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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Thursday 18 July 2024**

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# House of Commons

Thursday 18 July 2024

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Post Office Horizon Scandal

9.34 am

**Mr Speaker:** I wish to make it clear that I am once again waiving the provisions of the sub judice resolution in relation to this matter to allow Members to be able to discuss fully these issues of national importance.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): I congratulate you on your re-election, Mr Speaker, and thank you for granting this urgent question, which is to ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade if he will make a statement on financial redress for sub-postmasters and outstanding issues relating to the Post Office Horizon scandal.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Justin Madders):** I congratulate the shadow Secretary of State on his new position and on securing the first urgent question of this Parliament.

Members will know that the Government made a key manifesto commitment to ensure that justice and compensation are delivered as swiftly as possible for every postmaster caught up in the Horizon scandal. The Secretary of State has already met Sir Alan Bates, Kevan Jones and the chair of the Post Office, Nigel Railton, to discuss the progress being made and what more can be done. The Government intend to make a significant announcement on the new redress scheme before the summer recess. This scheme will apply to postmasters whose convictions have been overturned by the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences Act 2024 passed in the last Parliament.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** I welcome the Minister to his role. I say in all sincerity that I wish him the very best of luck. We on the Opposition Benches, in the national interest, wish the Government to succeed. It is vital that his Department succeeds in its brief. When British businesses do well, we all do well.

I hope this urgent question, on a matter on which the House has been in agreement, will set us off on the right foot in working together in the national interest. That matter is of course compensation for sub-postmasters affected by the Horizon scandal. I was the previous Post Office Minister, and the House will know of my commitment and my party's commitment to the individuals whose lives have been torn apart by this scandal.

It is right that the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences Act received Royal Assent during wash-up to quash the convictions of hundreds of affected postmasters, but the Minister will know that the Act itself does not

provide compensation, which is why, alongside that legislation, we announced plans for a new Horizon convictions redress scheme. This scheme will make compensation payments to those who have had convictions quashed by the Act.

In government, we ensured that Royal Assent was achieved as soon as possible so that there was no gap in the availability of compensation. It is only right that postmasters have access to swift and fair compensation. That is why we overturned those convictions. Those with overturned convictions have the option of immediately taking a fixed and final offer of £600,000. It is also why, in government, we changed the rules for those in the Horizon shortfall scheme so that they are entitled to a £75,000 fixed-sum award, bypassing the assessment process; so that all full and final settlements below that figure would be automatically topped up; and so that an appeal process for those in the HSS is also considered.

Although I am pleased that, as of 31 May, approximately £222 million has been paid to over 2,800 claimants across the scheme, I must push the Government for more detail on when the redress payments set out by the Horizon convictions redress scheme can be expected—we were told that it would be by July. I also note that the Department for Business and Trade has said that it “continues to work” on the new Horizon convictions redress scheme.

I ask the Minister—*[Interruption]*—when will the scheme be up and running? When does he expect the £75,000 top-ups and the HSS appeal process to be implemented, and the victims to be contacted to that effect? When will he open the scheme? Will he announce a date for full compensation under the Horizon convictions redress scheme?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I gently say to the Chamber that it is a new beginning, and we want to start on the right foot, not the wrong foot. It is difficult to go from Government to Opposition, but there is a two-minute limit for the Opposition and a one-minute limit for the third largest party. Please let's stick to the rules and start as we mean to go on.

**Justin Madders:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The shadow Secretary of State set out the intent he had in government, which we intend to carry on. We also believe there is absolutely no reason why we should not continue to work on a cross-party basis, as we agree with him on the importance of delivering fast and fair compensation, which is at the heart of all we are trying to achieve. We will be making a statement by the end of July, before the summer recess. As the shadow Secretary of State has already noted, we have committed to do that. We are working at pace with officials, victims and those who have been affected by the scandal to work up the detail, and an announcement will be made in due course.

**Jon Trickett** (Normanton and Hemsworth) (Lab): It is good to see you back in your place, Mr Speaker. The new Minister will recall the old saying that a new broom sweeps clean, and I am sure he will make progress very quickly indeed. It seems to me that the Post Office scandal reveals a wider problem in British society. Whether it is Orgreave, Grenfell, contaminated blood or the problems at Hillsborough, the British establishment

[Jon Trickett]

seems incapable of listening to the voices of ordinary people. Will he raise that matter with other Ministers and see whether there is a way for this Government to ensure that is not repeated?

**Justin Madders:** My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. In recent years, we, as Members, have reflected on the question of political accountability for decisions that have been taken and actions that have taken place over many years. We will be reflecting on how best to ensure there is genuine political accountability in the system.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I also welcome you back to your place, Mr Speaker. It is a genuine pleasure for me, as the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, to be addressing the House on behalf of the third largest political grouping. My party will use the privilege of that position to hold the Government and Ministers to account. We will not be using it simply to stoke division and manufacture grievance. That is what the people of the United Kingdom, and Scotland in particular, voted for.

At the heart of the Horizon scandal was the culture at the centre of the organisation that failed to respect the work that was being done by sub-postmasters at the frontline. The Minister and the Secretary of State will meet with the chief executive of the Post Office. What evidence have they seen that that culture has actually changed?

**Justin Madders:** I do not know if the right hon. Gentleman is aware that the current chief executive officer has stepped aside for a brief period to concentrate on the inquiry. Over the coming months, we will be reflecting on the important questions that the right hon. Gentleman raises, particularly when the outcome of the inquiry is known.

**Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): Referring to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton and Hemsworth (Jon Trickett), what role does the Minister think this Government can find for third party organisations, such as WhistleblowersUK or those organisations that work with people to highlight such scandals? As my hon. Friend pointed out, this was a systematic failure across Government and society, and we simply cannot allow it to happen again.

**Justin Madders:** My understanding is that the last Government undertook a consultation on whistleblowing. We are reflecting on the outcome of that and on the important point my hon. Friend raises. Across a whole range of bodies in this country, whistleblowers have not been heard. We need to consider whether the current legislation gives them sufficient confidence to speak out, and whether their actions and concerns are being addressed.

**David Mundell** (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): Many congratulations on your re-election, Mr Speaker. I congratulate the Minister on his appointment. I know he is genuinely committed to

promoting British business at home and abroad, but is he aware of a serious issue flowing from the Horizon scandal that is now affecting current postmasters? In order to express their disgust at what has happened in relation to Horizon, some members of the public are not using the Post Office in the way they did previously. Will he and the Government commit to promote the view that the Post Office is safe to use, because the scandal has been resolved and because using post offices is good for the community?

**Justin Madders:** I am concerned to hear about such incidents. It should go without saying that the postmasters are not the ones who should take the opprobrium of the public on this matter. They are doing a fantastic job. They hold communities together and provide a public service. We should celebrate that and encourage people to use their facilities as much as possible. If the right hon. Gentleman has specific examples of postmasters receiving abuse or people being discouraged to use their services because of the scandal, I would be interested to hear about them.

**Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): It is a delight to see you back in the Chair, Mr Speaker. There were many sub-postmasters and mistresses who were not convicted, but who are seriously out of pocket due to the shortfalls that they themselves made up and deeply traumatised by the experience that they went through. Can the Minister provide reassurance that the Department will seek to ensure that they are supported, and that the compensation scheme is swift, effective but also very straightforward for them?

**Justin Madders:** I thank the right hon. Member for her question. Those are the principles that we want to address and carry on with from the previous Government: the system should be fair, swift and simple. We know that postmasters have already gone through an incredibly difficult time. We do not want to make it even harder by having a convoluted system. We absolutely agree that justice should be fair, quick, complete and straightforward for people.

**Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): Beyond compensation, one of the most important things that campaigners are looking for is consequences for those people who played a part in the creation of this scandal. The Prime Minister has made much about the integrity and accountability of his Government. Presumably that is retrospective. What consequence does the Minister envisage for those current serving Government Ministers who are deemed by the inquiry to have been negligent in their conduct in ministerial office in the past?

**Justin Madders:** That is a very important question. It would be premature of us to draw conclusions before the inquiry has been completed but, absolutely, we should be looking very carefully at all those individuals whose behaviour unfortunately led to the scandal happening and to it taking far too long to address. That is a matter for the inquiry to make recommendations on and, certainly, we will be looking to follow those up.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I welcome the Minister to his place. I know that he was vociferous on this issue when he was on the Opposition Back Benches, so I have absolutely no doubt that he will deliver on it.

Some 26 postmasters implicated in the scandal in Northern Ireland are worried and concerned. It is imperative that all postmasters feel that they can have an open and frank discussion with no fear of repercussion in the upcoming investigations, and there can be no further unwarranted delays. Can the Minister confirm that, as a priority, he will make sure that postmasters have access at every level to ensure that their concerns are addressed and that he will make every effort to take steps in the right direction? Thank you so much, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I do not see why that point should have come last. *[Laughter.]*

**Justin Madders:** What a surprise to see the hon. Member in his place today. I am sure that this will not be last time that we have an exchange across the Dispatch Box, but he does raise an important point. We absolutely agree that we need to make it as easy as possible for postmasters to raise their concerns and to get the justice that they have so long waited for.

**Mr Richard Holden** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your return to your place, and the Minister on taking up his appointment.

Compensation is one part of this, but what victims of this scandal, such as Betty whom I met, want to see are truth and accountability. I am referring not just to Ministers, to whom my right hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) referred, but to those involved in the scandal. What can the Minister say to people in the Post Office and to Betty, who want to see those responsible in the Post Office properly held to account, as well as the compensation for their suffering?

**Justin Madders:** I thank the hon. Member for his question. He makes an important point. Justice is one side of the coin, but there is also accountability for what has happened. A lot of people want to see that: not just those directly affected, but everyone who has been outraged by the years of inertia and obfuscation that we

have seen in this scandal. The purpose of the inquiry is to get to the heart of who knew what, who did what and who did not do what they should have done, and whether individuals should take some responsibility for their actions. I have no doubt that, when those recommendations are released, we will want to see some very swift action on the back of that.

**Andrew George** (St Ives) (LD): I was privileged to be one of those MPs who, a decade ago, was campaigning on this issue in Parliament with the now Lord Arbuthnot and campaigning on cases in my constituency—people had been treated appallingly. Those people have not yet received compensation. If there is going to be any kind of delay in compensation to those who have suffered, is there any way that early, interim payments can be made to those who need the support now and certainly before too long?

**Justin Madders:** I thank the hon. Member for his question, and join him in praising Lord Arbuthnot's work in this area. As of 31 May, £222 million has already been paid out in compensation. There have actually been significant interim payments as well. We understand that, while this is a very large scheme, it is important that we get early payments, so I assure the hon. Member that interim payments are a very large part of this programme.

**Dr Kieran Mullan** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): The legislation that we passed was a blanket measure. It might be clear to us who is or is not included, but for the individuals affected it will not necessarily have been clear. Will the Minister update the House on the progress that has been made in identifying them and writing to them to confirm that their convictions have been quashed?

**Justin Madders:** I thank the hon. Member for his important question. We have been working closely with colleagues in the Ministry of Justice to identify those people who are affected by the legislation, and they will be contacted in due course if they have not been already.



## Business of the House

9.50 am

**Chris Philp** (Croydon South) (Con): Will the Leader of the House update us on forthcoming business?

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Lucy Powell):** The business for the remainder of the week will include:

**FRIDAY 19 JULY**—Subject to the House agreeing the motion on today's Order Paper, continuation of the debate on the King's Speech on planning, greenbelt and rural affairs.

The business for the week commencing 22 July will include:

**MONDAY 22 JULY**—Continuation of the debate on the King's Speech on the economy, welfare and public services.

**TUESDAY 23 JULY**—Conclusion of the debate on the King's Speech on immigration and home affairs.

**WEDNESDAY 24 JULY**—Motion to approve the Global Combat Air Programme International Government Organisation (Immunities and Privileges) Order 2024, followed by a general debate on education and opportunity, followed by, at 7 pm, the House will be asked to agree estimates.

**THURSDAY 25 JULY**—Proceedings on the Supply and Appropriation (Main Estimates) Bill, followed by a motion to approve the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Requisite and Minimum Custodial Periods) Order 2024, followed by a debate on motions on second jobs for Members of Parliament and to establish a House of Commons modernisation committee.

**FRIDAY 26 JULY**—General debate on making Britain a clean energy superpower.

The provisional business for the week commencing 29 July includes:

**MONDAY 29 JULY**—Second Reading of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill.

**TUESDAY 30 JULY**—Second Reading of the Budget Responsibility Bill.

The House will rise for the summer recess at the conclusion of business on Tuesday 30 July and return on Monday 2 September. Subject to the progress of business, the House will then rise for the conference recess on Thursday 12 September and return on Monday 7 October.

**Chris Philp:** First, I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your unanimous re-election to the Chair and your triumphant victory in Chorley with 75% of the vote. Clearly we can all learn a great deal from you about how to win elections. I look forward to working with you and, I hope, learning from your very long experience of this House. Congratulations to all colleagues elected on 4 July, including those Opposition Members who had to work so hard to survive what was an electoral tsunami of biblical proportions. I especially congratulate those on both sides of the House who were elected for the first time. It is a huge honour to serve in this House.

My particular congratulations go to the right hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) on her appointment as Leader of the House. I hope that she has had the opportunity to practise wielding a sword for

several hours and wearing an embroidered cape with panache; her predecessor, Penny Mordaunt, was an expert at doing both things. When looking at the *Hansard* of previous exchanges, I noticed that in the final business questions of the last Parliament, the shadow Leader of the House, as she was then, paid tribute to Penny's renowned, formidable blow-dried haircut. I can only apologise to the House for my own short back and sides being nothing in comparison. I know colleagues on both sides of the House will miss Penny, wish her well and hope she returns here before too long. I thank the House staff and Clerks for their work welcoming new Members, and the Leader of the House for the collegiate approach she has taken in our private discussions so far.

However, of course these exchanges are an opportunity to raise questions about House business and the associated conduct of Government. Although the new Government are less than two weeks old, there are already some questions I would like to raise.

First, the Government have announced, with no reference at all to Parliament, that the Rwanda scheme—enabled by Bills that this House passed—has been scrapped. The scheme had been due to start next week, and would have provided a deterrent to illegal immigration across the channel. We have seen deterrents of that kind work elsewhere. Since this Government came into office, more than 1,000 people have illegally and dangerously crossed the channel, with four tragically dying. These crossings are unnecessary, France being safe. When will the Government come to the House to explain the change of policy, and will there be any votes on it?

Moving on, according to press reports the Energy Secretary decided last week to cancel all new applications for oil and gas licences in the North sea. If true, that will increase energy prices and make us more dependent on potentially unreliable foreign gas imports. Why did the Government not first come to the House to explain the new policy, and will there be a vote on it?

The Chancellor gave a speech last week on housing and planning, during which the Housing Secretary and Deputy Prime Minister simply sat and listened in rather uncharacteristic silence. The Chancellor announced that green-belt protections will be scrapped—or, as she euphemistically put it, the green belt will be rebranded as the grey belt. Renaming whole swathes of green belt as grey belt is a piece of shameless spin that would make even Peter Mandelson blush. When will the Government come to the House to explain their plans for the removal of green-belt protections?

The Chancellor also made some outlandish claims about the economy and public finances. The economy is in fact in fantastic condition. Inflation—[*Interruption.*] Yes, it is—Members should listen! Inflation is down to 2%, lower than in the eurozone and the United States. Wage growth, in contrast, is much higher at 6%. Unemployment is low, at half the level left behind by the previous Labour Government, and the UK's economic growth so far this year is the highest in the G7.

I understand that the Chancellor might make a statement at some point to the House on these topics. Will the Leader of the House confirm that any claims about public finance made in this House will be accompanied by a full Office for Budget Responsibility

forecast, so we can be sure that any such claims are not simply being concocted by the Chancellor as a pretext for tax rises?

Mr Speaker, I have listed several major policy announcements made in the past 10 days with no reference to Parliament at all. You quite rightly said to the previous Government on many occasions that major policy announcements should be made when Parliament is sitting and first to the House. I would welcome your assistance in ensuring that the new Government adhere to those principles. Finally, then, I ask the Leader of the House to make a commitment now that all major policy announcements will be made only when the House is sitting, as the Speaker previously requested, and first to this House of Commons, where elected Members from all parties can ask questions, including the 250 or so newly elected Labour Members, who I am sure want to ask questions as well. I would be very grateful if she would confirm that.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I think the problem is that people's comments ought to reflect their previous jobs as well. Maybe that comment is from knowledge about making statements outside the House. I do not know; I do not make any judgment. The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct that when the House is not sitting, of course statements will be made by the Government, but when the House is sitting, I expect them to be made in the House. That has been a very clear message and the Leader of the House and I are both working to ensure that statements are heard here first. I certainly take the point on board, but I do not want to be drawn into what we should or should not be doing in the future. I welcome the ability to clarify the position.

**Lucy Powell:** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

I start by thanking His Majesty the King for yesterday's Speech and join colleagues in wishing Her Majesty the Queen a happy birthday for yesterday. I also thank the staff and security services who have worked so hard both to get Parliament ready for the King's Speech and on the huge task of transitioning from the last Parliament to this one, with so many new Members and so many leaving.

The election saw worrying incidents, including harassment and the sharing of misinformation and disinformation—it is unacceptable that some felt unable to go out campaigning, and our democracy depends on our coming together to say so—but we also saw the best of our democracy: the rapid changeover of power when people choose change.

May I thank you, Mr Speaker, for your leadership on MPs' security? I know that that is your top and most urgent priority. May I also congratulate you on your re-election? You are always fair and considered, and always put Members' interests first. Today might be the first big test of whether you know the names of all the new Members.

**Mr Speaker:** No tests, please.

**Lucy Powell:** We both share a strong commitment to upholding the role of Parliament and, as we have just discussed, to restoring respect. That includes Ministers first making major announcements in the House, when it is sitting. Rest assured, I will be robust on that, and I expect to see Ministers and Secretaries of State at the

Dispatch Box over the coming days as we play catch-up on the period in which the House was not sitting. Thank you for your forbearance on that, Mr Speaker.

I welcome all new and returning Members to this 59th Parliament. It is a Parliament to be proud of and one that reflects our country better than ever before. There are more women than ever, more Members from ethnic minority backgrounds and more Members from the LGBT community. It has been a real pleasure to see the excitement and possibilities of new Members—over half the House is new—as they find their way around this often baffling maze of a place. I saw that one had described it as being like freshers' week meets Hogwarts and Buckingham Palace. Let us hope that they do not all drop down with freshers' flu.

We lost some good colleagues from all sides at the election. I pay tribute to my predecessor, Penny Mordaunt, who was always a worthy opponent across the Dispatch Box. She brought a fresh approach not only to this role but as the first female Defence Secretary. I always thought that she was an underused asset for the Conservative party, and she will be missed—especially by the parliamentary hairdressers.

