early in the 2015 Parliament, the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) moved a ten-minute rule Bill and my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) said to me, “Go into the Aye Lobby and I’ll offer to tell for the hon. Lady.” I went through the Lobby only to find out that the whipping advice had changed and we were abstaining, so I became the first SNP MP to rebel in that Parliament. I didn’t keep it up, and I suppose I was giving the whipping advice for most of the period after that.

Let me come back to 2015. When 56 SNP MPs and only one Conservative MP, one Labour MP and one Liberal Democrat MP were elected in Scotland, it was almost a complete whitewash. That came several months after the Scottish independence referendum in 2014. It is worth gently and politely reminding the House that we had just had the Smith Commission and were told at that point that Scotland was to lead the UK and that it was a partnership of equals. I have to say, with regret, that that has not often proven to be case over the last few years.

With respect to the result of the 2014 referendum, it is our right to continue to put the case for Scotland to be an independent country in elections to Westminster and to the Scottish Parliament. I say to the House that that constitutional question has yet to be resolved. There is a fundamental question, given that this is a Union of equals, as to how Scotland is permitted to leave that Union if it chooses to do so. I make that point because in the election to the Scottish Parliament in 2021, there was a majority of independence-supportive Members. What mechanism is there—this will have to be addressed at some point—if the people of Scotland show through the election of Members of Parliament here or elsewhere that they have a desire to achieve a different solution? I accept that, for the SNP and those

who believe in independence, we will win that argument only if we can win the economic argument by showing that Scotland can, should and will be a prosperous country. We heard earlier from the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) about everything that is happening with green energy. We are faced today by many challenges, but, my goodness, what an opportunity we have with the potential for wind, solar and tidal. That will become an opportunity for us only if we can command the supply chain and drive the investment we need into that industry.

Of course, that desire to achieve economic growth ought to be for a purpose, and that purpose is ensuring that we can improve our public services. I say to Conservative Members respectfully that when we have that debate about the future—whether it is here or in Scotland—we need to have that engagement with everybody.

Let me quickly reflect on economic growth. It would be my contention that ever since the financial crisis in 2008, we have struggled to create the circumstances of sustainable economic growth. Indeed, this morning I was looking at statistics showing that growth in the US economy since the pandemic has been 8.9%, but relative growth for the United Kingdom over the same period has been 1.7%. Now, we can discuss Budgets, financial statements and all the rest of it, as we do, but we need to have that debate about the fundamentals. How do we up our game? How do we drive up investment? How do we drive up productivity? All the pressures that we have, along with the talk about tax cuts and the talk about investment in our public services, will be addressed only when we consider the fundamentals of how we deliver sustainable economic growth in this country.

We had, if I may say so, the disastrous premiership of the previous Prime Minister, which exposed weaknesses in our mortgage market from us not having long-term fixed mortgages, for example. We can talk about the fact that, yes, there are some encouraging signs with the economy, but when it comes down to real people, we know that 5 million households have been exposed to rising mortgage rates since the beginning of 2021. Analysis by the Bank of England shows that, given where we are now—and even with, I hope, the prospect of some reduction in interest rates over the coming period—another 5 million households will still be exposed to rising interest rates over the coming period. We can stop and think about what that means—it means that, on average, people are paying 40% more for their mortgages than they were prior to the rise in interest rates.

If I may, let me quickly reflect on what has happened over the course of the past nine years and, my goodness, the pace of change with Brexit, covid and, of course, the situation with Ukraine and now Gaza as well. I accept that, across the United Kingdom, people voted for Brexit. In Scotland we did not; we wished to remain in the European Union. The right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) talked about the three votes that she lost in this House. If I have one regret from all of that period, it is that as I think back to the 2015 to 2017 Parliament, or indeed the 2017 to 2019 Parliament, I would contend that in this House there was a majority for staying in the single market and the customs union. It is a pity that we did not come together across the House. Yes, we could have allowed the Brexit that people in the United Kingdom voted for. That did not

mean that we had to come out of the single market and the customs union. I regret the economic self-harm that we have had as a consequence.

I am glad about the progress that has been made this week on infected blood and on Horizon. My one regret is that we have not yet successfully dealt with the WASPI women. I know that will fall to the new Government, but I hope that, on a cross-party and consensual basis, we can recognise, accept and deliver justice, as we must, for the WASPI women who faced an increase in women's pensionable age that simply was not communicated in the right manner.

I see the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work on the Front Bench. I say respectfully that she will know that the other issue I want to see resolved is footballers with dementia. We think about the suffering that they and their families are going through. This needs to be classified as an industrial injury, and I hope that in the next Parliament there is some closure on that issue.

I will begin to wind up, Mr Deputy Speaker. For much of my time in this House, I have had the privilege of being not just the MP for Ross, Skye and Lochaber, but the SNP Westminster leader. I am grateful for the opportunity that I was given by colleagues and, I have to say, for the relationships that I had across the House in that period. I have talked about the right hon. Member for Wyre and Preston North (Mr Wallace) and his engagement with others, which is an example of the co-operation that needs to happen when we face the situations that we do. Indeed, we reiterate today that all of us will stand by our friends in Ukraine. We must see Russia pushed back and see liberty, freedom and security delivered to those people.

I do regret that the House has not been able to come together to the same extent over Gaza, because we are all watching the humanitarian crisis that is taking place there. I hope that we can show leadership on that issue, agree on the need to bring peace and security to the region, and recognise the importance of delivering a two-state solution so that both communities can live together, and the responsibility on this House to show leadership to make sure we can get to that point.

Finally, let me thank the staff in the House of Commons, who work day in, day out to make us feel welcome and to support us—the security staff, the Doorkeepers and the catering staff—and also the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers, for the roles they play and the courtesy they have always shown me. I want to thank my constituency staff and the leadership staff that I had at Westminster. The job that we all have as politicians, we only do because of the abilities of those who tirelessly work in support of us all.

Leaving this House is a bittersweet moment for all of us who are departing. I thank everyone for their co-operation, and for the arguments that we have sometimes had as well. We should remember that all of us come here to serve. What a privilege it is for each and every one of us. I thank all the voters of Ross, Skye and Lochaber. It has been the privilege of my life.

Finally, I first came to this place in 1980. I came with my partner, who is sitting in the Under Gallery, so there is a sense of closure. Having come here all those decades ago, today we will be leaving. Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Thank you, Ian, and good luck to you both.

2.12 pm

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): As I was watching this debate, sitting in this beautiful Chamber, I was thinking of my constituency of Harlow. Not so long ago, I was campaigning outside a Lidl supermarket, which I did regularly, handing out leaflets. One time—this is genuinely a true story—a lady came up to me and said that my leaflet had come through her letterbox that very morning. She said how handsome I looked, but followed that up by saying, “You look bloody awful in real life.” I tell that story not just because it is true, but because, however wonderful this place is and however incredible it is to be an MP, our constituents, especially in a place like Harlow, bring us back down to Earth with a bump.

That is very good for us, because we go back to our constituencies and do our community days every Friday and Saturday, and often on Sundays, and our constituents tell us what is going on. Almost every Saturday, I go to a wonderful sandwich café serving incredible coffee in the centre of the town, and my goodness, the constituents in that café tell me what is what. They tell me what is really going on, whether it is someone whose child cannot get special educational needs support or somebody who cannot get a house, or whatever it may be.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I was driving through Harlow one day, and to my shock, I suddenly saw my right hon. Friend sitting by the dual carriageway under a bloody great big sign reading “Vote Halfon”. You could not miss him, and I thought, “My God, there's someone who knows how to campaign.”

Robert Halfon: I thank my right hon. Friend—my truly honourable Friend—for his intervention. It is true; it is going to be a strange election. I have done six from 2001 onwards, including in 2005 when I lost by 97 votes, and at every single election I have stood by the roadside with a massive sign, usually “Please cut fuel duty”, from 6.30 am to 9 am or from 4 pm to 7 pm, waving at all the cars. One time, there was a van that used to pass every day, and they used to scream obscenities at me. They even brought an inflatable “up yours” sign to wave at me, and a few days before polling day, they threw a mild water bomb at me—just a balloon; it was fine. On the last day, on polling day, with this having gone on for almost six weeks, they got out of the van. I was thinking, “Oh my goodness, what are they going to do to me?” They slapped me on the back and said, “Good on you, mate. We're voting Conservative.”

As I have said, Parliament is an incredible place. An Essex MP came to my school, although I was brought up in north London, and said that the Houses of Parliament had over 1,000 rooms. I demanded to go and see those 1,000 rooms—I had to see every single one of them—and I came here on a tour, but sadly I did not see all 1,000 rooms. To this very day, I still have not seen all 1,000 rooms, but I decided on that day, at 10 years old, that I would be a Member of Parliament, because I thought this Parliament was so beautiful. I thought Central Lobby was so incredible. I loved history, and every single one of us in Parliament is part of living history.

[Robert Halfon]

I wanted to be in Parliament for another reason. Although I very rarely talked about it, because I did not want to be known as a disabled MP, when I was a child I could not walk. I used to walk on tiptoe—perhaps I should have gone into ballet at Covent Garden—and I was told that I would never be able to walk. I was told that I should go to a special school; the doctors wrote to my father saying so, and I remember seeing the letters, even at a young age. Then my father found this incredible professor at Great Ormond Street Hospital who understood what was going on, and I had operations throughout my childhood, right through to adult life.

What is being an MP about? It is about giving public service, looking after your constituents and serving the public. Professor Lloyd-Roberts at Great Ormond Street Hospital, the person who started it off, was the man who changed my life, and I felt that being an MP was my chance to help change other people's lives for the better. I should say that I was in another hospital and then moved to a nursing home, and none other than Nadine Dorries, the former MP for Mid Bedfordshire, was a nurse while I was in that hospital—so she tells me, and I think I sort of remember it. She is perhaps the only MP who has seen me in my birthday suit—less “The Plot”, more the pot, as it might be.

As an MP, you do things for your constituency and you also champion causes, and as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wyre and Preston North (Mr Wallace) said, you sometimes have a chance to govern. When I came in, I wanted to do three things: the first was to build an even better Harlow, and the second was to champion the cost of living. We think a lot about the cost of living now, but the cost of living in constituencies such as mine has always been tough. I have constituents where often, one partner works in the day and the other works in the evening, and people say to me, “We work for 48 hours and still find it hard to keep our heads above water.”

I started the fuel duty campaign because my local McDonald's had started charging for parking if people stayed beyond a certain time. I asked the franchise owner why he was doing this, and he said, “People are parking overnight because they can't afford to drive back home.” People were parking overnight and sleeping in their car because they could not afford the cost of fuel, which I realised was the central issue. It was also why, as a Conservative, I campaigned for the living wage. I was proud to attend Cabinet when George Osborne, the then Chancellor, announced it.

I was also proud to be George Osborne's Parliamentary Private Secretary. PPSs are usually known as “bag carriers” but, because of my legs, the Chancellor sometimes helped me to carry my briefcase, so I think I was the first PPS in history whose bag was carried by the Secretary of State, rather than the other way around.

The other most important issue to me has been championing apprenticeships and skills. Way back in 2008, when I was a parliamentary candidate, I went into a building in my constituency and met some young kids who were being looked after by the Prince's Trust, which is an amazing organisation that I love with every fibre of my body, and Catch22. They talked about apprenticeships, and about wanting to do skills, but there were no offerings for them. These kids were from very disadvantaged backgrounds, and I said to myself on that day that, if I were elected to Parliament, I would

champion apprenticeships and skills. My first speech in the House of Commons was about trying to get more schools to encourage their children, pupils and students to do apprenticeships, as well as go to university, by transforming careers advice in our schools so that people understand the apprenticeship offering.

I am very proud of what this Government have done. We often talk about successes in education and reading, but I am very proud of what this Government have done on skills. I believe that history will show huge apprenticeship reforms. People can now do an apprenticeship in everything from aeronautics to zoology.

Degree apprenticeships were introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock), and there have now been more than 200,000 degree apprentices. People can take one in every subject, and they are now regarded with prestige. Our T-levels are prestigious vocational qualifications. We have more than 20 institutes of technology teaching prestigious tertiary education. I love Harlow College, which I have visited more than 110 times since becoming a Member of Parliament, because the college, the staff and students have taught me everything I know. They helped me along the way when I was championing apprentices.

I was twice the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and, latterly, Higher Education, for which I am hugely grateful to the Prime Minister. It was a huge moment for me, because Select Committee Chairs and Back Benchers can campaign, and I got apprenticeships for prisoners and more careers advice for students in schools through, but Ministers can make policy. It is an incredible honour to be able to do that, and some of our reforms over the past couple of years, such as the lifelong learning entitlement, which will revolutionise adult learning, the improved apprenticeship levy and the £2.7 billion being spent on apprenticeships by 2025 will make a huge difference.

We stand up and get the credit for all these things, but I could not have done one thing without—without—

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Robert Halfon: I will in a second.

I could not have done one thing without the incredible staff here. They are the people who work for long hours. They look after us, they are loyal, they do the hard work, they do the research, and they help to prepare the speeches. I want to name a few who have been with me over the years. Some have gone, but I hope the House will forgive me if I name them all, because these people really have been incredible. They are Ann Russell-Day, Paul Abbott, Victoria Thornton, Janet Ballard and Melanie Torino—watching from above in the Gallery today—Maria Bellissimo, Hannah Ellis, Holly Papworth, Ethan Harries—watching from above—Natalie Dilworth, Anna Taylor—watching from above—Alex Griffiths, Simon Carter—who started me off, as my agent—Dan Swords, leader of Harlow Council, the youngest ever leader of any council in political history, and a former apprentice in my office—Emily Burditt, Clive Russell-Day, Aaron Farrell, and Howard Cox of FairFuelUK. There is also, of course, my wife Vanda, who is watching, and who has stood with me through thick and thin.

I will take an intervention now.

Nickie Aiken: Only if you need it.

Robert Halfon: I always love interventions from my hon. Friend.

I must also thank the wonderful residents of Harlow. They are tough. They want their Member of Parliament to work hard to champion and fight for Harlow, and they expect the best from their MP. I have worked hard to help regenerate our town, and some wonderful things have been happening. I want to give particular thanks to the editor of our local newspaper, Michael Casey, who is a very special individual. We used to have three newspapers in our town, which were free and went to every home. This man set up an internet newspaper that now receives literally millions of hits. He gives me a hard time, which is his right, but if it were not for him we would have no news in Harlow.

I do not need to suck up to you any more, Mr Deputy Speaker, because I am not standing again, but you have been a wonderful person to me, as have all the other Deputy Speakers. I am a huge fan of Mr Speaker as well, and I hope he remains in place for many years to come. He has shown me nothing but kindness.

I especially want to thank the Doorkeepers, one of whom is sitting in the Chamber. I hope he will not mind my mentioning him, but he knew me when I was a researcher. Every single one of the Doorkeepers is extraordinary and decent, and I am enormously grateful to them all. I should also mention the staff of the Tea Room. I love the Tea Room: I call it the lorry drivers' caff for MPs. Its staff have helped me every single day, and I love every one of them.

Let me end with just three asks. First, as I will not be here any more to make a nuisance of myself on fuel duty, I ask now that, whichever party is in government in the future, we continue freeze fuel duty and to cut it. Let us remember that the Prime Minister cut it by 5p when he was Chancellor. Secondly, I ask that we continue, as a House, to champion apprenticeships and skills. I was the first MP to employ full-time parliamentary apprentices in my office, and I hope that one day the Speaker will set up a scheme, additional to the intern scheme, to put more apprentices in MPs' offices and not just in the civil service of the House, however brilliant that is.

As I have said, I never talk much about my legs, but I am going now, and I am very lucky to have benefited from, for instance, the kindest officers and Doorkeepers in the world—as well as the Segway. I have run over a few Members' toes with it, from those of my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) to those of a former MP for Milton Keynes and a few others in between. Everyone has been very kind. It will not be the same not to be scooting through here and asking everyone to put their legs up, especially the ladies.

However, this is a terrible place for people who have difficulties. The lavatories are never working, the lifts are never working, and the doors are always shut. There is just not enough understanding. It is not about producing a press release saying, "We're an inclusive and diverse employer." That means nothing. I have had great chats in the last few days with brilliant House of Commons staff—as I have said, every single member of staff is brilliant—but there has to be change. Everybody should be able to access this place easily and comfortably, whatever their background, so I urge the new Parliament, you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Mr Speaker and the other Deputy Speakers to make that happen once and for all.

Finally, I pay tribute to the wonderful party that I joined at 15 years old. It is a family—a dysfunctional family, but a family nevertheless. I feel as though I am leaving home. It is a wonderful honour to have been a member of the Conservative party; I will still be a member and will help as much as I can. Let us go out there and be a compassionate Conservative party that puts social justice and helping the disadvantaged at its heart. Let us not sound too angry, which we can do from time to time. Let us go out and support the Prime Minister, and let us try to win this general election.

I have come to my last words. When I resigned, I quoted J. R. R. Tolkien, whom I love. I am looking forward to the Tolkien Society's annual Oxonmoot later this year. Those who know "Lord of the Rings" will know that when Gandalf takes the hobbits back to the Shire after they have all conquered the ring, he says that he is not going with them:

"I am with you at present...but soon I shall not be. I am not coming to the Shire...My time is over: it is no longer my task to set things to rights, nor to help folk to do so. And as for you, my dear friends, you will need no help...among the great you are, and I have no longer any fear at all for any of you."

I am more Bilbo than Gandalf, because I am small, I have fat feet, I do like a smoke and I love the countryside. For me, although I will not be in Parliament, as Bilbo said:

"The Road goes ever on".

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Thank you, Robert. We will miss you.

2.32 pm

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Ind): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), who has been a tireless and unflinching worker for motorists, as I know. I am glad that, in his valedictory speech, he gave a nod to the legendary Howard Cox, who has been a friend to me over the last two difficult years. I did not follow the advice that the right hon. Gentleman offered to candidates about standing by the side of the road with a sandwich board, but I did get in a cab and ask lots of questions.

I put on record my thanks to my constituents, who have been a source of comfort, support and enlightenment over the past nine years. I also thank my wonderful staff, past and present, who have been unstinting in their support, but who have been well and truly put through the mill—more on that later.

The best thing about being an MP is the interaction with constituents. It has been a privilege to represent the wonderful communities of Solihull and Shirley. Privilege seems such an inadequate word, but it is the only one we have, and I truly feel it. My chief wins include securing a £60 million investment in the local hospital, getting a fairer deal for our superb schools that do so much with so little, and fighting the outrageous plans to strip the borough of police services. In Parliament, it was a huge honour to be the Chair of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee from 2020 to 2023. The Committee made a real contribution, particularly post pandemic, in helping the industries and on head injuries in sport.

[Julian Knight]

Until December 2022, I would have encouraged anyone to become a Member of Parliament. Sadly, I would not do so now, due to the toxicity of the working environment. Be assured at this juncture, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I will be careful, as a wide-ranging criminal investigation into conspiracy to pervert the course of justice, fraud, and forgery involving multiple individuals, is ongoing.

Against all precedent, I was named in December 2022 in connection with an allegation by the Conservative party. Why was I named when multiple Members who have actually been arrested were not? A special case was made for me. I believe that that was for the following reasons. First, there was the pressure from hon. Members about my work to combat racism at Yorkshire county cricket club. It is no coincidence that this occurred three days prior to Mr Rafiq giving evidence once again to the Committee. He testified to exactly the same dirtying of his name that I have faced over the past two years. It was exactly the same *modus operandi*.

Secondly, I lack friends in high places. I played a major role in the current Prime Minister's failure to win the leadership. In addition, I made two complaints to two different Chief Whips about drunken bullying and harassment by a Government Whip. All I wanted was an apology and for it to stop. That bullying was witnessed by an independent female friend, who has supplied an affidavit that is currently with the police in order for them to take action. What is more, I blew the whistle on two occasions about the Islamophobia and racism that I had seen in my party, and nothing was done. In fact, one of the culprits is standing at the next election.

Finally, I think those in the party wanted to make an example of me. They had had their fingers burned over the issues relating to Mr Pincher, and the new Prime Minister wanted to be seen to be getting tough, regardless of the fact that I had told the Whips Office about the allegation back in February, and kept them informed throughout the time until my suspension. When I was cleared by the Met police without an interview, I became aware of a horrendous campaign of lies emanating from certain people within my own party. A boycott of my Select Committee was arranged, and I felt compelled to resign. Friends were pressured to drop their association with me. There is an allegation on the *Byline Times* website that an investigation that had been closed by the Met was moved to Essex at the behest of Government Ministers. That is utterly unprecedented. I think that my being cleared by the police so soon after the Government had taken the unprecedented step of naming me publicly was deemed a serious political embarrassment. The vultures were already circling around my seat, and hon. Members know exactly who they are.

Let me briefly outline the effect that this has had. I think of myself as a real Conservative, and I have been driven from my party—I am sitting on the Opposition Benches rather than the Government Benches. I have contemplated suicide on multiple occasions. Every night, I wake at 3 am—every night. I have lost my position and my future. My family has been placed under unbearable toll and misery. We are ordinary people: I drove to my selection night in a Skoda Fabia; I did not take a helicopter. Staff, both past and present, have been made ill by the barrage of innuendo contained in a malicious dossier and by relentless press harassment.

Hon. Members, we must be very careful for our future. I am actually irrelevant in this—I will go off somewhere else—but if what has happened to me is allowed to pass, it will happen again, and it could change the course of this country's history. An hon. Member could be removed from a hung Parliament by unfounded accusations and disgusting rumours—just imagine what that would have done in 2019.

Now I will retire to private life, relieved but saddened. I hope that one day we will see a real Conservative party again—a party that does not tax until the pips squeak, that believes in liberty and a small state, that does not hang innocent men out to dry. The last 14 years will, I am really sad to say, prove to have been a bit of a waste. Our legacy will be a Labour Government with bankrupt ideas and uninspiring leadership. Only true conservatism has the answer that this country needs, and my only hope is that the crucible of this election will lead to a rebirth of real free-market conservatism. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. I call Colonel Bob Stewart.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

2.39 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Ind): I am very sorry to have to follow such a speech, and I feel sympathy.

It has been a real privilege for me to be here. Fourteen years have gone like a flash. In my 28 years in the Army, I never thought for a moment that I would come to this place. After all, most of the rank and file in the Army view politicians with deep suspicion. When, a few years after I had left the Army, I told my Army colleagues that I was trying to be a Conservative MP, they accused me of having smoked dope. In truth, for 14 years I have felt that I have still been in metaphorical uniform. All of us are in metaphorical uniform, because every single Member of this place serves their country. They may not wear a uniform but, my goodness, they could easily do so.

I have never sought advancement; I like the Back Benches. I never wanted advancement. I told this to David Cameron when he was Prime Minister, and he said, "You won't get it either." I have made my share of mistakes in this place. [HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] I will mention one malapropism. I once intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) and stood up to say, "I would like to thank my hon. Friend," but what I actually said was, "I would like to spank my hon. Friend". I then corrected the mistake. *Hansard* very kindly suggested that they could amend their transcript, but I said, "By no means do that. It's far too good." If they remember me for anything, it is for spanking the hon. Member for Tewkesbury.

May I end by thanking colleagues for putting up with me? [HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] I have made some pretty decent friends, considering they are not in the Army. I like the staff. I particularly like the Doorkeepers, many of whom are ex-military. I thank my office staff, particularly Dr Reza Tabrizi and Neil Cropper. I also thank my wife, Claire Podbielski, for putting up with me for 30 years so far. After all, she has given us four children. [Interruption.] I think that should stand, whatever it was—I am sure it

was very rude. I would like to thank my wife for bearing four children: Julie, Delphine, Ophélie and Xavier. I have to say that at least two of them are in the military. Hooray!

Old soldiers are not meant to die. Apparently, they just fade away. Well, to hell with that—I do not want to fade too quickly. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Colonel Bob. You have been a true and absolute friend ever since I have known you, and you went beyond in helping me in my greatest time of need. I love you, Bob.

2.44 pm

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak, Mr Deputy Speaker, but it is not without a sad heart. When I was thinking about what to say, I thought, “Should it be a thank you?” We are sent here by our constituents; in my case, they have sent me three times, for which I am inordinately grateful, but the greater privilege is that they have let me into their lives, to help them. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) said, we should always remember that we come here to serve. We should serve with courtesy and with a smile, and ensure we are always second in the queue to our constituents.

I have had the most enormous amount of fun, whether in my constituency or in this place. I find it very difficult to run through my list of thank yous, but my first thank you is to my team, particularly to Lesley. Lesley started walking the streets with me—no comments, please; I am sorry for the turn of phrase, Lesley—when I was selected as a candidate back in 2014. She is still in my office, running it and being a star. Supporting her now are Wendy, Laura and the wonderful Helyn, who previously worked next door for my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock). Lesley has served this place for 42 years. It is people like her, and Carolyn, who came before, and Harry, who I thank. It is them, as staff, who do the lion's share of caring for our constituents, week to week.

I place on record, as many others have done, my thanks to the Doorkeepers, who are the glue who stick us all together. As they hugged me this morning and yesterday, their gold emblems jangled—[*Laughter.*] Come on, ladies and gentlemen! They are the Crown jewels.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): Where is this going?

Jo Churchill: It's not going anywhere. They are the glue, as are those in the Tea Room—I will be sad never again to have that special cup of coffee, with the little heart on top, poured by Godfrey; those who ensure our Committees are ready and our Select Committees are doing the important job of holding us to account; and the Clerks, who will answer any question of process. I give my thanks to them. If it were not for them, we could not uphold democracy; we do that and we do it well. We work across the House as people who come here to serve. When we lose the ability to do that courteously and kindly, and to work for the betterment of each and every person in this country, we are all losers, so long may that work continue.

After the glue, I want to thank all those who have served me in my private office or in the civil service. I had the privilege of being asked to go to the Whips Office. There are many former and current Whips in the

Chamber. The Comptroller of His Majesty's Household, my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), is in my view a star among us. She makes sure this Chamber runs. She will sit in the early morning and have her breakfast, which is often a piece of brie or gorgonzola that she picked up from Marks & Spencer on her way in. You are never quite sure if it is your feet, or if she is having her breakfast. She is an institution. Long may the people of Castle Point return our special star.

To the Deputy Chief Whip, my right hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), and to others, I say thank you. Thank you for never disclosing that I probably have one of the bawdiest senses of humour in this place. Near or far—if anyone remembers—we serve. Although the Whips Office perhaps is not always spoken about in the best of terms, we care. Those of us there care very deeply about ensuring that our colleagues in this place are looked after. It is not only about the votes; it is about making sure that, in one of the toughest jobs that we are called to do—because others are right that it is a vocation—we are supported. We support those in our “family”, and also look across the House to help others where we can. To the Whips Office, in which I was a retread, I say: thank you very much. It was truly the honour of my life to serve in the Royal Household, to be at the King's coronation with my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point and my right hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton, and to walk in front of the coffin of Her late, beloved Majesty.

I went from the Whips Office to the Department of Health and Social Care, and a pandemic occurred. In many ways, our finest and our best came to the fore. We should never forget that. It took a toll on our country and our finances, but we showed ourselves at our best: agile, committed, caring and inventive, as my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock), under whom I served, said. The vaccine, developed by the fine minds that we have running our businesses and employing our people, did us proud. Serving alongside the chief medical officer and the two deputies, the chief dental officer and others was another privilege of being in this place.

Taking the gene editing Bill through Parliament when I was in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was a Brexit bonus to me, and hopefully it will serve as a lasting legacy to farming. It was not the way I would have chosen, but it is the way we are walking, and you are better off finding sunshine when you walk than always seeing rain when you look upwards.

I came here as a cancer campaigner, having had it three times. Life is a joy. To represent is a joy. I will leave this place as Employment Minister, doing something that I think is incredibly special and very Conservative: making sure people have jobs. If we are about anything, it is making work for people and giving people dignity. With dignity, people can make choices, and with choices they can thrive.

That brings me on to the final bit. Our jobs mean that we can look after our families, and for me, my family is everything. I would not be here if my husband had not said to me, “Be happy and work for your constituents; I will support you all the way.” Many have spoken about the toll taken on families; for my family, it has been no

[Jo Churchill]

different, so I am going to enjoy them—the whole noisy, bawdy bunch of them—because they are the very best thing in my life.

I leave here with a heavy heart because I adore this place. We are lucky. I adore many of you. I think we are a fantastic party. To be one of the blues is to be on the best team, in my view, and I will carry on fighting for the blues, because this country needs compassion, hard work, and people who believe that we are the best to represent them. I have represented the very best of this country in Bury St Edmunds, and I will miss you all. Serve our country well, because it truly is the best. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): And thank you, Jo. I gave you a hug last night; I am sorry there was nothing jangling!

Jo Churchill: If hugs paid, I would be very rich. The last couple of days have been wonderful. To all those constituents who have written to me, thank you.

2.56 pm

Sir Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con): I welcome this opportunity to put on record my heartfelt thanks to all those with whom I have worked during my time as a Member of Parliament for Reading West. I am enormously grateful to my constituents for putting their faith in me through four successive general elections, and over the past 14 years as an MP—and indeed, during the four years prior to that, when I was a parliamentary candidate.

I have had the great joy of working with so many brilliant people and organisations across Reading. Together, we campaigned successfully to set up one of the first free schools in the country, the All Saints Junior School, which is still rated outstanding. We founded a new secondary school, the Wren School. We won funding for upgrades for local train stations at Theale and Tilehurst, and money for a new station in Green Park. We got the money for and ensured the construction of flood-alleviation schemes in Tilehurst and Purley. We secured a vital road crossing upgrade on Dee Road in the vicinity of several primary schools. We kept Pincent's hill green. We campaigned successfully together for stronger sentences for dangerous driving, and to strengthen legislation to deal with illegal encampments. We got the No. 33 bus redirected from the Birds estate. I could go on, and every colleague here will have a similar and probably longer list, but the one thing that I hope we will all agree on is that without the strength, energy and commitment of our constituents, none of what we do locally would be possible. I therefore thank each and every one of my constituents from the bottom of my heart.

It has been a real privilege to serve in government in a whole range of roles and Departments. I came into the role of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Secretary as the covid pandemic came upon us. I want to thank everyone, in the Government system and outside, who played such vital and important roles in making sure that we got support to millions of businesses and supported jobs up and down our country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) said, we should be proud of what we did as a Government during the covid pandemic.

My right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) is not in his seat, but he talked about vaccines. The vaccines taskforce sat within the Business Department, and we worked collaboratively across Government. If ever there was a beacon for how a national mission should be deployed, it would be the vaccines taskforce. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds, I place on record my grateful thanks to all the scientists, the folks in industry, the NHS, and the civil servants who worked so hard to ensure that our country was the first in the world to deploy a vaccine.

The last of the roles that I did in government was on COP26. I have been told by very many people internationally, including those in foreign governance, that COP26 was one of the biggest soft power wins for the UK in decades. We led the world on the green agenda, and that would not have been possible without the tireless work of so many of our brilliant civil servants, many of them unsung heroes, and, of course, the UK's outstanding diplomats across the world. When I worked on COP, I genuinely felt that I stood on the shoulders of giants. We have for many years enjoyed a strong political consensus on the need to reach net zero in our economy. I believe—and I know that many friends here believe it, too—that we are stronger for it. I very much hope that that consensus is maintained in the critical decades ahead, because I can tell you that the world wants our country to continue to lead on the green agenda, and I hope that we will.

I also thank my friends in the Reading West Conservative Association, who first put their faith in me when they selected me in 2006. As all other colleagues have done, I thank my brilliant parliamentary staff from over the years. It is always invidious to name colleagues and pick them out, but I particularly want to place on the record my thanks to Jessica Inns, who has patiently worked with me for many more years than I think she would care to remember, and to Will Saunders and Rachel Quinn, who will continue to work right to the last day for the constituents of Reading West. I know that all their mums and dads will be thrilled that they are getting a mention in *Hansard*.

I also thank my family: my wonderful mum and dad, my fabulous wife Ingela, and my brilliant daughters Isabella and Charlotta. As we all know, we could not do this without their support. Serving as a Member of Parliament is a rare privilege, and I will always carry a piece of this place in my heart.

3.2 pm

Dame Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): I suspect that this will be one of the most emotional speeches I have ever made in Parliament, so I apologise now for any snotty, ugly crying that may follow. I had hoped to hold it together, but given that I am following my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Sir Alok Sharma), it is just not going to happen.

I was the 305th woman to be elected to the House of Commons, in 2010. I would like to thank very much the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), for being pioneers

to people like me entering this place. I do not come from an ordinary political background. My parents were not interested in politics and I did not go to private school. Coming here was very much beyond what I thought was my reach, but it is because of the work that those women did to encourage women like me and others, including friends sitting around me, that we are here and I am able to make what will be my final speech in this place after 14 years.

I keep reminding myself that I have taken this decision to leave, and for what I think are all the right reasons. Everyone's cancer journey is different, but for me, my breast cancer was life-affirming. It has given me a renewed sense of the vulnerability and fragility of our short lives, and with the big five-oh on the horizon, this election was the opportunity to seek a new adventure. I do not know what that is yet, but I guess that is part of the excitement.

Clearing out the office has been a wonderful way of reminding me and my team—more about them later—of some of the incredible things that we have done. I found a newspaper cutting from 2010. Shortly after I got elected, I intervened to secure a wheelchair for a young boy who had faced months of delay in getting one, and was therefore housebound. The cutting has a picture of him in his chair, which had images of spiders on it. He looked so happy. That is a reminder that while 99% of what we do never gets into the public domain, it is important and, for some, life-changing. Mr Deputy Speaker, stop crying; you will set us all off.

I am not a particularly sentimental hoarder of things, so perhaps I do not have as much packed up in the loft as colleagues, but it has been fun to find old election leaflets—goodness, I looked so young in 2010—letters from Prime Ministers, plural, and colleagues past and present. It was good to read again some of my big speeches that the office got bound for me, such as the most terrifying proposal to move the Loyal Address and my ten-minute rule Bill to protect youngsters from abusive sports coaches, and it was nice to flick through ministerial documents such as the sport strategy and the review that cut the stake for fixed-odds betting terminals, something I shall remain incredibly proud of, even if I was a thorn in the side of my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead by resigning from her Government.

It is easy to forget in the chaos of any day's inbox how much we actually do in this place. It is also easy to forget how often we work across party lines. I found in my piles of stuff the Christmas card Paul Goggins sent me 10 days before he died, inside the order of service for his funeral. Paul and I worked on the issue of mesothelioma together. I came in during the recess after he died to add my name to all his amendments to the Mesothelioma Bill so I could move them for him, and then pushed two or three to a vote. I worked with the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Kim Leadbeater) on loneliness having met her before she came to Parliament at a reception with her parents to honour her sister Jo, whose plaque has always been in my eyeline.

I have worked cross-party on countless sports-related issues as well as played in many cross-party sports teams, including netball, cricket, rugby and of course football. I take home treasured medals, including the Guinness world record medal that I and the women's football team secured, trophies, such as the much-coveted pancake race trophy, and various politician, parliamentary

and campaigner of the year awards, which will all thrill my husband as he seeks to carry the weightier ones up the ladder into the loft.

But everything we do here is only because of the trust that our constituents have given us and it is beyond words how honoured I feel to have been elected four times to serve the people of Chatham and Aylesford. I cannot begin to describe how lovely the vast majority have been to me over many years. I am not some fancy-pants posh Tory to them—just Trace, the girl who goes and stands on the terraces of Chatham Town football club, or politely tells the ref how he may have made the wrong call at Aylesford Bulls. I got IDed in my local supermarket at the age of 42 because I was wearing a hoodie and tracksuit bottoms and the new young worker did not know who I was, much to my delight but to the abject horror of the supervisor. However, during my time as their MP, I have seen much change in the constituency. There have been enormous housing developments that have not only altered the rural landscape forever but put incredible and unforgiving pressure on our infrastructure, which in turn brings an immense amount of casework.

This is where I turn in my speech to thank my team. In 14 years, I have only had 14 members on my payroll. Two of my team have worked for me in that entire time and I am truly indebted. Theo was with me on my campaign in 2010 and I offered him the job when I stepped off the platform. We recruited Sarah-Jane shortly after, who is the most brilliant caseworker. They often know what I think before I have thought it myself. Theo knows from the way I type whether I am sending back a strongly worded email. From the way I hit the “enter” key, he knows whether to dive straight into the sent items to see if he needs to batten down the hatches. SJ knows how much I hate injustice and will fight the authorities to the end on behalf of residents. Given that they have been in my life longer than my husband, I shall miss them enormously.

Current team members Will, Harry and Nicci have been amazing support, despite my decision to stand down impacting them, and Nicci in particular has been amazing in that she organises all my constituency events, such as the over-55s fair, the apprenticeship fair and community heroes, the output of which means I have met tens of thousands of constituents in person in positive, inspiring environments. I am so proud of the previous members of my team who have gone on to incredible jobs both inside and outside Parliament. I have tried not to think of any of them as staff; I think of them as a valuable part of who I am and what I do. I have respected their contributions to my work on behalf of local residents and tried hard never to let people think that I do it all alone.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): In the spirit of not doing everything alone, will my hon. Friend confirm whether it was members of her team, or perhaps unnamed colleagues, who supported her in putting a row of question marks behind the Leader of the Opposition's seat on the Benches a few weeks ago, or in decorating other colleagues' offices with certain items?

Dame Tracey Crouch: I am not sure what my right hon. Friend is referring to. Nor would I ever, ever, Mr Deputy Speaker, on reshuffle day, call my most ambitious colleagues pretending to be Downing street. I wouldn't have done that at all.

[*Dame Tracey Crouch*]

I thank all the people here who make Parliament work: the cleaners, the posties, the wonderful catering staff—we have already heard about the Tea Room. I particularly thank Godfrey, the absolutely wonderful young man who brought in some Ghanaian honey especially so that I could make honey and lemon, and allowed me to smuggle in my son during the October half-term when we were not on recess and cook some sausages and beans. I also pay tribute to the late Julia, who, when I was pregnant refused to let me have egg from the hotplate—sorry to anyone who eats egg from the hotplate.

I pay tribute to the Clerks, *Hansard* and the Doorkeepers; I see the Principal Doorkeeper standing in his place. He once caught me on a school day, shall we say, having a drink in a pub in Maidstone. My only defence is that he was also there. John, who is standing next to him, was in this place when I first started in 1996, as were some of the security staff, including Geo and Michael—or “Sticky”, as he is known. I promised I would make reference to Tweedledee and Tweedledum, the two Doorkeepers behind the Speaker’s Chair. They are always quick with a sweet or glass of water, a chirpy smile and some crack about South Africa winning something at rugby. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds, I got some good hugs in with many of the staff yesterday. I am so grateful for their support; they have looked after us incredibly well.

Finally, I thank my family and friends. I particularly thank my husband Steve, who has supported every decision that I have taken in this place. He is very proud of me and knows how to use the washing machine better than I do. He is also exceptionally keen for me to get another job as quickly as possible so that I do not get under his feet. At eight, my son Freddie does not really understand—he sort of gets it, he sort of doesn’t. But he is very much looking forward to my being at home a lot more often—at least he says that until he realises the regime of homework that I will be imposing upon him. Ultimately, I am looking forward to having the summer off and spending some time with them both.

I made the choice to go, but I did not expect it to be so soon. I still had things to do—laws to pass, issues to raise and casework to finish. But ultimately, it has been a pleasure. I have known my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) since he was a young student working at McDonald’s. I taught him how to make a Big Mac—he was going on to bigger and better things in management at McDonald’s. I wish my hon. Friends who are standing a safe election, and I wish everyone, those who are standing and those who are not, the best of luck for the future, whatever or wherever that may be.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Thank you, Tracey—I love you. I think we had better hear from your mate, Andy Percy.

3.15 pm

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): It is a pleasure to have you in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker. You have been a friend, an ally and a support since I first came here, so thank you.

It is honestly a privilege to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Dame Tracey Crouch). We have worked together three times. When I was 16, I was working at McDonald’s in St Andrew’s Quay in Hull and she was my floor manager. She was much more senior than me: she had a white shirt and she was the one who told me, if I remember, what to do with my pickles and where to place them. We then worked together for our right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Sir David Davis) for a period, so this is now our third time working together. I can also confirm she has already offered me a job washing her windows, which I might well do. It has been a real privilege.

In the run-up to the 2010 general election, my hon. Friend and I used to have a thing every Saturday where, if a song from “Dirty Dancing” came on, and especially one particular song—I am sure she remembers which—we would ring each other up and sing it down the phone at one another. Or, if I missed her, I would pick up my voicemail to have Tracey Crouch singing “Hungry Eyes” or “She’s Like the Wind” down the phone. I really wish her all the best. She has been incredibly brave these last few years, and I love her to bits.

When I spoke at the boundary commission review to argue in favour of the abolition of my constituency, I said that it was the closest I could get to speaking at my own funeral. That is how I opened, yet today also feels a bit like that, because as I look at my name on the Annunciator, it will be the last time I speak and the last time that we see “Brigg and Goole”, because Brigg and Goole is being abolished at this election and split four ways.

Today also marks the end of 24 years in elected office for me—I was expecting howls of disbelief at the idea that that could be true of someone with such good skin and who looks so young. Over those 24 years, I did 10 years in East Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire, 10 as one of two Tory councillors on Hull City Council—there are now none of us—a period as a parish councillor in my village of Airmyn, and of course 14 years here. I thank all the people who voted for me for those various positions locally: the electors of Newland and Bricknell wards in Hull, who gave this working-class lad from the worst comprehensive, in the worst-performing education authority in the country, his first opportunity in elected office; and then, of course, the absolutely wonderful people of Brigg and Goole, and the Isle of Axholme, who returned me last time with 71% of the vote. I will be forever thankful. It is genuinely the privilege of my life to have served them here.

I also want to thank the Conservative party. I started leafleting for the Conservative party when I was 11, in part thanks to a lady who has long since departed, Mrs Stonehouse, who at that point was in her 70s or early 80s. I was the local paperboy, and I started delivering leaflets. The Conservative party is a family. It is a thoroughly dysfunctional family, and there are times when I do not want to spend another moment with those members of my family, but then, at the end of the day, I remember that we are all family, and I love them dearly—some more than others.

I want to thank Mr Speaker in particular—and of course you, Mr Deputy Speaker; he is not here and I have already thanked you, so it is not one over the other—for his support over these years, and also all the House staff, including the Doorkeepers and everybody

who does everything to keep us and this place functioning. Obviously I thank the Tea Room staff, but I also thank Anthony and Richard in the Strangers' Bar, who are thoroughly wonderful people.

I also thank many different colleagues. There are so many I have made friends with over the years, some whom have gone: Guto Bebb, who was my greatest pal in this place over those first couple of terms; James Wharton, who is now Baron Wharton; and my former flatmates, my right hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson) and my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), who I lived with in that first term. I also thank my new colleagues since the 2019 election, who have been particularly fun to be with, including my hon. Friends the Members for Burnley (Antony Higginbotham) and for Scunthorpe (Holly Mumby-Croft), my wonderful constituency neighbour, who in her maiden speech described me as like a father figure to her. I can reveal today that we are very much family—if anyone comes after this one, I am coming after them—but it is not a case of father and daughter; it is brother and sister, and she will forever be my elder sister. *[Laughter.]*

As I look around, I see so many great colleagues and friends who I am so proud to have served with. Although he is not here, I will pick out my chum and mate the Chief Whip, my right hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart). When we all got here in 2010, we used to hang out in James Wharton's tiny office—my right hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Gavin Williamson) would be there—and we had such fun. We knew why we were here, we were all part of a team and we knew where we were heading. It was the best of times for me.

I also want to thank David Cameron for giving me this opportunity. I was put on the A-list. When I came here, lots of people who did not like the A-list used to come up to me and say how terrible it was with all these A-listers—they would look at me, listen to me, hear my accent and think, “He couldn't possibly have been on the A-list.”—but being on the A-list allowed me to stand in my local constituency. However, I did text him this week saying, “I am sorry that I ended up being a disappointment,” because I did vote against the Whip 80 times in that first Parliament. When he once pulled me up for it, though, I did point out that that meant I voted with the Conservative Whip 90% of the time, which was a lot better than the Labour MP I had replaced.

I also want to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), who gave me the honour of being a Minister in the Department for Communities and Local Government, as well as our current Prime Minister, who I think is a thoroughly decent human being.

Of course, I want to thank my family and all my friends, my mum and dad and my grandparents, who are not with us any more. I thank in particular my parents, who did not need degrees and family money to give me the values that I believe I have exhibited in this Chamber. There are lots of other people I want to thank—so many friends over the years. I thank my constituency neighbours: my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden, and of course my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe.

I am proud to have served as a Minister, but I am most proud of having served as our trade envoy to Canada, a country that I have had a lifelong love affair with. *[Interruption.]* There is a drinking game going on over how many times I can say Canada. I want to thank two people who supported me in that role in particular: our two consul generals, Kevin McGurgan and Nicole Davison, and her wonderful partner Karen Ferguson. I also thank all the high commission team and all the people in the high commission in Canada who helped.

I am conscious of time. I am coming to my staff—a couple of them are here—but I am keeping them till last because I said that I was really going to spill the beans on them.

It has been the privilege of my life to serve the people of East Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire. We are the best of this country. We tell people what we think and we like what we say. We are blunt and we are clear, and we are concise about it.

I am proud locally to have helped deliver on some of the things that I hope have made life a little bit better. That includes cutting the Humber bridge tolls. My right hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) did a lot on that, but you would not know that by the time it got into my literature—I had completely and utterly written him out of it. I am proud to have brought the Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to my area—we will shortly be delivering the millionth book from that scheme—which has had a real impact on our pre-school literacy rates.

I also set up a first-responder scheme and have spent 12 years at weekends volunteering in the NHS with Yorkshire Ambulance Service. This past Saturday I was out at 1 o'clock in the morning responding to calls. That has put me in some of the most difficult of positions, but I am proud to have done it, as well as to have supported the steel industry, to have secured huge amounts of money for flood defences—I represent the most flood-prone constituency—and also, through the bid writing service that I set up, to have secured £2.5 million. We have got defibs all over, secured the town deal for Goole and, in more recent times, funded and produced in my constituency—thanks to the brilliant work of Oliver North—156 ambulances for Ukraine.

I am coming on to my closing remarks, but I have to thank my local councillors. My local party has been brilliant, particularly Councillor Rob Waltham, the leader of our council who has been my agent in all of these elections. He is utterly brilliant at making you do things you do not want to do in the pouring rain, so I thank him. I also thank my staff who have worked alongside me: the ones who presently work for me are Kassim Qureshi—who is in the Gallery—Julie Reed, Sarah Hayes, Elaine Harper, Mark Kerman, Tom Bramham and Pedr Owen, and my former parliamentary staff are Robert Lingard and Andrew Barrett. We all live on as friends to this day in the beer club. There is a game going on with my former staffers: if I get “beer club” into this speech, I am doing all right. I also thank others who have come and gone: Corey, Craig, Aiden, Liam, and so many more. I thank Pat and Liz—Pat worked with me for 10 years when I was a councillor. When I was made a Minister, the private office rang up my Goole office and asked her, “How does the Minister like his tea or his coffee?” She said, “I don't know, he gets his own,” which I thought was wonderful. Then she

[Andrew Percy]

said, “Some people rang up asking about this bloke called the Minister, and I had to ask, ‘Who do you mean?’” They never failed to make absolutely clear to me that my presence in the constituency office was nothing but a pain in the backside for them. I thank Pat, Liz, Georgina and others, as well as all of my interns who we have had over the years, particularly those from the US and Canada.

I also want to thank other teams I have worked with, including Conservative Friends of Israel, particularly James Gurd, the political director, who is now a close friend of mine; the European Leadership Network; and the Antisemitism Policy Trust, which I have worked very closely with, including with Danny Stone, who is also in the Gallery today. I also thank SurrogacyUK, which I worked with on my all-party parliamentary group on surrogacy.

I am so proud to have served in this place. It is an amazing privilege to get that opportunity, but I am sad to be leaving at a time when a couple of issues particularly close to my heart are in the news and are of such concern. The first is the appalling rise in Jew hate—antisemitism—in this country. It breaks my heart to see Jewish people in this country frightened and afraid to go about their business, showing their faith. It is a stain on our democracy and our country, and it is happening across the west. Antisemitism is the canary in the coalmine.

The second thing that breaks my heart is the tone of political discourse, and the way in which we seem incapable of having a discussion and a debate without it turning into threats, personal abuse and all the rest of it. I am the first one to be blunt. I believe in being clear and firm: tell people what you think, and do not be afraid of how you say it. Be forceful at times, if you need to be. But there is also a need to be respectful and to appreciate that, at the end of the day, the people on the other side of politics are motivated by the same thing, which is to do good; it is just that we disagree about how to get there. Unfortunately, today our politics is becoming so toxic and awful that we sometimes forget that all of us in this place are motivated by exactly the same thing. I have been proud to work across the Chamber with various colleagues. The right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), who was in the Chamber earlier, was very generous to me, and I will be generous to him too. I have also worked with the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell); we worked together very constructively in the Brexit years.

I will end by saying that I have met some absolute rotters in my time in this job, but none of them is in this Chamber today. Actually, I have just spotted one—no. [Laughter.] Generally, despite the rotters, I have worked and served with amazing people in this place across the political aisle. As I have said, it has been the privilege of my life to be here. I never thought I would be, and I count everybody in this place as a friend and thank everybody for serving alongside me.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): You are a true friend, Andy. I know we will see lots of you in the coming months when you come up and campaign for me at the election, and stuff like that—love you loads. I call Chloe Smith.

3.29 pm

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I begin by thanking all the House staff through you, as so many colleagues have done. The first thing I need to say to right hon. and hon. Friends is that it is literally my fault that we are having a snap election, because it was I who legislated for the removal of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, allowing the Prime Minister to call an election whenever he chose. I am sorry for that emotional rollercoaster.

I, too, will start by thanking my constituents, who have placed their trust in me five times. That makes me the longest-serving Member of Parliament for either of the two Norwich constituencies in modern times, and I am deeply proud of that. I would also like to thank all the volunteers at Norwich Conservatives. I, too, need to thank my office team, including the wonderful Alice Burt, who has worked for me for 14 years, since August 2010.

After some tough personal times, which I have shared with a few colleagues on these Benches and beyond, I really want to thank my friends here in this place, including but not limited to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), who helped me through these times. It is the right time to step back, for me and my family, and indeed to step forward to the next chapter of life. I came here as the baby of the House, at age 27, and now I am at the ripe age of 42—I can feel a few Douglas Adams jokes coming on here, so I will just say that I now know the meaning of life and can say, “So long, and thanks for all the fish.” [Interruption.] Come on, that deserved more than that. Are there no more readers of Douglas Adams on these Benches than that?

It has been an absolute privilege to serve Norwich North. I am most proud of the employment project I began in my constituency called Norwich for Jobs. I am proud of the investment I have been able to secure for the area, with new train carriages now serving the whole of East Anglia. That is material to people’s jobs and prosperity. It has been a huge honour to be able to serve in Government and lead both the biggest Department and one of the newest. The passions I have from those Departments—for the labour market and technology—are ones I will take forward into my new challenges, especially in my continuing work to help those who are economically inactive into the right jobs for them.

Like many others who have spoken this afternoon, I am very proud of this House. I want to give the example of when we came together, across parties, to pass the British Sign Language Act 2022. We all know how important that is for many constituents, and in many cases it was downright iconic. I am very proud to have done that. Can I take this opportunity to urge Members who are standing to be accessible in their campaigning? I am afraid to say that includes making sure that there is a sign language interpreter in Downing Street whether it is raining or not. The same goes for all major announcements and from all parties. Let us do that so that 100% of voters and citizens are included in our political discourse.

I am glad to note that one of the last, quite substantial things the House has done is to make progress this week for the victims of the infected blood scandal, which reminds us of what we have to do better and what we

must get right. From the last Parliament alone, I expect that we will be thinking again about the major decisions we had to take in those five years. I think about all the policy choices and terrible trade-offs that came from the pandemic alone; I regret some of those, and I do hope that they are the subject of a real debate in years to come.

From my roles in Government, I have a deep respect for a number of things that I want to touch on. From my first Government role in the Treasury was the notion that the public finances must be sound. From effectively a decade as the Constitution Minister and serving in the Northern Ireland Office, I have a huge respect for how our constitution and democracy work and how our Union holds together. As others have mentioned, working in the Whips Office gives you a deep respect for elected accountability through this place.

The role of Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, shared with my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Mims Davies), reminds us of the importance of public services and our duties to them and reminds us of our opportunities to help people into work and find positions that are best for them. Finally, I was able to support my right hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) by covering for her as Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology. That allowed us to write history in how we do maternity leave at the highest levels, and it gives one personally a great sense of perspective and possibility about what is ahead for our nation.

Having served as a Minister under all five Conservative Prime Ministers, I need to gently correct my right hon. Friend the Member for Wyre and Preston North (Mr Wallace) by saying that I share that record with him. The sixth Prime Minister that he and I served in the House under was Gordon Brown.

I add a further anecdote at this point: I wonder whether I might be one of the only Members of the House who has been mistaken for not one but two other Members of the House, one of whom is a man. I speak, of course, of the wonderful and late James Brokenshire, who it was a huge pleasure to work with in the Northern Ireland Office and in many other capacities, as many hon. Members did. It was, I think, Quentin Letts, then of the *Daily Mail*, who called us robot twins with bog-brush hair. I thought to myself, if that is what it takes to match up to James Brokenshire's record of public service, I am proud to have been his twin.

The other hon. Member who I have been mistaken for is none other than the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), which is perhaps more unusual. I met an absolutely wonderful resident in Norwich brandishing a Green poster from her garden two doors down the street from my house. She said, "I think this poster is yours." I said, "I really don't think it is. I think it must be yours. Allow me to return it to your garden." She said, "I think I recognise you." I said, "No, I'm sure you don't." She said, "I do. You're that Caroline Lucas." I corrected her, moved on, and left her to her Green activities. I hope that she and others vote Conservative at the election to come.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), who has briefly left the Chamber, who was the campaign manager for my by-election in July 2009. I am deeply grateful to her for that and for the number of other ways in which she taught me how

to do this job. From that, we should all remember the joys of July elections—let us put our sun hats and sun cream on, and let us not forget to have an ice cream. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon), who I think will speak later. I still owe him a dinner for the leg that he broke while campaigning for me in Norfolk that summer. I thank him and many others who came from across the country to help us in Norwich in that by-election.

To return to Norwich and Norfolk, it is an enormous privilege to have served in my home county. Having grown up in Norfolk, it was as great an honour to speak at my old high school as it was to speak at the United Nations on Government business. Both are equal in the work that we do for our community and our country. I thank my mentor, the noble Baroness Shephard in the other place, who was my Member of Parliament while I was growing up. She first met me when I was 12 and probably recruited me to the party and to the cause. Like other hon. Members, I pay tribute to my parents and my family, which has have grown since I have been an MP. As we say in Norfolk, in a phrase that sums up tenacity and determination, keep a-troshin' on—keep going, Mr Deputy Speaker.

To finish on a semi-comic note, my recent experience has been election, referendum, baby, election, baby, election, pandemic, cancer. Perhaps I am looking for a quieter life, but I hope that I never lose the sense of service, of empathy, of listening and of care for what people do, need and believe, because that is absolutely what we are here to do. I wish the next generation of public servants the courage to change what can be changed, the serenity and determination to keep a-troshin' on on behalf of constituents, and the wisdom to serve both our communities and our country.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Thank you, Chloe, and best of luck for the future.

3.39 pm

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): I rise to speak for the last time in this place. I am the 505th woman to take her seat in Parliament, but the first to represent the Cities of London and Westminster. The seat was established in 1298, so it took us a while, but we got there eventually. I am proud that I was given the freedom of the City last year.

Following on from what so many colleagues have said, it has been such a privilege to represent what I consider to be the capital of the capital. It is the home of Parliament, the monarch, the legal profession, the City of London and the amazing west end. The Cities of London and Westminster is the most amazing constituency to represent, and it has so many iconic sites, but the most important parts of my constituency are the people and the neighbourhoods: Soho, Marylebone, Pimlico, Fitzrovia, Covent Garden, Belgravia, Knightsbridge and the City—I could go on.

There are amazing people, residents associations and amenity societies in every part of the constituency, and I thank every single one of them for supporting me. I have been very proud to receive quite a lot of emails and letters since I announced that I am stepping down, with many saying, "I have never voted Conservative, but I voted for you." I thank them all.

[Nickie Aiken]

It has been a short time. I did not expect it to be one term, as I hoped that I might scrape a second. I started on the greasy pole, the ministerial ladder, during those four and a half years. I was appointed as a PPS in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government quite early on, but I found that it was not for me. [Interruption.] The Whips probably realised, too. Being on the payroll, I could not say anything. As colleagues know well, I do not like to be quiet, so I asked the then Chief Whip whether I could step down, and he said, “Okay.”

I have since been able to campaign, which is what I love. I am delighted that, in my one and only term, we have secured short-term lets registration. One of my proudest moments is securing an amendment to the Domestic Abuse Bill so that children are now recognised as victims if they live in a household in which domestic violence or domestic abuse exists.