I welcome the shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), to his new role. I know that he has always been keen. After holding very many ministerial roles, I congratulate him on finally making it as a full member of the Cabinet—albeit with the word “shadow” before his title. I hope that the role lives up to his ambitions. Debates about leaking roofs, broken toilets and the price of a bacon butty in the Members' Dining Room all await his close attention. I am keen to work with him and we have already had constructive discussions. I am clear that I want to take the whole House with us on the changes that we need to make.

However, we need to turn the page. Recent years have been plagued by scandals, bad behaviour, disrespect, poor standards and poor legislation. That is what next week's motions on a modernisation committee and on second jobs are about: for the House to work together to drive up standards, improve working practices and find reforms to make Parliament more effective. Let us be clear: it is not about changing the traditions and customs of this place—I know that you will be pleased to hear that, Mr Speaker—but the country voted for change. We will be a Government of service and begin that journey of restoring trust in politics and Parliament—action, not words. That is why we have hit the ground running by establishing the national wealth fund, resetting relations with junior doctors and dentists, launching the border security command, ending the ban on new onshore wind, taking immediate action on the prisons crisis, restoring house building targets and starting to tackle the water crisis—the list goes on.

The shadow Leader of the House asks about the economic record, house building and the Rwanda plan. I gently say to him that, after such a resounding Conservative defeat at the ballot box, I do not think that his best advice is to start saying that their record was actually great all along or that their policies were the best ones for us to follow. On the economic record, the truth is that living standards fell over the last Parliament for the first time on record. He was Chief Secretary to the Treasury when former Prime Minister Liz Truss crashed the economy, sending mortgage rates

[Lucy Powell]

soaring. Since we have come into government, we have discovered that things are even worse than we thought. [Interruption.] The Conservatives do not like it but I am afraid it is true. The country—[Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Leader of the House.

**Lucy Powell:** The country voted resoundingly for change because it was worse off, so the Conservative party would be best advised to look deeply at why it lost, rather than claim that people never had it so good.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the Rwanda plan. The record speaks for itself: four volunteers were all that scheme achieved, and far from stopping the boats or acting as a deterrent, the Government presided over the highest number of small boat crossings on record. It was an expensive gimmick that will not work, and the Home Secretary will update the House on that matter in the usual way very soon. The Energy Secretary will update the House today on his plans for a clean energy superpower.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked about house building and planning. We make no apology: we are unashamedly pro-house building. We have already restored the targets that his Government took away, and will be bringing in planning reforms to make sure that the country gets the 1.5 million new homes it needs.

The King's Speech shows that the Government are getting on with the job, with one of the most ambitious programmes ever of an incoming Government: following through on commitments on things like the Hillsborough law and Martyn's law, which the last Government failed to do, and putting rocket boosters under growth. The guiding light will be delivering on our missions. Yesterday was an historic moment: the first legislative programme from a Labour Government in 15 years. We have a mandate for change; the journey towards that change has begun, and I look forward to working with Members across the House to get on with that job.

**Carolyn Harris** (Neath and Swansea East) (Lab): How wonderful it is to see you back in your rightful place, Mr Speaker.

Last weekend, Rhian Thomas from Catwg primary school in Cadoxton, in my new constituency of Neath and Swansea East, won the primary school teacher of the year award. Rhian won the award for all she has done to create engaging learning experiences at Catwg primary school for pupils and the wider community. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating Rhian, the school, and all teachers everywhere on everything they do for our children and young people?

**Lucy Powell:** I thank my hon. Friend for that fantastic question, and welcome her back to her seat. She is one of the most redoubtable champions in this place, and I know that she will be really pushing that cause and many others, as she did in the last Parliament. I join her in congratulating Rhian on winning the primary school teacher of the year award, and thank all teachers across the country for the work that they do. One of the first things the Education Secretary has done since taking office is look to reset the relationship with teachers, so that we can really tackle the recruitment and retention

crisis facing our schools. As we come to the end of term, we join together in thanking every single teacher for the great work that they do.

**Mr Speaker:** We now come to the Lib Dem spokesperson.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): May I also say what a pleasure it is to see you back in your place, Mr Speaker? I welcome the Leader of the House to her position, and congratulate her on the election results: securing such a large majority is no easy task, and her party at all levels deserves credit. The same can be said for our party, the Liberal Democrats: we are now the largest third party in over a century, with our most MPs ever. I thank all of the Liberal Democrats' campaigners across the country who have fought tirelessly for a fair deal.

Our No. 1 priority is fixing the health and care crisis, so that no matter where in the country a person is, they can see a doctor or a dentist when they need to do so. Also central to our campaign was a fair deal for social care staff. The Government have promised to introduce a fair pay agreement for adult social care staff; while we Liberal Democrats welcome that announcement, there has been no detail of how it will be funded. The Liberal Democrats would fund a fair pay deal for social care staff by reversing the tax cuts handed by the Conservative party to the big banks. How will the Government fund that commitment?

Another issue that must be urgently addressed is our commitment to reach net zero. The report published today by the Climate Change Committee makes clear that the days of U-turning on climate commitments and diluting environmental targets must come to an end. Only a third of the emissions reductions required to achieve our 2030 target are currently covered by credible plans. The Liberal Democrats are committed to the bold, urgent action needed to tackle climate change, cut energy bills and create hundreds of thousands of secure, well-paid jobs. The Conservatives' lack of ambition relinquished our place as a global environmental leader. With COP29 nearing, the UK has a golden opportunity to turbocharge global climate change policies.

Of course, the worst scandal of the past few years has been the sewage scandal. Can we have a debate in Government time on how we can fix this scandal, which has blighted our communities up and down the country?

**Lucy Powell:** I thank the hon. Lady for her comments, and I welcome her to her place. I congratulate the Liberal Democrats on their success and their results in the election. They have an historic number of new Members of Parliament, although I am surprised that she did not bungee jump her way in this morning or rollerblade her way along from Members Lobby. She and I have worked together in the past, and I look forward to our working together in the future.

I know that part of the Liberal Democrat mandate at the election was about cleaning up our politics and turning the page, and this election certainly demanded action on that, so I hope we can realise some of that together. I worked closely with the hon. Lady's colleague the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) on risk-based exclusions in the last Parliament, and I look forward to having a constructive relationship with her on those issues as well.



The hon. Lady raised a few issues. We absolutely share the Liberal Democrats' concerns about the social care crisis in this country, and we are determined to get a grip on that. We know that care is not always available or of the quality that people deserve, and we are determined that everybody should have access to dignified, independent support in life. In the King's Speech, we announced action in the employment Bill on establishing a fair pay agreement in the adult social care sector, and we look forward to working together on some of those issues.

On net zero, there will be the opportunity to question the Energy Secretary later. We have a really ambitious plan to get to net zero and be a clean energy superpower by 2030, and we have already started that programme. We have lifted the moratorium on onshore wind, we have agreed to planning applications for more solar in the past week than—taken together—has ever happened in our country's history before and we have begun the process to establish Great British Energy.

I share the hon. Lady's frustrations about the quality of water in this country, and it falls to this Government—how can I put it?—to clean up some of the mess of the previous Government in this area. *[Interruption.]* I know Conservative Members do not like to hear about all their mess floating around in the rivers, but I am afraid it does float around. We have announced a number of measures on that already, and we will continue to work together as we see our water special measures Bill that was announced in the King's Speech yesterday progress through Parliament.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We are going to finish business questions at 10.50 am. To help each other, a speedy question and a quick response will allow us to get in as many Members as possible.

**Dr Lauren Sullivan** (Gravesham) (Lab): I welcome the Leader of the House to her new position.

Worryingly, last week there was an attack at the Gurdwara Nanak Darbar in my constituency of Gravesham. Thankfully, nobody was seriously hurt, but I would like to place on record my thanks to the gurdwara first responders and all the emergency services for that. Although the facts of the case are still unclear, the attack caused understandable anxiety in the local Sikh community. Would the Leader of the House consider scheduling a debate on the importance of protecting worshippers in their sacred spaces so that they may practise their faith without fear?

**Lucy Powell:** My hon. Friend raises a very important matter in her first question in this House, and I very much welcome her election and her attendance here this morning. These are very serious matters, and I am concerned to hear about them. She may be pleased to know that the first Home Office oral questions will take place on 29 July. If she does not get the response that she wants then, I shall certainly raise this matter for her with the Home Secretary.

**Dame Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): Congratulations on your re-election, Mr Speaker. Will the Leader of the House find time for a statement on flood defences? The last Parliament was on track to spend £5.2 billion on flood defences, including in communities like Severn Stoke and Tenbury Wells in my

constituency. There are concerns that the incoming Government may cancel that spending, so will she timetable a statement and reassure us that that is not the case?

**Lucy Powell:** I welcome the hon. Lady here to her place and congratulate her on surviving the tsunami that, I am afraid, took out some of her colleagues. She raises a very important matter. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs orals have not yet been timetabled, so the subject would make a good candidate for an Adjournment debate application, should she want to do that. In the meantime, I will get her a response on the Government's plans for flood defences.

**Navendu Mishra** (Stockport) (Lab): Mr Speaker, on behalf of the people of Stockport, can I congratulate you on your re-election? I also congratulate my fellow Greater Manchester Labour MP on her appointment as Leader of the House. I am certain that she will do a fantastic job.

Public libraries are a vital hub for communities across the nation, providing important spaces for drop-in sessions, internet connectivity, reading books and so much more, yet in my local authority of Stockport borough the local Liberal Democrat council is reducing staffed hours in our libraries—a move that threatens to leave many adults and children isolated and without access to critical services. As such, will the Leader of the House allow a debate in Government time on our treasured public libraries?

**Lucy Powell:** I thank my hon. Friend for his best wishes and for that important question. Libraries and access to them play a vital role in our communities, supporting local people and children with their education. I am afraid that the previous Government hollowed out local government funding over their 14 years in office. They promised levelling up, but in fact we got years and years of cuts. I will make sure that the Culture Secretary has heard my hon. Friend's question and supplies him with a reply.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Mr Speaker, congratulations on your re-election. I welcome the Leader of the House most sincerely to her position; I always think business questions is the most illuminating and refreshing part of the week's business.

One of the most pressing pieces of business that we considered prior to the general election was, of course, the compensation scheme for those infected and impacted by the infected blood scandal. Can we have an urgent statement to detail the Government's progress in ensuring that the compensation scheme is put in place and their progress towards the creation of the Infected Blood Compensation Authority? Victims are still dying weekly, and I am certain that the Leader of the House will want to do everything possible to ensure that these matters are addressed as quickly as possible.

**Lucy Powell:** I thank the hon. Member for that question; he and I both know, after sitting through these sessions in the last Parliament, that the infected blood scandal is probably the single biggest issue raised in business questions. It is absolutely important that we take action and follow through on the commitments that have been given. I assure him that there will be an update to the

[Lucy Powell]

House at the earliest possible opportunity on the Government's progress in dealing with the compensation scheme.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes) (Lab): I welcome the Leader of the House to her place. Will she join me in congratulating the business-led 2025 Group, which is celebrating the many positives of working in Grimsby and Cleethorpes? Could we have time to debate the importance of our town centres and the ongoing need for high street regeneration, and to recognise the dire impact on local economies of delayed repairs to infrastructure such as Corporation bridge in my constituency?

**Lucy Powell:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question and welcome her back to her rightful place in this House as the new Member for Grimsby. I know that she will do a fantastic job for the town. As she knows, one of our big areas of focus during the election campaign was town centre regeneration, and our planning and infrastructure Bill and other measures announced yesterday will focus on just that. I look forward to working with her on the issue over the coming months.

**Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): The last Conservative Government provided £213 million of funding for the Western Link road to complete the orbital route around Norwich, but during the election campaign I was concerned to hear rumours that Labour might axe it. Can the Leader of the House provide a statement quickly to give reassurance to the people of Broadland and Fakenham, and Norfolk more widely, that this much-needed infrastructure will continue?

**Lucy Powell:** I am sure this is an important matter for the hon. Member's constituents. I do not have the answer today, but I note that Transport orals will be coming at some point soon. I will therefore get him a response from the Transport Secretary, and if that is not forthcoming, I am sure he will apply for a debate in the usual way.

**Kim Johnson** (Liverpool Riverside) (Lab): Congratulations on your re-election, Mr Speaker. Some 47% of children in my Liverpool Riverside constituency are living in poverty—nearly one in two—and I am sure that the Leader of the House agrees that that is unacceptable. While I welcome the Prime Minister's announcement yesterday of the taskforce, it did not mention the removal of the two-child cap. Will the Leader of the House grant parliamentary time to discuss the removal of the two-child cap and dealing with child poverty?

**Lucy Powell:** I know the issue is close to my hon. Friend's heart. As an incoming Labour Government, we are absolutely committed to tackling child poverty and all the root causes of child poverty. That is why the Prime Minister announced the Government taskforce looking at these matters yesterday. We were clear in our manifesto that the economic circumstances do not currently allow for us to abolish the cap. Economic stability is the single biggest thing we can do to ensure that children do not fall into poverty, because when the economy crashes it is the poorest in society who pay the heaviest price. I think my hon. Friend has tabled some amendments to

the Loyal Address, and I sure she will have ample opportunity to debate them over the coming days of the King's Speech debate.

**Mike Wood** (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): My local councils in South Staffordshire and Dudley worked hard on local plans to provide the new housing that my constituents will need over the coming decade. In the light of the alarming Government briefings on their planning reforms, can we have a debate in Government time on how we can make sure that democratically drawn-up local plans are respected and that the green belt safeguarded by those local plans remains protected?

**Lucy Powell:** I think the hon. Member may misunderstand the policy in this area. This Government have made it clear that we are unashamedly pro-house building. We have to tackle the housing crisis in this country and meet the target of 1.5 million new homes over the course of this Parliament, and I think that his party also pledged to deliver that target in the election campaign. As he knows, the Conservatives in government withdrew the house building targets, which then reduced figures. What we are not proposing here is a developer free-for-all. This is about good, sensible, clear local plans being drawn together and then expedited with things moving more quickly. I can reassure him on that, but frankly we will take no lectures from the Opposition on dealing with the housing crisis.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): When it comes to children with special educational needs, children who have experienced trauma in their childhood or children with anxiety, local authorities carry all the risk, but do not have the resources. Our academy system is out of control and our health services are insufficient. Can we have a debate on children who experience such challenges in their early years to ensure that we address this issue early on in this Government?

**Lucy Powell:** May I welcome my hon. Friend back to her place? She was always vocal and committed in the last Parliament, and I have no doubt she will be so again in this Parliament. As she rightly points out, our education and care systems are not meeting the needs of children with special educational needs, often leaving them without the support they need to thrive. That is one of the issues being tackled in our children's wellbeing Bill, announced by His Majesty the King yesterday. As she will have heard this morning, there will be a debate on education in the business next week.

**Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): Immediately prior to Dissolution, the excellent Backbench Business Committee had granted a debate in the Chamber to discuss the performance of Southern Water. I know that the right hon. Lady will want to respond about sewage, but in fact the debate was to be about its failure to deliver clean water to significant parts of my constituency in addition to its failures on sewage. Will she please reassure me that in the absence of the Backbench Business Committee and the Petitions Committee, the Government will find time for Back Benchers to bring forward important issues that we wish to debate in the Chamber?

**Lucy Powell:** The right hon. Lady is a fantastic, strong voice in the Chamber. I welcome her and the naughty corner back to their place, albeit on the other side of the House. She makes an important point about an important debate, which I shall certainly pass on. In the absence of Backbench Business debates, we have and will continue to table general debates, and there will be availability for Westminster Hall debates in the usual way as well.

**James Asser** (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): This week, the new Minister of State for Education visited my constituency to look at the excellent work being done by the London Ambulance Service in its education centre, and in particular the apprenticeships that it offers, which have opened up opportunities to people who would not normally have access to that route, including military veterans. Will the Leader of the House look to find time to debate apprenticeships, particularly with an eye to schemes like this and how might broaden opportunities?

**Lucy Powell:** I welcome my hon. Friend to his place with his election as the Member for West Ham and Beckton. I am sure that he will be a strong MP for that new constituency. He raises an important point. Dealing with apprenticeships and apprenticeship reform, I hope that the announcement yesterday in the King's Speech of the new Skills England body sends a signal of how important this issue is for the Government in delivering on our mission for growth and delivering opportunity for all. He will have noticed that we have an education debate timetabled for next week, where he can raise the matter.

**Martin Vickers** (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): Throughout my time in the House, I have campaigned for improved transport connections to serve my constituency, which at that time was Cleethorpes. One such campaign was the restoration of the train service from Cleethorpes through Grimsby and Lincoln to Kings Cross. The previous Transport Secretary had approved that service, and I understand that it is now with Network Rail and LNER to complete the necessary arrangements. May we have a statement from the new Transport Secretary confirming that that service will indeed begin in the winter timetable?

**Lucy Powell:** The hon. Member raises a good point. He and I have discussed transport issues, and I support his call for greater transport infrastructure investment across our regions, and especially in the north, which I am afraid was distinctly lacking under the previous Government. I will raise that matter with the Transport Secretary, and I have no doubt that she will come before the House in due course. As I said in the business statement, she will bring forward a Bill the week after next, and he could raise those issues then if he has not heard from her before.

**Sarah Edwards** (Tamworth) (Lab): May I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your re-election? My constituency has a large number of villages and a rural contingent. While I welcome the announcements yesterday in the King's Speech, I wonder whether there is further information about how we will deal with flooding and, in particular, the flood resilience taskforce. Although we are in the summer, we will fast approach the winter.

**Lucy Powell:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question and welcome her back to her place. She was not here long before she had to face the electorate again, and it is great to see that she has been returned so convincingly. She raises important matters about flood defence, as others have. I note that the King's Speech debate tomorrow will cover rural affairs, so she might want to raise those issues with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who I believe will respond to that debate.

**Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): Double child rapist and murderer Colin Pitchfork was due to have his parole hearing last week in public, following my successful application to the chair of the Parole Board, who agreed to have it in public. The parole hearing has been rescheduled to an unknown date, and only last week the chair of the Parole Board said in public, without writing to me, that she had cancelled her decision to have a public parole hearing for Mr Pitchfork. I welcome the Leader of the House to her place. Could we have an urgent statement on this matter or, better still, an urgent meeting with the Minister to discuss why the Parole Board is acting in this way?

**Lucy Powell:** As ever, the hon. Gentleman raises an incredibly important issue. For new Members who do not know, he has a strong track record in this place of raising such matters. I will ask the Minister to meet him urgently to discuss this important issue.

**Paula Barker** (Liverpool Wavertree) (Lab): Congratulations on your re-election, Mr Speaker. I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House; I know she will do an amazing job.

In February 2022, MPs and peers passed an amendment to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill to repeal the Vagrancy Act 1824. However, the last Government failed to set out a commencement date for repeal, while trying to criminalise rough sleepers through the Criminal Justice Bill, which did not pass. I am aware that many homelessness organisations have written to my right hon. Friend, so can she give the House clarity on when the Labour Government will commence the section to repeal that Act, since it is already law? Surely, 200 years on, it is time to consign the Vagrancy Act to the dustbin, where it belongs.