I am sure the now Lord Chancellor will never forget the conversation we had when I was a very new, green MP and did not realise that, as a Government Back Bencher, I should not really table amendments. He said that he would not take through the amendment, and we had what I would call robust conversations, but he came around to my point of view eventually.

I have also campaigned to repeal the Vagrancy Act 1824, which makes it illegal to sleep rough. I am very sad that the Criminal Justice Bill will not go through wash-up, and that the Vagrancy Act will therefore remain on the statute book. I plead with whoever leads the next Government, and I hope it is a Conservative Government, to repeal the Vagrancy Act.

I am also proud of the new-born baby screening, which was the subject of one of the first ministerial meetings I ever had. The heel prick used to test for only nine diseases in new-born babies, the lowest number in the western world. By working with the then Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock), we changed that, and babies are now tested for hundreds of diseases.

There is also the fertility workplace pledge, on which I had a private Member's Bill—we all know what happens to some of those. I therefore set up the voluntary fertility workplace pledge, working alongside brilliant organisations including Fertility Matters at Work, Fertility Network UK and others. Companies across the country, big and small, are now signing up for workplace fertility policies.

I recently had the idea of a British Jewish history month, and I hope very much that the next Government will see it through. I have given this task to my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), and I know that he will see it through, because he knows what will happen if he does not. However, of all my campaigns, if there is one that may be particularly well known, it is the one on pedicabs. I have to thank all my hon. Friends for their support. They were quite surprised to find a reference to pedicabs in the King's Speech—and so, to be honest, was I—but believe me, it has been my life's work to secure a pedicab licensing scheme for London. It took two private Members' Bills and a Transport Bill that was never concluded, and then there was the King's Speech.

I have to put on record my thanks—some will be quite surprised by this—to the former Member of Parliament for Uxbridge and South Ruislip. During a conversation with me, he asked, “What is happening to pedicabs regulation?” I said, “Well, you may want to have a conversation with my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch.” I cannot tell the House exactly how he responded, but he did make it clear that there were no pedicabs in Christchurch. I said, “I know that.” A couple of weeks later, however, I received a text from the then Prime Minister, saying, “Where are we with pedicabs?” I replied, “We are still not getting it through.” His response was “Leave it with me.” This was at seven o'clock on a Saturday morning. By four o'clock that afternoon, the then Transport Secretary was ringing me up to say, “We are going to put pedicabs in the Transport Bill.” Obviously that did happen, but then my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak) became Prime Minister, and I will always be grateful to him and his team for putting pedicab regulation into the King's Speech. I was absolutely delighted when that happened, and it will make such a difference in central London—to tourists, to the safety of women and girls, and to the amenity of local residents.

There have to be some thank yous before I leave this place. Obviously I must thank my amazing office staff, who are here today: Louise Parry, Ben Sewell, Lucy Scoffin, James Lloyd and Harry McKay. I could not have achieved anything like what I have achieved without them. Apparently there have been 32,000 pieces of casework—not that I have done much of that. [Laughter.] You all know that you do not do your casework! I must also thank my amazing Conservative association team, including Reece and Paula, and my long-suffering agent James Cockram. I also thank my dear and close friends outside this place, because friends are so important. Kate and Andrew McCarthy, Clare Hambro, Christabel Flight, Daniel Astaire, Sally Vernon-Evans, Josie Lyon and Julie Molloy have kept me sane.

I must of course thank my amazing parliamentary friends as well, including the “Trophic Women”; I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) for pointing out that they were not “Trophy Women”, as I had thought. I shall not be able to name all my parliamentary colleagues, but I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones), for Eastleigh (Paul Holmes), for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) and for Aylesbury (Rob Butler), my right hon. Friends the Members for Staffordshire Moorlands (Dame Karen Bradley) and for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland), my right hon. Friends the Members for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) and for Elmet and Rothwell (Sir Alec Shelbrooke), and my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Jacob Young)—whom I must thank for pointing out to me once on my birthday that I was old enough to be his mother, and that he would be my firstborn.

I must also thank my friends across the aisle. As we have heard, it is so important in this place to have friends from across the aisle, and I will always be grateful to the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi), who has been an amazing constituency neighbour. We did so much together, particularly last

year in marking the fifth anniversary of the Westminster Bridge terrorist attack. I thank the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan); many Members have been surprised to hear me refer to him as “Sir”, but that is because he was my teacher at school. The last of the many Opposition Members I have to thank is the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck). She and I have campaigned together on many issues in Westminster over the years. I know she is stepping down, and she will be greatly missed.

I have to thank, and perhaps blame, my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), who is no longer in his place, for getting me into the Conservative party when I was 19, which was a long time ago. I will always be grateful to him.

I thank all the staff, including the Doorkeepers, those who work in the Tea Room and everybody else. I will always miss having our sweepstakes with the Doorkeepers outside on what time we are going to finish.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. We have known each other far too long—30 years, I think. I also thank Mr Speaker, who has given me amazing support over the years—first, when I was leader of Westminster City Council, and then in this place.

I have to thank my family, including my husband Alex. It is his fault I am leaving. I am afraid. He is now living the dream in Abu Dhabi and working very hard. I thank my son Harry, who is doing his English A-level today and who would be here otherwise. I was seven months pregnant with him when I was first elected, so he has known nothing but me being an elected politician. I thank my gorgeous daughter Georgia, who is the reason why I am here. When she was born in 2004, I was determined to show her that women can achieve in public life—so it is all her fault, really.

That is how I want to end. I want to say to any girl or mum of a girl watching this that they have every right to stand for public office. No matter what their background, where they are going or where they have been, they must consider standing for public office. We have got to hear more women’s voices in this place and across all political spheres. We are 51% of the population, and we give birth to the other 49%. We need to be heard. If this girl from Cardiff, who had a comprehensive education, can become leader of Westminster City Council and then the first woman MP for Cities of London and Westminster, you can too.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Diolch yn fawr, Nickie. Thank you for reminding us that if it was not for our staff, we would have to do the work ourselves. I look forward to seeing you and Alex in the UAE sometime soon.

3.52 pm

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Nickie Aiken), who reminded me that, as a young girl, she lived in Bromley. I am delighted to see her here.

Like my hon. Friend, I started my career in local government, and it is exactly 50 years since I was elected to Havering Council. I was younger and somewhat more acned, which indicates something about the quality of social life that I had at the time. I was lucky enough to take responsibilities on the council quite early, and I

enjoyed doing so. I was chairman of the environment committee—we had a committee system back then, rather than portfolio holders—and I was able to initiate important measures, such as cleaning up the streets of Havering, Romford and Hornchurch. That triggered a headline in the *Romford Recorder* that read, “Dog mess Neill steps in”, which may have set the general tone for what was to be the early part of my political career.

I then briefly found myself on the Greater London Council. That was useful, because I managed to keep pace with Ken Livingstone in the bar from time to time, which came in handy later when I became the London Assembly Member for Bexley and Bromley, and leader of the Conservative group on the London Assembly. Of course, that background in London politics has enabled me to meet many of my hon. Friends who are here today. My hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster is one, and my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond), who is sitting next to me, is another.

As I was engaged in London politics, I was also practising as a barrister, and I will say more about that in a moment. My journey, which started 50 years ago, comes to an end today, and it has been an amazing privilege. I am not quite sure what my maternal grandfather, a staunch trade unionist, would have made of it all, but I hope he is looking down favourably.

Eventually I was fortunate enough to be elected, after a couple of mishaps. I fought Dagenham twice—Dagenham fought back. It was perhaps the only election campaign where one of my former clients volunteered to deliver leaflets for me. When I was elected at the by-election in Chislehurst, another former client came up to me and said, “Ah, Bob. I voted for you.” Given I had got him acquitted a year or so before of a £250 million bearer bond fraud, I thought that was the least he could have done. In the end, the Bromley and Chislehurst constituency came along and I was elected at the by-election.

I had become the London Assembly Member under the usual circumstances: I did not live in either Bexley or Bromley, but the people of Bexley did not want anyone from Bromley and the people of Bromley did not want anyone from Bexley. I arrived and served on the London Assembly. I pay tribute to the work that is done in local government, across the piece and everywhere. I had the privilege thereafter of being local government Minister for a time, so I know how important the work of local government is.

I have now represented the wonderful constituency of Bromley and Chislehurst for the past 18 years, and I have made many great friends there. Bromley was Harold Macmillan’s constituency; I have always felt that very strongly as I see myself in the Macmillan tradition of one nation Conservatism. I am a politician on the centre-right. In my book, the centre in that phrase is as important as the right. Long may we continue to hold to that tradition of pragmatism, compassion and sensible moderation that has been the hallmark of our party over the years, which Macmillan epitomised and which inspired many of my generation.

The seat has changed over the years, but it is still a wonderful part of London to live in, as I do and intend to continue to do. It has been split up by the Boundary Commission. Among other things, that has triggered my decision to leave, as well as perhaps the passing of the years, although not really. I wish both Charlie Davis

[*Sir Robert Neill*]

in Chislehurst and Eltham and Peter Fortune in Bromley and Biggin Hill every good fortune in carrying on the fight—if they are successful, as I hope they will be, at the election.

Having arrived in the House, I served as a shadow Minister and was then appointed a junior Minister at the Department of Communities and Local Government in 2010. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) and I arrived at the Department on the same day. I seem to recall it took 24 hours before the civil service would let us into the building, because a fax needed to be sent to confirm who we were and that we had been appointed as Ministers. Lo and behold, who was the then Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Secretary of State Eric Pickles, but my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon?

It was a privilege to serve as a Minister. As well as local government, I dealt with the fire service. Interestingly, Eric asked me to become Minister for community pubs—I cannot think why that came about. I noticed that far more officials were willing to come with me on visits when I was dealing with community pubs than they were when I was dealing with local government pension funds. In the course of that local government work, I met the Deputy Chief Whip, my right hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), who is now sitting on the Front Bench. I appreciated David Cameron giving me the opportunity to serve as a Minister. He once described me at a Conservative councillors' conference as "Eric's mini me". Somebody once said junior Ministers were there to be the Secretary of State's human shield; well, I don't think I was much of that.

That time in Government passed, and for the past nine years I have had the greatest privilege of my career in Parliament: to Chair the Justice Committee. The law has been central to my life and always will be. Dealing with those issues in this House, and reminding people that a functioning justice system is as important a social service as functioning education, health and care systems, matters.

My brand of conservatism, and indeed all safe forms of constitutional government, depend upon respect for institutions, checks and balances, and the independence of our judiciary. I gently say that anyone in politics who has attempted to attack lawyers for doing their job, or judges for coming to their independent decisions, is not understanding of checks and balances—that is neither constitutional, nor, I say gently, very Conservative. I hope that I have done my best to make that case, and that there will be other ways in which I can continue doing so from outside this House.

I thank all members of the Committee. We have had a magnificent team over the years. When I started, two bright young Back Benchers came on to the Committee. One is now the Attorney General; the other is the Lord Chancellor. I rather feel that I have become a sort of legal-political Banquo—not king but father of kings. It is a great source of pride to me to see that serious lawyers are still prepared to come into Parliament and carry out essential public service. Frankly, we need more of them, because to scrutinise legislation, a forensic mind and approach is of genuine value.

I also thank the Committee Clerks. They have been absolutely brilliant. We have had numbers of them, most recently Rob Cope and his team, and David Weir,

who many hon. Members know, before him. I thank everybody who has worked with me in that role. I like to think that we have been consensual and dealt with things on a cross-party basis, and I hope that we have made a difference in a number of areas. My only regret in my farewell being brought forward somewhat unexpectedly is that there is still business undone that I would like to have returned to, such as the service and work of the probate registry, the situation in our prisons, and the pressures in our courts—there is still much more to do. The people who work in the justice system at every level provide a great service to our country.

I have also had the chance to pursue other causes dear to my heart, and I hope to be able to continue that, too. I am chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Gibraltar, which is a matter of great pride to me. Gibraltar is a proud part of the British family, and we owe it to Gibraltarians to have a good deal with the European Union in order to enable the free-flowing border that is absolutely essential to Gibraltar's wellbeing. It was our choice—although not my personal choice—to leave the European Union. That was the democratic decision, but as many people will know, it placed Gibraltar under particular pressures. We owe it to them not to obstruct any sensible deal. I am sure that that will be the case in the hands of this or any future Government, because we have built cross-party consensus on supporting Gibraltar.

I have also been able to do that sometimes very dangerous thing in politics of owning up to an interest in the arts. I am chair of the all-party parliamentary group on opera, and am delighted to have worked across parties with the Mother of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), and the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) in our campaign to rescue great institutions such as the English National Opera from at least some of the damage done by the cuts by Arts Council England. I have never understood the inverted snobbery that we sometimes have about public figures talking about an interest in the arts. I got interested in opera when I was a teenager, when I did a bit of amateur acting, would you believe. I never saw any contradiction in going to Sadler's Wells or Covent Garden, up in the gods on a Friday, and going to Upton Park to watch West Ham on a Saturday. It ought to be perfectly possible to enjoy both, and I hope that we have a future generation of politicians just as willing to talk about their interest in theatre, music and all other art forms as they are about sporting activities. They are all part of what enriches our souls.

Finally, the other thing that I have dealt with is stroke care. I very much hope to continue with that as it is very personal to me, as the House will know. For Ann-Louise's sake, and the sake of many others, I want to continue to ensure that we get better stroke care. We are great at the lifesaving bit, but we need an awful lot more to be done for therapy and recovery thereafter.

And so, as the greyhound of destiny catches up with the electric hare of fate, to quote those immortal words that we used to get on "I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue", I had better draw my remarks to an end with some thank-yous. I say a particular thank you to my office staff, who have looked after me throughout—to Vanessa and Rory, who are up in the Gallery, to Jane, to Lewis, to Sam, who was with me for many years, and to Joanne

in the constituency office. They have all been stars. They have been very tolerant of me. They have collected things that I have left in all manner of unlikely places. I could not thank them enough. They are like a second family.

I, too, thank all the members of staff of the Commons, at every level, from the Doorkeepers right the way around. All of you have been magnificent. I do hope that the Smoking Room will remain financially viable when I have gone. I shall always miss all of you.

The final thank-yous are to my family: to Anne-Louise, who has always been there for me—now it is my turn to be there for her—my two wonderful stepchildren, James and Victoria, and my little grandson, Aneurin, who is one this week. We are a very ecumenical family in political terms, as colleagues can tell from the names. For him, I want to make sure that the world is better when he grows up than it is in some respects at the moment. That is an ambition that we all have. Maybe watching this at some point will be my old mum, who is 100 in September—I just hope it is in the genes.

As for what the future holds, we will see. My practice was, of course, always at the criminal Bar. I found it useful sometimes when the witnesses could not see where the cross-examination was coming from. Anyone who knows the criminal Bar will not be surprised to hear that I had a message earlier today from my old head of chambers, Jim Sturman KC, saying, “Ring the clerks about coming back.” Who knows, but it has been the privilege of my life to represent Bromley and Chislehurst and its wonderful people—my friends and neighbours—and a privilege to have had the chance to do the jobs that I have done. Now is the right time for me to go—before, as happens with all old lawyers, I lose my appeal.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Sir Robert—Bob, as you are known to everybody—we are going to miss you. Love to Anne-Louise. You have always been there for her; we know that. Maybe there will be a bit more time now for opera. We wish you incredibly well.

4.7 pm

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): It is a huge privilege to follow my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill).

It is sobering for me to reflect that almost 19 years ago to the day, on 23 May 2005, I was sitting on the Opposition Benches waiting to make my maiden speech. All colleagues will know what a fraught moment that is. It is a bit like standing for the first time on the high diving board: you are hoping to make a bit of a splash, but not so much that you damage yourself in the process. Now, at the end of those 19 years, I am finally bidding farewell to this wonderful old place.

It was my ambition to come here from the age of nine, when I visited this place with my father. I fell in love with the Palace of Westminster and decided that I wanted to become a Conservative MP. You, Mr Deputy Speaker, will know how remarkable that is, because of course I am Welsh—but I am also a Londoner. I was, in fact, born in the London Hospital, which is within earshot of the Bow bells. That makes me the rarest of beasts: I am a Welsh cockney. My entire life has been lived in two places: here in our capital city, and in north Wales. I love them both.

It has been the greatest privilege of my life to represent the interests of the people of Clwyd West in this House in five successive Parliaments. I want them to know that they have my deepest thanks for the confidence that they have placed in me over the last 19 years.

My association with Clwyd West began in 1974, when I entered articles with the firm of William Jones and Talog Davies, St Peter's Square, Ruthin. For those who do not know it, Ruthin is arguably the finest small town in Wales. Its medieval centre is an outstanding collection of buildings, including Nantclwyd y Dre House, which is reputedly the only edifice left standing after Glyndŵr put the town to the torch in 1400, at the start of his rebellion. Almost opposite Nantclwyd is Sir John Trevor House, which takes its name from a former Speaker of this House. John Trevor was in fact simultaneously Speaker of the Commons and Master of the Rolls at the end of the 17th century. He was impeached for taking a bribe and was banished from the Chair of the Commons but, remarkably enough, he was allowed to remain Master of the Rolls, which just goes to show that in those days, higher standards were expected of politicians than of judges. Sir John Trevor was notorious for his very pronounced squint, which, as Speaker of the Commons, was something of an occupational hazard, because people never knew when they had caught his eye. Several hon. Members would stand up at the same time, and Trevor used to get terribly upset about it.

Over recent years, Ruthin has experienced many of the same difficulties as other small market towns up and down the country, so it was an unequivocal boon when it was awarded almost £11 million under the levelling-up scheme. The award will benefit not only the historical town centre, but the nearby villages of Bryneglwys and Gwyddelwern, which will have new community centres. The award also means that we will have a new, much-needed visitor centre on Moel Famau, which is the great hill that overlooks Ruthin. The award will help restore civic pride, and it will of course also act as a boost to the visitor economy. Most importantly, including to me personally, it will result in the removal of the ugly, intrusive roundabout that has been a carbuncle on the otherwise virtually perfect St Peter's Square since the 1960s.

I was pleased to work closely with Denbighshire County Council under the leadership of my friend, the excellent Councillor Hugh Evans, in producing the levelling-up bid, and I was delighted when it was granted. Towns such as Ruthin and many others in north Wales have in many respects been forgotten about over recent years. The levelling-up fund was developed to address the needs of such places, and I very much hope that other north Wales towns, such as Colwyn Bay and Abergelge in my constituency, will also benefit from it in future.

Over my years in this House, I have tried my utmost to advance the interests of north Wales. The levelling-up fund is a great initiative, but much more needs to be done. In particular, transport links need to be improved. Pleasingly, the Government have allocated £1 billion to the electrification of the north Wales coast main line. That is indeed welcome, but we need more flesh on the bone. My plea is that whoever is in government next

[Mr David Jones]

should press ahead with that project, to ensure that north Wales has the sort of rail infrastructure necessary in a 21st century economy.

I have been privileged in my time in this House to serve twice in government. My first ministerial roles were at the Wales Office, where I was ultimately appointed Secretary of State. In that capacity, I of course had many dealings with the Welsh Government. Many of them were positive, but my experience was that there was an unfortunate and undesirable tension between the two Administrations who are responsible for the governance of Wales. Too frequently, that relationship is perceived as a competition. That is probably the result of an inherent fault in the structure of devolution. I believe that it needs re-examining, so that both of Wales's Governments work in co-operation, whichever party is in power, for the benefit of Welsh residents.

I therefore recommend that the next Government conduct a review of the constitutional settlement, with the aim of replacing the current state of affairs with something that is more beneficial to Welsh citizens. Such a settlement would require recognition that some things are done best here at Westminster, some at Cardiff, and some at the local government level. Indeed, Welsh local authorities should be trusted more in the administration of their areas. If they were, there would possibly not have been the problems that we have seen as a result of the unpopular decision to impose a 20 mph speed limit across all built-up areas in Wales.

My second ministerial position was at the Department for Exiting the European Union, and I am very pleased to see my former colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), in the Chamber today. That was the most challenging and, in many respects, the most satisfying experience of my time here at Westminster. I always felt that the United Kingdom was an individualistic country, and that it was very different from the continental nations, and therefore not really fitted to be part of a supranational organisation such as the EU. I campaigned actively for Brexit, and I was delighted when the British people voted in favour of it.

The proudest moment of my time here at Westminster was when I took the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Act 2017 through this House, which triggered the legal process of withdrawal. We have, of course, now completed that process. We are once again a sovereign, independent nation, although I retain concerns about Northern Ireland under the Windsor framework. I also recognise that Brexit has been controversial, and that some divisions have been caused by it. Nevertheless, I believe that Brexit was ultimately the right thing to do and in the interests of the country.

Anyone who spends any time at all as a Member of this House is hugely privileged. We are supremely well served by erudite and brilliant Clerks, both in this Chamber and in Committees. We have the benefit of one of the finest research libraries in the world. We have the services of the immaculate Doorkeepers. We are fed and watered by excellent catering staff. We are kept secure by brave police officers, one of whom, Keith Palmer, gave his life for us; he was quite rightly—though, sadly, posthumously—awarded the George Medal. And we all have our teams of bright, highly motivated, talented, and sometimes very young people, all of whom

will probably go very far in life. I want to mention my team of Ted Wilson, Greg Wynne, Leanne Kennedy, Isobel Barrett and Isabel Turnbull, who are known in the office as “the two Izzys”. We are highly blessed in this extraordinary community, and I thank each and every member of it.

Finally, I thank the staff of *Hansard*, who record our every utterance, no matter how profound or banal, with absolute accuracy for the benefit—and probably the bemusement—of future generations. Indeed, such is their accuracy that I have no doubt that they will faithfully transcribe the names of some of the loveliest villages of my constituency: Llanrhaeadr, Llansannan, Llangernyw, Llanarmon-yn-Iâl, Clawddnewydd, Clocaenog and Cyffylliog—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”]—whose people I have been privileged to serve, and who I will miss so very much.

4.19 pm

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you so much for allowing me the honour of speaking this afternoon. I start by thanking you, and your fellow Deputy Speaker, for all your service to this House. May I also thank Mr Speaker for the kindness that he has shown me over so many years?

It is a pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones). We came into the House at the same time, and as he suggested, he and I probably have different views on what he regards as his greatest triumph. It is also a great privilege to follow my great friend, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill), although there was one moment when I thought I was not his friend. When I had the honour to be Parliamentary Private Secretary to Eric Pickles, he said to me one morning, “Will you come in on Friday, Stephen, there's a meeting I want you to attend?” It was a particularly tricky negotiation with the Fire Brigades Union. Bob opened the meeting. He then said “I have brought along the PPS to the Secretary of State today. Stephen, what would the Secretary of State like to say?” at which point I was completely blindsided—a bit like with much of his cross-examination.

I realise that as I stand here today it is 19 years and five days after my maiden speech in this House. I was elected on 5 May and I spoke on the 19th. I said then, and I still believe, that Wimbledon, combined with Raynes Park, Motspur Park and Morden, is the best place in the world to live. We have a unique suburban village, a revitalised town centre, and a business community which I described then as “lively” but which is now vibrant.

The tech sector in Wimbledon is thriving and home to many brilliant companies, but I think particularly of various companies such as Rockborne and a med tech company which is changing the way we can treat arthritis. Wimbledon has many small businesses and is often portrayed as a leafy suburb, but the reality is that as many people commute into Wimbledon as commute out. I still believe it to be the best place to live and it has been an honour to represent it.

Since announcing I was standing down, I have found people say, “What is your greatest achievement while in Parliament?” I suspect all colleagues here can think of a few. I am particularly proud of the fact that I have been

part of a Government who have transformed school standards across Britain. That gives life opportunities and life chances that were not there before. I was very pleased to be PPS to the inspirational Eric Pickles and it was a great honour to serve with my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) in his team as a Minister of State.

But what I particularly remember was a visit on 13 May 2005 when I held my first surgery. A constituent came to that surgery as the flat above had flooded her flat. For six months she had wanted for a piece of carpet to replace the carpet that had been taken away. That piece of carpet cost £77. She came to me as her last resort: she had been to Citizens Advice and to the local council; she had phoned her local councillor. I took up the issue with the council and two weeks later a cheque for £77 arrived.

That is actually a part of my proudest achievement: the service that I and my team have given to thousands of people. We should never forget that, when we are here in this place, there is the excitement, the pressure, the gossip, the chance to have a drink with a friend, but it is our work and help to our constituents that changes their lives.

I believe that we act as the advocate for our constituents against authority in the widest sense of the word. We should never forget that, for that is the power of good. I was saying something similar on the Iain Dale show about two years ago. Valerie from Wimbledon phoned in and said “Stephen Hammond is a wonderful MP; he is really great for the local community.” Iain Dale said, “Well I’m sure he’s pleased to hear that.” She said, “I doubt it, I’m a Labour voter and I’m never going to vote for him.”

But actually that is the whole point. Once we are here, we are here to represent all our constituents. We would like them all to vote for us but we know not all of them will. For those colleagues who are going out on the fight, I say, “Remember that, go out and fight for every vote, for you know not where it may come and it may well serve you in time.”

I think of a lot of things that I have heard in this Chamber today, and I am pleased to have sat through so many wonderful speeches. One thing that I think is important is that as Members of Parliament we should remember compassion. What we do and how we help is hugely valuable. It is a bit like what my great friend, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, said: centre-right, compassionate conservatism is the way forward for our party, and it is the way back for our party to Government.

I particularly remember a constituent who came to me a few years ago. His wife had given birth to a child in Greece about 13 or 14 weeks premature. She was airlifted back to St George’s via various methods. Her son was treated at the wonderful neonatal unit at St George’s that I have had the pleasure and honour of visiting several times. I met that constituent a few years later.

I have been proud to campaign for summer born children. I believe that summer born children have the right to start school a little later; that improves their lives and life chances. It makes them happier, more confident, more academically successful and more likely to achieve their real potential in life. I am grateful to successive Ministers at the Department for Education,

who have listened and changed the guidance to local councils at least three times. Although that is not law, it is now guidance—and up and down the country summer born children have benefited.

Over the 19 years, much about this place has remained constant. As many colleagues have reflected, there is still the camaraderie of friendship and the wisdom and knowledge of colleagues. To be fair, I also remember that on my first two days in the House two colleagues, meaning very well, told me how to run my constituency office and organise myself. Their versions were completely contradictory. What that tells all of us in this place is that the camaraderie binds us, but we each represent individual and different constituencies. I have always believed that everyone in this House, of whatever political colour, comes here for the right reasons. All too often, people forget that we are in this for the right reasons and although, as some colleagues have reflected today, politicians are maligned, what we do in this place for our constituents is important. Almost everybody I have met has come here for the right reasons.

The role of MPs has changed dramatically. When I arrived, there was a postbag every day; now I am lucky if I get one letter. But I do get well over 100 emails every day, which bring huge expectancy of a faster and greater response. Yet the reality is that sometimes the local council, the housing authority and—dare I say it—even Government Departments frustrate our ability to provide that for constituents. We also have a much greater local role than ever before. That is hugely important, but we should not forget that we are elected to this place to contribute to national life as well. In playing that important local role, we must remember that we are here to scrutinise and hold Governments to account. That is becoming increasingly important since we left the European Union because there is a greater burden of scrutiny on this House.

I join several colleagues in mentioning that the coarseness of political discourse is a concern and should be not just for the future but particularly for the next six weeks. People should, if possible, talk about hope and the sunny uplands and what they want to do for their constituents, rather than badmouthing opponents. Remember that they are in this for the right reasons.

I am pleased to see that the Government have made some real steps forward on social media, but some actors on social media still engender political hate. We must remain vigilant against that. Like so many colleagues, I would like to use this Oscar moment to say a few thank yous. I thank the Clerks and the Doorkeepers, and the police and security men who keep us safe. Many colleagues have commented on the wonderful people in the Tea Room. I think that I should acknowledge the people in the Pugin Room, who always used to say, “Ah, Mr Hammond—white Burgundy, family size.” I always seem to arrive.

I have been fortunate to have a wonderful political Conservative association in Wimbledon. I thank all my friends there. I recognise, like so many colleagues, that we are here only because we are part of a team—this is the Conservative team—and what I do for my constituents is because of the team of people I have. Over the years, the team has included Jerry Sherman, Ben Carleton Jones, Charlie McClelland, Alice Hopkinson, Paul Holmes—I can say that, even though he is now my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh—

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): That must have been a dark time in your office.

Stephen Hammond: Yes, our productivity went down.

Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con): So did your majority. *[Laughter.]*

Stephen Hammond: May I gently advise the deputy Chief Whip of that when he is thinking about future Government appointments? Jay Crush, Miles Jordan and Louise Stevens have also worked with me and put in extraordinary efforts.

As ever, my biggest thanks, like those of so many here, are to my family: to my wife, who is looking after her father today; and to my daughter, who is in the Gallery. No one could have wished for a more supportive family. They went through the ups and downs—mainly downs in my case—of political life and put up with it so tolerantly.

Finally, I thank the people of Wimbledon, who for the past 19 years have put their trust in me to represent them here, to serve their interests and to look after them in this House. It has been a huge and extraordinary privilege to be a Member of this place for 19 years. As I go, I do so, like many, with regrets that I am going, but it the right time to pass on the torch. I am hugely privileged and thankful for having had the opportunity to be here for so long.

4.31 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond), who had been my good friend for many years before he became my hon. Friend. We had a long-standing shared interest in his wife—*[Laughter.]* That is perhaps not the appropriate thing to say, given that his daughter and my goddaughter are in the Gallery, but we have been chums for a long time.

I have to admit that, unlike many other hon. colleagues, I have had no hugs in the last few days. *[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."]* That may be because I have been in the mountain kingdom of Lesotho, far away from this place, watching the incredible events of the last few days unfurl. I was able to come back here early in time to join this last hurrah, to vote on something—goodness knows what it was—just now and to speak in this valedictory debate.

Many hon. Friends may not have been to Lesotho. The former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), spoke earlier about the importance of defending democracy. It is interesting that there is a small, close Commonwealth country friend that absolutely shows love and respect for this House. The Speaker of the Lesotho Parliament said to me that, whenever he is vexed by something about procedure or what he should do, he always turns to the House of Commons. It is at a different end of the planet and in another hemisphere, but so many people around the world look to this place. What we do here matters beyond our walls here, beyond our shores and beyond our constituencies. It is really important that we all remember that. I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I look slightly dishevelled and below par today, but I spent the last 20 hours on a series of planes to get back here today.

Earlier, people promised anecdotes about various trips. I am not going to give any anecdotes. I am not going to talk about going to Syria with the now hon. Member for Rochdale (George Galloway)—good grief—going to Yemen with Keith Vaz, or going to Greenland with Mr Deputy Speaker, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ribbles Valley (Mr Evans), who was in the Chair just now; it is probably just as well.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in the 27 years you and I have served in this House—two life sentences, as my wife constantly reminds me—we have seen great events; some better than others. We have seen the Iraq war, the financial crash, Brexit, covid and the transition of monarchs.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you and I were elected on 1 May 1997, with 33 first-time Conservatives, I think—those of us who scraped through the battle of the 1997 election—as well as 176 first-time Labour MPs and one new Ulster Unionist party Member. Out of those numbers, today some 13 Conservatives remain, including you, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead, and various others. Only 18 of those 176 Labour MPs have survived to this day, as well as the one Ulster Unionist who is now a DUP MP, so on our side the 1997 intake was resilient, as you and I know only too well. I became an MP on 1 May, and I will cease to be an MP on 30 May next week, which happens to be my birthday. What a birthday treat that is going to be.

First, I probably owe Mr Speaker an apology. I am one of the longest-serving members of the naughty corner—or the rough trade corner, as it has been known—the source of much heckling, noise and verbal exercise, the source of that one famous quote at Prime Minister's Question Time when the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) made the rookie mistake of leaving a question open-ended. He said that he had just been with his comrades in the European socialist group at the European Parliament, and guess what they said to him? The heckle from this corner was, "Who are you?" and various other heckles besides.

I apologise for the heckling and the noise over the years, but of course, during the tenure of the previous Speaker, we wore a badge of honour as members of the BBB club. It was a literal badge; I have tried to find it. That was—I hope this is in "Erskine May"—the "bollocked by Bercow" club, of which there was a league table in *The Sunday Times*, alongside a story about those of us who had been upbraided by the Speaker on the most occasions. It certainly was a badge of honour; thank goodness that things have moved on and the quality of the Chair has improved hugely over the past few years. Fuelled by jelly babies in this corner, as well as good banter and good camaraderie, I hope—I should leave a little note—that whoever occupies the naughty corner after the election, be it on the Opposition Benches or the Government Benches, upholds the best traditions that we have tried to uphold.

As you and I know, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a privilege to be in public service. It is a privilege to be a Member of Parliament, to serve this House, to serve as a Minister—for those of us who have been given that opportunity, for however fleeting a time—and to serve on Select Committees. I have been the deputy Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee for 10 years now, and those Committees are one of the great strengths of this House. The Home Affairs Committee was described by Quentin Letts as probably the best Committee in

Westminster. In response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) and her reference to dealing with Quentin Letts, I had the great advantage, because when I first arrived and he was—I think—the sketch writer on *The Daily Telegraph*, he and I were often mistaken for each other. In those days, certainly, we looked quite similar, so when he wrote up any references to me, they were usually prefaced by “The Adonis-like Tim Loughton, the epitome of charm and handsomeness”, or whatever. Try looking like the people who write the columns, rather than those who are written about in the columns.

But the greatest privilege, of course, is to serve one’s constituents. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead has also said, and as others have echoed, the first and last reference point of being an MP should be our constituents: their problems are our nation’s problems, and we need to understand those problems if we are to provide the solutions for all of our country. As many of us know—goodness knows it is going to be the case this time around—the seat for which one is selected is something of a lottery. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead was going to be the candidate in East Worthing and Shoreham, because the people compiling the shortlist rather preferred her to me, but then she was selected for Maidenhead and so the way was clear.

Sussex is where I was born, grew up and went to school. The constituency was where my relatives lived and where my father had gone to school. To have that sort of connection to one’s constituency is particularly special, as many hon. Members have pointed out. It has been a joy to represent the best county in the United Kingdom as its Member of Parliament for 27 years. I am grateful to my constituents, in a constituency whose boundaries have been completely unchanged, who have had the foresight to elect and re-elect me in seven elections. In 1992 I pitched my tent in the soviet republic of Sheffield, Brightside—alas, I narrowly lost on the day by 22,500 votes due to the inclement weather—but we have all been through that. So I thank my constituents first.

Like everyone who has spoken, I want to thank my staff, starting with Fiona Chadwick, who I inherited in 1997. She had worked for Terence Higgins in Worthing and other MPs in the House of Commons since the 1980s. She was part of the coven, as it was called, in the basement. She has great expertise and still works for me part time. I also thank Kari Sargeant, who has worked with me and run my office since 2015, as well as Justine, India, Ellie, Liza and others in my office. I only employ women; I know my place. They run a very efficient office.

I have employed a number of researchers over the years, many of whom have gone on to greater things. Some have become millionaires; some have become Ministers for the Cabinet Office with disgracefully larger majorities than I have in my constituency, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart) will testify. I thank all my staff and the many researchers and others who have worked for me over the years. I have never actually had to sack anybody, which is quite a surprise to my hon. Friend.

As other hon. Members have done, I thank all the staff of the House who make this place tick. I will not read them all out, and I will certainly not mention the bar staff, who seem to get the biggest cheer from my

colleagues when they are mentioned. The staff are the unsung heroes who make democracy work so that we can do our job.

I thank my civil servants from my time at the Department for Education. The secret of having good civil servants is to have happy hour. At 6 o’clock, the drinks cabinet in my office was always open for those members of my private office who were still around. I do not think anyone would be allowed to do that these days, but it worked really well. If I had a particularly difficult subject that I wanted a civil servant to have a meeting with me on, I invited them during happy hour and gave them a very large gin and tonic, and I always got my way. That is what good Government is actually about.

As my colleagues have done, I thank all the Conservative party officers and volunteers who do all the work behind the scenes, in all weathers, which makes it possible for us to get elected and do our job.

Most of all—I am glad that many other hon. Members have mentioned this—I thank our families. This is the most family-unfriendly job. It was a particular irony for me, having been the shadow Children’s Minister for eight years and then the Children’s Minister, that my job did not enable me to be as good a father as I would like to have been. When I was first elected in 1997, my son Hector was under three; Freya, the gobby one, to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon is godfather, was just one; and Tilly was minus six months. We give up so much, and our families give up so much more, to enable us to do our job.

Many other hon. Members, including the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), who opened the debate, have said that this place has changed a lot and that it has changed for the better, and I agree. In 1997, the security briefing that we were given was five minutes with a police officer, who gave us our locker key and said, “Right, Mr Loughton, you’d better put your name on everything, ’cos crime happens in this place as well, you know.” That was the entirety of the security briefing. The only other briefing was a nice 20-minute video from Betty Boothroyd, with wonderful vistas of the river and the Palace. That was all the preparation we had. Things have moved on greatly, I am glad to say.

In those days, we had all-night sittings—the best place to sleep was under the tables in the Strangers’ dining room. Fortunately, those days have gone. When I served on my first Finance Bill Committee with my right hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Nick Gibb), we had to keep the business going until 5 o’clock in the morning. He and I spent several hours reading out the Southern train timetables between Worthing and Bognor Regis, and talking about related matters, to keep the Committee going. That sort of thing was a bit silly and does not happen anymore, so things have got better.

I echo the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead, who said, “Don’t want to go back into opposition.” We were both elected in 1997. Only by 1 May last year had we been in government for longer than we had been in opposition for those 13 long years beforehand, and government is better.

I end by urging future Governments on a couple of issues on which I feel strongly. I have championed, I hope, the cause of children and young people, particularly

[Tim Loughton]

disadvantaged children in the care system. As Children's Minister, I worked on reforming children in care regulations and on adoption—although, I was surprised to read in the biography of the former Prime Minister, now the Foreign Secretary, that that whole piece of work on adoption was actually his idea and only started after I left office. But hey, that's politics.

We should never forget that children and young people are 20% of the population, but 100% of our future. We lose sight of that at our peril. We have not done enough on children's social care. It is a false economy not to do that as early as possible and not to work on prevention rather than having to fire-fight the symptoms of neglect. That is why the Best Start for Life programme, championed by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom), and the first 1,001 days, which is something I have been involved in, is so important, because it is life changing if we deal with children and their parents at the beginning of their lives, not later in life. Future Governments need to remember that. The work we did on child sexual exploitation and early years is also really important.

Let me turn to one piece of unfinished business. I have here a copy of my private Member's Bill—I always carry one around—which is now the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Act 2019, of which I am very proud. It has enabled more than 25,000 couples to have an opposite-sex civil partnership since 2019, and has enabled people getting married to put the name of their mother on their marriage certificate—something that had not happened since 1837.

That may seem like a little thing, but it was brought home to me when I received a wonderful letter from somebody I had never met before whose daughter had just been married in Bath in the same church where he and his late wife had been married. He said that being able to put his late wife's name on the marriage certificate made such a difference, and that it was as though she was actually there, even though she was not there physically.

The bit of unfinished business is section 4, which gives powers to coroners to investigate stillbirths. It is as vital now as it was when that became law back in 2019 for the Government to get on with it and issue the regulations. I urge the next Government to treat that as a priority.

The job has changed. The job, I think, has got harder. Three people have been murdered in my time here: Jo Cox, David Amess and the police officer Keith Palmer. Social media has made our job harder. It has divided society, and promoted hate and the cancel culture. But those of us who work here—those of us who work together across the Chamber, across Committees and across all-party groups—all share that devotion to public service and making the lives of our constituents and our nation better, regardless of party difference.

I will continue to work with friends across the political divide on other platforms outside of Parliament. After 47 years as a party activist—I joined at the age of 15—eight elections and 12 years on the Front Bench, I hope that I have made a bit of a difference through legislation in this place and a bit of a difference for my constituents, and that I have gained a bit of respect for what I have tried to do.

Finally, there is an old adage that poses the conundrum: what is the difference between knowledge and wisdom? Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit, not a vegetable, but wisdom is knowing not to put a tomato in a fruit salad. This place is full of knowledge, but I think we have seen today that we are losing a lot of wisdom from this Chamber. That is a great sadness, with various colleagues moving on for whatever reason, but this place is a source of wisdom. When we use that wisdom wisely and with consensus across the House, we can achieve great things, and we have. I am proud to have played a small part in that.

4.50 pm

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Ind): After 14 years, I still have not worked out how to write a beautiful speech. Listening to my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) reminds me of how eloquent he is, and he will be a sad loss to this House.

My entry into politics as a wee boy from Ardrossan—you come from Paisley, Madam Deputy Speaker, so you will appreciate this—was something of an unconventional background. I was influenced by the colossus that was Margaret Thatcher. I was influenced by a grandmother who would shout at the television when Ted Heath was on. I was influenced by a mother who would walk through picket lines to get to work, because she had to work to keep a roof over her head. We were a single-parent family, and she was a grafter who always did the right thing.

And I was influenced by the Scottish National party councillor across the road—a woman called Marjorie Forrest, who is still alive to this day. I was influenced by seeing election posters appear in the window, and I wondered what they were. I would see loud speakers appear on top of her car, and I wondered what they were. I thought that politics and campaigning was something everyone did, because I saw it in the house opposite, but I also saw desperate people going to her to get help on simple matters that, for a person in desperate need, was life-changing. I have carried that desire to help people with me ever since.

As the many Members in this Chamber know, that is not always seen by the press and the media, and we do not often share it publicly because we see people at their lowest, their most vulnerable, their most frightened and their most scared. We often see people when we are the last port of call and, because we are the last port of call, each and every one of us does everything we can to turn their situation around. We can all think of situations where we have done that, which makes me incredibly proud.

I also think of how I got here. Had I followed the path of least resistance, I would have joined the Labour party in Scotland because, by that time, we were down to 10 seats, and then we went down to none. But I was a Conservative, so I was my association's deputy chairman. I was president of Glasgow University Conservative club. I fought for Michael Forsyth in Stirling in 1992, and again in 1997. That defeat in 1997 really hurt, and I thought, "Never again shall we see that."

The first seat I contested was Glasgow Govan. The saying goes, "I fought Dagenham, and Dagenham fought back." Trust me, there is a thing called a Glasgow kiss

that involves the forehead and no other part of the anatomy. I luckily avoided the Glasgow kiss, but I had a few close shaves.

The day after the election, I woke up in my hotel room at the Scottish Event Campus in Glasgow, pulled back the curtains and said to mum, “That is my constituency over there.” And she said, “Not any more, it’s not. It was your constituency yesterday, but the election has been and gone. You have no connection with it any more.” That was not the first time that my mother brought me back down to earth with a bang.

The reality is that we build up relationships through the campaigning we do. We are identified as being the Conservative candidate or the Conservative MP. We take on issues that we never otherwise would. We take on issues that we never otherwise would. We do it because of our role, but when that role gets taken away—as is its very nature—some of those relationships will change. That for me will be one of the things I will find very hard.

I fought Selby in 2005, and I was supposed to win. Michael Howard even came to Selby to close the national election, and that same night Tony Blair went to Scarborough to close Labour’s campaign; so my advice to any candidate in the selection is to not have the Leader of the Opposition in your constituency on the eve of the poll if you are a Labour MP and think you will win or the Prime Minister if you are a Tory MP and think you will win. We gained Scarborough and we lost Selby. Take it from me, sometimes candidates are best left on your own.

I failed to get reselected for Selby. I was supposed to be fast-tracked and all the rest of it, but I was not. That was a painfully low point for me. My mum came into my bedroom one Saturday morning, and my duvet was over my head—I had been having my duvet over my head a lot recently—and she said, “Listen, you fought two parliamentary seats. Most people never get to fight one.” Those were her words of wisdom. She was trying to be helpful, but I responded by saying, “No, I fought two parliamentary seats and the next one I fight I am going to win.” That became my sole focus and my drive and determination.

I was blessed that I got Fylde, a seat that I had never been to before in my life until I applied, to be honest, but one I naturally fitted with. It is a beautiful constituency and one with so much diversity. It has everything from BAE Systems, which is building the Typhoon fighter jet, to Westinghouse, which makes nearly all of the UK’s nuclear fuel, and so many other diverse businesses. It is also very beautiful. People look at Lytham St Annes on a map, next to Blackpool, and think it must be a challenging place, shall we say, but it is not. Madam Deputy Speaker, you have talked about your visits to the Clifton Arms Hotel in Lytham, which is certainly a very fine establishment. Lytham St Annes continues to go from strength to strength. It is not posh Blackpool, it is Lytham St Annes.

There are many other fine towns in the constituency. I was very proud to be able to secure regeneration money for Kirkham and see the town on the up. I had leaders of the council and various other people tell me multiple times that the M55 link road would never happen—that it was too complicated, that there were just too many different funding pots that kept flooding

about. I said, “I will get that link road built.” It nearly killed me. It took me 10 years. But that link road is opening next month. It was something that others found too complicated, too boring or too detailed, but that is my legacy, because sometimes boring and detailed is what makes the wheels turn. So when people drive over that M55 link road, just spare a little thought for me.

The timing of my departure, unlike for some people, was not entirely of my choosing. There was much work I intended to carry on. I say to whoever succeeds me that I will stay out of their way or I will give advice—it is entirely up to them. That applies to whether that person is from my party or another. When I became a Member of Parliament, I got no support from my predecessor, to be frank. I came in here one night, feeling like Cinderella. I had three big bags and had been invited to a reception—the first of many—but I was sat up in a Committee Room with three giant sacks of mail.

The only reason I knew I had mail was that I saw people come in with these green envelopes. I went down to the post office that used to be down here and said, “Have I got any mail by any chance?” He said, “Oh yes, Mr Menzies, you have a lot of mail.” When I asked how much, he said, “This much”, and there were three sacks. I was set up there opening it all, so I know what it feels like at the start. My advice to any new Member starting is to find that mail as soon as you can.

We have talked about campaigns and the things we have secured, and we have talked about casework. As other Members have said, the people who deliver that are our parliamentary staff. I have been blessed to have had some of the most outstanding and loyal people over the last 14 years, which I appreciate now more than ever. Shirley has been my office manager from day one, and Adam has been with me for the last five years. I also have Liam, Roger Small and Max Smith. They are the team who go out day in, day out, do the detailed work and make me look good. They allow me to go on foreign trips or do stuff on a Select Committee while casework is being done. When I have been looking after my mum, they have allowed me not to be here while casework is being done.

Some of my earlier staff are now earning multiple times what I earn. Maybe that is because I recruited bright, talented people, or maybe it is just because MPs are not destined to earn a lot of money, but the one thing that is sure is that all my staff will be earning a lot more money than I will be in a few weeks’ time, even the most junior member. With that in mind, I have to think about looking to the future. I say to my staff: you are brilliant people. Whatever you go on to do, people will be very lucky to have you.

We, too, are lucky to have the people who support us in our roles, be they the Doorkeepers, who are incredibly polite and who know more about what is going on in this place than anyone else, or the people who work in the Tea Room and keep us fed. I think back to the horrible day when PC Keith Palmer was murdered during the terrorist attack on Westminster bridge. My hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) and I left Parliament and got to the rope line at Lambeth bridge. Gladys, the elderly lady who works in the Tea Room, was waiting behind the rope line, because she wanted to make sure that her Members were okay. That

[*Mark Menzies*]

is the level of dedication. It is not about making bits of toast; it is about caring. My goodness, the staff of this House care.

I would like to point out that the people who work in health and wellbeing, which is not always talked about and which, until recently, was not as good as it should have been for Members, have helped many people, including me. The pressure on MPs is extraordinary, regardless of whether it comes from the long hours, being away from family, the demands on us or social media. That pressure is huge, so I urge the parliamentary authorities to keep investing in health and wellbeing, and to look after MPs, be they those who are currently serving or those who will come into this House after the next election. They should be nurtured and cherished, because they are people who want to do good, but they are also fragile souls.

In my time here, I have never been a Minister. I started off by being a PPS. My first Minister got sacked and my second Minister got sacked, so when I was appointed as Sir Alan Duncan's PPS, he was frightened, because my track record was not a good one. Where I came into my own was being a trade envoy. Again, my advice to colleagues coming into Parliament after the next election is that you should sometimes be polite, but also know when to stamp your feet, because occasionally—just occasionally—the squeaky wheel gets oiled. It was after the 2017 election that I thought, “Stuff this. I want to be doing something.” So I created merry hell about my desire to become a trade envoy. To be fair, the right hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Gavin Williamson) phoned me up the next day and said, “I know you want to be trade envoy for Argentina, but we're going to appoint you trade envoy for Colombia, Peru and Chile. How do you feel about that?” I bit his hand off. Argentina was then added a year later.

I have served as trade envoy for seven years. At the time of Brexit and huge change in this country, it was something that was incredibly relevant, and I felt really privileged to be out there battling for British business, sometimes really small businesses. When I was in Colombia in February, we were helping a cheese supplier from the constituency of Mr Deputy Speaker, the right hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans), to enter the Colombian market. That is a small supplier entering the global stage as a result of what we do.

As trade envoy, I secured the largest ever infrastructure deal in Latin America. I was the chairman of the UK-Peru infrastructure taskforce and we secured a £1.7 billion infrastructure deal, the largest in living memory. With the help of Sir Mark Kent, who is now the chief executive of the Scotch Whisky Association, we also got Argentina to unilaterally drop its whisky tariff, boosting Scotch exports. Experts—we should always be careful of experts—told me that that would not happen. They had been working on it for years and they thought Argentina would want something in return. Sometimes you draw on your past experiences, and my experience of working in retail is that sometimes you put forward a simple offer or a simple ask and you make them see that the numbers stack up. We did that and, three weeks later, Argentina signed the unilateral

dropping of Scotch whisky tariffs. My advice to people is, “If someone tells you something is too difficult or complicated, don't believe them.”

Some of the best advice I got in my early days as an MP was, “Be kind to the House and the House will be kind to you.” I have seen people who on occasion have not been kind to the House fall by the wayside. My dear friend Sir David Amess, whom I miss terribly to this day, was incredibly kind to me. I would go and see him, often daily, and we would chat things over. He was always there as a stalwart support. He said to me, “Don't try and be too clever; never be too political, because sometimes that boot will be kicking your backside.” He was right. Sometimes we hold strongly different views, not just from Opposition Members but from those on our own side—take Brexit, for example—but there is much more that unites us than divides us.

I will try to bring my comments to some sort of natural conclusion—this is where I wish I had allowed Adam to write my speech. The one thing that has kept me going is the privilege of serving Fylde. My constituents are fantastic, kind, Lancashire people who want the best for their communities. I always strove to deliver that for them. The Fylde that I leave behind is a better Fylde than I inherited. Many people will be able to say that about their respective constituencies.

I would also like to thank the people who took me on the many trips over the years. I was once accused by the media of being the second most travelled MP in Parliament. I objected strongly from Gibraltar. A lot of the travel I did—my trade envoy work and my Inter-Parliamentary Union work, for example—was not something that would appear on the Register of Members' Financial Interests. In actual fact, I got more than my fair share of trips. As a result, I became a more rounded and well-balanced Member of Parliament. It allowed me to see a broader view.

I thank Sir Mark Kent, whom I met in Argentina, who is now chairman of the Scotch Whisky Association, for allowing me to see how top-quality ambassadors work. I thank people such as His Royal Highness Prince Sultan and Prince Khalid at the Saudi embassy for opening my eyes to a country that I knew nothing about but which my constituency depended on for jobs. I have more people working in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia than any other Member in this House because of the aerospace defence relationship.

I also thank the Inter-Parliamentary Union for opening my eyes to some of the most interesting things in the world. Anyone who has ever been on an IPU or Commonwealth Parliamentary Association trip will always come away much better informed. Rick Nimmo, Dominique Rees and the team have done tremendous work in that field.

For the last seven years, I served as chairman of both the all-party parliamentary group on Latin America and the APPG on Saudi Arabia. That is something on which I feel fulfilled leaving this House. I have also spent time on Select Committees. I joined the Transport Committee thinking we were going to get lots of travel, but the furthest we got was Vauxhall bridge to check vehicle emissions, and that was after two and a half years. We did travel, though, with the International Development Committee, with my right hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley, and I also went to New

York with some great people on the Scottish Affairs Committee a few weeks ago. We were flying the flag for the UK.

It has been the greatest honour of my life to serve in this place. The wee boy from Ardrossan, where people told me when I was growing up, “Just don’t get carried away. If you ever become a councillor, you’re doing well. People like you don’t become MPs.” My mum worked in an explosives factory for 32 years and was a member of a trade union. She was widowed a month before I was born and brought me up on her own. “People like that don’t have sons who become Conservative MPs.” Well, I did and I have. I have served this place well, I think, for the last 14 years. I will miss it terribly. I do intend to be one of the sad gits walking around with an orange pass, so you have not seen the last of me.

I also want to say that I would not have been here without my family, and my family is my mother. She encouraged me when I was growing up, and she encouraged me when the chips were down. Over the last three years, she has been in hospital 38 times. She has almost died five times and officially been put on end of life twice. She is 89 but she is still going strong. If my mum can cope with all that, get through adversity and demonstrate what true resilience looks like, so too can I.

I do not know what the future holds for me, but I am optimistic, because the experiences and friendships that I have earned in this place will do nothing but stand me in good stead. Some things I would change, for sure, but the majority of it I would not. It has been an honour and a privilege. You are my friends; you are my family. I will miss you, but I will see you around. Thank you very much, and God bless.

5.13 pm

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): I shall be brief, mainly because I have to leave shortly to collect my son from nursery. Like many other Members here, I want to start with thanks to family. The immense patience of my wife over the past 14 years with my career in politics has been something to behold, but my mother has dealt with 45 years of having a husband or son as Member of Parliament for Worcester. She has done immense service to the constituency and to our country from the way she supported my father, and she has been an inspiration to me.

I want to very briefly talk about my passion for education. I made my maiden speech on the importance of education. It was great to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) and, indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond), who spoke about what we have been able to do as a Government for education. I have been banging on about school funding for my entire time in Parliament. It is a deeply nerdy subject, but it is vital, and colleagues on both sides of the House have engaged in the debates. We have made some real strides, but there is much more to do.

I point to recommendations of the Education Committee with regard to properly funding the work of teaching assistants in schools as a key objective for the next Parliament. We have had some great debates with contributions from Members on both sides of the House about the importance of meeting special educational needs; the House passed some fantastic legislation in 2014 but it has not achieved its objectives, and we need to ensure that those needs are better funded in the future.

I have been honoured to chair the Education Committee for the last year or so. I pay tribute—as has everyone else—to all the staff in the House, but I pay particular tribute to the Clerks of our Select Committees, who work incredibly hard behind the scenes to ensure that we can produce great recommendations on a cross-party basis. They helped me to produce a report just last week; I have it here, and I commend it to the House. Given some of the comments that we have heard from hon. Members in all parts of the House about the challenges of social media, I am delighted that we were able to hold a meeting yesterday in the Reasons Room, where the brilliant hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) was able to deliver cross-party support for our report on screen time. I seriously recommend that the next Government, from whatever side they come, engage with the recommendations of that report to better protect our children from the perils of social media. I think there is real concern about that across all parties in the House, and there are strides that can be made.

Let me end by thanking my constituents in Worcester for giving me the privilege of my life by enabling me to serve such a wonderful constituency, and thanking colleagues across the House for being such great friends.

5.16 pm

Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con): Alas, we find ourselves here. I never thought I would be speaking for the last time in this Chamber, let alone doing so under the age of 30. Indeed, I never thought I would even make it here before the age of 30. My former boss, my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg), often says that I make him feel exceptionally old because his former intern has not only made it to Parliament, but is retiring before him. My thanks go to him for all the wisdom that he has passed on over the years.

There is an irony, is there not, in standing up in a place where words are of paramount importance, and then finding it difficult to find words to express the bittersweet nature not only of having served in this place, but of leaving this place. So many people have said today that being a Member of Parliament is an honour. That is one of the most horrendously clichéd words we can use but also one of the truest, because it is an honour and it is a privilege. As MPs, we have the opportunity to really make a difference—to make a difference to the individuals we help through casework and the families whose lives we touch day in, day out; to make a difference to whole communities; and, of course, to make a difference to our entire country. I think we all know, if we search deep down, that the reason we want to be here is that we want to make a difference, and to try to make the world a better place. I say that not just of colleagues on this side of the House but of those right across it, because I think we are all united in having come here with good intentions.

However, this is also a huge responsibility. You stand up every day and have to search your soul to do what is right. Sometimes it is easy to know which way you will vote, but at other times it is very difficult, especially when you find yourself on the opposite side of the argument to friends, family, colleagues and many constituents—although your constituents will definitely be the ones to let you know when you are on the opposite side to them. Ultimately, we all have to look

[Dehenna Davison]

ourselves in the mirror and know that we have made the right decision. I have been proud of most of the decisions I have made in this place, although I think we can all say that we are human and have made mistakes, and there may be things that we would change.