**Lucy Powell:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question and welcome her back to her place. I look forward to continuing to work closely with her, as I have done in recent years. She always raises incredibly pertinent matters in this House. I do not have the answer to her question, but the Home Secretary will come to the House for a number of reasons in the coming weeks, when my hon. Friend might want to raise this matter. On Tuesday we have the immigration and home affairs debate on the King's Speech, and Home Office oral questions are on Monday 29 July. If she does not get a reply at either of those, I will raise the matter directly for her.

**Mr Andrew Snowden** (Fylde) (Con): As one proud Lancastrian MP to another, congratulations on your unanimous re-election to the Chair, Mr Speaker.

Planning on the green belt is a huge concern in my constituency of Fylde—housing is part of it, but there are also the Morgan and Morecambe wind farm proposals. Most residents back the new renewable energy being



[Mr Andrew Snowden]

built off the Fylde coast, but there are concerns about the cabling and substation route, which appears to take the route of least resistance. It will see miles of farmland and countryside dug up, and substations built in inappropriate locations. We seem to be unable to get answers from the company on why that has been chosen as the preferred route, when other far more appropriate routes for cabling and substations exist. Will the Leader of the House assure me that the Government will work with us to get answers from the company and clarity about the other routes that could be used for the cabling, and to ensure that it works with me, local campaigners and the council to get the most appropriate route?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. This issue is so important that I think the hon. Gentleman ought to think about having an Adjournment debate on it—although he nearly had one just then.

**Lucy Powell:** I warmly welcome the new Member to his place. He is a rarity as a Conservative Member in north-west England and Lancashire. He raises an incredibly important question: connecting the national grid appropriately to our new clean energy programme is a critical issue for the Government. The Energy Secretary is here today to make an oral statement, so the hon. Gentleman may want to raise the issue with him then. There will be other opportunities in upcoming days if he is not able to get an answer later today.

**Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): On Tuesday, I was fortunate to visit Team Wales Business Club at the Principality stadium, where I met some fantastic, resilient young sportspeople: Alys Thomas, Poppy Ellis, and my constituent Harrison Walsh, the Paralympian discus thrower. Will the Leader of the House join me in wishing Team GB the best of luck in the Olympic and Paralympic games to be held in Paris this summer? It will be a really exciting time for our young people, who can aspire to participate in these sports in the future.

**Lucy Powell:** I welcome my hon. Friend back to her place. New Members who do not know her will not be aware that she raised matters relating to sport very thoroughly—indeed, superbly—during the last Parliament. I certainly join her in wishing Team GB all the very best for the upcoming Paris Olympics.

**Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Speaker, and I congratulate the Leader of the House on her appointment.

The recent closures of two Boots pharmacies in Hampton in my constituency came amid hundreds of other community pharmacy closures across England, driven largely by the financial pressures on community pharmacies from an outdated pharmacy contract, coupled with impenetrable bureaucratic NHS England processes that do not engage with local communities when it comes to closures and new licence applications. Will the Leader of the House urgently grant a debate in Government time to consider this issue, given the health crisis faced by our country?

**Lucy Powell:** The hon. Lady has raised an extremely important issue. Ensuring that community pharmacies are available in every community, offering a full range

of services that can help to prevent people from needing access to primary care or A&E, is key to our delivery of an NHS fit for the 21st century. I am sure that the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, who I know has already been progressing some of these matters, would welcome a question about this particular matter during Health questions next Tuesday, and hopefully the hon. Lady's name will be drawn in the ballot.

**Ms Julie Minns** (Carlisle) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House join me in wishing Shankhill Church of England Primary School a very happy 150th birthday? Like the hundreds of other rural schools across Britain, including a number in my own constituency of Carlisle, Shankhill not only provides an outstanding education for its very small number of pupils, but makes an important contribution to what is an isolated community in north Cumbria. Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on the important contribution that rural schools make to our country?

**Lucy Powell:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on her election, on being here and on asking her first question in this place. That is always a daunting process, but I hope she now feels that she has the confidence to go on. She has raised an important matter which I know has been raised by others in the past—namely the challenges faced by rural schools with, in many instances, diminishing pupil rolls—and I think she should raise it again during next week's education debate.

**Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): I was pleased to hear the Leader of the House say earlier that town centre regeneration remained a priority for the Government. May we please have an urgent statement from a Minister about the status of levelling-up fund grants? As the Leader of the House may know, towards the end of last year, Andover in my constituency was awarded £18.3 million to kick-start the regeneration of its town centre. Since then, a memorandum of understanding has been signed and some money has changed hands, and on that basis Test Valley borough council has made significant contractual and budgetary commitments, but there now appears to be an inexplicable delay in progress with the grant. We have to ensure that the money is spent by the early part of 2026. I should be grateful if the Leader of the House could provide some clarity, not just for Andover and for me, but for other Members who are similarly affected.

**Lucy Powell:** I will certainly seek to obtain some clarity for the right hon. Gentleman on that issue. As he will know, this Government are prioritising town centre redevelopment and “brownfield first”, and our planning and infrastructure Bill that was announced yesterday will include reforms of compulsory purchase order and land value issues, which will enable local authorities to acquire, for instance, derelict or empty properties that they need for town centre regeneration at a more appropriate value. That will unlock significant investment, which I hope will benefit the project to which the right hon. Gentleman has referred.

**Lola McEvoy** (Darlington) (Lab): In 2025, Darlington, our region and the world will celebrate the bicentenary of the railway. In my constituency, the celebrations have already started. Will the Leader of the House grant us a



debate to discuss and celebrate the contribution of our industrial heritage in Darlington and how this Labour Government will create a new generation of green industrial jobs for the future in Darlington, in the Tees Valley and across our country?

**Lucy Powell:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on her election as the new MP for Darlington; I know she is going to provide a very strong voice for the people of Darlington on these important matters. She will know that the green industrial revolution is absolutely at the core of the delivery of this Government's missions—not only on growth, but on job opportunities and making the UK a clean energy superpower by 2030. Transport and the railways are a core part of that, which is why we saw the announcement yesterday of our railways Bill and our rail franchising Bill, which will be debated at the end of the month. She may want to raise these issues in that debate as well.

**Dr Kieran Mullan** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): In one of her first acts, our new Deputy Prime Minister cut “Levelling Up” from her Department's title. The Leader of the House will know that there are dozens of town boards up and down the country that are populated by community leaders, business leaders and charity leaders. Whether it was intended or otherwise, the change has genuinely caused anxiety among many of them about whether their funding might also be cut in future. Can we have an urgent statement in the House so that the new Deputy Prime Minister can reassure them that the levelling-up funding they are due to receive will still be delivered?

**Lucy Powell:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. As a former MP for a northern constituency—I think he has travelled some way south since then—he will know that while the previous Government had strong rhetoric on levelling up, the reality was very different. There were small pots of money that were not transforming communities, and one of the biggest issues at the election was that large parts of the country, especially in the midlands and the north, felt that the previous Government had failed on levelling up. This Government will get growth in every part of the country, and we are committed to doing that.

**Adam Jogee** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the warm welcome you have given to me and all the other newbies. It is wonderful to see the Leader of the House in her place on the Government Front Bench.

Walleys Quarry landfill in Newcastle-under-Lyme has blighted the lives of my constituents for far too long. In the early days of this new Government, can we have a debate on the adequacy of the enforcement powers of the Environment Agency and on how we can tackle the worst effects, health-wise and environmental, of landfill sites in Newcastle-under-Lyme and across our country?

**Lucy Powell:** I welcome my hon. Friend to his place. He raises an issue that I know is of great importance to his constituents, and there are serious questions to be answered as to why such breaches have been allowed to continue without being properly addressed. I understand that criminal investigations are ongoing. We are monitoring

the situation closely so that we can put an end to this awful situation. A Labour Government are not going to sit back as the previous one did and let the toxic stench continue to hang over Newcastle-under-Lyme.

**David Mundell** (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): I warmly commend the right hon. Lady on her appointment. Will she bring forward a debate in Government time on the future of Royal Mail? There are obviously issues with the overall ownership of Royal Mail, but there are also serious service issues in constituencies like mine, where Royal Mail was found wanting in the delivery of election material; indeed, there were delays to postal votes. It has now changed the uplift times for many post boxes, so many of my constituents will be unable to post a first-class letter on the basis that it will be delivered the following day.

**Lucy Powell:** The right hon. Gentleman raises issues that I know were raised by many others during the election campaign. If he is not able to raise them with the Secretary of State in the upcoming King's Speech debate—possibly on Monday, when we are debating the economy and public services—I am sure that such issues would make an extremely good candidate for an Adjournment or Westminster Hall debate, and I hope he manages to secure one.

**David Baines** (St Helens North) (Lab): Congratulations on your re-election, Mr Speaker. I welcome the Leader of the House to her place; I also welcome and look forward to debating the children's wellbeing Bill announced yesterday. In St Helens North, there are many children in mainstream education with special educational needs such as dyslexia and autism who are waiting for assessment or struggling for support, despite the best efforts of their fantastic schools and hard-working teachers. I hope that that issue will be covered in the debate on the Bill, but if not, can parliamentary time be found to debate special educational needs so we can ensure that no child is left behind?

**Lucy Powell:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on asking his first question. As a former teacher, he is laying down a clear marker that special educational need and children's wellbeing will be at the forefront of his agenda as the new MP for St Helens North. He will have seen that there will be an education debate next week; I hope he can raise these important issues then.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I very much welcome the Leader of the House to her position. I look forward to a weekly relationship of questions and answers and wish her well.

I am very concerned about the Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill, a private Member's Bill that Fiona Bruce, the then Member for Congleton, introduced under the last Government and that the then Prime Minister was going to bring in. Unfortunately, such was his haste for an election that the Bill was not included in the wash-up before the last Friday; in another week, it would have been law. What can we do to make sure that that private Member's Bill can be proceeded with? When the Prime Minister was in opposition, I had discussions with him about ensuring that the special envoy is in place. Will the Leader of the House discuss that in Cabinet, or should we bring forward a debate?

**Lucy Powell:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question; I am not quite sure why he is at the back of the queue already, when the House has been sitting for so little time, but maybe he will get himself higher up the queue in future debates.

The hon. Gentleman raises an important matter. A number of significant pieces of legislation failed to get through wash-up after the then Prime Minister took such an illogical decision to call an early election—one that I am sure Opposition Members are living to regret—but there will be a private Members' Bills ballot in due course, which may be an opportunity to pursue the matter.

**Helena Dollimore** (Hastings and Rye) (Lab/Co-op): May I congratulate you on your re-election, Mr Speaker, and welcome the new Leader of the House to the Dispatch Box?

My Hastings and Rye constituents have suffered hugely because of the crumbling infrastructure of Southern Water. People have been left without water for over five days on not just one but two occasions. Residents and businesses have yet to be properly compensated. The town centre of Hastings has been flooded twice, and we have seen record levels of sewage dumped in our sea and even appearing in people's homes. Will the Leader of the House look into when I can raise the matter in upcoming debates in the House?

**Lucy Powell:** What an excellently put question from the new Member for Hastings and Rye, which has a special place in my heart as the location of all my childhood holidays. I am disturbed to learn of the failures of Southern Water in dealing with these issues. As my hon. Friend will know, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has got straight to work, bringing in the water bosses and taking a series of steps to clean up our rivers and seas and hold water companies to account. We will soon be introducing the water special measures Bill; I hope my hon. Friend will take a keen interest in that legislation and will contribute fully as a new Member.

**Chris Vince** (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I apologise for standing up for too long earlier, Mr Speaker. May I thank you and your office for the support that you have given to new Members, which has been really great? I congratulate the Leader of the House on her position.

I would like to call for a debate on an issue that is affecting taxi drivers and their passengers, not just in Harlow but in other parts of the country. As a repercussion of the Deregulation Act 2015, taxi drivers are no longer required to get licences from authorities in whose areas they operate. Different authorities have different standards, meaning that some taxis are checked less regularly, and some authorities do not require the same signage that we require in Harlow. That has a huge impact on the taxi trade and, particularly in the case of signage, on the safety of passengers. Can we have a debate on this important issue?

**Lucy Powell:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising such a big issue on his first outing. As the Member of Parliament for Manchester Central, I know what a big issue this is for taxi drivers and others who are worried

about safety and other issues. I will ensure that he gets a full response from the Department for Transport. This would make an excellent topic for an Adjournment debate, which I think would attract attention from across the House.

**Shaun Davies** (Telford) (Lab): I thank all House staff for the fantastic induction that new Members have received. It has been first class.

Talking about the best start, can we have a debate in Government time on giving all children the best start in life? Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating Telford and Wrekin council on retaining its outstanding Ofsted rating for children's services?

**Lucy Powell:** I congratulate my hon. Friend, who was a real champion and vocal supporter of local government in his previous capacity. We often sat opposite each other in the shadow Cabinet. I am delighted to congratulate Telford and Wrekin's children's services, which went from a "requires improvement" judgment in 2016 to being outstanding today. That is incredibly hard for children's services to achieve, and I am sure he will raise these issues many times in the House over the coming months.

**Mr Speaker:** Finally, I call Jim MacAlister.

**Josh MacAlister** (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): Josh MacAlister, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** It's Jim for today!

**Josh MacAlister:** As a new Member, I was going to start my very first question by congratulating you and saying that you are the best Speaker I have seen in the Chair.

I welcome my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) to her place as Leader of the House. A number of my constituents have been directly affected by the infected blood scandal. Between the publication of the independent inquiry's final report and the Dissolution of the last Parliament, there was not sufficient time to have a full debate on the report's findings. Will the Government give time in the coming months for a full debate on that topic?

**Lucy Powell:** You were doing so well, Mr Speaker—you got to the final question before getting a name slightly wrong.

I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Whitehaven and Workington (Josh MacAlister) to his place. I know he will contribute greatly to the House over the coming Parliament. He asks an important question, which was raised earlier, about the infected blood compensation scheme, which this Government are absolutely committed to introducing. I am confident that there will be a statement or some kind of parliamentary moment on that before the recess.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I fully understand that some Members will be disappointed not to get in. We will keep a list and try to make sure that we get you in next time. Business questions last for about an hour, and you can help me and each other by asking short, punchy questions.

## Prison Capacity

10.53 am

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Shabana Mahmood):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement about prison capacity in England and Wales.

As you know, Mr Speaker, I wanted to make this announcement first in this House. However, given the scale of the emergency facing our prisons, I was forced to set out these measures before Parliament returned.

Since this Government took office two weeks ago, it has become clear that our prisons are in crisis and are at the point of collapse. The male prison estate has been running at over 99% capacity for the last 18 months. We now know that my predecessor warned No. 10 Downing Street but, rather than address this crisis, the former Prime Minister called an election, leaving a ticking time bomb. If that bomb were to go off—if our prisons were to run out of space—the courts would grind to a halt, suspects could not be held in custody and police officers would be unable to make arrests, leaving criminals free to act without consequence. In short, if we fail to act now, we face the prospect of a total breakdown of law and order.

Rather than act, the last Prime Minister allowed us to edge ever closer to catastrophe. Last week, there were around 700 spaces remaining in the male prison estate. With 300 places left, we reach critical capacity. At that point, the smallest change could trigger the chain of events I just set out. With the prison population rising, it is now clear that by September this year, our prisons will overflow. That means there is now only one way to avert disaster.

As the House knows, most of those serving standard determinate sentences leave prison at the halfway point, serving the rest of their sentence in the community. The Government now have no option but to introduce a temporary change in the law. Yesterday, we laid a statutory instrument in draft. Subject to the agreement of both Houses, those serving eligible standard determinate sentences will leave prison after serving 40%, rather than 50%, of their sentence in custody, and will serve the rest on licence. Our impact assessment estimates that around 5,500 offenders will be released in September and October. From that time until we are able to reverse this emergency measure, 40% will be the new point of automatic release for eligible standard determinate sentences.

The Government do not take this decision lightly, but to disguise reality and delay any further, as the last Government did, is unconscionable. We are clear that this is the safest way forward. In the words of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Mark Rowley, these steps are “the least worst option”. He went on to say that

“the worst possible thing would be for the system to block”, and that any alternative to these measures would be “dangerous for the public”.

I understand that some may feel worried by this decision, but I can assure the House that we are taking every precaution available to us. There will be important exclusions. Sentences for the most dangerous crimes—for sexual and serious violent offences—will not change. That will also be the case for a series of offences linked

to domestic violence, including stalking, controlling or coercive behaviour and non-fatal strangulation, as well as those related to national security.

We will also implement stringent protections. First, this change will not take effect until early September, giving the probation service time to prepare. Secondly, all offenders released will be subject to strict licence conditions, to ensure they can be managed safely in the community. Thirdly, offenders can be ordered to wear electronic tags, and curfews will be imposed where appropriate. Finally, if offenders breach the conditions of their licence, they can be returned to prison immediately.

Let me be clear: this is an emergency measure, not a permanent change. This Government are clear that criminals must be punished. We do not intend to allow the 40% release point to stand in perpetuity. That is why I will review these measures again, in 18 months’ time, when the situation in our prisons will have stabilised. Throughout, this Government will be transparent. We will publish data on the number of offenders released on a quarterly basis, and we will publish an annual prison capacity statement, legislating to make this a statutory requirement.

When we implement this change, we will stop the end of custody supervised licence scheme introduced by the last Government, which operated under a veil of secrecy. From the Opposition Benches, I was forced to demand more information about who was being released and what crimes they had committed. This Government have now released that data, showing that over 10,000 offenders were released early, often with very little warning to probation officers, placing them under enormous strain. This was only ever a short-term fix. It was one of a series of decisions this Government believe must be examined more fully, which is why we are announcing a review into how this capacity crisis was allowed to happen and why the necessary decisions were not taken at critical moments.

The measures I have set out today are not a silver bullet. The capacity crisis will not disappear immediately, and these measures will take time to take effect. But when they do, they will give us the time to address the prisons crisis, not just today but for years to come. This includes accelerating the prison building programme to ensure we have the cells we need. Later this year, we will publish a ten-year capacity strategy. That strategy will outline the steps that the Government will take to acquire land for new prison sites, and will classify prisons as being of national importance, placing decision making in Ministers’ hands. The Government are also committed to longer-term reform and cutting reoffending.

Too often, our prisons create better criminals, not better citizens, and nearly 80% of offending is reoffending, all at immense cost to communities and the taxpayer. As Lord Chancellor, my priority is to drive down that number. To do that, the Government will strengthen probation, starting with the recruitment of at least 1,000 new trainee probation officers by the end of March 2025. We will work with prisons to improve offenders’ access to learning and other training, as well as bringing together prison governors, local employers and the voluntary sector to get ex-offenders into work. We know that if an offender has a job within a year of release, they are less likely to reoffend. It is only by driving down reoffending that we will find a sustainable solution to the prisons crisis.