I have used the word “I” a lot already, and I shall probably use it a lot more, but so many colleagues have expressed the sentiment that this is not a single-man sport but a team sport. I would not have been able to achieve anything in this place—and I mean anything—without my incredible team: Joanne Howey, Niki Trotter, James Middleton, and the two who are up in the Public Gallery, Jack Bell and Ellie Varley. I am an only child—I have never had siblings—but through doing this job and hiring those two incredible people up in the Gallery, I have gained a brother and sister. They are not getting rid of me just yet—or if they are, it is only as a boss, never as a sibling.

We have achieved some incredible things here, but what makes me proudest on a national level is the awareness that my team and I have managed to bring to the issue of one-punch assaults. Only last week I was here in the Chamber making an emotional speech—one of the few emotional speeches I have made; I was tearing up a little—not expecting to have to make another for a while. I talked about the impact of my dad’s death through a single punch, how that has motivated me, and all the work that I have done and the incredible people I have met—those at One Punch UK, and other families campaigning to improve awareness and improve the outcome for victims. I secured some brilliant commitments from the Government, which is now a laugh, isn’t it, given that I will have to have to fight the next Government to make sure that they carry those over? They can rest assured that I will not be off their backs until I get those commitments honoured, once the election has passed.

I thank all the activists and local volunteers who put in so much effort to help me get to this place. I particularly thank Councillor Richard Bell, the Conservative group leader in Durham. He is also now deputy leader of the council, because back in 2021, through a massive effort from all our volunteers and activists, we secured the massive feat of knocking Labour out of power in Durham for the first time in more than 100 years. Richard Bell serves in that role brilliantly, as do all the new councillors who were also elected. I thank the three chairmen I have served under in Bishop Auckland: Ted Henderson, Philip Leech, and Luke Allan Holmes, who, at the ripe old age of 21, is standing for City of Durham at this general election. Of course, I wish him well in that.

So many colleagues have said this, but my biggest thanks have to go to my constituents, the brilliant people of the Bishop Auckland constituency, who put their faith in me. I was a young woman who was not even from the county, but they put their faith in me as a Conservative; this was the first time they had elected a Conservative Member of Parliament since the seat was created in 1885. I am so grateful to each and every one of the 24,067 people who put their cross in the box next to my name. I could tell so many tales, but I will not now. All I will say is that in meeting so many constituents over the years, I have had moving experiences and

incredibly supportive conversations. There has been a lot fun, as well as a lot of heated debates at points. I am particularly grateful to those constituents who may not have agreed with me or some of the decisions I have made, but who have handled all the communication and the debate well, and with respect.

This place is such an adventure. I do not just mean getting lost in my first few weeks here, when I would accidentally find myself in the kitchens or on a rooftop where I was not supposed to be. I find being here as a young woman particularly funny, because mine is not the face of a traditional MP, as most people like to point out. I have been quizzed so many times on whether I am an intern or here on work experience. Now that I am 30, I find it incredibly brilliant to know that I still have a youthful face. Even today, on my final day in this place, I was quizzed by security when I was going out on the Terrace with my lunch. They asked, “Excuse me, madam, do you have a parliamentary pass?” It is wonderful that our security are doing their jobs so diligently. It is also nice to know that I have clearly made a substantial impact in my four and a half years here!

Like so many colleagues, I must pay tribute to all the staff in this place, because they are nothing short of exemplary. The service they offer us to make sure that the wheels of democracy keep moving is second to none. I will always remember one of my first interactions with the brilliant Doorkeeper Wayne, who took me on a tour on my first day. I remember walking through those doors, and my eyes lit up as I wandered into the Chamber on a Sunday evening, wearing a T-shirt, bover boots and a woolly hat. I said, “Oh my gosh, I am in here.” I was standing by the Opposition Benches, as I had not got my bearings and did not know which side was which at that point. Like a schoolgirl, I asked, “Am I allowed to sit on these Benches now?” He said, “Madam, the Benches are yours now; of course you can.” That memory will stay with me right until my final days.

I must say thank you to all the Doorkeepers; the catering team; Anthony and Richard in the Strangers’ Bar for always letting me know when the new ciders are coming in—they know me well—all the team at the Speaker’s Office; the Speaker and the entire Deputy Speakers team; the Clerks; those in the Public Bill Office; security; and the cleaners. I have probably forgotten lots of people, but a huge thank you to everyone who makes the wheels of this place turn.

I am surprised that no one has mentioned them yet, but I must also say thank you to Kelly and Jackie downstairs, for helping to keep so many of us looking tame. You cannot tame this mop of mine, but they do their best. I am so grateful to them, not just for making my hair look swish, but for the friendship they have offered over the years and the service and dedication they have offered to so many Members from across the House. This is an incredible workplace, but it is not just a workplace; it is like a huge family.

I did a short spell as a Minister. I managed a year, which is more than a lot of colleagues have done, given how tumultuous it has been in recent times. Let me pay a small tribute once more to the brilliant team at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for all their support—to the private office, and all the civil servants who worked so well with me, giving me honest advice and challenging me at times, when that

challenge was reasonable. Ultimately, they were serving the people of this country to make its communities the best they can be.

Of course, I come back to colleagues; they make this place. It is about coming in every morning and seeing colleagues, sometimes smiling and sometimes with grumpy faces, and knowing that we are one team—comrades—here to make this country the best it can be. There are too many memories to share, and I do not want to name too many individuals for fear of offending others, but I pay tribute to the man sitting right beside me, my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt). I have fond memories of our first rebellion together—the first of not too many, colleagues will be pleased to know. We basically egged each other on, and admitted only once we were out of the voting Lobby, “I wasn’t going to do it if you weren’t!” To the Whips, I am sincerely sorry for that, but I have no regrets about sharing that special memory with one of my closest friends.

I genuinely wish all colleagues—whether they are departing, by choice or not, or staying in this place—the best of luck for whatever comes next. Given the breadth of talent right across the Benches, Members will go on to brighter and better things and will continue to play their part in serving the country and making the lives of individuals and communities better, every step of the way.

This place sometimes feels a bit like battle. Certainly, the bits that we see on TV—the Punch and Judy of Prime Minister’s questions—look like battle, but there is also the battle of ideas, in which we often fight so well and so constructively, even when we disagree. I think back to the battle against covid, when this House really came together in the best possible way, fighting not among ourselves but that horrendous pandemic, to keep our constituents safe. If you will indulge me, Madam Deputy Speaker, I must quote Taylor Swift just once in this speech. This is to colleagues of all rosette colours: in the battles that we have faced together,

“I had the time of my life fighting dragons with you.”

I thank them for picking up their swords and fighting so diligently.

I did not anticipate that my time here would be so short. As I said, I did not anticipate being here so soon—I thought that it would be in 10 years’ time, if I ever made it at all. Leaving here means that I can now fulfil my key responsibility, towards my friends and family. I regret to say that I have probably neglected them a little over the past four and a half years. We all know how intense and all-consuming this place can be, and that our friends and family deal with it the most—they deal with the backlash, with our grumps when we come home after late-night votes, and with seeing all the vitriol that we get on social media. In many ways, it impacts them more than it does us.

I thank my wonderful dad, who is no longer with us but inspired me to make it to this place; my late nan, who inspired me to be the sort of strong, independent woman who I always aspired to be, who could make it here to Parliament; and my mum, who is tuned in somewhere on the airwaves, I hope. The person I need to thank most of all is my absolutely brilliant, inspiring and dazzling partner Tony, who ensures that when I get home from a late-night vote, there is food on the table,

and who picks me up and really lights me up on my darkest days, and makes me want to be the best I can be. I am looking forward to joining him on his next adventure. Colleagues, thank you, and best of luck for whatever comes next.

5.27 pm

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my dear and hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Dehenna Davison).

It has been the honour of my life to serve as Colchester’s Member of Parliament for the past nine years, the last four and a half of which I have been a Government Minister at the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care. I put on the record my sincere thanks to my superb, hard-working constituency team, the brilliant civil servants with whom I have had the pleasure of working, my local Conservative association, and all those who have supported me in so many ways over many years. Together—I genuinely mean together—we have achieved so much.

Locally, our work has included dealing with over 70,000 cases on behalf of local residents on a wide range of issues; securing £40 million of Government town deal and levelling-up funding to regenerate our city; getting over £75 million of investment into Colchester Hospital, including for an upgraded accident and emergency department and a new orthopaedic surgical centre; getting multimillion-pound investments in the arts and in road and rail infrastructure; and securing city status for Colchester. Britain’s first capital city under the Romans is a city once more.

Nationally, our work includes all war graves now falling under the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in perpetuity; the tampon tax fund, which led to funding of over £86 million going to support women’s health charities; establishing the all-party parliamentary group on baby loss; introducing groundbreaking parental bereavement leave legislation; helping to create the household support fund, which has made over £2.5 billion available for families in need; introducing reforms to childcare, children’s social care and provision for special educational needs and disabilities; working alongside brilliant NHS staff to reduce waiting lists and improve urgent and emergency care; and cementing the UK’s status as a life sciences superpower.

This job, for all its challenges, has given me the opportunity to bring about change and make a difference. I feel deeply honoured to have been able to work to improve life chances for children, in particular. Of course, I am sad to be leaving Parliament and politics today. Despite knowing that it is without doubt the right decision for me and my family, there is much that I will miss about serving as Colchester’s Member of Parliament, not least having the opportunity to meet and help so many local residents and to work with parliamentary colleagues on both sides of the House.

I will conclude with a handful more thank-yous: to all the staff and security here at the Houses of Parliament; to my wonderful, supportive family, without whom, frankly, I would not have been able to do this job—especially my wife, Elinor; and, last but by no means least, to the people of Colchester. I thank them for electing me, for

[Will Quince]

putting their trust in me, and for giving me the opportunity to serve them in the best job in the world. I wish my successor all the very best.

5.30 pm

Sir James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): May I first express my sadness that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, are also standing down from the coterie of Essex MPs? I thank you for your part in recognising the talents of a young James Duddridge in Melton Mowbray, and rubber-stamping, over a glass of white wine, my aim to serve as a Member of Parliament.

Comrades, time flies in this place. I remember, in 2004, having round my kitchen table Ian Robertson, my chairman, who is a great sage; the late Tony Smithson, who was my first agent; and Tony Cox, who is now leader of the council. I said, "I'm really ready for the general election." We named it five-five-five, because we predicted, a year in advance, the date of the election—at that time, it was not that difficult to predict. They said, "A year will go quickly," but 20 years has now passed, which is amazing.

I want to thank the people who selected me and elected me. I must have been doing something right, because at each election, more people have voted for me than at the previous election. I jotted down a few bits of advice, but when I re-read them after hearing former Prime Minister talking about democracy and a former Secretary of State talking about defence and defence spending, they seemed a little low-level. This is my advice anyway. Let someone else manage your bloody email. It is absolutely dreadful and drives me mad. Eat less, and perhaps more importantly, drink less. Join the armed forces parliamentary scheme, which is absolutely amazing and superb for finding out about colleagues and the services. Value family over politics, and do not covet others' success; help them achieve that success.

My team have been fantastic. Pindie Fanibe runs my office. I call her the boss; every now and again, I am allowed to make a decision. Marcus Llewelyn-Bowen—sorry, Llewelyn-Rothschild; that was a Freudian slip. He is very flamboyant, my Marcus. He is registered blind and he goes into hospital every other day for dialysis, but he still carries on as my caseworker. He is absolutely amazing. Before me, he served another Member of Parliament. I thank James Moyies, who is an exceptional individual. He stood against me twice as the UKIP candidate, but then became my agent and is now my employee. I am sure he will carry on. I also thank Sam Pettengall, who I hope to see leaving politics and joining the Royal Navy, certainly as a reserve, and Cheryll Gardiner, whose son Luke will hopefully come to this place as a Derbyshire Member of Parliament.

Alicia Kearns: On my hon. Friend's point about loyalty to him, today in the Chamber we have spoken a lot about how important it is for women to come to this place, but women do not come to this place without good men behind them. This will do nothing for your reputation, but you are the good man who brought me into this place. I know that you may sometimes regret it, but there are few people in this world who meet a young woman twice, each time for less than half an hour, and then, when an election is announced, move them into

their house the next day—open their home to them—and put their entire life aside to fight every day for that person. It is no surprise that you have such loyalty from your team, because your heart is so enormous, and without you, I would not be here. I am so grateful to you, and to Katy and your kids, who allowed that to happen. You are a phenomenal man, and I will very much miss you in this place.

Sir James Duddridge: You are not going to make me cry. I thank my hon. Friend, and I do think we need to change whom we elect as candidates. For a number of reasons, I hope I am replaced by a woman in Rochford and Southend East—or Southend East and Rochford, as it is now called.

I would like to mention Lucy Paton-Brown, who was with me for 10 years and is absolutely fabulous, and Philippa Buckley, who is now in Zambia but did a great job for me. I also want to mention my wife, because she worked for me, and also because I would get in trouble if I did not mention her. We have three lovely children, and I am going to spend more time looking after our new arrival, the one-year-old. It happens to be a Labrador dog, which is proving to be much harder than the children.

I would not recommend coming to this place—and it is the best job in the world. I have no regrets. I served 19 years, including nine years on the Front Bench in five different Departments under three Prime Ministers. I particularly enjoyed the camaraderie of the Whips Office. At one point, I held the title of the most sacked Minister in the Conservative Government; I like to think of it as the most reappointable Minister in troubled times, but others may disagree. I was the Minister that took through the withdrawal Act, having voted three times against that as a Bill, having never voted against the Government before. I am particularly proud of my time as Minister for Africa, something I got to do twice, building on my previous work as a banker in Africa. That is something I would very much like to do.

I thought I was going to do at least another 10 years. That is not the right thing for me now, but it has been brilliant. I look at everyone, or I would look at everyone if I had kept my glasses on, and I can think of a moment of joy with them, a moment of sadness, an embarrassing moment, a—

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): Revelation.

Sir James Duddridge: A revelation—I thank my right hon. Friend. It has been absolutely superb. I will miss this place, and I say thank you to everyone who has served—in the broadest way—this House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Just before I call the next hon. Gentleman, the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton made an impassioned intervention—a correct one, making an excellent point—but she kept referring to the hon. Gentleman as "you". This upsets me so much. I cannot let it go, because what if, when I am not here—which will be very soon—nobody bothers? What if we descend into just an ordinary place, where people use first names, nicknames, "you", or sloppy language, and wear white trainers? It just would not be right.

This is a very special place, and the fact that we call each other “the hon. Member” and use the third person and not the second person is part of the way that we do things here, with dignity and precision and by stepping back from the personal. I appreciate that what the hon. Lady has just said is personal, and this is a personal debate. There is nothing wrong with that, but in debates about political topics, it is very important to keep the personal out of it and stick to the facts. That is why it is so important that we respect the rule of speaking through the Chair and refer to people, not as “you”, but as the hon. Gentleman or the hon. Lady. I simply cannot miss my last opportunity to say that, and I so hope it will not be forgotten.

5.39 pm

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to catch your eye for what will be the last time in my 23 years in this place. Like all Members who have spoken in this wonderful debate, it is going to be a great wrench to leave the House. The only person who may have a slight skip in his step is Mr Speaker, who will no longer have to consider the many applications for urgent questions that I have submitted over the years. It has been a wonderful time and, as briefly as I can, I want to thank all those who have made it possible.

As all other hon. Members have done, I want to thank everybody who works here. Little do they realise, but they are supporting a great parliamentary system. I want to thank the Doorkeepers, the caterers, the security staff and the Librarians—I want to thank everybody who works here, without exception. They keep the show on the road. Every single one of them supports our great parliamentary system. We thank them for that.

Reflecting for a moment, I suggest that much has changed since I joined the House in 2001 and almost all for the better. For a start, the hours are much more family-friendly. As a green MP in 2001, there was no briefing. My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) basically made the point that we were thrown into the Chamber—I would not say literally—and told to get on with it and learn. Things have also changed for the better in that we have many more lady MPs, which has been a great improvement to the House.

Things have changed for the better, but what has not changed for the better has been a narrative that has grown stronger in recent times and in certain quarters that our parliamentary system is broken and not performing as it should. I would contend that that is not true. While I accept that it is not perfect, I do believe that it is representative and effective, and is respected around the world. For example, it managed to contain the Brexit debate—probably the most passionate debate that we have had in a generation—and channel it accordingly in an open way that I think few other countries could have pulled off.

This Chamber remains the crucible where the matters of the day are debated and resolved. Its fulcrum is the obligation that we all tell the truth in this place. We should never forget that MPs can still effect great change. I, like other colleagues, look back with fondness and satisfaction at the campaigns and good causes that I have participated in, whether campaigning for our 2015

manifesto to contain the promise of an EU referendum, against arming the Syrian rebels, for official recognition and support of our nuclear test veterans, greater funding for the British Council, or securing a focus on outcomes when it comes to cancer, as was embodied in section 5 of the Health and Care Act 2022. I thank all colleagues—many of them are in their places—who supported that effort.

Of course one has not always been successful; none of us is. We can all list our somewhat disappointments. I opposed our Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan interventions and, despite the passionate debates that we had on those occasions, we still intervened. It was another sadness to me that we did not manage to do more at the time to get the Government to think again about defence cuts.

My amendment in 2019 on the Northern Ireland backstop was defeated by the largest recorded parliamentary majority in history: 600 to 24. It is still fresh in the mind. I remind colleagues that one just has to keep going on. Perseverance has a quality all of its own and my goodness me, there were times in those years when we needed it.

I have heard so many interesting speeches in the Chamber this afternoon, and it has been a real pleasure to be part of this debate, but I would suggest to colleagues that humility is also a great quality. We should never forget that. I was reminded of that recently by my constituency team, who put it to me that, in all the elections I have fought since 2001, the less time I spent in the constituency, the more my majority went up. Indeed, that is true: I have had an increased majority in every single general election. I will not say that I am not a very diligent constituency MP, but perhaps—perhaps—I have eased off just a little bit since 2001.

Overall, I would say that, with hard work and perseverance and by garnering support when needed, MPs can still effect change and truly help their constituents, occasionally with the help of the occupant of the Chair—as you well know, Mr Speaker. It is nice to see you in your place; and now that you are here, may I thank you personally for everything you do for this place? You are the guardian of something very precious in that Chair, and your presence there has been a real source of strength and support for Members across the House in making sure that our parliamentary system remains true to itself and does not meander. Thank you very much indeed, Mr Speaker.

I have enjoyed my time on Select Committees and all-party groups, which is where we see the best of cross-party work. That is something we all value in this place. I concur with the many observations made by colleagues that we are at our very best if we can foster consensus across the divide and move an issue forward. Like many others, I have certainly benefited from cross-party consensus, when we have been able to engineer it.

I come back to the effectiveness of this place and the minority of individuals, increasingly noisy though they are, who say that this place is broken or not effective, or that it needs to be improved because it does not represent its constituents. That view is completely wrong, and I say that as somebody who has been in this place for 23 years—and there are colleagues who have been here much longer than I. This place is effective, and we should remember that. I would therefore caution against ill thought-through, sweeping reforms, which will harm

[Mr John Baron]

our democracy. Past innovations, such as the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, have served to highlight the wisdom of convention, I would suggest. We should be wary of talk of, for example, a written constitution, proportional representation or House of Lords reform. We should be careful what we wish for. We are here courtesy of the accumulated wisdom of previous generations. We discard that experience and wisdom at our peril if we do not consider things very carefully.

I wish all colleagues well, past and present, and I wish those staying on good fortune in the next Parliament. I will certainly be keeping in touch with many friends. My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis), a very good friend, has been sitting next to me for most of this debate, although he has had to go, and there are many other colleagues here who I look forward to keeping in touch with after I leave.

Naturally, I would like to thank my constituency association, along with councillors, activists and the many friends I have made in the constituency, for their contributions and friendship over so many years. The association stood by me on a number of occasions when I did not always agree with my party. The closest I came to being removed as an MP was in 2003. It was not an election year, but there was an extraordinary general meeting to—I was going to say “to deselection me”, which I think is what it was in effect, because of the way I voted on the Iraq war.

Opinion was very divided, as colleagues may remember—I see my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon), a good friend, sitting on the Bench at the front, who will remember that moment. Having voted against my Whip, I had to resign from the Front Bench. That caused a stir in the association, but we got through it, and since then I have had no issue at all with my association over not always agreeing—or not agreeing, I should say—with our interventions in Libya or Afghanistan, post 2001. The association understood that MPs are representatives, not delegates.

I would like to thank my constituents for their support, and for ensuring that I won increased majorities over the years. I am going to stay connected to my wonderful constituency of Basildon and Billericay, which it has been a great honour to serve, by participating in the annual fun walk—it is now a charity—that I founded in 2002. Since then, it has raised around £1.5 million for good causes across the constituency and beyond. I may be stepping down as the MP, but I will certainly stay connected to the local area by staying involved with that charity event as chair of the trustees.

I would like to thank my staff, to whom I owe so much. My constituency team—Jo Turner and Annie Akinin—have been with me since I became an MP. My London team—Claire Lumby, Selina Short and Benjamin Yates, who is sitting in the Gallery—have been with me for up to 16 years. They have 80 years of service between them, which is a rarity in this place, and my constituents have benefited as a result. I am very grateful to them, and I am proud of them for everything we have achieved together.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife Thalia, my daughters and my wider family—whether they are still with us or not—for their support over the years. It has always added perspective and balance to my endeavours

in this place, which I shall miss. It has been a great honour to serve, but the time has come to move on, and I wish you all well.

I have one remaining message for my party: please stay wedded to the centre ground when fighting general elections. I am an old-fashioned, one nation Tory, and compassionate conservatism is the way forward. I do not want us to wander off to the right—I do not think we are going to—because we must stay centred. Delivering economic efficiency, strong finances, robust economies and all the rest of it is not an end in itself; it is a means to help the less fortunate in society, and we have to remain wedded to that idea. The Prime Minister understands this, and I wish him well at the next general election.

5.52 pm

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): It is nice to see you in the Chair, Mr Speaker. Thank you for all your service, and for the kindness that you have shown me since you have been in the Chair.

When I was in my early teens, I had a day out in London. I sent my parents a postcard of this building and, rather arrogantly and presumptuously, I wrote on the back, “My future office”. I had forgotten all about it, but when my father passed away just a few days after the last general election, I found that postcard in his house. I guess the dream came true, and they kept it for all those years.

I have won four general elections, and I will be the first and last MP for Winchester and Chandler’s Ford, because the boundary changes will break up the constituency. I have said from the very start that nobody owns Winchester. I would like to think that I won the seat because I worked so hard to get it, and I would like to think that I kept it because I did the job to the best of my ability every single day. Equally, nobody owns the keys to No. 10 Downing Street. The future has not been written yet and, contrary to what people may read, this election is not over. Like many colleagues, I wish my Conservative friends standing on 4 July the very best, especially my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who is a hard-working, decent man. We are very lucky to have him as our country’s leader.

I will not detain the House, but I want to reflect on two things and to thank people. For me, just being an MP was enough—it was clearly a mission of mine from a very young age. I worked with my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt) as his PPS in the then Department for Health, and I have been a Government Whip, which is the only team game in this place. I have been a Health Minister, and now I chair the Health and Social Care Committee. It is record of which I am proud. As the Health Minister, I began what would become known as Pharmacy First and I wrote the cancer plan, so it is appropriate that I should follow the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron). We urgently need a new cancer plan from the next Government.

I established the HIV Commission alongside the shadow Health Secretary. We worked to produce the road map to get England to zero new transmissions by 2030, and we will do so. I extended the human papillomavirus vaccine to boys, which is not something that my teenage son thanks me for, given that he had to have it the other day. That may seem a small and

technical change, but I know that it will save tens of thousands of lives. Sooner rather than later, we will eradicate cervical cancer from our country.

Clearly, there is so much more. Over a good number of years in Government, we do so much and, frankly, I cannot remember the half of it. Working alongside two Secretaries of State—the current Chancellor, whom I have just mentioned, and my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock)—I think we did some good things. I am so grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), who spoke at the very start of this debate many hours ago, who as Prime Minister asked me to serve in her Government.

Of course, being elected Chair of the Health Committee was a huge honour, and I have worked with some fabulous officials and fabulous Members across party lines—which is the great secret of this place—to produce some really important reports on prevention, assisted dying, dentistry, digital, integrated care systems and pharmacy. I think they will stand the test of time.

I cannot let this moment go without mentioning the armed forces parliamentary scheme, which has just been mentioned. Among all the amazing experiences I have had here, it is one of the best things I have done. I recommend it highly to returning and new Members.

I have a few important thank-yous to my staff of the present—Alice Hammond, Toby Colehan, Alex Pinney and Helen Hill—and of the past, especially Russ Norton and Janette Munro Ford, without whom I would never have won in the first place. Obviously, like everyone, I thank the good people of Winchester and Chandler's Ford for giving me four in a row. Thank you so much. It has been a great privilege to represent you, and I have always done my best to put the constituency first. Of course, I thank my wife Susie and my children Emily and William, who allowed me to do this in the first place.

Finally, to repeat something I said in the House a few days ago, there is a maxim that I try to live by in my life and that I have certainly tried to live by in the House of Commons, and I hope that those coming after me will too: it is nice to be important, but it is much, much more important to be nice.

5.56 pm

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): Mr Speaker, I am delighted that you have come back into the Chamber, because it gives me an opportunity to start by saying how delighted I am that your team and my team will be in the Challenge cup final in a few days' time. I know that your father, in particular, would have been delighted in the Wire taking on the Wigan Warriors.

I have been incredibly humbled this afternoon to sit here among colleagues, friends and people I remember watching on TV when I was not a lot smaller than I am now. They have been truly fantastic servants to this House. I feel that I am a bit of a fraud, really, because I have only been here for four and a half years. It is a remarkable place. I listened with great interest and genuine fondness to the references made to the cross-party support and camaraderie that exist in this place. There is a wonderful spirit that occurs every day when people come to work in this magnificent place. I am regularly stopped in the Warrington South constituency by constituents who ask, "What's it like to be an MP? What does it feel like?" I can genuinely say that it is the

proudest thing that anybody can do. Every day when I walk into this Palace and walk past the statutes of great people of our history, I remember that I am here serving the people who have elected me: the 86,000 people I represent in the Warrington South constituency.

As I have only been here for four and a half years, I will keep my remarks relatively short. I want to go back to before I was elected, because I had never planned to get into politics. In fact, I took the view that, having spent 20-odd years in business, if I got into politics I would probably never get anything done. But that is not the case. You can make a difference. You have to focus your energies and you have to be certain about what you want to achieve. I have looked back over the past four and a half years at the work that this Government have delivered for my constituents, and at the work that I have done to ensure that the people I represent have better lives, and I am incredibly proud.

We focused on improving access to public transport, and we have 105 new zero-emission buses in Warrington, paid for by this Government. I am incredibly proud that people in Warrington travel on public transport at levels not seen for many years. We have also focused on healthcare and broadband, and securing a broadband service for the people of Higher Walton has been an incredible achievement. We have campaigned to strengthen flood defences following the terrible flooding of Storm Christoph in 2021 in the Dallam area.

I have held an annual jobs and apprenticeship fair to help young people find jobs, which has been one of the most rewarding annual events. Each year, a thousand young people come to meet more than 40 local employers and talk about their future with their parents. And it has been brilliant to receive emails afterwards saying, "I am going on an apprenticeship. Thank you for the opportunity."

I am so pleased that we used the town deal cash not simply to build new buildings, but to help people in the constituency gain new skills. We opened a next-generation health and social care academy, which is training future healthcare assistants and social workers at Warrington and Vale Royal College. We are about to open an advanced construction academy to help the future builders of our homes and settlements get the skills they need.

I have managed to get around every single school in Warrington South over the past four years. I have met every headteacher, and I have spoken to a group of children in every school about democracy and the importance of getting involved with politics as they grow up. I thank the teachers for their efforts. I genuinely appreciate their work, because every school in Warrington South is now good or outstanding, which was not the case when this Government came into office in 2010.

I have not always pushed things forward, as I have sometimes pushed to stop things when constituents have asked for my help. I have opposed development on the green belt, including schemes such as the Six56 distribution centre and the ginormous Stobart distribution centre. Both have gone to a public inquiry because I raised them here in the Chamber of the House of Commons. I quickly proved myself wrong, as you can come to Parliament and make things happen.

I particularly thank the local councillors in Warrington South. When I came to office, we had one Conservative councillor on Warrington Borough Council. Councillor Kath Buckley, who retired a few days ago, is a remarkable

[*Andy Carter*]

woman who fought cancer twice and has flown the flag for conservatism in Warrington for many years. I thank her greatly for all the support she has given to me. I also thank Ken Critchley, Mark Jervis, Linda Butler and Ghazala Chapman, my Warrington South Conservative councillors. Thank you for the work that you have done over the years to fly the flag in Warrington South.