[*Shabana Mahmood*]

In a speech last week, I called the previous occupants of Downing Street “the guilty men”. I did not use that analogy flippantly. I believe that they placed the country in grave danger. Their legacy is a prison system in crisis, moments from catastrophic disaster. It was only by pure luck, and the heroic efforts of prison and probation staff, that disaster did not strike while they were in office. The legacy of this Government will be different. We will see a prison system brought under control; a probation service that keeps the public safe; enough prison places to meet our needs; and prisons, probation and other services working together to break the cycle of reoffending and so cut crime.

I never thought that I would have to announce the measures that I have set out today, but the scale of this emergency has forced this Government to act now, rather than delay any longer. This Government will always put the country and its safety first. I commend this statement to the House.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

11.1 am

**Edward Argar** (Melton and Syston) (Con): I am grateful to the Lord Chancellor for very timely advance sight of her statement. May I take this opportunity to congratulate her on her appointment, as well as the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones)? I congratulate the Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, the hon. Member for Swindon South (Heidi Alexander) on her return to this place. Notwithstanding the occasional tussle across the Dispatch Box, I look forward to working constructively with Lord Chancellor, and to holding her and the Government to account. She is of course a decent, courteous, and incredibly able person, and I wish her well in her role.

We recognise the challenges and pressures facing the prison and criminal justice system, and the need to ensure that our prisons function effectively. Of course, the Government were well aware of those things when they were in opposition, as I know from challenging oral question sessions. In Government, we took the right decisions to significantly toughen up sentences for those who commit the worst crimes, in order to ensure that society was protected. To reflect that, we set in train the biggest prison building programme since the Victorian era. More than 13,000 additional prison places were delivered while we were in government. Two new prisons opened; one prison is under construction; there are two prisons with planning permission; and one prison is on the cusp of a decision. Labour’s planning permission proposal for prisons would not impact any of those developments. In that respect, it is simply a gimmick.

Crucially, in the covid pandemic, supported by the then Opposition, we made the tough but correct decision not to mass-release prisoners as other countries did, and we maintained that bedrock of our justice system, trial by jury. Those correct decisions meant less space, and the number of people on remand waiting for trial or sentencing dramatically increasing from around 9,000 to 16,500, with resulting additional pressures.

In deciding to reduce capacity pressure, the paramount consideration for the Lord Chancellor must always be public protection. With that in mind, although we will of course have to scrutinise the detail of her proposed sentence reduction scheme, I must say that we have significant public protection concerns about what she has announced so far, and I hope that she will be able to address those concerns today.

The Lord Chancellor set out plans for limited exclusions relating to domestic abuse, but can she confirm that if a domestic abuser is convicted of, say, common assault, as is often the case, they would not be exempt from this policy? What exclusions does she plan to put in place to ensure that the worst, persistent, repeat offenders cannot benefit from this scheme? She set out that this was a temporary measure that will be reviewed after 18 months. What criteria will she set for its ending? Better still, will she commit to sunsetting the measure in the delegated legislation, and to returning to the House on this afresh in 18 months, if needed?

What additional resources are being made available to probation? We hear what the Lord Chancellor says about getting 1,000 more trainee probation staff by March 2025, but how many of those will actually be new? How many will be additional to those whom we already planned to have in place through the existing trajectory for new trainees? Can she guarantee that no prisoners will benefit from her early release scheme without GPS tags and strict conditions? Indeed, will she mandate the imposition of GPS tracking? Can she confirm to the House progress on bringing HMP Dartmoor’s places back into use, and her long-term plans for HMP Dartmoor’s places? The previous Government committed £30 million to acquire land for building new prisons, and had already begun drawing up a site longlist. Is she expanding that fund, or merely re-announcing the same thing?

More widely, the Lord Chancellor states that this is a temporary measure to ease pressure, so what are her long-term plans for meeting demand? Is she planning to scrap the tougher sentences for serious crimes that the Conservatives put in place to protect the public, and so to reverse our changes, or is she planning to build more prisons over and above the six that we committed to funding, to meet future demand? If it is the latter, has the Chancellor agreed the significant extra funding needed? Those are the long-term questions to which she and the Government owe this House and the public answers, given the changes that she is making today. I hope that she will be able to give clear answers.

**Shabana Mahmood:** I welcome the shadow Lord Chancellor to his place; we have always worked constructively together wherever appropriate, and I look forward to continuing to do so while he is in post. He made a heroic attempt to gloss over many years of failure in planning by the previous Government. I was surprised that he managed to say it all with a straight face. He knows full well that for many years the previous Government struggled to get such measures past many of their Back-Benchers, not all of whom have returned post the general election, but some of whom remain here, and remain implacable opponents of any kind of planning developments in their constituency. They think that national infrastructure is a good thing as long as it is elsewhere. I look forward to seeing whether there is a



change of heart among those on the Opposition Benches. It would be welcome, because this Government will not allow the planning system to prevent our country from having either the prison places or the national infrastructure that we so desperately need. He also knows full well that of the 20,000 places that were supposed to have been provided by the previous Government by 2025, only 6,000 have been delivered.

I am concerned about the position relating to prisoners on remand. The shadow Lord Chancellor rightly notes that the number of those on remand in our prison estate is around 16,000. Of course, judges need to be able to remand people to prison for public protection reasons. That will not change. He will know, given his former role in the Department, that there are no immediate solutions, because many of those individuals will in the end be sentenced to custody. I am considering all options available to me for driving that number down as much as possible. In the end, we will need our 10-year capacity plan to take account of what we expect the sentenced population to look like.

On the sentences that are covered by this measure, the shadow Lord Chancellor will know that in order to make a change by means of a statutory instrument, it has to relate to specific offences. That is why we have taken every precaution and every option available to us to exclude sentences connected to domestic abuse. He knows that those will include—I am sure that he has seen the draft statutory instrument—offences related to the breaching of a non-molestation order; stalking, which I mentioned in my statement, including stalking involving the fear of violence, serious alarm or distress; strangulation or suffocation; controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship; the breaching of a restraining order; and a breach of a domestic abuse protection order. The common offences that we know are connected to domestic abuse are caught in the statutory instrument. On multiple and repeat offences, he will know that the decision relies on the combination that is reviewed when the sentencing calculation is done.

As I said in my statement, I will return in 18 months to update the House. We want to remove this temporary measure as quickly as possible, and we will be transparent throughout. The shadow Lord Chancellor will not need to chase me around this building trying to find out what is happening, as I had to when I was in his position and we were considering the previous Government's early release scheme. We will be transparent in a way that the previous Government simply were not. We will do a quarterly release of all the data, and we will update the House regularly.

I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman followed the announcement on Friday closely, so he will know that the announcement on probation does not involve new money. It is a re-prioritisation of resources, because strengthening probation to make sure that it is in the strongest possible position to deal with the early release scheme is incredibly important to us.

On Dartmoor, the right hon. Gentleman knows the history very well. Safety is our No. 1 priority, and after close monitoring of the situation at HMP Dartmoor, it has been decided that prison will be temporarily closed. I will update the House as the situation develops. I say to him gently that we have committed to a 10-year capacity strategy. We recognise that we need to make

sure that this country has the prison places that it needs. We will deliver where the previous Government failed, and we will never allow the planning process to get in the way of having the prisons that we need in this country.

Longer term, however, we will also look at driving down reoffending, because the entrenched cycle of reoffending creates more victims and more crime, and it has big impacts on our ability to have the capacity that we need in our prison estate. That is why this Government will make it a key priority to drive down reoffending. That is a strategy for creating better citizens, not better criminals. It is a strategy for cutting crime, and in the long term, it will deal with our capacity problems for years to come.

**Bambos Charalambous** (Southgate and Wood Green) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend to her place on the Government Front Bench. The imprisonment for public protection population is more than 2,700; 99% of those people are over tariff, and more than 700 prisoners are now 10 years over their original tariff. Can she accelerate the Ministry of Justice's refreshed IPP action plan to help to reduce the prison population and right that wrong?

**Shabana Mahmood**: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. The situation with IPP prisoners is of great concern, and I know that huge numbers of Members on both sides of this House care about it deeply. I share that concern. IPP prisoners are not caught in the changes that we are putting forward; those are indeterminate sentences, not standard determinate sentences. We supported the previous Government in what we thought were sensible changes to the licence period and the action plan, and we will continue that work. However, any changes made have to account for public protection risks, first and foremost. We want to make progress with that cohort of prisoners, but not in a way that impacts public protection.

**Mr Speaker**: I call the Lib Dem spokesperson.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I also welcome the Lord Chancellor to her new position, and thank her for advance sight of her statement.

It has been apparent for months that measures of this sort would be necessary. These are described as temporary measures, but 18 months is a very long time for temporary measures. There would be a real danger of damaging public confidence in our criminal system if the measures were to be extended beyond that point.

The answer surely has to be more than just building more prison capacity. The problem is not that our prison estate is too small; it is that we send too many people to prison, and that the time they spend there does nothing to tackle the problems of drug and alcohol dependency, poor literacy and numeracy skills, and poor mental health, which led to their incarceration. Can we hope to hear in the very near future the Government's comprehensive plan to tackle the issue of the time that people spend in prison?

Finally, may I bring to the Lord Chancellor's attention the report published this morning by His Majesty's inspectorate of probation on the failings of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough probation delivery

[Mr Alistair Carmichael]

unit? That report outlined that our duty of care to those whom we lock up should not end the day they leave custody. When will we have a response to that report?

**Shabana Mahmood:** I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his place. On the 18-month period, we have inherited a criminal justice system in complete crisis and at risk of total breakdown and collapse. It will take some time, by necessity, for us to be able to put that right. I do not want to mislead the public that somehow these changes will have a quick effect. The system is in dire straits and it will take time to repair it. It is right that we are up front and honest about that time, and I will update the House regularly.

As I say, this Government's approach will be very different from that of the last Government. We will have a regular release of data, and I anticipate that I will regularly appear before Members to talk about that data, but I welcome that opportunity because it is important that the public are kept updated, and that their representatives in this place are able to scrutinise what is happening and hold us to account. We will need time for the measures to take effect to enable us to move the system to a position of greater health.

In terms of who goes to prison, why and for how long, when we have overcrowded prisons, there is no capacity to do much other than hold people in their cells. The activity that we know is important to help people in the prison system to turn their lives around, come out as better citizens and make better choices, having made amends to society, cannot happen in deeply overcrowded prisons. That is why dealing with the capacity crisis is so necessary not just to prevent the collapse of the criminal justice system but to cut reoffending in the long term. Creating some space will allow us to introduce proposals to bring down reoffending rates in the country.

On probation, I pay tribute to all probation staff for their tremendous work. My first visit in my new role was to meet probation staff in Bedfordshire. I recognise that they have been working in a system and a service under extreme strain and facing real difficulty. That is why we will onboard 1,000 new trainee probation officers before March 2025 to add extra capacity, and why returning the probation system to health will be a key priority for this Government.

**John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I declare a non-pecuniary interest: I am an honorary life member of the Prison Officers' Association.

In seeking to be fair, as she always is, my right hon. Friend is being too kind on the last Government. They brought about a staffing crisis in our prisons that has brought rehabilitation to an end and levels of violence that we have never seen before. Will she bring forward as soon as possible a workforce strategy for our prisons and probation? As a matter of urgency, will she look in particular at Feltham young offenders institution, which has become a violent emergency for staff and for prisoners themselves?

**Shabana Mahmood:** My right hon. Friend is right. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all the staff in our prisons, who do an excellent job under very difficult circumstances. He is right to acknowledge that the

levels of violence in our prisons have been increasing, placing those staff at ever greater risk. This is similar to the question that I just answered on probation. When prisons are so badly overcrowded, it is incredibly difficult to run any kind of regime that can do good work on rehabilitation, or provide a safe atmosphere for the staff who work in them.

I will, of course, have conversations in the usual way when it comes to discussions about the spending review and other measures that the Chancellor will bring forward. I hope that I need not tell my right hon. Friend that I will bat hard for our Department and the people I represent. That will all happen in the usual way. We are committed to publishing our 10-year capacity strategy as quickly as possible so that we can begin the process of returning our system to some sort of health. I thank him for raising Feltham; I will look at that and write to him.

**Greg Smith** (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): I listened very carefully to the Lord Chancellor's comments about Members present and past who had legitimate concerns about new-build prison proposals in their constituencies. She will no doubt be aware of the proposals for a new mega-prison in Buckinghamshire on farmland adjacent to HMP Spring Hill and HMP Grendon. Those proposals are deeply unpopular in my constituency, first, on fairness grounds—they are affecting communities just one mile from the construction of HS2, which are already under siege from big construction—and, secondly, because the prisons in Buckinghamshire cannot recruit to the vacancies that they already have. Fully staffing a brand new prison is just not going to happen, so I ask the new Lord Chancellor to do my constituents the courtesy of sitting down with me so that she can hear why this particular proposal just will not work.

**Shabana Mahmood:** I thank the hon. Member for his question. May I gently say that this is part of the problem? I am not going to get into the specifics of his particular constituency or those particular planning proposals—those proposals are already within the planning system, as the shadow Lord Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Melton and Syston (Edward Argar), alluded to in his remarks—but prisons have to be built in this country. We have to do more building, we have to do it more quickly, and we have rightly said that we will always treat prisons as of national importance. That was actually a change brought in by the previous Government to unlock the delays that they had faced for many years, particularly when concerns were raised by their own Members of Parliament.

We take too long to build any kind of infrastructure in this country. That will not be the approach of this Government, so while I am very happy to consider any proposals that any Members of this House have about specifics in their constituency, the reality is that prisons will always be deemed by this Government to be of national importance, and they will be built.

**Emily Darlington** (Milton Keynes Central) (Lab): First, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her new post, and thank her for reassuring us that this scheme will not apply to sexual violence, domestic abuse and stalking—that will really reassure survivors in my constituency. Will she review how the scheme will affect

those with learning disabilities who are in prison without support, and ensure that there is good communication with local councils on the housing of ex-offenders, with early notification that is not on a Friday afternoon?

**Shabana Mahmood:** I welcome my hon. Friend to her place. This change is designed in part to allow probation to do the job that it would normally do when it comes to prisoner releases on licence. We will have an eight-week implementation period; that is one of the big differences between this scheme and the previous Government's end-of-custody supervised licensing scheme, which was pretty chaotic and opaque. Things moved very quickly, not allowing probation the time to do its job. I am not going to pretend that the eight weeks is ideal, but it is better than where we might have been: it allows the sentencing calculations to be redone and some planning to then happen in the normal way, so that we can make sure that, when those people are released into the community, they have a proper release plan in place. Once we are into the prospective element of the change, I believe that the process will be much smoother, and probation will be able to do a much more effective job of managing those prisoners as they are released into the community.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr iawn, Llywydd. The Secretary of State is entirely correct to say that prisons are in crisis: they have been in crisis for years, and reform is urgently necessary. It is evident that there are many people in prison who should not be there, but that is the only place that they can be—people for whom community-based prevention and rehabilitation would be way better. The last Government promised us a women's residential centre based in Swansea, but according to an answer to my written parliamentary question earlier this year, delays and uncertainty over planning saw that proposal sidelined. Will the new Labour Government commit to succeed where the last Government so obviously and appallingly failed and facilitate the establishment of a women's residential centre in Wales, where we have no women's prison?

**Shabana Mahmood:** I thank the right hon. Member—that is a very compelling bit of lobbying from her. May I offer to meet with her, so that we can discuss this issue in person?

**Ruth Jones** (Newport West and Islwyn) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State and her team to their places. Can the Secretary of State comment on what was reported in *The Guardian* earlier this week? Apparently, the former director general for propriety and ethics wrote to the previous Prime Minister telling him that a failure to act on the prison crisis would bring the criminal justice system to a point of "critical failure". Does she agree that, if this is true, that is an enormous dereliction of duty by the Conservatives?

**Shabana Mahmood:** I thank my hon. Friend. I did read those reports in *The Guardian*. Of course, none of us has had sight of any of those papers. If those reports are true, it is very worrying indeed. As I said in my opening remarks, I did not use the phrase "the guilty men" lightly when I spoke about the crisis we have inherited and the change we are being forced to make. I believe it was a serious dereliction of duty by the

previous Government. I could hardly believe the state of the prison system that I inherited, and I think we have been forced to make the changes that we have because of that failure.

**Dr Kieran Mullan** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I welcome the Lord Chancellor to her post. I just want to push her slightly on the description of this scheme as a temporary scheme. Whatever she may say, the legislative impact of what the Government are doing will be a permanent change. If she wants to be subject to scrutiny and to have a temporary scheme, there is absolutely no reason why she cannot sunset the legislation to be a genuinely temporary change, and come back later if she thinks she needs to reintroduce it. That is a way to welcome scrutiny and be true to what she says about its being a temporary scheme.

**Shabana Mahmood:** It is a temporary scheme. We will revert to the usual 50% level as quickly as possible. I think 18 months is the right period for me to return to this House. The hon. Member will have many opportunities to scrutinise these changes because this Government will be different from the previous Government, because we will be transparent all the way through. I anticipate many moments in this House when I will be challenged. It is a temporary change. It will always be a temporary change.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I have had many constituents placed in prison because of failed mental health services, when the crisis team does not turn up and there is no capacity in secure accommodation. Will the Secretary of State have urgent discussions with the Secretary of State for Health to make an assessment of those people who should be in mental health services rather than in the criminal justice system?

**Shabana Mahmood:** My hon. Friend is right that we have broad failure across many of our public services, including within the health service. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has said, we have inherited an NHS that is "broken". I will have conversations with him on the matter that she raises, but it is important, as we try to return the prison system to health, that we do so in conjunction with the other public services that we know are crucial to the proper functioning of the criminal justice service.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Can I welcome the Lord Chancellor to her place and wish her well in the very important role she now has? It is imperative that, when a judge sentences a criminal, consideration of fulfilling justice prevails more than consideration of spaces in prison. How will the Lord Chancellor address the difficulties to ensure that justice and serving an appropriate sentence will remain the focus? The logistics of that can then be dealt with.

**Shabana Mahmood:** The hon. Member is right. In the end, individual sentencing decisions are for judges. They have discretion to apply the law as they see fit in the circumstances of the cases in front of them, and nothing that we have decided changes that picture. More broadly, we will have a sentencing review—it is something we committed to in our manifesto, and I will say more



[*Shabana Mahmood*]

about that later in the year—to make sure that all our sentencing is consistent and coherent, and that our sentences do actually work, which is what they are meant to do.

**Paula Barker** (Liverpool Wavertree) (Lab): I welcome the Lord Chancellor to her place. She has certainly hit the ground running in a very difficult backdrop from the previous Government. We know only too well that, often, prisoners are released on Friday afternoon, with little or no access to statutory services, and they become homeless. What assurances can she give the House that this has been thought through, and the unintended consequence of this decision will not be extending the homelessness crisis?

**Shabana Mahmood:** The implementation period that we have put forward in our proposals will allow the probation service time to prepare. As I have said before, that is different from the early release scheme brought forward by the previous Government; it will allow the probation service to do its job and ensure that there is a proper plan for all releases into the community so that they are successful releases. I am sure that my hon. Friend will know about the community accommodation service, which provides transitional accommodation for up to 84 nights for those who are at risk of leaving prison homeless. That will continue. The previous Government scheme released prisoners with little or no warning. This scheme is different. It gives probation time to prepare and should hopefully iron out some of the previous problems.

**Derek Twigg** (Widnes and Halewood) (Lab): I congratulate the Lord Chancellor on her appointment.

As has been mentioned, reoffending has been a major problem. Drug and alcohol rehabilitation services are at a premium and need looking at, but another key factor is ensuring that when prisoners leave prison, they get a job. What work is being done to ensure that there are more employment opportunities for those who are leaving prison?

**Shabana Mahmood:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As I said earlier, employment is crucial, because we know that if those who leave prison are in work within a year of leaving prison, they are much less likely to reoffend. That is why one of our manifesto commitments was setting up employment councils in our prisons—bringing together prison governors and local employers to make sure we are doing everything we can to drive down rates of reoffending. We will have more to say on that in the coming weeks and months.

**Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): I associate myself with the comments of the right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts), because the women's residential centre she speaks of happens to be in my constituency.

The Lord Chancellor will be very aware of the current issues in Parc prison, Bridgend. I pay tribute to the very hard work of my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Chris Elmore) and to the previous Welsh Affairs Committee. The previous Government blamed the local

culture of the community for the issues that were arising in Bridgend; I certainly find that insulting. There is also an issue regarding staff there, and the intimidation that they and their families have faced. Will the Lord Chancellor reinforce and support those in the Prison and Probation Service who work in Parc prison, Bridgend, and work—particularly with my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend—to ensure that the culture in the prison changes and people are safe?

**Shabana Mahmood:** I would be happy to meet both my hon. Friend and the right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts)—individually or together—to talk about the women's prison, and to write to them on that point.

In relation to Parc, I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Chris Elmore). I would be happy to work with him and other hon. Members with an interest. I am deeply concerned about the situation at Parc prison, and pay tribute to the staff who work there. As I have said many times, I am in absolute awe of the efforts made by staff across the Prison and Probation Service, who keep our system—a system which has been in dire straits—going under extreme pressure. I will happily meet hon. Members to discuss Parc, but it is a situation that I am already monitoring closely.

**Kim Johnson** (Liverpool Riverside) (Lab): I congratulate the Lord Chancellor on her new position; I am sure she is going to do an amazing job.

The law on joint enterprise needs urgent review. Thousands of young black men are incarcerated for long prison terms for crimes they have not committed. Will my right hon. Friend state how and when she is looking to undertake a review of that law?

**Shabana Mahmood:** Of course, joint enterprise is not related to the changes we are making today, but I know that it is an issue of real concern and interest for my hon. Friend and other Members across the House. As I understand it, the Crown Prosecution Service is already reviewing the evidence. It is right for that to conclude before the new Government set out any measures, but I will be engaging closely with the CPS on its review.

**Ben Goldsborough** (South Norfolk) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and those on the Front Bench on their appointments.

We in Norfolk are lucky to have, in Sarah Taylor, a police and crime commissioner who is standing up with integrity and honesty, just like our new Government, and being open. What work will the Secretary of State be undertaking to ensure that police and crime commissioners in Norfolk and around the country are being supported in the work they need to do?

**Shabana Mahmood:** Police and crime commissioners are crucial to helping us to manage the current crisis and as we move the system to some health, hopefully sooner rather than later. I had meetings with many police and crime commissioners while in opposition. I have already met the lead representative for the PCCs on the Criminal Justice Board, and that has already met to talk about how we make these changes in the safest possible way. I will continue engaging in that way.



**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes) (Lab): I welcome the Lord Chancellor and her team to their places on the Front Bench.

Further to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous), is expanding this scheme to include unfair indeterminate sentences not worth further consideration? That would provide an additional 2,700 potential early releases.

**Shabana Mahmood:** I welcome my hon. Friend back to her place. I am well aware of the issues around indeterminate sentences for public protection. I know that matter is of great interest to Members, as it was to me as a constituency Member of Parliament. I know this territory well. It would not be appropriate to make changes in relation to IPP prisoners, because there is a different order of public protection risk. I am determined to make more progress on IPP prisoners. As I say, we will build on the work done by the previous Government. We worked constructively with the previous Administration on sensible changes that could be made in the safest possible way for the public. Those changes were on the licence period and the action plan, which we will crack on with as a new Government. Any changes that we make to the regime for that type of sentence, which has been rightly abolished, must be done while balancing the public protection risk, which we would never take lightly.

## Clean Energy Superpower Mission

**Mr Speaker:** Before I call the Secretary of State, I note that there is disappointment from the Opposition that the statement was not provided in time. The statement was not provided to my office in time either. I know we want to set off in the right way. I am sure that the officials will make note when they arrive that we need to make sure that statements are provided on time. That was meant to be four minutes past the hour. I am sure that the Secretary of State will want to ensure that it never happens again.

11.37 am

**The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Edward Miliband):** With permission, I would like to make a statement about the Government's mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower. This Government were elected two weeks ago. Since then, we have lifted the onshore wind ban in England, which had been in place since 2015; consented more than 1.3 GW of solar projects, powering the equivalent of almost 400,000 homes; established the 2030 mission control centre in my Department under Chris Stark to plan and deliver our mission; and established under the Chancellor a national wealth fund to create good clean energy jobs across our country. We are just getting started.

We are moving at this pace for one overriding reason: the urgency of the challenges we face. We have the challenge of our energy insecurity, laid bare by Putin's invasion of Ukraine and paid for by the British people in the worst cost of living crisis in generations. We have the challenge of an economy that does not work for working people, with too few good jobs at decent wages. We have the challenge of the climate crisis—not a future threat, but a present reality. This Government have a driving philosophy: homegrown clean energy can help us tackle all those challenges, including crucially energy security. Today the Climate Change Committee publishes its progress report to Parliament. I thank the interim chair Piers Forster and the interim chief executive James Richardson for their excellent work.

The Committee says in its report:

“British-based renewable energy is the cheapest and fastest way to reduce vulnerability to volatile global fossil fuel markets. The faster we get off fossil fuels, the more secure we become.”

It is right. That is why making Britain a clean energy superpower is one of the five missions of this Government, delivering clean power by 2030 and accelerating to net zero across the economy.

Today, the committee's report also lays bare the truth about the last Government. Despite achievements, which I am happy to acknowledge, the report is coruscating about the lurch of recent years. It says that

“last year...the previous Government signalled a slowing of pace and reversed or delayed key policies.”

It goes on:

“the...announcements were given with the justification that they will make the transition more affordable for people, but with no evidence backing this claim.”

It concludes that

“the country is not on track”

to hit our 2030 international target of 68% emissions reductions. Indeed, it says:

[Edward Miliband]

“Our assessment is that only a third of the emissions reductions required...are currently covered by credible plans.”

That is our inheritance for a target to be achieved in just five years.

I will respond formally to the committee in the autumn and, as part of that, I have asked my Department to provide me with a thorough analysis of its findings, but I can tell the House today that we will hold fast to our 2030 clean power mission and our nationally determined contribution, because it is the right thing to do for our country.

Today, I set out our next steps. First, onshore wind is one of the cheapest sources of power that we have. To those in the House who claimed they were protecting communities with the onshore wind ban, let us be clear: they have undermined our energy security and set back the fight against the climate crisis. That is why in the first 72 hours of this Government we lifted the ban, which today I confirm formally to the House. Under the onshore wind ban, the pipeline of projects in England shrank by 90%.

Over a year ago, the last Government’s net zero tsar Chris Skidmore, whom I pay tribute to, made a recommendation of an onshore wind taskforce to drive forward projects. The last Government ignored it; we will implement it. The taskforce will work with developers to rebuild the pipeline of projects.

Secondly, solar power is among the cheapest forms of power that we have. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and I are determined that we have a rooftop revolution. We must use the rooftops of our country for solar far better than we do at the moment. That is why the Deputy Prime Minister and I are clear that rooftop solar should play an important role, where appropriate, as part of the future standards for homes and buildings. The solar road map—we have been waiting for it for 18 months—will be published soon, with greater ambition. I have reconvened the solar taskforce to deliver that objective.

As we face up to the challenge of the energy transition, we must also plan for how we use land in this country to ensure a proper balance between food security, nature preservation and clean energy. After dither and delay under the previous Government, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Secretary will publish a land use framework working in tandem with our spatial energy plan.

I also assure the House that communities will continue to have a say on any proposals in their area. It is important for this Government that where communities host clean energy infrastructure, they should directly benefit from it. But we will not carry on with a position where the clean energy we need does not get built and the British people pay the price.

Credible external estimates suggest that ground-mounted solar used just 0.1% of our land in 2022. The biggest threat to nature and food security and to our rural communities is not solar panels or onshore wind; it is the climate crisis, which threatens our best farmland, food production and the livelihoods of farmers. The Government will proceed not on the basis of myth and false information, but on evidence. Every time, the previous Government ducked, delayed and denied the

difficult decisions needed for clean energy, that made us less secure, raised bills and undermined climate action. No more.

Thirdly, offshore wind will be the backbone of our clean energy mission. Allocation round 5, overseen by the last Government, was a catastrophe for the industry, with no offshore wind contracts awarded. The upcoming round is a critical test. We will get this crucial industry back on its feet. By the beginning of August, I will report back on the budget for AR6 to ensure that as much clean, home-grown energy as possible gets built while ensuring value for money.

Our fourth step is the Great British Energy Bill announced in the Gracious Speech. I am extremely proud that this is the first Bill for decades that will enable us to establish a UK-wide publicly owned energy generation company. The truth is that there is already widespread public ownership of energy in Britain, but by foreign Governments. We have offshore wind farms in the UK owned by the Governments of Denmark, France, Norway and Sweden through state-owned companies. Those Governments know that a publicly owned national champion is part of a modern industrial strategy and generates a return for taxpayers, crowding in, not crowding out, private investment. For too long, Britain has opted out and lost out. Today, we say: no more.

Great British Energy, headquartered in Scotland, will invest in home-grown clean energy to increase our energy independence, create good jobs with strong trade unions and tackle the climate crisis. It will invest in technologies such as nuclear, offshore wind, tidal, hydrogen and carbon capture, and ensure a just transition for our oil and gas communities. GB Energy will also oversee the biggest expansion of community energy in British history through our local power plan. The Government believe in the ownership of British assets by the British people, for the benefit of the British people. Following the people’s verdict at the general election, I hope that this is a patriotic mission that the whole House can get behind.

I have seen 19 years of debates on climate and energy in this House. The clean energy transition represents the biggest transformation of our economy for 200 years, and it is massively challenging. We have been at our best as a country, and as a House, when we have worked together for the sake of the national interest. I pay tribute to people of all parties who have been champions of this agenda over the past 14 years: Baroness May, who legislated for net zero; the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey), who oversaw the growth of offshore wind; Caroline Lucas; and on the Labour Benches, my friend Alan Whitehead.

One of my early decisions was to re-establish the role of the Secretary of State as the lead climate negotiator in my Department, because we can only protect future generations with strong action at home and leadership abroad. Next week in London I will host the President of this year’s COP29 in Azerbaijan. He will be joined by the Presidents of COP28 and COP30. I have invited the President of COP 26, Lord Sharma, who presided with such distinction, to join our discussions. This is a sign of how I intend to go on—working with people of all parties and none in this national endeavour. That is what the British people have a right to expect of us. As the Prime Minister rightly says, “Country first, party

second.” That is more true on this issue than any other. This Government will act at pace and work with anyone who shares our mission. I commend this statement to the House.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Secretary of State.

11.46 am

**Claire Coutinho** (East Surrey) (Con): I would like to put on the record my disappointment not to get the statement in good time. I know that the right hon. Gentleman will want to provide us with the same courtesy that we tried to provide him when we were in government. That being said, I congratulate him on his return to government. I was sad not to see more of him during the election campaign, particularly because our ability to secure enough cheap energy will be crucial to this nation’s success in the decades ahead. I would also like to put on record my thanks to the officials he will now work with.

I wish the right hon. Gentleman well in his endeavour, but energy will be this Government’s big test. They talk a good game on growth, but the Secretary of State’s energy policy is their greatest liability. In government, we built more offshore wind than any other country bar China. We set out the largest expansion of nuclear power in 70 years. We said that, yes, we will need oil and gas in the decades ahead, as the Climate Change Committee has said, and we should use British oil and gas where needed. We are in a global race for energy, and demand will be higher in the years ahead because of data and artificial intelligence.

If the right hon. Gentleman’s plans to decarbonise the grid by 2030 are in place, we need to know what they will do to people’s energy bills, our energy security and our reliance on the current dominant player for cables, batteries and critical minerals—China. He is happy to quote the Climate Change Committee, but it also acknowledged that we will need oil and gas well into 2050. He must answer: where would he like that to come from?

When it comes to quotes, he should consider some from the business world who have commented on his policy, such as the chief executive of Mitsubishi Power, who said that his plans would require a “huge sacrifice” by the country, citing the costs of the Secretary of State’s approach. The chief executive of Ineos said that his approach to energy was “absurd”, leaving us dependent on imports of foreign fuels with higher emissions and doing nothing for the climate. Even the GMB said that his plans were “unviable” and would lead to power cuts, blackouts and enormous cost. Unite has said that the Government’s plans for the North sea would turn oil and gas workers into the coalminers of their generation.

The right hon. Gentleman must answer why he would like to import gas with much higher emissions. How many jobs will be lost from his plans? How much investment into the new technologies of the future, such as hydrogen, carbon capture and offshore wind, will be lost? Will he meet those workers and explain to them what will happen to their livelihoods?

During the election, the right hon. Gentleman claimed that he would lower bills and save families £300. However, those numbers are already in the savings, and no one on his side can set out the cost of his plans to decarbonise

the grid by 2030. Who will pay for those network costs? What will they do to people’s standing charges, which were already too high?

The right hon. Gentleman also, I think, commented on having a say in terms of communities. The energy infrastructure he will need, and the fact that he wants to go further and faster, will have a huge impact on rural communities. Their concerns must be addressed. As I set out, the plans for our energy cannot come at the expense of our food or national security.

In his statement, the right hon. Gentleman accused me of dither, but as he will know from his officials, in at least one of the cases he has signed off I had already instructed some time ago that I was minded to reject it, and that paperwork was being prepared. He must set out urgently what his criteria will be. In one case, he overturned an expert examining authority. In another case, he signed off a solar farm which will be 40% on our best and most versatile agricultural land. Did he know that was the case? If so, what was his basis for finding that acceptable? Will he continue our efforts to build more solar on rooftops? I think he mentioned that he would reconvene the solar taskforce. I hate to tell him, but it had never been disbanded and we were due to publish that work. So, I would like to know what date he will be able to publish that work.

In conclusion, the Secretary of State’s party won the election and promised change, but he was not on show during that campaign to answer these critical questions of how he was going to provide that change and what it will mean for the country. What will his plans mean for the price of electricity? What will they mean for our ability to keep the lights on? What will they mean for struggling families’ bills, for our economy, and for the livelihoods of oil and gas workers? What will they mean for our reliance on China? For all that the Labour Government talk about growth, they will not be able to deliver on that with the Secretary of State’s plans for energy. I hope that in the months ahead he will set out some of that detail to be examined.

**Edward Miliband:** May I start by congratulating the right hon. Lady on her recent engagement? I wish her and her fiancé all the best for the future. We may disagree on some issues, but I believe this Government and the right hon. Lady can at least share a belief in long honeymoons. [*Laughter.*]

On the right hon. Lady’s response, I have to say that I was disappointed. The lines were very, very familiar. That is because they were the lines she has used for the last year. And here she comes today to the House and repeats the lines as if the intervening meteorite has not hit the Conservative party: the worst election result in 200 years for her party. The truth, as sensible Conservatives know, is that the lurch she worked on a year ago with the former Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak), was an electoral disaster for the Conservative party—the lurch away from climate action. What we saw in her statement is the classic dilemma for the Conservative party, which we will see played out, I hope, for many long years of Opposition. The dilemma is do they go the Reform route to be climate deniers, or do they actually re-embrace climate—[*Interruption.*]



**Mr Speaker:** Order. Can I just say that I do not need any advice? I will decide whether it is a question. It is an answer, actually.

**Edward Miliband:** On the points the right hon. Lady made, there is a fundamental issue, which is that unless we drive for clean energy—this is what the Climate Change Committee said; I strongly recommend that right hon. and hon. Members read it—we will end up energy insecure. We had the worst cost of living crisis in generations because of our exposure to fossil fuels, both domestically and internationally, set and sold on the world market. Unless we drive for clean energy, we will end up paying more for energy. The House would not know that from what she said about our 2030 target. She had a target when she was in government of 95% clean power by 2030. Of course, targets did not matter for the previous Government, because they were always miles away from reaching them.

As for the North sea, we set out our manifesto position, which is not to issue licences to explore new fields but to keep existing fields for their lifetime. Here is the truth of the conversation that we must have. The fate of North sea oil and gas communities is defined by these questions. Do we drive forward the clean energy of the future? Have we a plan for carbon capture and storage? Have we a plan for hydrogen? Have we a plan for offshore wind? The Conservatives had no such plans, so we will take no lectures on just transitions from them.

The right hon. Lady had other lines that were a rehearsal of the election. Let me say this to her, on the solar question. She referred to one particular planning decision, and I do think she has a degree of brass neck. She criticised me for overturning the planning authority. I am in a quasi-judicial role, so I will be careful about what I say, but she had this in her Department for a year. She could have agreed with the planning authority and rejected the application, but she chose not to do so. That is the reality.

In my experience, when you lose a general election a period of reflection is in order, and I say to Conservative Members that they need to reflect long and hard on the signals that they sent in this election. Their climate lurch was a disaster—a disaster for them electorally, but, much more important to me, a disaster for the country. Under this Government, Britain is back, open for business and climate leadership.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): It is great to see you back in the Chair, Mr Speaker. It is also great to see the Secretary of State at the Dispatch Box on this side of the House again. I welcome what he said about the jobs, lower bills, energy security and climate action that lie at the heart of this Government's plans. That is very true in respect of the Liverpool city region, where offshore wind—as he said—will play an important and increasing role in our energy future, along with onshore wind, solar power, hydrogen, carbon capture and nuclear energy. However, we also have exciting plans for tidal energy in the region, and I hope he can confirm that it will form a part of what he wants to achieve through the plans that he has announced.

**Edward Miliband:** My hon. Friend has long been an eloquent advocate for the role that business can play in generating the clean energy of our future and generating prosperity. I can absolutely confirm that we want to

embrace the widest range of technologies. Obviously we must ensure that that gives value for money, but what I always say on these occasions is that the climate crisis and the energy security challenge are so big for us as a country that we must embrace every form of technology at our disposal, because that is the only way in which we will succeed.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. May I just gently say that these exchanges must finish at 1 pm? I hope we can help each other along the way, but first I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): I welcome the new Secretary of State to his place. I share his passion for climate action. Let me add, however, that next time he makes a statement we will need our copies in better time than was the case today.