Here in Westminster, I am particularly pleased to have played a small part by serving on a couple of Committees, on Bills with which I have had some involvement outside of this world. The Media Bill, the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill, and the Online Safety Act 2023, all of which we legislated for in this Parliament, will set the course of this country for the next 20 years.

I have listened to every speech, and nobody has mentioned the people who make us sound and look great on the TV and radio every day. The people who turn on the microphones, twiddle the knobs and push the faders—they will probably cut me off now—do the work to make sure that our constituents at home can see and hear the work that goes on here. I pay particular tribute and thank the team who work behind the glass in this Chamber.

My first question to the Prime Minister back in early 2020 was about funding for the Peace Centre in Warrington. It was set up by Colin and Wendy Parry following the Warrington IRA bomb that took their son Tim and also killed Johnathan Ball. The circumstances were tragic. This speech would not be complete if I did not mention the Peace Foundation, as the Peace Centre moves into a new phase. I am incredibly grateful for the work they have done in the town I represent.

I want to say thank you to my team in Warrington and here in Westminster: Stephen Taylor, who also served as my agent at the last election and who has stayed with me all the way through as my office manager; Stewart Gardiner, my senior caseworker; Lyndsey Olsen, who gave up being a teacher to come and answer letters from parents about schools—I could not have asked for somebody who has more detailed knowledge to help people navigate their way through the SEND system than Lyndsey; James Parker, who has run my office here in Warrington; Julie Groom, who has joined to make sure I turn up at the right events at the right time; and most recently, Alec de Jongh, who has joined and is a bit of a technical whizz—I have discovered I can do things on Facebook I never knew I could do because of his work. They have been an inspiration and support, and I thank them for their hard work. I also thank them on behalf of my constituents for all the casework and the responses they have given to the 31,000 emails or pieces of casework I have received over the last four and a half years.

Finally, I want to thank my wife, Aggie, and my son Harry. I could not have done it without them; they have made a world of difference.

Standing up for our constituency, I think, is the greatest honour we can have here as a Member of Parliament. I am looking forward to getting behind whoever the Warrington Conservatives choose as the new parliamentary candidate for the new Warrington

South seat and putting forward the Prime Minister's clear plan for securing Britain's future as we move forward to the general election.

Finally, I want to say thank you to the voters in Warrington South who sent me here. The former Defence Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wyre and Preston North (Mr Wallace), said that if the electorate don't get you, the boundaries will. The boundaries have got me this time; I hope they do not get me next time.

6.6 pm

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): “Do well, doubt not” is the motto of the Borough of Tunbridge Wells and was my theme when, 19 years ago in this Chamber, from the other side of the House, I made my maiden speech. That motto was not a bad piece of advice and encouragement to a new Member of Parliament, and I have tried to take it to heart during these 19 years.

In my maiden speech I said we needed to get the A21 dualled, we needed to get a new hospital built at Pembury and we needed to help the many people in Tunbridge Wells, a place associated with prosperity, who are in need. Now, 19 years on, we have got the A21 dualled, we have got a new hospital, and it has been my privilege as well as pleasure to help many thousands of people with their difficulties and help them solve some of the problems they have faced in their lives.

Tunbridge Wells is a town with a vigorous voluntary sector. I am proud to be the patron, president or vice-president of many organisations, such as the Tunbridge Wells Mental Health Resource, the Sea Cadets and the Hospice in the Weald.

For my ability to do all of these things the people of Tunbridge Wells, who for five consecutive general elections have returned me to Parliament. I could not have stood for election without the support of those in my marvellous Conservative association, who first selected me and have been staunch in their support throughout. They are friends as well as colleagues, and I am very grateful to them.

I would like to say a big thank you to my office teams who supported me. I thank my current team, who are in the Gallery with us today: Diane Talbot, and Oliver Gill, who remarkably as a very young man helped draft and get passed a private Member's Bill to make for the first time it a criminal offence to sexually harass women and girls in public—that was a remarkable legislative achievement for someone very early in his career. We send our love to Fiona Lloyd Williams, who is currently battling with some health difficulties; she herself has battled on behalf of constituents as my caseworker. I thank Annie Jack and Sam Howard, the newest members of my team, and in the past Rachel Godfrey, Matthew Dickens, Adam Hignett, Peter Franklin, David Mercier, Alexine Bullett and Joanna Garner have supported me marvellously.

Mr Speaker, may I thank you for your kindness and that of your staff over the years, and thank all the staff of the House, particularly the Select Committee staff? I have had the privilege of chairing what has been the most stimulating and exciting Committee of this Parliament: the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee. Our weekly hearings during the height of the pandemic were broadcast live on all the national TV channels. Some of the hearings—a certain one lasted seven hours—attracted an audience in the millions.

Having had the privilege of serving the country in government, I would like to thank all the brilliant civil servants we have. I benefited in particular from two marvellous principal private secretaries, Alex Williams and Jacqui Ward, during my time as Secretary of State. I thank the special advisers I had, including Jacob Willmer, Glenn Hall, Meg Powell-Chandler and Will Holloway.

Finally, I want to thank my family. My parents John and Pat were at the counts, sharing my excitement when I was first elected to this place. I thank my amazing wife Helen and our three children, every one unique and talented and very different. For Allegra, Leila and Peter, their whole lives, almost, have been spent with me coming to this place and with weekends being taken up with constituents—I could not have done it without them.

It has been a pleasure and an honour to serve the country as well as my constituents, which I could not have done had it not been for the people of Tunbridge Wells returning me to this place. I am the son of a milkman from Middlesbrough. I am the first person in any generation of my family to have been educated beyond the age of 16. To have been able to do what I have done in this place and in government is entirely down to the people of Tunbridge Wells, so I express my gratitude to them for returning me to this place. There are 650 constituencies in this country, but I defer to the words of H. G. Wells, who when he contemplated Tunbridge Wells said:

“Tunbridge Wells is Tunbridge Wells, and there is really nothing like it upon our planet.”

Mr Speaker: I call Richard Bacon.

6.12 pm

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, as you slide gracefully into the Chair. I am pleased to see you there too. Before you disappear, Mr Speaker, I thank you for everything you have done. You have been a tremendous Speaker during my time here and, like many others, I am very grateful to you. I hope we see each other again before too long.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is an enormous pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I know that I cannot now say Madam Chairman, as I know you would have liked me to yesterday, but we like to do things properly in this House. If I say “you”, I will be referring to you, and not anybody else.

I would like to thank my South Norfolk constituents for sending me here at six successive general elections. I want to thank my private secretary and office manager Tracy Reeve for 27 years of outstanding service, both to me and my South Norfolk constituents for all of my 23 years as an MP and for some four years before that as private secretary to my predecessor John MacGregor, now Lord MacGregor of Pulham Market. You know him well, Madam Deputy Speaker, as you served as his special adviser many years ago, before either of us was in this House. You know Tracy Reeve, my private secretary for many years after Lord MacGregor left the Commons, and you know my constituency of South Norfolk very well too, so it is a great pleasure to finish this debate with you in the Chair. Nothing I have done in the last

23 years for my South Norfolk constituents would have been possible without Tracy Reeve, and I am enormously grateful for her service.

This morning I was lying in bed with my wife Catherine and my dog Beaufort, who had made himself comfortable using the well-known “commando crawl through a non-existent space” technique for which spaniels are famous—by the way, my wife will get very cross if I do not mention her dog Calouste. As I was lying there patting his head and thinking of what I wanted to say, I was reminded about a story I heard from a colleague in the Tea Room the other day. As a Conservative Member of Parliament, she had attended the Conservative candidates’ weekend selection process, and she said that she had heard one of the would-be candidates opine that there was no point in becoming an MP unless one became a Minister. One hopes that he will learn quite a lot before he ever gets anywhere near this place—if he does at all—because, plainly, that is completely incorrect.

My colleague’s story reminded me of another one, particularly in this week when we have finally righted the long-standing injustices of the infected blood scandal—I remember Alistair Burt standing around here talking about it at the end of the 2017 Parliament, and that was very recently in relation to the length of that scandal—and the Post Office Horizon scandal. I remember that, as I left the Public Accounts Committee in 2017, after some 16 years, Tony Collins, the renowned computer journalist, telephoned me about it. Luckily, because I was then involved in other matters to do with housing, James Arbuthnot, and many others in this place, took it up very seriously.

As we finally correct those wrongs this week, and are reminded of other huge wrongs over many decades, such as the one corrected by the work of those including Andy Burnham—the Hillsborough scandal—and of other great work by many other great colleagues, I was reminded of another story. Consider the following:

“Investigations into the allegations have revealed them to be a mixture of unsubstantiated rumour, incorrect information or repetition of earlier allegations which have been fully investigated and found to be unsupported by the facts.

A question: was that official statement aimed at refuting public disquiet about (1) the efficacy of measures taken against Foot and Mouth, (2) the reliability of the army’s S80 rifle and radio sets in Kosovo and Sierra Leone, (3) a government order that police should keep protesters out of sight during the state visit of the President of China, (4) the possibility that BSE can cross the species barrier to humans, (5) the loss of an RAF Chinook helicopter and twenty-five security personnel on the Mull of Kintyre, (6) the existence of illnesses collectively known as Gulf War Syndrome, (7) the export to Iraq of machine tools capable of arms manufacture, (8) the circumstances surrounding the torpedoing of the Belgrano, (9) the radiation sickness claimed by some participants in the British atomic tests of the 1950s”—

which my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) has so assiduously campaigned on, having even joined by telephone a surgery that I had with my constituents because I knew that he knew more about that matter than anyone else—

“(10) experiments carried out at Porton Down during the same period (11) the denial of full pensions to thousands of disabled ex-servicemen (and their widows) for over fifty years, or (12) ...the loss of the carrier HMS *Glorious* and her two escorts in 1940?”

The answer is that the statement was made by the Ministry of Defence in December 1994 to refute a body of opinion that there might, indeed, be a condition...referred to as Gulf War Syndrome. But it could just as well have been...those others”.

[Mr Richard Bacon]

We all know this. It is a phenomenon that Tim Slessor, in his book, “Ministries of Deception”—which I am quoting from here—refers to as “the Whitehall Loop”.

“At its simplest, this is the closed circuit procedure where, in reply to questions asked of a government department or minister, the answers are put together by the very same civil servants whose earlier judgement is both the subject and the cause of the inquiry in the first place.”

I remember bumping into Simon Burns, who was, at the time, the Health Minister responsible for the national programme for IT in the health service—the NPfIT, as it was called. There were at least eight other Ministers during that period; I tracked it closely from 2002 to 2011. I would not recommend that anyone read it unless they have a particularly masochistic disposition, but in the book that I wrote about Government, I devoted an entire chapter to the NPfIT, where I lovingly detailed the many ways in which what was then called “Connecting for Health” managed to conceal information about how badly things were going. One day, Simon Burns came up to me in the Tea Room and said, “Richard, I am sick and tired of being told things by you, and then finding out six months later that they are true.”

The truth is that, whether it is on the Child Support Agency, the Criminal Records Bureau, the tax credit scandal, the Rural Payments Agency scandal—which has led some farmers, sadly, to commit suicide—the Student Loans Company, or the recruitment of junior doctors, or many, many other things, it is our constituents who, through us as their Members of Parliament, keep Government honest. They so often know far more about how Government is actually working than the Government themselves do. That is why we need Members of Parliament who see their chief job as representing and protecting their constituents, and as requiring the Government of the day, of whichever political complexion, to justify themselves and to keep explaining their actions.

I am delighted to see my friend the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) back in her place. Of the various things I have done in the 23 years I have been here, I have not found any more consequential—or more fun—than the work we did together when I was her deputy Chairman on the Public Accounts Committee, between 2010 and 2015. She performed an extraordinary service and, by the way, wrote a great book about it, “Called to Account”, which hon. Members may wish to read.

It says next in my notes, “Dame Eleanor said,” but that is because when I wrote them you were not in your seat, Madam Deputy Speaker. As you yourself said yesterday, MPs of all parties are the people who do not just shout at the television but

“get up and do something about it.”—[*Official Report*, 23 May 2024; Vol. 750, c. 1104.]

It is an honourable estate; it is an honourable calling. It is one of the most important things we can do. It is worth devoting oneself to, to the point of exhaustion, in order to keep our people free and to keep our Governments honest.

It says here “self-commissioned housing”, so I suppose I had better say a word about that before I conclude. It is well known that for the past 10 years or so, since I steered through the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015, I have worked very hard to try to implement

that. I see the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), nodding. I remember bouncing up to her in the Lobby many years ago, when she was Prime Minister, and saying, “Is it true that self-build housing was discussed at Cabinet this morning?” She said, “Yes.”

I am sorry to report that there is still more to do. I see the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) in her place. I nearly succeeded in coaxing her into giving evidence for the report I did in 2021 for the then Prime Minister—it was several Prime Ministers ago; we have had quite a few. There are some excellent recommendations in there, some of which have even been implemented. I wrote to the current Housing Secretary on 11 March with some detailed suggestions about how the recommendations might be implemented.

I will sit down in one or two minutes, but I must place on the record my huge gratitude to the Culture Secretary, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), who, when she was Housing Minister, allowed me to introduce her to one of the nation’s leading planning silks. Silk to silk, they talked through the issues and the things I was proposing. My right hon. and learned Friend said to her officials, “What’s wrong with this?” and they could not provide her with an answer, so that now sits on the statute book as section 123 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023. I hope that a future Government will do their best to implement it, and I shall certainly be encouraging them to do so.

In conclusion, I will just say this. It has always been an article of faith to me that there is no “they”, just “us”. If there are things we want to fix and change, it is we who have to do it. As Karl Popper put it—I am not jealous of many things, but I am jealous of the right hon. Member for Barking because she was at the London School of Economics when he was still teaching there:

“Progress depends on us, on our watchfulness and our efforts, on the clarity of our conception of our aims and on the reasonableness of their choice. Instead of posing as prophets, we must be the makers of our fate.”

6.23 pm

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): It is a great honour to be the last speaker on the Back Benches in this debate. We have heard great emotion from many people, and I realise that it is such a wrench for many people to leave Parliament. It has been an honour for all of us to serve, but particularly for me to serve as the Member of Parliament for Hendon. I have been intimately involved in eight parliamentary elections in the past 28 years. In many ways, in some seats, it is no great achievement for someone to be elected. It is in the marginal seats that it is an achievement. We are the ones that have changed Governments.

I thank my constituents in Hendon for electing me on four occasions. At the last election, I received 26,878 votes, the highest number of Conservative votes in the constituency since 1935. It sometimes irked me when I was first elected in 2010 that I had a majority of 106 and over 20,000 people had elected me, while there were others sitting on different Benches who had received fewer votes than me but had huge majorities. That did not feel quite right.

Each and every Member present will claim that their constituency is different from everyone else’s, but Hendon—just like London—is very diverse. As someone who was

born and grew up in the south of England and never saw a person of colour until the age of 12, being in Hendon did not come as a great shock to me, but it has taught me a huge amount. I have a large Jewish constituency, a large Muslim constituency, Hindus, the largest Chinese community outside of Soho and Manchester, and the largest Iranian community in the whole country.

There are many issues that connect those different religious groups, which I have always campaigned on, but there has also been a huge amount of diversity in the local economy. We have seen huge development, meaning that the boundary changes that have been applied will make a difference. Under the previous Conservative council, when I was a councillor, we introduced development that created the Stonegrove estate, the Grahame Park estate, Beaufort Park, West Hendon, Upper Fosters and the Peel Centre. All made homes for people in their local area, and we should be very grateful for that.

As I said, I have worked on issues that have brought communities together, but the reason why I have focused on the Jewish community is that they are a small number in this country—about 300,000. The number of Muslims in this country is more like 6 million, and their voices will be heard by the different Members of Parliament in this place. My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) raised issues of concern to many of my constituents—issues about antisemitism and education—but I am pleased that this week, Lord Pickles published his report of the Alderney expert review, laying to rest the issue of a concentration camp on British soil during the second world war.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole has seen other things as well. A particular issue of concern to my constituents is that of Israel, which is understandable. My hon. Friend and I visited Israel a few weeks after the 7 October attacks. We visited Kfar Aza, and I only wish that each and every Member here in Parliament could experience what we did. I have not said this before, but my hon. Friend said to me that he could not take pictures during that day, and I told him that we must. Just as Bert Hardy and other photographers went into Bergen-Belsen and the other concentration camps, I said, “We have to go there and take pictures, so that the world knows this really did happen.” We have had people saying that it did not happen, but I can assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that it did.

I would be one of those hawkish Members who wants to see the issue in Gaza resolved, but I do not believe a ceasefire now would achieve that. I do not want to see any deaths on any side, but when Members said recently in a debate that there had been 30,000 civilian deaths, I tried to challenge that. We do not know how many of those people are civilians and how many are Hamas fighters—the Foreign Office said that it has not made a prediction of that number—but we do know that 80% of people in Gaza support Hamas, and Hamas has got to be removed.

The decision of Ireland, Norway and Spain this week to recognise an independent Palestinian state is not only wrong, but allows the conclusion to emerge that terrorism works, and we cannot allow that. It is simply impossible to recognise a state that has never existed in any meaningful form, so what exactly are those countries recognising? I gently say to the premiers of Spain and Ireland that they have never particularly recognised their minority communities.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) said that you should never ask a question in this place if you do not know the answer. There was an occasion when I asked the former Prime Minister—now Lord Cameron—if he would visit Israel. I have to say that one of the best experiences of being in Parliament was the moment when I visited Lord Cameron in his suite at the King David hotel. We walked past the guys with machine guns guarding him, and we sat and drank whisky with him. I have to say that it was not that different from sitting on the throne in Saddam Hussein’s palace in Baghdad—of course, without Saddam Hussein, and with whisky.

We have lived through an extraordinary period in this Parliament. People often ask me, “What is the best part of being an MP?” I find that easy to answer: it is the people, particularly the constituents. The stories that they tell are sometimes heart-wrenching, often annoying, regularly amusing and always interesting. I have had great people working with me in the constituency—some political, some not. I particularly think of people like Val Duschinsky and Hugh Rayner, who work with me in the Hendon association, as well as Rabbi Ginsbury, Simon Rea and Mushtaq Rehman, the respective leaders of their religious communities. Activists such as Rupa Monerawela, Richard Nash and Manubhai Makwana have been a great support to me. There are also individuals such as Ari Leaman, who has done so much for the teenage community, and Lorraine Bushell for the Grandparents’ Association.

I am asked what is the biggest mistake that I have ever made as a Member of Parliament. That is easy to answer: it was on the military action in Libya, when I walked past my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) and thought, “How’s he going to explain why he’s voting against this?” But we not only created a failed state, but significantly contributed to the current immigration and asylum crisis. That was my biggest mistake, and I bitterly regret it.

The right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) said that being an MP is not what it used to be, and she is correct. Several years ago I was on a boat and the skipper said, “What was it you said that you did for a living?” I said, “I didn’t.” Before long, one of the other crew said, “Well, it can’t be as bad as being a Member of Parliament.” It is still vital to be a Member of Parliament; those who come after us will recognise that.

I leave on one note that I am particularly sad about. For 30 years, I have complained about sewage in our rivers and our seas. Not much has changed over the last 30 years; all that has changed is that the Government have implemented a scheme for monitoring the amount of sewage that goes into our rivers and our seas. The Lib Dems are making this a central plank of their election campaign. They should be advised that their MPs voted against the super-sewer here in London, so they do not have a good record on the issue. In my opinion, the EU directive was never fit for purpose, so while Ministers have repeatedly claimed that water quality is improving, it is simply not; it is the way that water quality is measured. Such claims lead me to conclude that this is the same kind of behaviour by Ministers that was witnessed in the contaminated blood scandal.

Having been elected continuously for the last 22 years—for the last 14 as the Member of Parliament for Hendon—has taken a huge toll on me. That is why I

[*Dr Matthew Offord*]

have decided to step down, but I would not change it for a thing. I am looking forward to Ameet Jogia, the Conservative candidate, taking forward what we have achieved. He was not only born in the constituency but is a local candidate.

I have to thank my staff for the work that they have done over the last few years. In this Parliament alone, they have undertaken 60,884 pieces of casework. I have had a good staff who have remained friends, beginning with Laura Pike, Hannah Evans, Ness Hirst and Katherine Toone, and now with Eamonn Walsh, George Bose, Carolynne Fisher and Steve Martin, who volunteered, and Hilary Smith, who has been with me for the last 16 years. They have really been true public servants. As was said, they are the ones who ensure that the work is actually completed. Of course, I cannot forget Maximus Decimus Meridius—my Jack Russell, Max—who still attends Parliament on occasions. He has enabled me to concentrate on animal welfare issues. So, in the spirit of a Roman language, I say: *veni, vidi, vici*.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Just before we come to the wind-up speeches, I hope that the House will indulge me bending the rules for a moment or two to say a few words before I vacate the Chair for the last time—which is a very difficult thing to do. The first time I sat in this Chair, I imagined that it would make me feel like somebody with power and grandeur. I tell you, I felt like Alice in Wonderland—you know that picture of Alice shrinking and the chair getting bigger—because I thought, “This Chair is awfully big and I’m awfully small.” It still feels like that.

I would like first to say a few words about the other occupants of this Chair: the team made up of the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers—my dear friends and colleagues. The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means, the right hon. Member for Doncaster Central (Dame Rosie Winterton); the Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans); and my right hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale), together with Mr Speaker, make up the team who keep this place going every day. It is a brilliant team, and I could not have been more fortunate in having such great people to work with. Not only are they good parliamentarians and great politicians, but they are also great fun, and when we have a moment, we have a very good laugh. I say a very sincere thank you to them all. They stood in for me, looked after me and kept me going when I was seriously ill last year. Thanks to what they did, I am better.

I pay particular tribute to Mr Speaker. At the end of the last Parliament, the House of Commons was in danger of going the wrong way. Sir Lindsay Hoyle has restored dignity, decency, kindness and humour to this place, with a light touch and his own extraordinary personality. I know, because I have seen it every day, how much effort he has put into doing that, and long may he continue.

I thank all those who have helped and supported me over 27 years in Parliament. At the moment, the most important people are those in my office on the Deputy

Speakers’ corridor: the wonderful Robi and James. I also thank their great predecessors L-J, Abi, Clemmie, Georgie, Joanna, Sarah and the magnificent Jo-Jo.

I also thank, as lots of Members have, our brilliant Clerks, who are so patient and wise; the Doormen; and the magnificently sympathetic ladies and gentlemen in the Tea Room, especially Mary and Godfrey, who always keep me some fish and chips on a Friday, when the Tea Room closes before the House rises. Of course, I also thank the ladies and gentlemen in the Pugin Room—sometimes we are last in there, too, aren’t we, Mr Deputy Speaker? Don’t tell anybody.

I could never have managed without Jackie and Kelly downstairs. They know who they are; they know how much we rely on and care about them. There are quite a few “Ayes” and “Hear hears!” around the Chamber, mostly—but not entirely—from ladies.

May I also thank the people who have maintained my constituency office and my private office? I am lucky to have such loyal colleagues, all of whom have also become great friends of mine and of each other. There have been very few of them over a span of 30 years, because they have all stayed for a very long time. I really do not know how they have the patience to deal with me, day in, day out—I could not do it. I thank in particular Debbie, Jess, Karen, Beverly, Carol, Iona, Gilly, Frankie, Tom, Sophie and Sean.

Epping Forest Conservative Association is a brilliant team. I see that the hon. Member for South West Hertfordshire (Mr Mohindra), who was once its chairman, is sitting on the Front Bench, acknowledging and agreeing with what I say. The association has provided a great many colleagues in this place, notably—as well as my hon. Friend—our late friend James Brokenshire. It will be good to take a moment to remember him, and the other colleagues whom we have lost. James’s wife Cathy—I should perhaps say his widow—has been an absolute stalwart of my office for the last two and a half years, carrying on so much of the good work that James started. The Conservative association team has been led forever, I think, by our wonderful president, the inimitable Valerie Metcalfe, who, having told me what to do over seven general elections, is affectionally known as my fairy god-agent.

Many Members have said this afternoon that the people who make the sacrifices for us Members of Parliament are our families. I am fortunate enough to have a great family and a lot of very close friends, and I am thinking particularly of my lifelong friends. I will not embarrass them by mentioning them, because they are not politicians, but they know who they are. They have stood by me through good times and bad. I will, however, mention my brother Robbie and my wonderful son Matthew, who has spent his entire life with a crazy mother who is a Member of Parliament. It would not be wrong to say that he was brought up in this building. He was born exactly a week after the 2001 general election, and he was very early, something that I have never been. I apologise to all the people whom I have kept waiting over the years, which is most of them.

Finally, let me say a sincere thank you to my constituents in Epping Forest, the people who have given me the chance to be their representative here for 27 years. I have friends in Epping Forest in every political party, in every town and village, in every walk of life. They are brilliant, brilliant people. They are the backbone of this

country, and I am sure that they would agree with whoever said, “All that is necessary for evil to prevail is that good men”—and women—“do nothing”. They, we, and all the people who have been talked about this afternoon are the good people who do not do nothing, and that is why evil will not prevail.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): This has been the most emotional day of my life. You have caused me to cry a dozen times, you people, and I am still crying. We now come to the winding-up speeches, and I call Lucy Powell.

6.43 pm

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): Let me say again, as I have already this week, how much admiration I have for Madam Deputy Speaker, the right hon. Member for Epping Forest (Dame Eleanor Laing), and the other Madam Deputy Speaker, the right hon. Member for Doncaster Central (Dame Rosie Winterton). They are both marvellous, inspiring, incredibly stylish women. Parliament, and the parliamentary hairdressers, will be all the poorer for their departure. I wish them both well in the future, and I am sure that we will see them again.

It is my pleasure to wind up this valedictory debate, at 6.44 pm on a Friday; I do not intend to make a habit of speaking in Parliament so late on a Friday. We have had 31 speeches today, all of which have been incredibly moving, powerful and emotional. As the main Labour person in the Chamber for the past four and a half hours, I have felt slightly like a gate-crasher at a private party, but I am glad to have been here. Today has shown that all of us in politics know that this is a vocation, not a job. It is a life in service, always in the public eye, and very rarely with an off switch. We have been reminded today, as we often are, that the constituents are the boss, and our families are the bedrock.

A huge amount of parliamentary experience is leaving this place today. I could not even add up the collective number of years of service by everybody who has spoken today. It is a huge amount, and we should recognise that for what it is. While I personally am excited for the general election, I have felt a great deal of sadness today and this week for so many people departing. I have felt today how many of my friends on the Government Benches are leaving. It has been a very emotional day for all of us. These really are the very best days in Parliament. I am sure that we can all agree on that. It has felt a little bit like the last day at high school, which today is for lots of year 11s and year 13s across the country. Perhaps we can all swap shirts at the end of the debate and sign them for each other. *[Interruption.]* Okay, well, we could all sign each other's shirts—you know what I mean!

One of the themes of contributions today is the importance of cross-party working, so I will try to respond in that spirit. How fitting it was that the two opening speeches were from such long-standing, powerful women Members of Parliament. This has been very different from many valedictory debates that we have had in years gone by. Those two women, who I will come on to say something about, inspired many of the other women who spoke today. That was a real theme of the debate.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) sends her apologies: she cannot be here for the wind-ups, and wants it noted that she had a bit of an accident with an out-of-control buggy when she was on granny duty. She is fit and strong, but she had to leave to get more painkillers for her shoulders. She really has been an exemplary Member of Parliament—the Mother of the House, and political mother to many of us. She really did create a path for many of us to follow.

It was also a real privilege to be here for the last speech by the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), another fantastic sister to all of us who has been a voice for the voiceless. She leaves an amazing track record that she can be proud of. Her words about democracy and respect for democracy were ones that we will all cherish.

My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) is not in his place, though it does not really matter if people are not in their place any more, because there is no sanction. Right to the last, he was the enthusiastic, bobbing Back Benchers who was always there, although he is not there now. He was here every day, for most oral statements and questions, and we shall miss him.

A lot of people are not here, actually. We all recognise that the right hon. Member for Wyre and Preston North (Mr Wallace) was an exemplary Defence Secretary in very difficult times, and the whole country felt a great deal of confidence in him.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), who is in her place, has had a long career, but she has always been feared and revered, and respected, in equal measure. Tax avoiders and money launderers take note: she is not going very far. She is a real example of joint working on a cross-party consensus.

The right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) will always have a very long-lasting legacy with the public as the Health Secretary during covid, there on our televisions every evening providing that reassurance. I wish him well with his future career.

This is a very sad, emotional day for the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford). It is very sad day for all of us because, although it might be a low bar, as I am sure the whole House can agree, he is definitely the most popular Member of this House from the Scottish National party. *[Laughter.]* We all wish him really well in the future.