There is no doubt that the best route to affordable energy is renewables, but under the former Government renewable projects faced long delays and costs have skyrocketed. Indeed, that Government's record on renewables was absolutely miserable. Our electricity demand is expected to double by 2050, and we must make upgrading our grid infrastructure a major priority. The Government will know that one of the biggest challenges will be to bring communities behind hosting the big infrastructure changes needed for the grid expansion, and to cope with the huge landscape transformation. How will they secure public consent?

As the Secretary of State said, to achieve our legally binding targets we also need a “rooftop solar revolution”, which will include introducing stronger incentives for households to install solar panels and ensuring a fair price for energy that they sell back to the grid. Will the Government work on those incentives with the Liberal Democrats?

We Liberal Democrats acknowledge the new approach taken by this new Government, and I look forward to working constructively with the Secretary of State to achieve our very ambitious targets.

**Edward Miliband:** May I welcome you to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker?

I welcome the hon. Lady's questions; we worked together on these issues when we were in opposition. Let me deal with her two substantive points. On the question of public consent, this is absolutely something that we need to do, and I see it in three ways. First, communities need a say. Secondly, communities need benefit. Communities are providing a service to the country when they host clean energy infrastructure, so there needs to be benefit for those communities. Thirdly, this is a debate that we will have to have, and I am afraid the last Government did not grasp the nettle on this issue.

We are going through a massive change in our economy. If we do not build the grid or roll out solar, we will be poorer as a country and we will absolutely expose ourselves to future cost of living crises. I look forward to receiving as much support as possible from the Liberal Democrats, and indeed from all Members of this House, in making the case to people. We have to go out and make the case, as I think happened in the 1950s when we will built the grid. If we do not make the case,

we will leave ourselves exposed as a country, and it is the British people who will pay the price. I completely concur with the hon. Lady on rooftop solar.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend back to his position on the Front Bench, and I particularly welcome his reference to hydrogen. I know he has been to visit ITM Power in my constituency. When will an announcement be made about the chosen two technologies to pursue with small modular reactors? Will he give an assurance that whichever firms are picked, they will have to ensure that a very high percentage of the SMRs are built in this country by UK firms, such as Sheffield Forgemasters in my constituency? That will create well-paid jobs as well as clean energy.

**Edward Miliband:** I definitely concur with what my hon. Friend says about ITM Power—an incredibly impressive company that I have visited. I also concur with him on the SMR programme. Our manifesto made it clear that we support new nuclear, including at Sizewell, and we also support the SMR programme. Part of our challenge is to examine the legacy left to us by the last Government, but he should be in no doubt about my absolute support for the SMR programme. It is important, and we will strive to keep to the timetable set out.

**Dame Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State to his role, but he has been quite political in his replies. I gently point out that in West Worcestershire, fewer people voted Labour in this election than in the last election or the one before. I wonder whether he has ever visited the beautiful landscapes of West Worcestershire. The Malvern hills and Bredon hill are some of the most treasured landscapes in our land. What parameters is he going to put around the building of pylons, wind farms and solar farms across that beautiful landscape?

**Edward Miliband:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question. As with any planning decisions, there are clear parameters in the legislation on the consultation that needs to take place with local communities. I gently point out to her that, nine years ago, the last Government banned onshore wind in England for some of the reasons that she set out. I thought that was a mistake at the time, and it turned out to be even more of a mistake than I thought, because it exposed us to energy insecurity. We have to make judgments as Members of this House. Given the scale of the climate crisis, the energy insecurity and the energy security threat that we face, do we believe that we need to build infrastructure? I happen to believe that we do—yes, with community consent; yes, with community benefit; and yes, with the planning rules that I have set out.

**Martin McCluskey** (Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West) (Lab): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his new position. He was lucky enough to visit my constituency during the election campaign and to visit the port of Greenock, where he saw the great potential that exists for Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West to contribute to the Government's clean energy mission. What plans does he have to ensure that every part of the country, including in Scotland, can make a contribution? What

message does he have for my constituents who are looking to the Government to make an investment in our ports and our marine assets?

**Edward Miliband:** My hon. Friend is an incredibly eloquent advocate for his port, which I was delighted to visit during the election campaign. He makes such an important point: for an island nation looking to take advantage—in terms of jobs as well as generation—of the opportunities of offshore wind, including floating offshore wind, our ports are a massively undervalued and under-invested asset. That is why in our manifesto we set out the largest public investment in ports since privatisation. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that it must involve the whole of our United Kingdom. Scotland has a special place in that, as it will become the new headquarters of GB Energy.

**Dr Kieran Mullan** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): In the last Parliament, I was lucky enough to be the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on deep geothermal. I felt that we made good progress in convincing the Government of its merits in helping the climate change transition. Will the new Secretary of State commit to a meeting with the REA—the Association for Renewable Energy and Clean Technology, which acts as the secretariat for the APPG—and me to see what more we can do to convince the new Government of the role that deep geothermal can play?

**Edward Miliband:** In the spirit that I spoke about in my statement, may I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his work on deep geothermal? It was an outstanding example of how Members of Parliament can advance the role that particular technologies can play. He is a most eloquent advocate for this technology. Among the many places I went during the election campaign, I had the chance to see deep geothermal in Cornwall, which also has the potential for lithium mining: it is a source of critical minerals. Between me and the new Minister for energy—the Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen (Michael Shanks), who is going to be a very busy man—we will make sure that we meet the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues to take forward this agenda.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Siobhain McDonagh):** In line with the Cornwall thread, I call Jayne Kirkham.

**Jayne Kirkham** (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): Cornish ports such as Falmouth, which the Secretary of State visited during the campaign, have well-advanced plans to reconfigure to service floating offshore wind in the Celtic sea. Cornish further education providers are keen to gear up to provide specialised courses to support the speedy growth of that industry so that young people in Cornwall have the opportunity to train for those high-skilled jobs of the future, but in the past they have struggled because of a lack of Government support. Will the Secretary of State please confirm that support will be available to ports, businesses and educational establishments in Cornwall, to enable them to plug into the vast opportunities opened up by floating offshore wind in the Celtic sea?

**Edward Miliband:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on her election. May I say that she is a great person to go out on a boat with and that I very much enjoyed our tour?

My hon. Friend makes such an important point about the Celtic sea and about the opportunity that we have. One of the decisions on my desk will be how we make sure that we advance floating wind technology and that we manufacture it in the UK. As Tim Pick, the offshore wind champion, often reminds me, the largest floating wind prototype is off the coast of Scotland, but it is not manufactured in the UK. We need to change that.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I call Llinos Medi.

**Llinos Medi (Ynys Môn) (PC):** Diolch, Dirprwy Lefarydd—thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Labour manifesto stated that building new nuclear power and small modular reactors will be important in developing new clean power, yet in the King's Speech yesterday there was not a single mention of nuclear power. Can the Secretary of State assure me that developing new nuclear power is still a priority of this Government? What are the specific plans for the Wylfa and Trawsfynydd sites in Wales?

**Edward Miliband:** I welcome the hon. Lady to her place. Great British Energy will of course have a strong interest in nuclear power, working with Great British Nuclear. It is very important for the future. This Government were very clear in our manifesto about the role that nuclear power—both large-scale nuclear and SMRs—can play. I know that the last Government purchased the site for Wylfa, and it is something that we will certainly be looking at.

**Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op):** I welcome my right hon. Friend to his place and congratulate him on his ambition. BioYorkshire is a project—a green new deal—to create 4,000 green-collar jobs and upskill 25,000 workers. It will also create hundreds of spin-offs and new start-up companies focused on chemicals, agriculture and a new generation of fuels. Will he ensure that his Department has early engagement with this green new deal for York and North Yorkshire? Will he ensure that that is part of his energy superpower for the future?

**Edward Miliband:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing this project to my attention. In a way, the questions from both sides of the House demonstrate the huge potential we have in this area, not just to tackle the climate crisis and energy insecurity but to create the good jobs of the future. I undertake that the Department will want to look closely at her project.

**Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con):** What assessment has the new Secretary of State made of the proposal to build an interconnector between Morocco and the UK to bring clean solar and wind energy that could potentially provide 8% of the UK's grid requirements?

**Edward Miliband:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question. I certainly took an interest in the project when I was in opposition. I have met Xlinks, the company involved. I need to be careful about what I say on these matters, as he will appreciate, but it is certainly a project that my Department will want to consider.

**Afzal Khan (Manchester Rusholme) (Lab):** I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. He has already shown more ambition and leadership on transitioning away from dirty energy in his 14 days in government than the Tories showed in 14 years. Does he agree that by making the UK a clean energy superpower, we will be able to tackle air pollution, which kills more than 100 people a year in Manchester alone?

**Edward Miliband:** That is the kind of question I like. My hon. Friend makes a serious and important point about air pollution, which is another reason why we need to move away from fossil fuels. In a sense, the tragedy of air pollution is that it is a silent killer. Tens of thousands of people a year die prematurely in our country as a result of air pollution. People would be out on the streets if it were any other issue but, because it is a silent killer, it is too little noticed. He is absolutely right that this is yet another reason why it is important that we act with speed and transition as fast as possible.

**Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con):** I am conscious that we do not have a register of interests at the moment so, for the Secretary of State's own protection, it might be helpful if he could tell the House whether he accepted any donations or otherwise during the election campaign that might be declarable.

I want to press the Secretary of State further on protecting the landscape. Eighty per cent of my constituency is in an area of outstanding natural beauty, now rebranded as a national landscape. Can he reassure me that, in their planning decisions, he and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government will respect the notion of protected landscapes? There is a series of solar farm applications in my constituency, some of which are either in or impinge on the area of outstanding natural beauty. The landscape is protected for a reason, and it is important that the Government respect those protections in planning law. I hope he can confirm that that will be the case.

**Edward Miliband:** On the right hon. Gentleman's first question, I am proud to have been supported by the GMB and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers during the election campaign. I think the sums are below the declarable limit, but I am very happy to put that on the record.

As a constituency MP, I understand local people's concerns about planning issues, and we have to take those concerns seriously. We know that not all planning applications are good, and that is the Government's position. At the same time, particularly in the light of what the National Infrastructure Commission has said, it is widely recognised that how the planning process works has delayed the clean energy we need and has made us poorer as a country. This Government are determined to change that.

**Brian Leishman (Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab):** I thank the Secretary of State for the constructive manner in which he and the Government have approached the vital issue of the Grangemouth refinery, which is crucial to life in my constituency. Can he confirm that the UK Government will be tenacious and resolute in seeking an industrial future for the Grangemouth site? Will he agree to meet me to discuss potential options for its future?



**Edward Miliband:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for being such an eloquent advocate for Grangemouth so early in his time as a Member of Parliament. His counsel, advice and work on this subject have been very important. I have had three conversations with my counterpart in the Scottish Government over the last two weeks, which is a sign of how we intend to continue. We will work across parties and across Government to do all we can. The future of Grangemouth really matters to this Government, and we will leave no stone unturned in working with the unions, the companies and the Scottish Government to do everything we can to secure a viable future for activity on the site and for the communities of Grangemouth.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): After the King's Speech and this statement, we still do not have a clue about what GB Energy will look like. The Government cannot even tell us where it will be placed, other than within the 30,000 square miles of Scotland. Greg Jackson, the boss of Octopus Energy, has said that if we reformed this absurd energy market through some form of regional pricing structure, everybody in the UK would have cheaper bills and Scotland would have the cheapest energy in Europe. Will the Secretary of State look at that and ensure that he delivers that prospect for everyone in these isles?

**Edward Miliband:** I am slightly disappointed but not surprised by the hon. Gentleman's tone. I would have thought that the Scottish National party would welcome a publicly owned energy generation company located in Scotland—my counterpart in the Scottish Government certainly welcomed it. Let us be absolutely clear that it will be a generator of energy. That is what companies such as Ørsted and Statkraft do. They own power in this country, and we will do the same. These are complex questions, and we definitely need fairness across the United Kingdom when it comes to energy prices. That is what this Government endeavour to deliver.

**Nadia Whittome** (Nottingham East) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his appointment and welcome him back to government.

My constituents, and indeed all our constituents, have suffered the worst cost of living crisis in generations, thanks to the Conservative party being in thrall to fossil fuel interests and failing to invest in renewables. Does the Secretary of State agree that we need a publicly owned domestic energy champion that can speed up our transition to green energy, reduce our reliance on volatile international gas markets and cut household bills at the same time?

**Edward Miliband:** My hon. Friend has been an incredibly eloquent advocate on these issues, including in the last Parliament. This is an important point for all parties in the House to reckon with. The energy insecurity case for action on clean energy is totally transformed from when I was Energy Secretary 15 years ago. Why? Partly because Russia's invasion of Ukraine reminds us of what exposure can look like, but it is also because we have seen a 90% fall in the cost of solar and a 70% fall in the cost of offshore wind over the last decade. The old argument that this energy will save us money in the long term but might cost more in the short term has changed. This is the cheapest, cleanest form of energy we can access.

**Nick Timothy** (West Suffolk) (Con): There were 1,360 submissions from interested parties against the Sunnica application in West Suffolk, and the technical report recommending against the application is 339 pages long. Has the Secretary of State visited the Sunnica site? How many hours did it take him to read all the submissions and evidence to make his own detailed technical and legal judgment to overrule them.

**Edward Miliband:** Anyone who knows me knows that I am a super-nerd. I take all of my responsibilities, particularly my quasi-judicial responsibilities, incredibly seriously, and I did in all the judgments I made.

**Alistair Strathern** (Hitchin) (Lab): My hon. Friends will find it nice referring to my right hon. Friend as the Secretary of State, and I thank him for his statement. His actions over the last few weeks underline the damaging inaction of the past 14 years. The CCC report out today confirms the true extent of the Tories' climate denialism and the way in which it has undermined our ability to deliver on so many important aspects of this agenda.

Does the Secretary of State agree that no less damaging than climate denialism is the climate delivery denialism to which Members in certain parts of this House are now starting to fall back? Can he confirm that this Government will not shy away from some of the tough choices that will have to be made to deliver not only the climate agenda that voters have supported but the energy security we desperately need?

**Edward Miliband:** I thank my hon. Friend for his important question. He draws attention to a fact in the Climate Change Committee report that is worth underlining: we have an internationally set, nationally determined contribution of 68% reductions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. However, the Climate Change Committee said this morning that only a third of the emissions reductions required are covered by credible plans—that is the legacy we have been left. I am determined that we meet those targets, which is why we have to speed up and act in a way that the last Government did not.

My hon. Friend is right about clean energy. As I said earlier, this is a debate that this country will have to have. We can say no to clean energy and to building grids, but that will leave us poorer and more exposed, and mean that we are not doing what is required to tackle the climate crisis. This Government have made their choice; others will have to do so too.

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I welcome the Secretary of State to his post. I welcome the tone of his statement and I share its ambition. Will he join me in commending the ambitious work of Lib Dem-led Oxfordshire county council, which wants to reach net zero by 2030, and the work of all councils everywhere? They are on the frontline of the climate crisis in our communities. He talks about local people having a say. Does he agree that often the best way for local communities to feel they have that say is through their local councils?

**Edward Miliband:** Characteristically, the hon. Lady makes an important point. To deliver this agenda, we have to get the central-local relationship right, because if we try to deliver it all from the centre we will not succeed. To take the example of improving the appalling

[*Edward Miliband*]

state of energy efficiency in our homes, much of that work will have to be delivered by local authorities. That is the right way to do it, and I pay tribute to all the local authorities across the country that are showing ambition in that area.

**Rachel Blake** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his appointment. The Cities of London and Westminster have a huge contribution to make for the UK to be a clean energy superpower, not just through investment driven from the City of London and innovation driven by businesses across the constituency, but through our residential community energy schemes, such as Aldgate Solar Power, which is a fantastic local co-operative. However, after years of dither and delay by the Conservative Government and the former Conservative council, the Pimlico district heating undertaking is in desperate need of investment. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss how we can make it an exemplar scheme and mitigate the cost for local residents and leaseholders, who may be facing significant costs because of the nature and construction of the heating equipment?

**Edward Miliband:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on her election. I have worked with her in the past and I know she will be an outstanding Member of Parliament. The Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen, is going to be very busy, but I am sure he will happily meet her to discuss her question. She raises community energy schemes.

I want to emphasise that one thing Great British Energy will deliver is our local power plan, which will work with local communities and local authorities to deliver community energy. One of the answers to the question of how we build public consent for this is community ownership of energy. We want to drive that forward, and that is what the local power plan will be about.

**Sir Gavin Williamson** (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his appointment. The decisions that the Government have made will see a much more rapid decommissioning of oil and gas in the North sea. How much additional money has he secured from the Treasury to cover the Government's legal costs for that decommissioning, and how much does he think it will cost in total?

**Edward Miliband:** The most important thing is to secure a just transition for those communities, as set out in our manifesto, through £8.3 billion from Great British Energy and over £7 billion from our national wealth fund. The truth is that there is massive debate in the House about licensing. The right hon. Gentleman will not have been at the debate when we discussed these issues, but the difference it makes to how much of our gas demand is produced domestically is that under the old Government—[*Interruption.*] Let me explain. Under the old Government policy, there would have been a 95% reduction in our demand met domestically, but under this Government's policy, it will be 97%. For all the hue and cry from the Opposition, that is the reality.

**Perran Moon** (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State to his position. Cornwall is one of the most deprived areas of northern Europe. However, we are blessed with vast renewable energy resources, as mentioned earlier: onshore wind, offshore wind, geothermal, tidal, solar and ground source heat technologies, as well as critical minerals, not from China but from Camborne and Redruth. Will the Secretary of State meet me and Cornish colleagues to discuss how GB Energy will be used to realise our renewable energy potential and to transform local Cornish economies?

**Edward Miliband:** My hon. Friend is also a great guy to go on a boat with. As he says, Cornwall and our coastal communities have an incredibly important part to play. Some of the biggest economic challenges we face as a country are in our coastal communities. It is not easy, but if we get this right it will be a massive opportunity, not just for Cornwall but for all our coastal communities, and that is what this Government intend to do.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Siobhain McDonagh):** I call Jim Shannon.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Oh, thank you—you caught me off guard there, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I am so used to being the last one in the House to be called.

I welcome the Secretary of State to his place. I know it has always been his ambition to have the opportunity to have this role. Now he has it, I hope it goes well for him, and we will support him in what he is trying to achieve. With the new Government comes a new way of achieving goals and aims. I represent Strangford, which is a mostly rural constituency. Farming is a way of life and a key part of the economy. It creates thousands of jobs and opportunities, and is key to our future. Green energy and net zero are important for that as well. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the farming community and agrifood needs will be paramount in any effort to achieve a better world for all of us to live in?

**Edward Miliband:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. In the last few days, I have sometimes said to people that I feel that I am going back to the job I did 15 years ago, but getting to try and do it better. I am sure Members on the Opposition Benches would agree with that. It is an amazing opportunity and a big responsibility.