My dear friend the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) has been a great campaigner, a great parliamentarian and a good friend, and has a really strong track record on education. Together with the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), the three of us did our best to try to get this House to agree to Common Market 2.0 and take a slightly more sensible approach to Brexit. I regard them both as friends, and I know that this House will be all the poorer without them here.

The right hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) was brilliantly brief and very funny in his remarks.

What a wonderful speech the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) gave. It was very funny and moving, and I completely agree with her that family is everything.

[Lucy Powell]

The right hon. Member for Reading West (Sir Alok Sharma) will forever be known as the President of COP26, when the whole world was watching. He did that job absolutely brilliantly and has a strong track record to take with him.

The hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Dame Tracey Crouch) and I are both in our 50th year—she is not here either, because she has family duties. I have immensely enjoyed working with her over the years, especially on football.

The right hon. Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) is another strong woman who succeeded both in her career and in motherhood. She is a great inspiration.

In one short term, the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Nickie Aiken), another friend of mine, has achieved a great deal. I have enjoyed working closely with her on the House of Commons Commission, and I wish her well.

What a typically funny, inspiring, thoughtful and informative speech the hon. and learned Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) gave. He will long be known for all his work on justice, and I am sure he will be back in other guises.

To the right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones): what fantastic service you have provided to Wales. I wish you well; or rather, I wish him well—if the right hon. Member for Epping Forest (Dame Eleanor Laing) was here, she would tell me off.

The hon. Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) is another popular Member of this House—so many popular Members are going. He reminded us of the importance of the constituency work we do—although he might want to have a conversation with the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster behind him about other people doing that constituency work for him.

The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) is another Member who I have worked with, on early years and the importance of the first 1,001 days. I have really enjoyed the naughty corner, which he talked about, over these last few years. It will be much depleted after today, although I am not sure that I will follow his advice and try to make myself look like Quentin Letts. That might be a step too far.

The hon. Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) and I have been friends for a number of years. I know that it has been a difficult year for him, but I am sure we can all wish him well for the future.

I thank the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) for also being brief—I think we all enjoyed that—and for his passion for education and the work he has done as a Minister and as Chair of the Education Committee. I think we can all most definitely take his advice about screen time.

The hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Dehenna Davison), who is not in her place either, might be relatively young, but I think we can all agree that she has made a real impact during her time in the House of Commons.

What a proud record the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince) laid out for us today.

The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (Sir James Duddridge) gave us some great words of advice, which I might print out for all incoming MPs after the election, and is obviously well loved by his neighbours.

The hon. Member for Basildon and Bicarilli—[*Interruption.*] Billericay—there are lots of Essex Members here today and they know better than me, thankfully. The hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) is a very independent-minded and strong parliamentarian, and he leaves a legacy that I am sure many others will want to follow.

The hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), as a Health Minister, introduced those vaccines and a cancer plan—what a great record that is. I wish him well, too.

The hon. Member for Warrington South (Andy Carter) and I have worked together on a number of issues, and I know that broadcasters and those in the media will miss him greatly in this place. As my husband works in Warrington Hospital, the hon. Gentleman and I keep in close touch about how well the hospital is doing under his leadership and support there as the local MP.

The right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) has made a real impact in Parliament, both as a Minister and as a Select Committee Chair, and I know that many Opposition Members greatly respect his work.

The hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon)—what long service. He did what no one else had done up to that point, which was to mention his pet dog. He was only matched by the Member who followed him, the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord), who spoke very well about the importance of the different communities we all have in our constituencies.

In summing up, I want to say a couple of other things. One Member is not here but, during our debate, he announced that he would be standing down: the hon. Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay). I am sure we will all cheer along with his recovery in the coming months. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”]

We have also lost some good friends during this Parliament: Tony Lloyd; Jack Dromey, without whom my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham would not have been able to be a Member; Sir David Amess, who we all miss greatly; James Brokenshire; and Dame Cheryl Gillan.

This is a remarkable place to work and this has been a remarkable Parliament, in which we have had Brexit, covid and war. In today’s debate, a few lessons have united everyone who spoke: the importance of our constituencies; the importance of our staff; the importance of our family; and the importance of the staff who work here. I wish you all well.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call the Minister.

6.57 pm

The Treasurer of His Majesty’s Household (Mr Marcus Jones): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. [*Interruption.*] I am already receiving a note from the Whips telling me that I have spoken too long. Sending such notes is often my role in this House.

I am delighted to be standing in for the Leader of the House today. I observe that it is tradition, week on week, for the Leader of the House, the shadow Leader of the House and the Chairman of Ways and Means to

spend a considerable amount of time at the parliamentary hairdressers. Unfortunately, I have not made it to the salon today.

I pay tribute to the Chairman of Ways and Means, Dame Eleanor, who is standing down from this House. She has done a fantastic job over a long period, as both a Member of Parliament and a Deputy Speaker. It is sad to see her leave the House. I also pay tribute to Dame Rosie, who is also leaving the House. The Whips spend a lot of time dealing with the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers, and it is an important relationship for the workings of this House.

I want to pay tribute to several colleagues who have not spoken in this debate, and I hope you will give me some latitude, Mr Deputy Speaker. I pay tribute to our hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay), who is a brave, brave man. Sadly, he is not standing again at the election.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell), who has been ill for some time, and acknowledge the work he has done in this House and on the Council of Europe. I also want to mention my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid), who has also been poorly. I am glad to say that he is standing again at the election. I pay tribute to him and the work he has done, particularly for our fishing industry and several other industries that affect his area.

I will try not to speak for too long, but to mention as many of the speeches as possible. There have been some fantastic speeches, some serious comments have been made, but we have also heard some very good humour. First, let me mention the speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). It has been a pleasure to be her Whip for the past 18 months, and one could not find a more dedicated public servant. She has had a distinguished career in this House. She has been the Home Secretary and, as we all know, the Prime Minister. Despite holding those great offices, she has always, every week, been back to her constituency to knock on doors and speak to her constituents. I know from a friend of mine that she has had regular surgeries, regardless of the role she has held in this House.

On the way my right hon. Friend has dealt with things since she was Prime Minister, I would call it—this is a crude term—“old school dedication”. She has assiduously attended this House and spoken in a huge number of debates. She is invariably here to vote. As I say, it has been a pleasure to deal with her closely for the past 18 months. I also pay tribute to Sir Philip May, who has been an excellent aid to my right hon. Friend. It was good to hear her talk about our democracy and the threat to it, and why we should always promote democracy. The speech she made was of the highest quality, as ever.

The right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) told us that she had made 9,800 speeches in her 42 years in this House and in that time had never rebelled once. That is a Whip’s dream and I have every admiration for her. She is a great campaigner, has done a massive amount for her constituents and has been a great representative in this place.

The right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) also made a very good speech. If he does not mind, I shall call him the humble crofter—it is

meant in the greatest of spirits; that is how we affectionately know him on the Conservative Benches. I always used to enjoy Prime Minister’s questions when he was the leader of his party. At times, it got a bit tasty and adversarial, on both sides, but I can attest to the fact that in the Tea Room one could always have a good, civil and pleasant conversation with him, and I thank him for that. He was absolutely right in saying that we are all here to try to improve the lives of our constituents and for the right reasons. He was also right to say, “Leave whipping to the Whips”, which is a very good principle.

I also want to talk briefly about my right hon. Friend the Member for Wyre and Preston North (Mr Wallace), who was an excellent Defence Secretary. He saw the problems in Ukraine with Russia’s invasion of it a long time before they happened. He did a massive amount of groundwork that was under the radar at the time. He also reminded us about the part that the families of Members of Parliament play. That is really important and I wish to thank my wife, Suzanne, my son, Oliver, and my daughter, Martha, who have been huge supporters to me over the past 14 years and will doubtless be huge supporters to me during the general election campaign.

The right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) told a lovely story about being chastised by the great Betty Boothroyd, and she was right to mention the conventions and protocols of this House. They can often be easily forgotten when we are in the heat of battle. They are important for the workings of this House. It is important that this House shows how to operate democracy not just in this country, but across the world.

My right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) talked about how he overcame his dyslexia to become a Member of Parliament and a Cabinet Minister. It is important to inspire future generations to overcome adversity and get here. He also talked about what he did during the pandemic to meet the massive challenges across the country. I thank him for his work. He also mentioned the importance of special advisers. I pay tribute to the Chief Whip’s special adviser, Emma Pryor, who has done a massive amount for the Government.

I had two stints with my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) at what was the Department for Communities and Local Government, and then the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. My abiding memory of that second stint, which unfortunately was only for two months, is of working on the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 in the 40° heat of the Committee Room. We both knew that we were on our bike, so to speak, but I remember that on the final day of the Bill Committee, he came to sit in the Gallery and watch the whole thing. That is the mark of the man. I thank him very much for all the support, guidance and help that he has given me over my time in the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon) went through the important work that he has been doing for many years on the Public Accounts Committee to hold the Government and public services to account. I remember spending many a happy hour with him on the Housing and Planning Act 2016, where he showed his depth of knowledge about self-build

[*Mr Marcus Jones*]

housing. I hope that, over time, more of the things that he has advocated for come to fruition, because he has made valid points.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Sir Alok Sharma) for his speech, for the leadership that he has shown on climate issues and for his work as COP26 President.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Dame Tracey Crouch) made an excellent speech. Sadly, the Football Governance Bill that she has championed has not made it through the wash-up, but I hope that the next Government will take it up and deliver on it. She was very kind to me. When I was the pairing Whip, I gave her a slip to go and speak to Manchester United. She turned back up at the Whips Office with a signed Manchester United football that I gave to the Warwickshire air ambulance charity, which auctioned it for £400. I was grateful to her for that.

I think forthright is the word that I would use to describe my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), who has been an excellent Member of the House. Usually, Members of Parliament display a great deal of loyalty because they want to get preferment and a ministerial role. He spent a lot of time rebelling but, despite that, secured a ministerial role. Having worked alongside him during his stint as the Northern Powerhouse Minister, I can say what an excellent job he did.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) made a characteristic speech. The man is the most expensive MP in Parliament and the MP for white van man—quite literally. His work on the fuel duty, which has been frozen, or actually reduced, since 2011, has been phenomenal. He has cost the Treasury billions of pounds, but he has done a massive service to his constituents and mine—to all of our constituents—to help them cope with the cost of living.

My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) reeled off a huge list of achievements, particularly as a Health Minister. I thank him for his work.

It was a pleasure to serve with my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) in the Whips Office. She does not look like it, but she is a true grafter not just for her constituents but for the Government, particularly in her role as Vice Chamberlain of His Majesty's Household. In the time that I was working with her, she made a huge effort to support the welfare of many of her colleagues, and I thank her for that. She also did a huge amount during the pandemic as a Health Minister. It was good to hear her reflections on that difficult period for the country.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) did not speak for as long as I expected—he obviously was not charging by the unit today. I was lucky enough to be the Minister responsible for local government for two and a half years. He had that role too, and I know how much he enjoyed it and the good work that he did. He was also pubs Minister, as was I, and as you have always wanted to be, Mr Deputy Speaker. If my hon. and learned Friend will indulge me, I recall a Westminster Hall debate in which he was described as the pint-sized pubs Minister. He took it all in his stride and with his

characteristic great heart. One someone who has been a Minister, it is quite easy to drift away, but he has not done that. He took on the role of Chair of the Justice Committee, and he is one of the most assiduous and prolific contributors in this Chamber. He will be missed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) talked about the changing nature of the work of MPs since he came into the House. It has certainly changed in the 14 years that I have been here. I know how hard he has worked for his constituents. A friend of mine was eternally grateful when he managed to save the ground of Old Emanuel RFC in his constituency. That is the type of work that is invaluable from a Member of Parliament for constituents.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) talked about the huge events that have taken place since he has been in this House. He rightly mentioned the Iraq war, the financial crisis, Brexit and covid. He highlighted the world-changing events over the last 20 years and what Governments over that time have had to contend with. He mentioned the importance of children's social care and children's development, particularly in the first 1,000 days, and I agreed with his points.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) talked about his achievements as a UK trade envoy, and I thank him for his service and dedication to that role over a number of years. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) reeled off a catalogue of achievements, especially his work on baby loss, parental bereavement, children's services and special educational needs, which is so important to many young people and families across the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (Sir James Duddridge) made a very pertinent point about Members of Parliament gaining experience. The armed forces parliamentary scheme has a great deal of value for Members of Parliament who have not been in the forces. After being on the scheme, they understand more about our forces and what being a member of our brave armed forces is about and how they often have to work in difficult circumstances.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) made a very self-deprecating speech. I recall working with him very closely when we tried to stop the disbanding of the 2nd Regiment of the Royal Fusiliers. Sadly, we were not successful, but he did a massive amount of work on that. All I can say to my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Nickie Aiken) is: pedicabs. I congratulate her on that legislation, because it will make central London safer and more welcoming to visitors. I thank her for that.

On the contribution from my right hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), we all want a legacy from our time here in the House. She certainly has that in the British Sign Language Act 2022 and the work she has done for British Sign Language. She was right to point out the importance for this and the next Government of ensuring that there is support for people who are deaf and that we make things accessible.

My abiding memory of my right hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), from when I was growing up, is him with his head sticking out of a tank—I think it was in Kosovo or Bosnia. He is

a very gallant gentleman and, in his own inimitable style, he talked about his 14 years in this place and the hazards of *Hansard*, with which he may have had issues at times. He is a true friend and a very loyal colleague to many.

Matt Hancock: While the Minister has been on his feet, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) has announced that he will not be standing for election again. He has served almost entirely within the Cabinet over the past 14 years, and I am sure that he would have participated in this debate, had he had the opportunity. I am sure that the Minister will want to make some remarks about him, too.

Mr Jones: I thank my right hon. Friend, and I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), who has a significant legacy through his work as Education Secretary. He was not always popular, but we now have significantly more good and outstanding schools in this country following 14 years of a Conservative Government and his work. The English education system has gone up the league table, and we now have the best readers in the western world. We have also gone up the league tables in reading, writing and maths, and he can be very proud of that record, as can this Government.

Before I make my final remarks, I would like to thank MPs' staff, who do a huge amount of work throughout the year and over the course of a Parliament. They do a lot of work that people do not see or acknowledge, but they give a massive amount of support to Members of Parliament. I would like to thank Jeff Clarke, Alan Farnell, Martyn Punyer, Jonathan Collett, Laura Thurston and Steph Henshaw, who work in my offices.

I would also like to thank the House staff, including the security, the police officers who keep us safe, and the Doorkeepers—if you want to know anything that is going on in this place, ask the Doorkeepers. They are a reliable source of information, but they are also a very important part of the work that we do here. Just like the Deputy Speakers and the Opposition parties' Whips Offices, the Doorkeepers are an integral part of running this place. That was particularly important when we sent most Members of Parliament back home during the covid pandemic lockdowns and ran a virtual Parliament, when co-operation was most needed. I would also like

to thank the officials who support the Whips Office, and I thank the Leader of the House's officials on her behalf.

To conclude, I wish those standing in the election a very safe campaign. I hope that my colleagues on this side of the House who are standing again are returned, and I wish them the best of luck. On behalf of the House, I wish those standing down the very best in whatever they are going on to do once they leave this place. I thank them for their service, and for their dedication to their constituents and this place, over the time that they have been here.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I agree with the Minister that I was the best pubs Minister this country has never had. Can I also say how much I am going to miss both Rosie and Eleanor? It has been a privilege to be working as a team on the Ways and Means corridor—it has been absolutely superb—and Mr Speaker has been absolutely fantastic with us and, indeed, with the House. It has not been an easy year for Lindsay: as you know, his father was ill, and the great Doug Hoyle passed away earlier this year. I am sure many of us will remember Doug with huge fondness.

The Minister mentioned John Howell and David Duguid, and I wish both of them well in their recovery. I visited Craig Mackinlay in hospital about a dozen times, and I have to say that if you could bottle his positivity, he would be a billionaire. He was amazing with his resilience and his inner strength, and I wish him, Kati and Olivia the very best for the future.

As you have said, all of you who are standing down have been my friends—you have all touched me over many, many years as great friends. I have been an MP for 32 years, and I know that some of you have been MPs for longer; others have been MPs for less time, but you have all been great friends during that time, and I wish you all the very best for the future. For those who are standing, I wish you the very best of luck.

As you can see, there is no Adjournment debate today, and that is why Jim Shannon is not here. [*Laughter.*]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered matters to be raised before the forthcoming Dissolution.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Good luck, everyone.

[*Mr Deputy Speaker*]

Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill

Consideration of Lords amendments

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I confirm that nothing in the Lords amendments engages Commons financial privilege.

Clause 12

RESTRICTION ON TITLE

7.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Jacob Young): I beg to move, That this House agrees with Lords amendment 1.

Mr Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments 2 to 67.

Jacob Young: All amendments made to this legislation in the other place were minor and technical in nature, and serve to make the legislation function as intended.

This is a historic day for leaseholders: this package of reforms will transform the leasehold housing market and the lives of millions of leaseholders across England and Wales. Our reforms to lease extensions and the buying of freehold will give families and individuals security, which is a core Conservative principle. Giving more leaseholders the freedom to manage their own building will empower them to make important decisions themselves, such as choosing a management company that delivers good-quality work at reasonable prices, and will require management companies to up their standards and give leaseholders a better deal in order to retain and win business.

On service charges, leaseholders must be given more information as to what is being done to their property and what they are actually paying for. The requirement for landlords and management companies to specify exactly what the service charge entails will encourage higher standards among those companies and empower leaseholders to challenge poor service. That is because transparency is a core Conservative value, too. Similarly, our buildings insurance reforms will stop leaseholders being charged exorbitant, opaque commissions on top of their premiums and tackle the proven cases of insider trading in the market—fairness is another core Conservative principle.

Then, we turn to the millions of freeholders living on new estates who are impacted by poor service, bad management and opaque fees. Those estates and the properties on them bring joy, security and futures for everyone who has purchased those properties, including the 1 million households that will have been created in this Parliament. I can tell the House today that the Government's target of building 1 million new homes in this Parliament has been met. These further rights for homeowners on private and mixed-tenure estates encapsulate what the Bill is trying to do: bring fairness, security, transparency and competition to freehold estates. It is not right to force someone who has bought a freehold property to deal only with one management

company, which is not required to give any information or charge reasonable fees—a monopoly.

The Bill will explicitly ban the creation of future leasehold houses. This is a once-in-a-generation reform that will alter the housing market forever, and I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call the Father of the House.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I think the whole House wishes that the Secretary of State was able to be with us. He is one of the people who has helped to move this forward, together with the junior Minister. I say to Michael: well done, not just on education, but on getting a grip of the horrors in residential leasehold.

After the Grenfell fire tragedy, people realised that those stuck with the bill not just for cladding but for every other fire defect were not the developer, the architect, the surveyors or the suppliers of components, but the residential leaseholders who by law are only tenants and own not a single brick in the building. It was when the Secretary of State came in that the action started. Actually, he was not the first. Two other Secretaries of State had to give instructions to their permanent secretaries to start giving out some compensation. I still commend to the Government having an agency to take over potential claims of all residential leaseholders, taking action against those responsible and holding a roundtable with all their insurers. That would get £10 billion in almost overnight, saving the money going to the lawyers.

To return to the Bill, there has been cross-party agreement over the past eight years that something was needed. The Law Commission produced many recommendations, most of which are in the Bill. I will not go into all the detail of the debate that I heard in another place, where some Members seem to think that people's property rights are being harmed. I do not remember those Members of another place complaining when the disgraceful statutory instrument 632 came through in 2020, boosting landowners' values by about £5 billion. The only people paying that were the leaseholders.

I am very grateful to the people who have supported the all-party group on leasehold and commonhold reform. Katherine O'Riordan has done really well on that, as have the trustees of the campaigning charity Leasehold Knowledge Partnership, Martin Boyd and Sebastian O'Kelly, together with new trustees, including Liam Spender, who has done a great deal in fighting off very bad landlords in the east end of London.

Three problems remain, on which the House will want to see the next Administration take action urgently. One is that forfeitures, as the whole House accepts, is a draconian system that must go. The threat of losing the home is one thing, but all the equity going to the landlord is totally another, and that should be stopped. In one case in which I was involved in Plantation Wharf, someone was at risk of losing £600,000 over a disputed bill of £7,000.

Secondly, the commitment to bring in a ground rent cap has not come forward but it must be introduced. I acknowledge that I have a share of a small block of leasehold flats in Worthing where I have a home, and I own another leasehold property that I let out, but I will

not benefit from this because I have negotiated with my landlord that they will pay the ground rent for the next 30 years, which will see me out. We need a ground rent cap. We know that ground rent turns to peppercorn if there is a legal extension, and we ought to get to that as fast as we can. If on the way we have to stop at £250 a year, that is fine.

The last thing is that we need to recognise that a move to commonhold is the only way forward to ensure an effective housing market. We ought to stop new residential leasehold properties being sold, and we ought to find a way to help existing leaseholders avoid facing penalties from external landlords, who can go into all sorts of bad behaviour, whether on insurance commissions or other ways of taking money off leaseholders improperly. That would be in the interests of both landlords and leaseholders.

I congratulate the Government and thank the Minister for his attendance. I am very grateful to the Opposition for helping persuade the Prime Minister that this Bill could come forward in this last Session of this Parliament. I claim the credit because on the Tuesday before the King's coronation, I was standing with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the official Opposition and I said to the Prime Minister that the Opposition would help him—Rishi looked at Keir, Keir nodded, and now we have the Bill.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): On that note, may I on behalf of the Opposition also welcome this Bill? We are pleased that the disagreements down the other end of the building have been resolved and that it can go forward. It is not perfect, as the Father of the House has pointed out, and I hope that a future Labour Government will take the next steps that we need. It is a step forward, so we are pleased to support this legislation going on to the statute books this evening.

Jacob Young: With the leave of the House, I pay tribute to all the staff and Clerks here, the countless campaigners on the rights of leaseholders and some of those mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley), the brilliant parliamentary champions of the Bill, including my hon. Friend himself, the officials who have worked so hard to deliver the Bill, and indeed my private office and officials for their work on the Renters (Reform) Bill, which sadly has not made it through the wash-up today, such is the nature of a snap general election.

7.30 pm

But the person I must thank above all is, as my hon. Friend said, the Secretary of State, who has today announced his decision not to stand again. He has been an amazing mentor to me, a phenomenal person to work with, and a great and generous friend. I know he is not everyone's cup of tea, but he will go down as one of

the great reformers, and children today go to better schools and get a far better education because of Michael Gove—he is brilliant and I will really miss him.

I have loved this job over the last four and a half years, representing my home as the first MP for my constituency who is actually from Teesside. I hope the people of Redcar and Cleveland will send me back here in six weeks' time to continue delivering for them.

I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and all those who sit in that Chair. You were in that Chair for my maiden speech, and you are there today as we deliver the final Bill of this Parliament. And with that, the 2024 season comes to an end.

Lords amendment 1 agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): With the leave of the House, I will put a single question on the Government motions to agree to Lords amendments 2 to 67, otherwise we would be here a long time.

Lords amendments 2 to 67 agreed to.

7.32 pm

Sitting suspended (Order, 23 May).

MESSAGE TO ATTEND THE LORDS COMMISSIONERS

8.22 pm

Message to attend the Lords Commissioners delivered by the Lady Usher of the Black Rod.

The Speaker, with the House, went up to hear His Majesty's Commission; on their return, the Speaker sat in the Clerk's place at the Table.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that the House has been to the House of Peers where a Commission under the Great Seal was read, authorising the Royal Assent to the following Act and Measure:

Finance (No. 2) Act 2024

Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024

Post Office (Horizon System) Offences Bill Act 2024

Media Act 2024

Pet Abduction Act 2024

Paternity Leave (Bereavement) Act 2024

Building Societies Act 1986 (Amendment) Act 2024

British Nationality (Irish Citizens) Act 2024

Zoological Society of London (Leases) Act 2024

Victims and Prisoners Act 2024

Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024.

His Majesty's Most Gracious Speech

Mr Speaker: I have further to acquaint the House that the Leader of the House of Lords, one of the Lords Commissioners, delivered His Majesty's Most Gracious Speech to both Houses of Parliament, in pursuance of His Majesty's Command. For greater accuracy I have obtained a copy, and also directed that the terms of the Speech be printed in the Journal of this House. Copies are being made available in the Vote Office.

The Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

The focus of my Government has been to deliver its plan to increase economic growth and safeguard the health and security of the people of the United Kingdom.

My Government has taken action to lay the foundations for long term economic growth, to ensure that work always pays, and to support the British people with the cost of living. My Ministers have met their commitment to halve inflation, which is now at its lowest rate since September 2021.

My Government has delivered tax cuts for millions of working people, with National Insurance contributions for employees cut by four percentage points, saving a typical employee over £900 a year. National Insurance contributions for the self-employed have also been cut by three percentage points and the requirement to pay contributions on lower levels of profit has been removed. Legislation has been passed to raise the income threshold for the High Income Child Benefit Charge and halve the rate at which Child Benefit is withdrawn. This will help parents towards the cost of raising their children. My Government has also rolled out the first phase of expansion of childcare in England to hundreds of thousands of parents.

Through my Government's direction, the United Kingdom has continued to be at the forefront of technology and innovation. New laws have fostered innovation in British broadcasting to reflect changing viewing patterns and growing demand for high quality online content.

Tax legislation enacted this session has incentivised investment and enhanced support to make it safer and easier for small and medium sized businesses to focus on innovation.

As more businesses shift to digital marketplaces, my Ministers have worked to ensure that new legislation promotes competition, while securing better value for money for consumers and protecting them from unfair practices.

Legal frameworks have been updated to ensure that Great Britain can safely capture the opportunities for economic growth presented by the evolving technology of automated vehicles.

My Ministers have championed British goods and innovation. The United Kingdom is now the world's fourth largest global exporter while maintaining high standards in trade. Laws were passed to end the export of livestock from Great Britain for fattening or slaughter. Legislation was passed to support the United Kingdom's accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. This will remove tariffs

from ninety-nine per cent of British products exported to a trading bloc worth 15 per cent of global GDP following this accession.

My Government has taken advantage of the freedoms afforded by the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union to reduce burdens on business. The Smarter Regulation Programme has introduced reforms removing up to 50 million hours of administrative work per year for businesses, saving them an estimated £1 billion annually. Legislation was previously passed to remove the principle of supremacy of European Union law and over two thousand instruments of European Union law have been reformed or removed from the statute book.

To enable the NHS in England to carry out more operations and procedures, my Government has delivered 101 surgical hubs, Community Diagnostic Centres operating from 160 sites, and more doctors and nurses.

Legislation passed this session has made it cheaper and easier for leaseholders to purchase their freehold and addressed the exploitation of homeowners through punitive service charges.

My Ministers have taken action to deliver justice for victims and keep communities safe from crime, anti-social behaviour, and terrorism. The victims of the Infected Blood and Post Office Horizon scandals have suffered decades-long injustices. My Government has legislated to ensure that they are compensated fairly and treated with respect.

The Victims' Code has been put on a statutory footing and the parole process has been reformed to put the interests of victims first. Laws passed this session will ensure that a parent who kills the other parent has their parental responsibility suspended.

My Government has taken measures to disrupt the business model of people smugglers and deter dangerous and illegal journeys to the United Kingdom. Legislation has been delivered to underpin the partnership with Rwanda to tackle small boat crossings.

My Ministers have ensured that intelligence and law enforcement agencies have the powers they need to keep pace with a new generation of threats to national security.

Legislation enacted this session will allow for the regulation of pedicabs in London. This will provide passengers with the confidence that they are in a safe, licensed and roadworthy vehicle and that they will not be overcharged.

New laws strengthening the sanctions regime have limited the role that sanctioned individuals can play in UK businesses and extended the use of immigration sanctions while stopping the exploitation of financial markets.

The United Kingdom continues to play a leading role in defending freedom across the world, including when ideological extremes and technological advances are weaponised to foster division. My Government has committed to increase defence spending to 2.5 per cent of GDP by 2030 and to ensure our gallant Armed Forces are equipped for the challenges they face. In an age of great change, my Ministers remain united by a steadfast belief that the United Kingdom and her allies are strongest when governed by values of freedom and fairness. Standing shoulder to shoulder with the United Kingdom's allies, my Government has increased its diplomatic and military engagement in the Middle East

to encourage de-escalation, deliver humanitarian aid to those in need, protect freedom of navigation and build momentum towards a lasting peace. My Government has consistently provided essential defensive military assistance to support Ukraine.

The United Kingdom has led global efforts on the safety of Artificial Intelligence, hosting the world's first Safety Summit last year at Bletchley and launching the United Kingdom Artificial Intelligence Safety Institute - the first of its kind. At the Artificial Intelligence Seoul Summit this week my Government reached a new agreement between ten countries and the European Union to work together to launch an international network to accelerate the advancement of the science of Artificial Intelligence safety.

The Queen and I were pleased to welcome His Excellency the President of the Republic of Korea and Mrs. Kim Keon Hee for a State Visit last November.

My Ministers have consistently promoted the strength of the Union, including through action to support the restoration of the Executive in Northern Ireland.

Members of the House of Commons, I thank you for the provisions which you have made for the work and dignity of the Crown and for the public services.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

PROROGATION

Mr Speaker: The Commission was also for proroguing this present Parliament, and the Leader of the House of Lords said:

“My Lords and Members of the House of Commons:

By virtue of His Majesty's Commission which has now been read, we do, in His Majesty's name, and in obedience to His Majesty's Commands, prorogue this Parliament to Friday the thirty-first of May.”

End of the Fifth Session (opened on 7 November 2023) of the Fifty-Eighth Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the Second Year of the Reign of His Majesty King Charles the Third.

Written Statements

Friday 24 May 2024

BUSINESS AND TRADE

Companies House: 2024-25 Public Targets

The Minister of State, Department for Business and Trade (Kevin Hollinrake): I have set Companies House the following targets for the year 2024-25:

Use our new powers to ensure companies on the register have a legitimate address—in particular, by taking action against identity and address theft. 100% of companies that have been defaulted to Companies House's address due to not providing an appropriate office address, or using an address that has been hijacked, will have been removed from the register, be pending removal, or have been updated to an appropriate registered office address, in accordance with the law.

Eradicate the use of PO box addresses as a registered office address by companies on the register.

Introduce the technical capability to verify an individual's identity by March 2025. This will help ensure Companies House is prepared for the anticipated transition process whereby all new and existing company directors and persons of significant control will be required to verify their identity, either directly through Companies House or through authorised third parties.

Develop a strategic intelligence assessment to identify the priority areas for action in the fight against economic crime, and act upon it.

Digital services are available for a minimum of 99.5% of the time.

80% of customers are satisfied with Companies House.

Incoming calls to the contact centre to be answered within an average of four minutes.

Manage expenditure within budgetary limits and utilise central government funding.

[HCWS501]

Growth Guarantee Scheme: Contingent Liability Notification

The Minister of State, Department for Business and Trade (Kevin Hollinrake): I am tabling this statement for the benefit of hon. and right hon. Members to bring to their attention the details of the growth guarantee scheme, which will replace the recovery loan scheme on 1 July 2024 and run until at least 31 March 2026.

The growth guarantee scheme is facilitated by the Government-owned British Business Bank and delivered through its delivery partners. Under the scheme, lenders will offer facilities of up to £2 million to support businesses that would otherwise be unable to access the finance they need, or would only be able to do so on worse terms. The scheme is forecast to facilitate £2.19 billion of finance between 1 July 2024 and 31 March 2026.

Some notable features of GGS are as follows:

The maximum amount of external finance available will be £2 million per business in Great Britain; for businesses in scope of the Windsor framework, the maximum amount will be £1 million per business.

To lend through the scheme, lenders will be required to certify that they would not have been able to offer a facility to the business on their normal commercial terms, or that they would have only been able to do so at a higher interest rate.

Personal guarantees will be permitted, but not required, for all facilities in line with delivery partners' usual policies. Principal private residences may not be used as security under any circumstances.

The minimum facility size will be £25,001 for loans and overdrafts and £1,000 for asset and invoice finance products. Businesses will be required to meet the costs of interest payments and any fees from the outset. The lender must establish that the borrower has a viable business proposition assessed according to its normal commercial lending criteria. Businesses who have made use of the previous coronavirus loan schemes, or the recovery loan scheme, will be able to access the scheme.

Given the above, the maximum contingent liability for the forecast £2.19 billion scheme is £1.533 billion.

I will be laying a departmental minute today containing a description of the liability undertaken.

[HCWS502]

Shipbuilding Credit Guarantee Scheme

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Alan Mak): The shipbuilding credit guarantee scheme is a finance instrument that provides guarantees to banks in respect of loans made to vessel owners and operators seeking to place orders at UK shipyards. The scheme was launched in July 2023 and the Department for Business and Trade is the accountable Department.

The export credits guarantee department—operating as UK Export Finance, or UKEF—acts as service provider to the Department for Business and Trade via a memorandum of understanding. UKEF manages inquiries and applications under the scheme, as well as assisting with the set-up and implementation of the scheme, and DBT covers resource and other costs. In order to have the necessary approvals to progress actual transactions, or potential transactions, on behalf of DBT, ECGD must apply for a Contingencies Fund advance to cover the vote on account period in financial year 2024-25. This Contingencies Fund advance of £90,000 was made over recess, and I am notifying Parliament at the earliest opportunity.

Parliamentary approval for additional resource of £90,000 for this new service will be sought in a main estimate for the export credits guarantee department. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £90,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

[HCWS503]

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Carbon Budgets

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Claire Coutinho): Earlier this week we were proud to be able to announce that we had decided to forgo the option to carry forward any over-performance from the third carbon budget to the fourth carbon budget. Following

that, I want to give an update on our progress on delivering against the UK's world-leading system of carbon budgets.

We are extremely proud to have met, and indeed exceeded all three of the carbon budgets to date. In 2013, the Climate Change Committee said the Government were "not currently on track" to meet the third carbon budget. But our continued delivery of emissions-reducing policies meant that we were in fact able to exceed the target.

When the fourth carbon budget was set in 2011 it was considered by some, including in Government, to be so stretching, that a review point would be needed to see if it was actually achievable. As late as 2019, the Climate Change Committee said that "Government continues to be offtrack for the fourth" carbon budget. But again, with continued policy delivery, the UK is now on track to more than exceed the fourth carbon budget. And a future Minister will have to make a decision, like the one we announced earlier this week, as to whether to carry forward that over-delivery.

The fifth carbon budget goes further still in reducing emissions. But since that was set, we took the decision to move to net zero by 2050 target. That means we will have to significantly overdeliver on the fifth carbon budget. And our own plans show that we are indeed on track to overdeliver yet again.

Ministers took decisions on the level of the sixth carbon budget (CB6) in March 2021. This was the first net zero-aligned carbon budget and so requires an even more challenging level of emissions reduction. We are still more than eight years away from the start of the sixth carbon budget period and more than 13 years away from the end of it—despite which, we have around 300 policies in place to deliver emissions reductions required over the sixth carbon budget period, with around 200 of these having quantified savings associated with them. The most recent assessment showed that 90% of the savings required to meet the CB6 target are covered by quantified policies.

The UK has reduced emissions further and faster than any major economy, becoming the first to halve its emissions against the 1990 baseline, and we remain steadfastly committed to net zero. This is a record of which we are immensely proud, and indeed a record in which everyone in this country should feel pride.

[HCWS505]

Oil and Gas Overlaps: Offshore Wind Projects

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Claire Coutinho): The North Sea Transition Authority has announced three tranches of licences from the 33rd oil and gas licensing round. Production from these licences will support our world-class oil and gas industry and help maintain the UK's energy security. Data published by the Climate Change Committee shows that the UK will continue to need oil and gas, alongside abatement technologies, even when we reach net zero in 2050.

A number of licences from the third tranche of the 33rd oil and gas licensing round have direct overlaps with, or come within 500 metres of, areas which are already under agreement for offshore wind development. It is important to note that the oil and gas licences grant

exclusivity to explore the licence area, but they do not confer consent for any operational activity. This would require separate consents from the North Sea Transition Authority.

Oil and gas developments and offshore wind developments already co-exist and my expectation is that they will continue to do so. Oil and gas developers and offshore wind developers are already expected, through their respective consenting and stewardship processes, to take account of other projects when planning their developments.

To give greater reassurance to affected offshore wind developers that oil and gas licensees will take account of their developments, and to promote co-existence, the North Sea Transition Authority has introduced a new clause in relevant licences following discussions with the Crown Estate and Crown Estate Scotland. The new clause will require the oil or gas licensee to have a co-location agreement with the affected offshore wind developer in place before any operational activity can take place in that licence area, which includes seismic surveying, drilling exploratory wells or installing subsea or surface infrastructure.

Co-location agreements will be the way forward for resolving any issues arising from overlaps and I expect all parties to engage constructively, to act in good faith and to behave reasonably when approaching discussions on co-location. Where there are difficulties in reaching a suitable co-location agreement, the parties should first seek independent mediation or discuss a way forward with the North Sea Transition Authority and the Crown Estate or Crown Estate Scotland.

Some stakeholders have asked about the role of the oil and gas clause in Crown Estate leases in the event an oil or gas developer asks for it to be used. This clause allows the Crown Estates to determine an agreement for lease or lease, in whole or in part, at my request where this is necessary to enable an oil or gas project to proceed. This clause has never been used and no oil or gas developer has ever asked, a Secretary of State to determine an offshore wind lease.

I would like to clarify that there should be no assumption that oil and gas has primacy over offshore wind, or vice versa. In the highly unlikely event that I receive a request from an oil or gas developer to ask the Crown Estates to determine an offshore wind lease, there should also be no assumption that I would agree to do so. In line with previous Government guidance, it would only be used in very exceptional circumstances, only after all avenues for co-existence had been explored and only after appropriate compensation for the offshore wind developer had been assured. For the sake of clarity, I would like to emphasise that co-location agreements will be the primary mechanism for resolving any issues arising from overlaps.

The previous guidance on the oil and gas clause in Crown Estate leases was published in 2014 and I recognise that the oil and gas industry, the offshore wind industry and UK energy policy have all changed significantly since then. My officials will consult with the North Sea Transition Authority, the Crown Estate, Crown Estate Scotland, Scottish Government, the offshore wind industry and the oil and gas industry on appropriate changes to the 2014 guidance in order to incorporate the new requirements on co-location agreements and to reflect wider updates since the guidance was published.

[HCWS504]

TRANSPORT

Decision Deadline Extensions for Proposed Developments and National Networks NPS.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Mark Harper):

This statement confirms that it is necessary to extend the deadlines for decisions on the following three applications made under the Planning Act 2008:

The A122 (Lower Thames Crossing) Development Consent Order for the proposed development by National Highways for a new road crossing connecting Kent, Thurrock, and Essex. It will connect to the existing road network from the A2/M2 to the M25 with two tunnels (one southbound and one northbound) running beneath the River Thames. The Secretary of State received the examining authority's report on 20 March 2024, and the current deadline for a decision is 20 June 2024.

Associated British Ports (Immingham Eastern Ro-Ro Terminal) Development Consent Order for the proposed development by Associated British Ports of a new roll on-roll off ferry terminal at the Port of Immingham. The Secretary of State received the examining authority's report on 25 April 2024 and the current deadline for a decision is 25 July 2024.

London Luton Airport Expansion Development Consent Order for the proposed development by Luton London Airport Ltd for the construction of a new passenger terminal and aircraft stands at London Luton airport, to allow passenger capacity to increase from 18 million per annum to 32 million. The Secretary of State received the examining authority's report on 10 May 2024 and the current deadline for a decision is 10 August 2024.

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make his decision within three months of receipt of the examining authority's report unless exercising the power under section 107(3) to extend the deadline and make a statement to the Houses of Parliament announcing the new deadline. The new deadline for all the above applications is 4 October 2024. This is due to the general election and to allow appropriate time for any new Secretary of State to consider the applications. The Department will however endeavour to issue decisions ahead of the deadlines above wherever possible.

The decision to set new deadlines is without prejudice to the decisions on whether to give development consent for the above applications.

National networks national policy statement

I laid the national networks national policy statement for parliamentary approval on 6 March 2024. Following the approval of the House, I am today, 24 May 2024, designating it as a national policy statement under section 5(1) of the Planning Act 2008 and have duly arranged for publication as required by section 5(9)(a) of that Act.

This designation supports the development of critical transport infrastructure. The updated NPS provides a robust and up-to-date policy framework that clarifies what is required to enable the development of major road, rail and strategic rail freight projects while setting clear and strengthened requirements around the environment.

[HCWS506]

Petitions

Friday 24 May 2024

PRESENTED PETITION

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Petrol Price Premium: Barnsley East

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares, as highlighted by the Barnsley Chronicle, that fuel prices in Barnsley East are regularly around 3 pence per litre higher than in comparable neighbouring areas like Wakefield and Kirklees, with prices sometimes higher than in Central London.

Further declares that people in Barnsley East are some of the hardest hit during the cost-of-living crisis, and that high petrol prices in the area are putting further unnecessary pressure on households.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to take into account the concerns of the petitions and take immediate action to ensure that Barnsley East is not forced to pay a petrol price premium.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Stephanie Peacock.]

[P003002]

OBSERVATIONS

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Popular uprising in Iran

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that in response to protests and anti-regime uprisings led by women and youth throughout Iran, Iranian repressive forces have opened fire on protestors; notes that more than 750 protestors have been killed including 83 women and 75 children, as well as more than 30,000 protestors arrested; further notes that Amnesty International has reported that child detainees have been subjected to horrific torture, including beatings, flogging, electric shocks, rape and other sexual violence; further declares that the regime's deliberate poisoning of schoolgirls across Iran is to take revenge on young girls for participating in demonstrations, with the number of executions increased to over 400 this year; further notes that the UN Special Rapporteur on Iran has categorised the atrocities during the uprising as Crimes Against Humanity; and further declares opposition to the killings and arrests of protestors, and support for the Iranian people's uprising to achieve democracy and freedom.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to condemn the Iranian Government's violent crackdown on protests led by women and youth, support democratic movements in Iran and put pressure on the Iranian regime to stop the repression.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Caroline Nokes, Official Report, Tuesday 30 April 2024; Vol. 749, c. 230.]

[P002969]

Observations from the Minister for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, United Nations and the Commonwealth (Lord Ahmad): We condemn the Iranian regime for its violent crackdown on protests led by women and youth. We continue to utilise targeted sanctions, and work alongside partners, to hold Iran to account.

Substantive response:

The UK Government condemn the Iranian regime for its continued repression of fundamental freedoms, including against women and girls, and human rights defenders. We have been clear that the "Woman Life Freedom" movement was an authentic, grassroots call for change.

Furthermore, the UK Government responded decisively to the Iranian authorities' crackdown on protesters. In October 2022, one month after the death of Mahsa Amini, we sanctioned leading political and security officials responsible for serious human rights violations.

In November 2022, we worked alongside partners to establish a fact-finding mission at the UN Human Rights Council, to thoroughly and independently investigate the regime's treatment of protesters.

In December 2022, we were instrumental in revoking Iran's membership of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. The UK's permanent representative to the UN, Barabara Woodward, delivered a statement to the UN Economic and Social Council, imploring members to remove Iran from CSW and expressing solidarity with Iranian women and girls.

After the protests were muted due to the authorities' violent crackdown, we sought to maintain pressure on Iran in the international sphere. In November 2023, we co-sponsored an Iran human rights resolution at the UN Third Committee. The resolution condemned the measures used by authorities to respond to the protests, such as arbitrary detention, the disproportionate use of force, and the use of force resulting in the death of peaceful protesters.

The resolution also underscored the UK's and partners' serious concerns at reports of ill-treatment during arrest, physical and psychological abuse, and physical violence in detention, including sexual and gender-based violence.

In July 2023, the Minister of State for the Middle East, Lord Ahmad, condemned Iran for its brutal use of executions as a means of stifling dissent. Lord Ahmad called on Iran to issue a moratorium on the death penalty as a first step in changing course and listening to the concerns of the Iranian people.

We will continue to hold Iran to account for its human rights violations. Since Mahsa Amini's death, we have sanctioned 94 individuals or entities responsible for human rights violations. The fact-finding mission has the UK's full support until the completion of its mandate next year, and we welcome the findings of its first report, published on 8 March.

It is clear that human rights defenders in Iran continue to be targeted by the regime, with nine protesters being executed in association with the protests. We call on Iran to immediately release all those unjustly detained.

We stand with the Iranian people in their struggle for fundamental freedoms.

EDUCATION

St. Leonard's Catholic School

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the Department for Education is not doing enough to mitigate the anxieties and stress of the parents, pupils and teachers at St. Leonard's Catholic School in City of Durham following on from the disruption caused by RAAC; further declares that pupils at St. Leonard's Catholic School have not been offered mitigating circumstances for the disruption to their education caused by RAAC.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to bring forward legislation to ensure that the Secretary of State for Education can provide the pupils at St. Leonard's Catholic School mitigating circumstances for their exams this year, and all those who suffer similar circumstances.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mary Kelly Foy, *Official Report*, 23 April 2024; Vol. 748, c. 907.]

[P002959]

Observations from the Minister for Schools (Damian Hinds): The safety of staff and pupils is paramount, and the Department for Education is working closely with schools and colleges to provide the support and resources to mitigate the presence of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete. There are over 22,000 schools and colleges in England and the vast majority are unaffected by RAAC—around 1% have confirmed RAAC in some areas of their buildings. The Department's RAAC identification programme is complete. Any school or college that advised us that they suspect they might have RAAC has had a survey to confirm if RAAC is present. We have confirmed to all schools and colleges how they will be funded to remove RAAC permanently, either through grants or through the school rebuilding programme.

We are supporting schools and colleges to keep any disruption to education to an absolute minimum and put in place bespoke plans based on their individual circumstances. All schools and colleges with confirmed RAAC are providing full-time face-to-face education. Every case is unique and the impact on schools is highly varied. In some cases there is no impact on teaching space, or it is limited to small areas; for example, RAAC may be limited to a single classroom. We are taking every step possible to remove any obstacles to learning. For some schools, this may include funding to provide additional education support for their pupils, such as online tutoring or extra lessons.

We have worked particularly closely with St Leonard's Catholic School and Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, and have provided extensive practical and financial assistance. This includes alternative spaces for learning and funding to put extra education provision in place. All pupils at St Leonard's have been in full-time face-to-face education since October, and additional education support is available to pupils, including those due to sit exams this year. Additional specialist facilities had initially been sourced at other providers in the local area, including science laboratories at Durham University and at another local school within the trust, St Bede's Catholic School

and Sixth Form College, Lanchester—with transport provided for pupils. The school now has access to its own specialist facilities.

The trust has also received significant funding for RAAC-related costs. This includes funding for curriculum support, staffing costs and software packages to provide additional education support for pupils. The school and trust continue to receive support from a dedicated team of officials, all of whom are fully committed to supporting the trust and the school to address the impact of RAAC on pupils and staff. They meet regularly with BWCET representatives and the school to develop and deliver solutions to address the impact of RAAC.

The Department has worked closely with Ofqual and awarding organisations to understand what mitigations can be made for students at RAAC-affected schools sitting exams this year within the current regulatory system.

We have also worked with Ofqual and awarding organisations to facilitate discussions with St Leonard's School. We have asked awarding organisations to, where possible, agree extensions to deadlines for the submission of coursework and non-exam assessments so that pupils have as much time as possible to complete these tasks. We have asked awarding organisations to offer as much flexibility as possible when granting these extensions and this has been a key area of support offered to RAAC-affected pupils within the existing qualifications framework.

In cases where pupils who have covered the full content of a course are impeded from demonstrating their regular level of attainment at the time of their assessment (for example, if there was ongoing noise during an examination), special consideration can be used as a mechanism to provide minor adjustments to pupils' marks. JCQ member awarding organisations, including those which offer GCSEs and A-levels, have published guidance which sets out when it may be applied and in what possible circumstances. JCQ has also published specific guidance on how existing special consideration arrangements may apply to centres affected by RAAC or other building issues, particularly in the context of non-exam assessment—<https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/High-Levl-RAAC-mitigations-FINAL.pdf>. Special consideration arrangements may apply in a number of different situations.

Special consideration only applies to incidents that occur at the time of an assessment. It is not possible to make adjustments to grading to reflect variabilities in teaching or provision that students may have experienced, or any other issues individual pupils may face over the course of their study that may affect their learning. This is because exams and other formal assessments are designed to be an impartial measure of a pupil's performance at a particular point in time, and our qualifications system has always reflected the variability in pupils' experiences in schools and colleges in their results.

Ofqual, as the exams regulator for England, is responsible for maintaining qualification standards and promoting public confidence in regulated qualifications and national assessments. Ofqual's statutory objectives, as set out in the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, require it to regulate awarding organisations to ensure that qualifications give a reliable and consistent indication of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. This

means that regulated qualifications, such as GCSEs and A-levels, must represent what pupils know, understand and can do at the point of assessment, rather than what they might have known and been able to do if they had been taught differently, or under different circumstances. This is important as it ensures that the evidence used to grade and award qualifications is consistent and can be trusted, and that both holders of qualifications and those using them to make decisions (such as employers or higher education institutions) can be confident in the information they convey about students' achievements.

A reliable indication of the knowledge, skills and understanding of those taking qualifications and assessments is achieved by ensuring pupils taking a given qualification are assessed and graded to the same standard. It is therefore not possible to bring forward legislation to allow qualification grading to be amended to reflect any disruption to learning that pupils at RAAC-affected schools, such as St Leonard's, might have experienced without undermining the role of qualifications to fairly represent the actual attainment of pupils. Introducing such legislation would create a system where different standards were to be applied for different groups of students, and result in qualifications that would not provide a reliable indication of knowledge, skills and understanding.

It is important that schools and colleges with concerns about exams and questions about whether their students will be eligible for special consideration contact the relevant awarding organisation as soon as possible to discuss their specific circumstances. Decisions on special consideration, when it is or is not appropriate, are for each awarding organisation to make on a case-by-case basis.

The Department is committed to supporting BWCET and St Leonard's and is continuing to work with them in the interests of pupils. We have also confirmed that St Leonard's will be rebuilt as part of our school rebuilding programme, which is transforming over 500 schools across England.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Protection of the Amazon rainforest

The petition of the residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the Amazon is the world's largest rainforest and makes up half of the planet's remaining tropical forests, home to about three million species of plants and animals and 1.6 million indigenous people; further notes that the forest is the world's largest natural carbon sinks, absorbing and storing an amount of carbon equivalent to 15 to 20 years of global CO₂ emissions from the atmosphere; and further declares continued deforestation of the Amazon is contributing to the forest's inability to recover from droughts, fires and landslides.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage the Brazilian Government to protect forest land and end large-scale deforestation, to prevent nearly half of the Amazon rainforest from collapsing and that these irreversible consequences for the Amazon and the planet are avoided.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Martyn Day, *Official Report*, 30 April 2024; Vol. 749, c. 229.]

[P002964]

Observations from the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley):

The UK is committed to working with Brazil to address deforestation of the Amazon and its detrimental impact on global climate, environmental conservation and the communities who reside there.

Following his election in October 2022, the UK welcomed President Lula's vocal commitment to Brazil's domestic action on climate change, including net reduction in deforestation by 2030. We commend Brazil for delivering impressive results already, notably a 51% reduction of deforestation levels in 2023.

Climate and nature have long been central to the UK's relationship with Brazil, and we are proud to be the third biggest contributor of climate finance to Brazil, with more than £511 million committed.

The Prime Minister met President Lula in May last year, when he announced a UK contribution of £80 million to Brazil's Amazon fund. An additional £35 million was announced at COP28, making the UK the fund's second largest donor.

This funding supports initiatives under the green and inclusive growth (GIG) partnership, announced by former Foreign Secretary James Cleverly during his visit to Brazil last May, for which an implementation plan was launched at COP28 in December.

The GIG partnership is driving strengthened co-operation and dialogue to support Brazil's economic transition to net zero, turn the tide on deforestation, and develop a bioeconomy to generate new commercial opportunities for Brazil and the UK.

Taking care of forests and their peoples is a key pillar. Our aim is to combat deforestation and promote a socio-bioeconomy involving non-timber products, in addition to fostering biodiversity goals more broadly and tackling illegal gold supply chains.

Promoting the rights and engagement of indigenous peoples and local communities who reside in the Amazon is also a priority. This year, our partnerships for forests (P4F) programme came to an end, with a total of £24 million invested in Brazilian bioeconomy businesses. In the state of Para alone, which is set to host COP30 next year, P4F reached more than 3,500 people and secured more than 16,000 hectares under improved management of sustainable land use.

This year, with Brazil holding the G20 presidency, the UK continues to engage closely to support concrete outcomes on climate, nature and energy.

The second permanent under-secretary of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Nick Dyer, visited Brazil in March. He visited a UK PACT project on sustainable supply chains in Para and met with civil society representatives to discuss the threat posed by deforestation to indigenous communities and the alternative bioeconomies that could enable sustainable livelihoods.

My visit to Brazil in May, shortly after the devastating extreme weather and flooding in Rio Grande do Sul, highlighted the importance of working together with

Brazil and other international partners to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis to lessen the impact of similar incidents in future.

Looking ahead to 2025 and Brazil's hosting of COP30, at a pivotal moment 10 years on from the Paris agreement, we are exploring how to support Brazil's vision and have already started a series of COP26-to-COP30 dialogues

to share expertise from the preparation and delivery of COP26. This includes engaging with Brazil on its proposal to develop a tropical forests forever fund by COP30.

We will continue to work with Brazil through to COP30 and beyond to protect forests, address the global climate and nature crisis and build a more sustainable, just and inclusive future together.

Written Corrections

Friday 24 May 2024

Ministerial Corrections

TREASURY

Finance (No. 2) Bill

The following extract is from the debate on the Finance (No. 2) Bill in Committee of the whole House on 8 May 2024.

Gareth Davies: Current oil and gas prices are higher than normal, and OBR projections indicate that high prices will persist over the next five years. The ESIM is a mechanism that switches off the EPL if, for a period of six months, the average prices of both oil and gas fall below set thresholds. Those thresholds are currently \$74.21 per barrel for oil and 50p per therm for gas, and are based on a 20-year historical average to the end of 2022—before higher energy prices began—and are adjusted each April based on the annual change in the preceding December’s consumer prices index.

—[*Official Report*, 8 May 2024; Vol. 749, c. 634.]

Written correction submitted by the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Gareth Davies):

Gareth Davies: Those thresholds are currently \$74.21 per barrel for oil and **57p per therm** for gas, and are based on a 20-year historical average to the end of 2022—before higher energy prices began—and are adjusted each April based on the annual change in the preceding December’s consumer prices index.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Measles

The following extract is from the urgent question on Measles on 22 January 2024.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield):... NHS figures show that almost 3.5 million children under the age of 16 are unprotected and at risk of catching this serious and preventable disease.

—[*Official Report*, 22 January 2024; Vol. 744, c. 33.]

Written correction submitted by the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield):

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield):... NHS figures show that **around 3.4** million children under the age of 16 are **not fully vaccinated** and **may be at risk** of catching this serious and preventable disease.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Friday 24 May 2024

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS AND TRADE	63WS	ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO—continued	
Companies House: 2024-25 Public Targets.....	63WS	Oil and Gas Overlaps: Offshore Wind Projects	65WS
Growth Guarantee Scheme:			
ContingentLiabilityNotification	63WS		
Shipbuilding Credit Guarantee Scheme.....	64WS	TRANSPORT	67WS
ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO	64WS	Decision Deadline Extensions for Proposed	
Carbon Budgets	64WS	Developments and National Networks NPS.	67WS

PETITIONS

Friday 24 May 2024

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
EDUCATION	21P	FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT	
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.....	23P	OFFICE—continued	
St. Leonard's Catholic School	21P	Popular uprising in Iran	19P
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS.	23P	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development	
Protection of the Amazon rainforest	23P	Office	19P
FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND			
DEVELOPMENT OFFICE	19P	PRESENTED PETITION	19P
Education	21P	Petrol Price Premium: Barnsley East	19P

WRITTEN CORRECTIONS

Friday 24 May 2024

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS	15WC	MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS—continued	
Health and Social Care.....	16WC	Treasury	15WC
Measles	16WC	Finance (No. 2) Bill	15WC

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**not later than
Friday 31 May 2024**

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CONTENTS

Friday 24 May 2024

Speaker's Statement [Col. 1125]

Solent Ferry Regulator [Col. 1126]
Bill presented, and read the First time

Sanctions [Col. 1127]
Motion—(Anne-Marie Trevelyan)—agreed to

Coroners [Col. 1138]
Motion—(Gareth Bacon)—agreed to

Victims and Prisoners Bill [Col. 1145]
Lords amendments considered

Energy [Col. 1163]
Motion—(Robert Langan)—agreed to

Tribunal and Inquiries [Col. 1167]
Motion—(Gareth Bacon)—agreed to.

Valedictory Debate [Col. 1173]
General debate

Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill [Col. 1271]
Lords amendments considered

Prorogation [Col. 1278]

Written Statements [Col. 63WS]

Petitions [Col. 19P]
Observations

Written Corrections [Col. 15WC]
Ministerial corrections