The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the role of rural communities, particularly farming communities. We are determined to get the balance right between food security, nature preservation and clean energy. The truth is that we, as a country, have not thought about the role of our land enough in recent years. We hope that will be driven by the land use framework that will be produced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State and his team to their place. He will know that my constituency has benefited hugely from offshore wind, particularly in operations and maintenance, but the critical part of the supply chain has failed to be produced. What does he suggest

that Members across the House can do to ensure we get the supply chain right so that my constituents can benefit from that investment?

**Edward Miliband:** I welcome my hon. Friend back to the House. It is fantastic to see her back in her place—I congratulate her. She knows much about this subject through working for RenewableUK when she was outside the House, and she makes an important point. The shadow Secretary of State drew attention to our generation of offshore wind, which we have done well, but it is commonly accepted that we have not done nearly so well in generating the jobs that should come with that. Part of what I will be doing with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business and Trade is developing a proper green industrial strategy, including in the supply chain. That will provide clarity about the plan to ensure that we have not just energy generation, but job generation too.

**Carla Denyer (Bristol Central) (Green):** I welcome the Secretary of State to his role, and welcome the Government's recognition that public investment must play a substantial role in decarbonising power. I have seen that from my previous career in offshore wind. However, this public investment must not be only about de-risking private sector investment, though some of his colleagues have implied that that would be the principal role of Great British Energy. Will the Secretary of State confirm that Great British Energy will invest in fully publicly owned, or at least majority publicly owned, renewable generation projects, and will not confine itself to taking minority stakes in private sector-led projects that would give it very little control?

**Edward Miliband:** I welcome the hon. Lady to her place. I can confirm that GB Energy will play a role in all kinds of ways, and that we are certainly not restricting it in the way that she suggests. Furthermore, in the constructive spirit of these exchanges, I would ask that the Green party thinks about its commitment to tackling the climate crisis, which we all share, and then thinks about this question of infrastructure. If it wants to tackle the climate crisis, it should know that that simply will not happen if its leading members say no to new energy infrastructure.

**Torsten Bell (Swansea West) (Lab):** I, too, welcome the Secretary of State to his place. It is very appropriate that he is bringing this level of energy to the debate, and we all hope to see much more of that in the years ahead. It is a big contrast to the previous 10 years of inaction, which has cost us, not just in terms of our energy security, but in wasted opportunity. I wish to touch on one of those opportunities, which is the huge tidal power potential that Britain has in Swansea, and not just in Sefton. Does he agree that it is time to seize that opportunity, rather than waste it?

**Edward Miliband:** I welcome my hon. Friend to his place. He was head of policy when I was Leader of the Opposition, and I tended to do what he told me, rather than the other way round, so it is a particular pleasure to see him in his place. He makes such an important point. Tidal is an area where Britain is in the lead, but we want to go further and faster, as it has huge potential for our country.

**Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con):** I welcome the Secretary of State to his place, but I have to say that the Government's disastrous decision to industrialise our highly productive, good agricultural land by approving three huge solar farms clearly demonstrates their unwillingness to listen to the concerns of local rural communities; it runs roughshod over them and their ability to have their say. It is also hugely detrimental to food security. Can he explain to the House how he will look the farming community in the eye and explain his decision, as well as the Government's lukewarm words on food security being national security?

**Edward Miliband:** I am afraid that we have to conduct these debates on the basis of fact, not myth. Some 0.1% of our land, and around that amount of agricultural land, is being used for solar panels. We cannot proceed on the basis of myth. The hon. Gentleman talks about the farming community. Farmers want this. The National Farmers Union has supported this decision. Of course we will work with local communities, but every time an Opposition Member gets up and opposes clean energy, they are saying to the British people, "We are going to make you poorer. We are going to make Britain more energy insecure, and we are not going to tackle the climate crisis."

**Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab):** I thank the Secretary of State for setting out his very clear strategy. Will he confirm whether projects such as the new hydrogen hub in Bradford will be at the forefront of that strategy? Will he guarantee proper investment in places such as Bradford, so that we can grow and become a global leader in this sector, as well as generate well-paid and sustainable jobs?

**Edward Miliband:** I really welcome my hon. Friend's advocacy on this issue. The hydrogen economy is a really important part of our future. It is yet another example of where we can succeed as a country and generate good jobs and good wages. I look forward to engaging with him on these issues.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD):** May I take the Secretary of State back to the question of tidal power generation? If he speaks to the developers in the sector, they will tell him that they need two things to keep growing the sector. They need an expanded pot for the ringfenced allocation in the next allocation round, and they need an ambitious deployment target for the sector. Can we have an early announcement on that? If he really wants to understand the potential of marine renewables, he needs to get himself up to the European Marine Energy Centre in Orkney. He is very welcome there at any time, but he might want to come in the summer, while the days are still long.

**Edward Miliband:** I thank the right hon. Member for that invitation, and I will very much consider it, because I care a lot about this area. Obviously, I have to make decisions, in a certain capacity, about allocation round 6, but I have heard what he has said.

**Blair McDougall (East Renfrewshire) (Lab):** I welcome the Secretary of State and his excellent team to their new roles. Can I look forward to welcoming them back to Whitelee wind farm, which he has been to many



[Blair McDougall]

times before, to see how the largest onshore wind farm in the UK is contributing not only energy, but to the community and its life?

I declare an interest as the outgoing chair of the Uyghur Campaign in the UK. The Secretary of State will be aware that much of the polysilicon used in solar manufacturing is sourced from the Uyghur region, where Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims are routinely used as slave labourers. The expansion of solar that the Secretary of State is envisioning gives us enormous economic leverage in the UK, and I wonder how he intends to use that leverage to get the industry to clean up its supply chains and seek alternative sources of polysilicon.

**Edward Miliband:** Let me welcome my hon. Friend to his place. He raises a very important issue. There were some standards put in place by the previous Government, but I think that we should take this issue incredibly seriously. I look forward to discussions with him on these issues.

**Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Reform):** The Secretary of State speaks very passionately about GB Energy. I remind him that just a few years ago, the Labour-controlled Nottingham city council had its own energy company called Robin Hood Energy, but this was Robin Hood with a modern twist: it robbed from the poor and gave to the rich, and cost the taxpayer about £50 million. Can the Secretary of State tell the House from that Dispatch Box how much GB Energy will cost the taxpayer?

**Edward Miliband:** First of all, let me explain to the hon. Gentleman that Robin Hood Energy was a supply company; this is a generation company. Robin Hood was a retailer, so it is different, but I have to say that I am surprised at the position that he takes. I thought his party was in favour of publicly owned energy. I think it produced lots of videos on social media to that effect.

**Adam Jogee (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab):** The Secretary of State knows from his recent visit to my constituency just how important energy security is for the people of Newcastle-under-Lyme. I am just sorry that there was no boat. Over 14 years of the Tories, families' bills have been pushed up, and we were left at the mercy of Putin after his invasion of Ukraine. May I urge the Secretary of State to get to work quickly, following his excellent return to the job—he is the comeback kid—so that we can cut bills and give my constituents the energy security that they deserve?

**Edward Miliband:** I think to be called a kid at my time of life is stretching things a bit, but I am nevertheless grateful to my hon. Friend for his contribution. He makes the important point that huge opportunities exist right across our country. The United States has used the Inflation Reduction Act to seize those opportunities. Our economy is smaller, but we intend to seize those opportunities with a proper, modern industrial policy.

**Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD):** I welcome the Secretary of State to his place. Somerset is home to many ground-mounted solar farm developments. Although I fully support the significantly increasing

amount of electricity that we generate from renewables, I believe that the communities that host the infrastructure should receive compensation. The Government's recent policy statement on onshore wind agreed with that, so will community benefit funds be mandated for new solar farm developments?

**Edward Miliband:** The hon. Lady raises an important issue. The previous Government had a whole series of consultations out on community benefit. We will respond to those, but I want to be very clear that I believe that when a community takes on the responsibility of hosting clean energy infrastructure, it should benefit from it.

**Anneliese Midgley (Knowsley) (Lab):** I welcome my right hon. Friend to his role, and I welcome his ambition. During the general election campaign, so many residents in Knowsley told me that they were struggling with the cost of living crisis and rising energy bills. Can the Secretary of State confirm that Great British Energy will allow us to take back control of our system, give us energy security, and crucially lower bills for families?

**Edward Miliband:** Let me welcome my hon. Friend to her place, and congratulate her on her election; she will be a great Member of Parliament. She raises such an important issue. More than 3 million people are in fuel poverty in our country. One thing that this Government will do that the last Government did not is demand that landlords raise the standard of their accommodation to a proper energy performance certificate standard C by 2030. That will make a dent in this issue, but the House should be in no doubt about our ambition to cut that number of 3.2 million as much as possible in the five years of this Parliament.

**James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con):** Plans for 90 miles of pylons from Lincolnshire to my North West Norfolk constituency and new substations are strongly opposed by local communities. Will the Secretary of State commit to a review of network technologies, and consider a presumption in favour of underground or offshore proposals?

**Edward Miliband:** I will look at all proposals, but I think the hon. Gentleman knows that underground cables cost six to 10 times more; that is why the last Government did not agree to them.<sup>1</sup> If part of our challenge is to cut bills for people, that is not a sustainable solution for the future. I am sympathetic to all MPs who raise issues on behalf of their constituents, but I gently say again to him that if we want to avoid a repeat of the cost of living crisis, if we want to tackle the climate crisis, and if we want energy security, we will have to build the grid in our country.

**Henry Tufnell (Mid and South Pembrokeshire) (Lab):** I welcome the comments of the Secretary of State, which are incredibly encouraging for communities such as mine in west Wales. Throughout the campaign, I heard again and again the demand from local people, from Pembroke Dock to Milford Haven, for well paid, secure jobs in the industries of the future. In the port of Milford Haven we have a huge opportunity, particularly in the area of floating offshore wind. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss the opportunities for my constituency, and how we can overcome the barriers to investment in local jobs?

1. [Official Report, 2 September 2024; Vol. 753, c. 1WC.] (Correction)

**Edward Miliband:** I was delighted to visit the port of Milford Haven during the election campaign. There is an interesting issue here: the £1.8 billion investment that this Government are making in our ports will hopefully allow us to invest in floating offshore wind at more ports than the last Government were able to. I cannot make promises about particular ports from the Dispatch Box, but this is so important, because if we are to get the jobs here, we must invest in our port infrastructure.

**Greg Smith** (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): The Secretary of State referred multiple times to community consent, yet the 6,000 acres of solar installation in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) had no community consent. That sends shivers down the spine of my constituents in and around the villages known as the Claydons, who are looking down the barrel of a 2,100-acre solar installation called Rosefield. That is on top of a proposed battery storage plant next door, and on top of the National Grid wanting to build a brand-new substation to take the thing in; it is the tail wagging the dog. What will change to make community consent a reality?

**Edward Miliband:** What the hon. Gentleman wants for nationally significant projects is community veto.

**Greg Smith** *indicated assent.*

**Edward Miliband:** The hon. Gentleman nods his head. I will be honest with him: we are not going to give community veto. The last Government did not give it either. There are nationally significant projects that the Government have to make decisions on. Obviously, we have to take into account the views of local communities, but the whole point of decision making on the nationally significant infrastructure programme is that we look at the needs of the nation as well. That is why community benefit is important. If we ask local communities to host clean energy infrastructure, sometimes they will not want it, or sometimes a minority will not want it—I am not making presumptions in this case—and then we should ensure that those communities benefit from it.

**Andrew Pakes** (Peterborough) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State and his team to the Chamber. It is a privilege to make my first contribution in this House on such an ambitious plan. It is ambitious not just on net zero, the climate crisis and energy security, but on jobs and opportunities for young people in places such as mine. In my constituency, Peterborough college is already building a green technology centre to develop new green apprenticeships, and we have plans for a clean energy transition centre. Will the Secretary of State put on record his commitment to working with trade unions, communities, colleges and others, so that we can move from blue-collar to green-collar apprenticeships, and give young people an opportunity to succeed in life as we meet our climate and energy needs?

**Edward Miliband:** I welcome my hon. Friend to his place. He raises the important question of how we ensure—this issue will be familiar to Members across the House—that we not only have the capacity to generate jobs in clean energy but can meet the skills needs of the country in order to fill them. This is frankly something on which we need to do a lot better

as a country. My Department—I will talk about this in the next few weeks—will take on more of a function around looking at the skills needs of the clean energy economy, working with the Department for Education on how we meet them. He raises a crucial point in that context.

**Tony Vaughan** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Lab): I congratulate the Secretary of State and his team on their recent appointment and thank them for their recent visit to Cheyne Court wind farm in my constituency, which was opened by the Secretary of State in 2009. Dungeness A and Dungeness B in my constituency are former nuclear power stations that are in the process of being decommissioned. Dungeness has the land, infrastructure, grid connections and local expertise that make it well placed for new nuclear. Will the Secretary of State be willing to meet me to discuss how we can harness Dungeness's potential for the local area and the regional community?

**Edward Miliband:** I was delighted to visit the Cheyne Court wind farm with my hon. Friend—a wind farm that I opened 15 years ago on my first visit as the Secretary of State. Pictures of how much I have aged between then and now are available on request. He raises a really important issue. He is an important advocate for clean energy, whether in relation to wind power or the potential nuclear programme. Both are important to us.

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Lab): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his position, and on the vigorous start that he has made on this most important of issues facing humanity and the world. I was particularly encouraged to see him put climate diplomacy high on the agenda, and at the heart of the new Cabinet. That is so important, after 14 years of the previous Government's denigration of Britain's role in the world on this most important issue of tackling climate change. Will he further outline to the House the work that he plans to ensure that, unlike in the past 15 years, Britain will be the main player that it needs to be in global co-operation on tackling the threat of climate change?

**Edward Miliband:** I am pleased that my hon. Friend has asked me that question. The world wants to see British leadership, but British leadership starts at home with the power of example. If we do not show that we are acting at home then people say, "You're telling us one thing abroad, but doing something different when it comes to your own domestic situation." The truth is that COP29 in Azerbaijan and crucially COP30 in Brazil will be very important moments. COP30 is when the world has to come to terms with how far off track we are from 1.5°C, and put in our nationally determined contributions for 2035. I look forward to Britain playing as much of a constructive role in those negotiations as we can.

**Luke Myer** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State to his place. Teesside is perfectly positioned for the green jobs of the future—jobs in hydrogen, clean power and ports—as my right hon. Friend knows from his recent visit to Teesport. Will he meet me and colleagues to ensure that we can bring jobs and investment to Teesside?

**Edward Miliband:** My hon. Friend, who I welcome to his place, makes such an important point about the role Teesside can play. I saw on a recent visit how much potential there is and we look forward to working with him on these issues.

**Luke Murphy** (Basingstoke) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend and his team to their place. He had the privilege of visiting Basingstoke college of technology during the election campaign to meet some of the fantastic apprentices and students there. Further to his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Andrew Pakes), will he commit to working with colleges such as BCOT as he develops the plan for skills and training for the hundreds of thousands of jobs we need to deliver on our ambition of a clean energy superpower?

**Edward Miliband:** I thank my hon. Friend and welcome him to the House. He brings a wealth of knowledge and experience on these issues. I enjoyed my visit to Basingstoke. What really came home to me on that visit was young people's enthusiasm for this agenda—not simply because they care about the climate crisis, but because they see this as a potential future for themselves, their friends and their family. I look forward to working with colleges such as his to make that a reality.

**Josh Fenton-Glynn** (Calder Valley) (Lab): It is great to see my right hon. Friend in his place after over a decade of leadership on this issue, talking about climate change and really making that difference. If we are to be a clean energy superpower, we need to learn from good examples and better practice wherever it is. In Calder Valley, Together Housing is a good example of a housing association that is doing well in putting solar on roofs and taking advantage of microgeneration. However, I am sure he will agree that one problem for those kinds of projects is that the national grid is not up to scratch. Key to being a clean energy superpower is getting a modern national grid. Will he also agree to visit some of Together Housing's projects, which keep bills down and put solar panels on roofs?

**Edward Miliband:** I welcome my hon. Friend to his place and congratulate him on his election, and I commend his housing association for what it is doing. He raises one of the biggest issues that the previous Government faced and that this Government face. The flipside of all the Conservative Members saying that they do not want the grid built is what my hon. Friend just said—maybe they should have a conversation. What he is saying is that if we do not build the grid, we cannot get the clean energy and we cannot cut bills for our constituents. I do not say that this is easy, and I do not want to pretend that it is. Certainly the last Government did not find it easy, but we have to decide. To govern is to choose, and our choice is that we believe this clean energy infrastructure needs to be built.

**Peter Swallow** (Bracknell) (Lab): Last week Bracknell Forest council held a climate change summit, bringing together local businesses, schools and community organisations in my constituency to engage in discussions about how best to face the challenges of climate change. Does the Secretary of State agree that communities are crying out to take part and to be engaged in the clean energy transition?

**Edward Miliband:** Again, I congratulate my hon. Friend. He raises an important point that we have not touched on: the role of citizens in this change. My sense is that, while of course there are specific planning issues that people raise about their own communities, the view of many citizens in our country is, "What can I do? What difference can I make?" I think the Government need to do a better job of answering that. That is not nanny-statism, to reassure the Conservatives, but public information about the difference people can make in this incredibly important cause.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Siobhain McDonagh):** Last but not least, I call Laurence Turner.

**Laurence Turner** (Birmingham Northfield) (Lab): As a recent official of the GMB trade union, which has been mentioned in this statement, I welcome the Secretary of State and his team and officials to their place. How welcome it is to have a change of Government from the record of the last 14 years, with the ducking and delaying of difficult decisions on issues from nuclear to gas storage, and the exclusion for too long of workers' voices from the decisions that affect the energy system. In opposition, my right hon. Friend established an energy transition working group to bring together trade unions and workers' voices at the heart of energy plans. Can he confirm today that continuing that group in government will be an early priority for this new Administration?

**Edward Miliband:** I welcome my hon. Friend to this House and thank him for the work we did together in opposition on all these issues. As this is the final question, he ends on a really important point: this Government have a completely different attitude to the role that trade unions can play in the future of our energy system, and we are proud of it. If we are to make the energy transition, including in the North sea, and build a proper industrial policy for the future, we should do what every other self-respecting nation does and have trade unions at the heart of our policymaking and decision making. That is what this Government will do.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Congratulations everybody on getting through that; I am delighted that everybody got to ask their question and I thank the Secretary of State for his responses.



## Points of Order

12.56 pm

**Mr Gagan Mohindra** (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I first welcome you to your place? Secondly, I have had the benefit of two ministerial visits by Government Members, both of whom I respect, without the courtesy of letting me know. I have spoken independently to both of them—the right hon. Member for Rawmarsh and Conisbrough (John Healey) and the hon. Member for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard)—and they have both assured me that it was an error in process that will be corrected. I just wanted to make sure the whole of the Treasury Bench and the new Government followed the normal protocols and ensured that all Members of the House were duly informed of visits.

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Luke Pollard):** Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Defence Secretary and I have spoken to the hon. Gentleman and apologised for the administrative oversight. I assure him and other Members that it will not happen again.

**Dr Kieran Mullan** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In the statement on prison capacity, the issue of the Friday release of prisoners was raised. I recognise it was raised by hon. Members sincerely and with good intentions. However, private Members' Bills are an incredibly important part of the work of this House, something we all recognise and value, and during the previous Parliament the former Member for Barrow and Furness steered through, with cross-party support, the Offenders (Day of Release from Detention) Bill, to stop the routine release of prisoners on a Friday. I seek your advice, Madam Deputy Speaker, on how we can ensure that the record accurately reflects the incredibly important work on that private Member's Bill, which contributed to that issue and was not mentioned in the statement earlier.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Siobhain McDonagh):** I thank the hon. Member for his point of order and for giving notice of it. Although it is not a matter for the Chair, he has clearly made his point and it is on the record.

**Carla Denyer** (Bristol Central) (Green): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, who has now left the Chamber, misrepresented the position of my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay). My

colleague has called for all options on the necessary energy infrastructure to be properly explored, but he has not objected to it. Will the Secretary of State please correct that?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Similarly to my last response, although I thank the hon. Member for her point of order, it is not a matter for the Chair. However, it is clearly recorded and is a matter of record.

## BILLS PRESENTED

### BUDGET RESPONSIBILITY BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by the Prime Minister, Darren Jones, James Murray and Tulip Siddiq, presented a Bill to impose duties on the Treasury and the Office for Budget Responsibility in respect of the announcement of fiscally significant measures.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 1) with explanatory notes (Bill 1-EN).*

### HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL BILL

*Presentation and resumption of proceedings (Standing Orders Nos. 57 and 80A)* Secretary Angela Rayner, supported by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary David Lammy, Secretary Yvette Cooper, Secretary Bridget Phillipson and Secretary Lisa Nandy, presented a Bill to make provision for expenditure by the Secretary of State and the removal of restrictions in respect of certain land for or in connection with the construction of a Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre.

*Bill deemed to have been read the First, Second and Third time, pursuant to the Order of 22 May 2024, and to be printed (Bill 2).*

### PASSENGER RAILWAY SERVICES (PUBLIC OWNERSHIP) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Secretary Louise Haigh, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Angela Rayner, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Ed Miliband, Secretary Jonathan Reynolds, Secretary Ian Murray, Secretary Jo Stevens and Darren Jones, presented a Bill to make provision for passenger railway services to be provided by public sector companies instead of by means of franchises.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 3) with explanatory notes (Bill 3-EN).*

## Debate on the Address

[2ND DAY]

*Debate resumed (Order, 17 July).*

*Question again proposed.*

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

Most Gracious Sovereign,

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

### Foreign Affairs and Defence

1 pm

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Siobhain McDonagh):**

I call the Secretary of State for Defence.

**The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey)**

*rose—*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** The question is—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, go ahead.

**John Healey:** You are confusing me, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I have confused myself!

**John Healey:** But may I say how great it is to see you in the Chair for this debate, albeit in a temporary role? And may I say, through you, that the Foreign Secretary wanted to be here for the debate, but he and the Prime Minister are hosting the leaders of over 40 European countries at the European Political Community meeting at Blenheim palace today—it is an important day for our country. He will look forward to following the debate as soon as he returns.

I congratulate all 315 re-elected and returning Members of this House, and welcome in particular all Members who were elected for the first time. Savour that special feeling when you first walk into this Chamber and sit on these green Benches. Remember it; respect it. Our constituents have given each of us their confidence; they have given us the mandate to serve them and the country.

Two week ago, I stood at my local constituency election count in a sports hall in Rotherham. It is the honour of my life to stand at this Dispatch Box today as the Defence Secretary—as part of the new Government at the start of this new era for Britain. The last time that I spoke at this Dispatch Box was a week before the election in 2010, as a housing Minister dealing with planning reform. Even then, I warned that “there are fundamental flaws in the Conservatives’ proposed planning regime”.

However, my main argument on that day focused on accountability. I said:

“accountability is a central tenet”—*[Official Report, 29 March 2010; Vol. 503, c. 611.]*

of public life, serious decisions and good government. Having re-entered Government, I feel that just as fiercely as I did 14 years ago. What we do, what we say and how we conduct ourselves in Government matters. We must always be accountable in this House, to the public and to Parliament. By doing that, we will help to regain trust in Government and return politics to public service.

I pay tribute to my predecessors, Grant Shapps and Ben Wallace, whom I shadowed for over four years from the Opposition Benches. The House will now miss them both in differing ways. They served as Defence Secretaries during what the Chief of the Defence Staff has described as the most extraordinary time for defence in his career. That responsibility now passes to me. I am grateful to have the support of such a stand-out ministerial team: the Minister for Defence Procurement and Industry, my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Garston (Maria Eagle); the Minister for the Armed Forces, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard); the Minister for Veterans and People, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Selly Oak (Al Carns); and Lord Coaker in the other place.

The first duty of any Government is to defend the country and keep our citizens safe. That is why I pay tribute, on behalf of the House, to the men and women who serve in Britain's armed forces, many of whom are overseas on deployment right now. They are rightly respected worldwide for their bravery and their professionalism. We thank them for what they do to keep us all safe, as we thank those out of uniform in UK defence. They will have this new Government's fullest support to do their job in defending this country

That is why at the NATO summit in Washington last week, the Prime Minister confirmed the Government's unshakeable commitment to NATO, and our total commitment to spending 2.5% of GDP on defence. It is why the Prime Minister launched this week a first-of-its-kind strategic defence review. And it is why we announced in the King's Speech legislation to create a new armed forces commissioner to improve service life.

**Sir Alec Shelbrooke (Wetherby and Easingwold) (Con):** I wish the right hon. Gentleman, who was a committed parliamentarian in his shadow role, all the best in his new role, to which he brings great depth and seriousness. He has just described the strategic review and outlined the ambition to get to 2.5% of GDP. If that strategic review recommends more than 2.5%, will the Government still enact it in full?

**John Healey:** We have launched the strategic defence review, which was a manifesto commitment. It will be conducted within the framework set out in our manifesto, with the determination to complete it within the first year and to raise defence spending to 2.5% of GDP as soon as we can. The country has not spent at that level since I last stood at the Dispatch Box back in 2010 under the then Labour Government.

I welcome to their roles the new shadow Defence Secretary, the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge), and the Liberal Democrat spokesperson on defence, the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord), who cannot be here for the debate—the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) is ably standing in for him, and we look forward to hearing what he has to say. I also welcome the SNP spokesperson on defence, the hon. Member for Angus and Perthshire Glens (Dave Doogan). As Defence Secretary, I want to take the politics out of national security. I say to the House: I will always look to work with you—putting country first, party second. I have offered the shadow Defence Secretary access to

intelligence briefings, and will do so for other relevant Members. The new strategic defence review will brief and welcome submissions from other parties across this House.

I want us to forge a British defence strategy for the future, not just a defence strategy for the new Labour Government. No party has a monopoly on defence or on pride in our military. We in the Labour party have deep roots in defending this country. Throughout the last century, it was working men and women who served, and sometimes died, on the frontline fighting for Britain. It was Labour that established NATO and the nuclear deterrent. As his Majesty the King said yesterday, our commitment to both is “unshakeable.” We are a party with deep pride in forging international law and security: the Geneva conventions, the universal declaration of human rights, the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and the comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty were all signed by Labour Prime Ministers. We are a party with deep respect for the serving men and women of our armed forces. Theirs is the ultimate public service: they defend the country and are essential to our resilience at home. I know they will inspire me in the weeks, months and years ahead in this job.

As the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak), said yesterday in the debate on the Address:

“Every month in my previous job, I became more concerned about the threats to our country’s security.”—[*Official Report*, 17 July 2024; Vol. 752, c. 51.]

We know that these are serious times, with war in Europe, conflict in the middle east, growing Russian aggression and increasing global threats. We know, too, that there are serious problems. It was Ben Wallace who said to me in this Chamber last year that our armed forces had been “hollowed out and underfunded” over the past 14 years. Morale is at record lows, alongside dreadful military housing and a defence procurement system that the Public Accounts Committee has described as “broken” and wasting taxpayers’ money.

Less than two weeks into this Government, we now see that those problems are much worse than we thought. Just today, new official figures that we have been able to release as scheduled show that forces families’ satisfaction has fallen to the lowest level ever reported. We cannot solve those problems all at once, but we are determined to fix them.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is right to say that NATO is the cornerstone of our defence policy. We must also strengthen our role in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, but would he elaborate on how we will be extending our support and solidarity to Ukraine as it faces Russian aggression?

**John Healey**: My hon. Friend has served with distinction in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, a body that draws together well-informed, committed Members from all parties in this House. It is an important civilian bulwark in the NATO military alliance, and I thank him for that service. He intervened on me just as I was about to move to the topic of Ukraine, so I ask him to bear with me for two or three minutes; if I have not answered his questions by then, I would welcome another intervention.

On Ukraine, I have been proud of UK leadership—proud that the UK and this House are united on Ukraine, because the defence of the UK starts in Ukraine. Ukraine is my first priority, and on my second day in this job, I was in Odessa. I spent the afternoon with President Zelensky and his team. We held our bilateral talks, we celebrated Ukraine’s navy day, and we also toured a military hospital, talking with injured Ukrainian servicemen. The Ukrainians, military and civilians alike, are fighting with huge courage. They have regained vast territory that was taken by Putin at first, and as a country without a navy, they have driven Russia’s fleet out of the western Black sea. They have opened up grain corridors and are now able to export almost as much as they did before Putin’s full-scale invasion in February 2022. However, Russia is far from a spent force, and if Putin wins, he will not stop at Ukraine.

In opposition, we gave the Government our fullest support for all the military aid this country gave to Ukraine, and I trust this Opposition will do the same. The UK is united for Ukraine, and I want to work together to ensure we remain united for Ukraine. The Government are now stepping up support: with President Zelensky, I was able to say that we will speed up the delivery of the military aid already pledged. We will step up support through a new package of more ammunition, more anti-armour missiles, more de-mining vehicles and more artillery guns. At the NATO summit in Washington last week, the Prime Minister went further, confirming £3 billion a year to help Ukraine for as long as it takes.

This King’s Speech shows the Government getting on with the job, just as we have in the first fortnight, with urgency and purpose. The Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and I have all spoken with our counterparts from across the world. At the NATO 75 summit, we met leaders of all 32 NATO nations—it was a NATO summit bigger, stronger and more united than ever. At that summit, the Prime Minister and Chancellor Scholz of Germany announced a new

“firm commitment to strike a deep UK-Germany defence agreement...without delay”,

a first step towards resetting Britain’s relationships with European allies. Last weekend, I hosted the Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister of Australia at Sheffield Forgemasters, then at Wentworth Woodhouse in Rotherham, where I reaffirmed our commitment to AUKUS and to our Indo-Pacific partners. I have also had the privilege of meeting outstanding personnel in these first less than two weeks, including personnel at the permanent joint headquarters, RAF Northolt and NATO maritime command, alongside top-class civilian officials in the Ministry of Defence and other Government Departments.

This week, the Foreign Secretary went to the middle east, pursuing our push for peace and an immediate ceasefire, and the Prime Minister launched the strategic defence review headed by Lord Robertson, General Barrons and Dr Fiona Hill. That review will be carried out at pace, ensure that we have a NATO-first defence strategy, and put people at the heart of Britain’s defence plans. I thank the reviewers for the work they will do in the weeks and months ahead. To end where I started, Britain is today hosting the European Political Community—a 47-strong grouping of European leaders—at Blenheim palace, discussing Russian aggression, European security and counter-migration action.



**Mr Dhesi:** Will my right hon. Friend give way on that point?

**John Healey:** I obviously did not answer my hon. Friend's questions on Ukraine earlier on. I give way again.

**Mr Dhesi:** I thank my right hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene once again—he is being very generous with his time. He slightly touched on this point, but does he agree that the level of death and destruction and the loss of innocent lives in Gaza are intolerable, and that we must work to have an immediate ceasefire, an immediate release of hostages and urgent humanitarian aid into Gaza? Will my right hon. Friend outline what His Majesty's Government are doing to bring that into effect?

**John Healey:** My hon. Friend is right: the scale of the conflict and, in particular, the deaths that we see in Gaza are not just intolerable, but agonising. When we think back, the terrorist attack launched on Israel in October was deeply shocking as well. I am proud that it was the Labour party that led the debate in Parliament in February, when this House agreed to push for an immediate ceasefire. I am proud of the way that we have led arguments for that ceasefire, but also of the way we worked in private in opposition—work that we are now picking up in government. My hon. Friend may not have heard me say this, but the Foreign Secretary has already been to the middle east to pursue what the Prime Minister, when he was Leader of the Opposition, declared at the end of October in a speech at Chatham House: that if we got into government, we would help lead a new push for peace. In the first fortnight, that is exactly what we have been doing.

**Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind):** I congratulate the Secretary of State on the appointment he has received; I know it is a position he has sought, and I wish him well. The conflict that is going on and the bombing in Gaza have already resulted in 40,000 deaths. Are the Government serious in pushing Israel to take part in an immediate ceasefire? Are they also prepared to suspend or stop all arms sales to Israel in order to save further lives?

The Secretary of State also made a point in his speech about the need to adhere to international law. There are international court judgments at the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court; are the Government going to support those judgments and ensure that they are carried out, whatever the political consequences? They require action to be taken internationally to bring a halt to this appalling conflict. Forty thousand are already dead, and the occupation continues. Surely there must be a way forward that stops the loss of life.

**John Healey:** The right hon. Member is no longer a member of the Labour party, but I know that he watches what we do and say very closely. He will know that from the outset, we have argued that international humanitarian law must apply in this conflict, and must apply equally to both sides. The answer to his first question is yes: this Government are serious about pursuing an immediate ceasefire, which is why the Foreign Secretary has already been out to Israel to press that case.

On the question of arms sales to Israel, on the Foreign Secretary's first day in post, through the established system that we use, he commissioned the British Government's most up-to-date assessment of the degree to which any of our UK arms export licences may be facilitating a serious risk of a breach of international law. He has said clearly that he wants that process to be as swift and transparent as possible, and he is looking hard at exactly that issue. I hope that underlines the simple answer to the right hon. Member's first question: yes, this Government are serious about a ceasefire, and about the application of international humanitarian law without fear or favour.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** First, I commend the Secretary of State for the role he played in opposition and the role he now plays in government. I think that each of us, on hearing the words of the Secretary of State, will be inspired and feel more confident about road forward. When it comes to the middle east, we are all aware of the influence of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Iran, and we are aware of the axis of evil of Iran, North Korea, Russia and China. We are also aware that the IRGC supplies ammunition, finance and personnel to the Houthis in Yemen, Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon and terrorist groups right across Syria. When it comes to addressing that group and what it does across the world, can the Secretary of State today give the House an assurance that it is a priority for this Government to proscribe the IRGC and put it out of action?

**John Healey:** I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we are looking really hard, as he and this House would expect, at the growing threats that Iran poses not just as a state, but through its proxies and its growing alliances with other hostile nations. In many ways, he helps me supply an answer to a question that I have sometimes been asked over the last two days, which is: why have another strategic defence review now? The simple answer is exactly that: the threats are increasing and changing, the nature of warfare is changing and the growing importance of our alliances is becoming clearer. It is for that reason, a year after the last Government's defence review, that this is imperative. We will pursue this properly and do it at pace, because that is what we need to do both to respond to the growing and changing threats we face and to take the decisions we must take on the capabilities we need to defend the country.

I will wind up now so that other Members from all sides can speak. We were elected on a manifesto promising change. After less than two weeks, I hope that the House and the public see that the work of that change has begun to strengthen the foundations of this new mission-driven Government in making Britain better defended and making Britain democracy's most reliable ally. The Prime Minister said in his speech in this House yesterday:

"This Government have been elected to deliver nothing less than national renewal...and start the work of rebuilding our country—a determined rebuilding, a patient rebuilding, a calm rebuilding."—[*Official Report*, 17 July 2024; Vol. 752, c. 54-55.]

That is the task he has set me to lead with my Defence team, but there is so much more to do. I want defence to be central not just to the future security of Britain, but to the country's success in this new era, bringing greater economic growth and wealth across the UK, reconnecting

Britain in the world and forging a new partnership for Britain between Government, business and workers with their trade unions. Together we will make Britain more secure at home and strong abroad.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Siobhain McDonagh):** I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

1.23 pm

**Mr Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and welcome to the Chair.

May I warmly congratulate the Defence Secretary on his new role, and strongly endorse the comments he made about Britain's armed forces? My own regiment has recently been on the frontline in Estonia, and I want to strongly endorse the words he used. I also endorse the advice he gave to new Members sitting on these green Benches. I first sat on these green Benches—on the Government side—37 years ago, and I strongly agree with what he said. I feel that sense of honour and privilege every day in this House.

I had hoped to start by welcoming the Foreign Secretary to his place. I wanted to wish him well in discharging the immense responsibilities of the office he now holds. I have to say that I was dismayed to hear the Foreign Secretary answer questions on the “Today” programme this morning that should more properly have been answered in this House—a view that I believe Mr Speaker shares. Nevertheless, I have no doubt that the Foreign Secretary will be very well served by the outstanding civil servants at the Foreign Office. I want to express my gratitude to our ambassadors and high commissioners around the world. On overseas visits throughout my tenure, I was superbly served and looked after. I also want to thank the outstanding young officials who worked in my private office.

I should like to pay a special tribute to my noble Friend Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton. He demonstrated clear strategic thinking about how British foreign policy needed to adapt to the world as it is today and injected real energy into British diplomacy. I hope the whole House will acknowledge that to persuade a former Prime Minister to serve as Foreign Secretary was a real benefit to our country. It was also a pleasure to serve alongside the former Members for Berwick-upon-Tweed and Macclesfield, who I am very sorry are no longer sitting alongside me on the Front Bench. They were both superb Ministers, who worked diligently at the Foreign Office.

I cannot recall a more perilous period in international affairs. I entered the House of Commons just two years before the momentous fall of the Berlin wall, which precipitated the demise of the Soviet Union and the consequent end of the cold war. It is difficult to overstate, having lived with the terrifying spectre of nuclear confrontation, the collective relief we all felt. Yet the world is once again in the grip of a galloping escalation of tensions and dangers, where the international institutions created on the heels of the second world war to defend our values and protect mankind are being undermined, the narrow nationalism that so disfigured our continent is once again rearing its destructive head, and despots and dictators increasingly ride roughshod over democratic freedoms and the rules-based order.

Putin's brutal and illegal invasion of Ukraine has brought war once again to the European continent. The Israel-Gaza conflict is devastating and risks regional conflagration. Poverty and debt stalk the global south. Yet covid taught us that no one is safe until we are all safe, while climate change is the greatest existential threat of our time. Never have we faced dangers so grave when our fates are so closely entwined. So at the very time when we need an international rules-based order to tackle these common threats—climate change, migration, terror and pandemics—we are more fragmented than ever. Divisions are hardening and debate is coarsening.

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham Hodge Hill and Solihull North) (Lab): I am very grateful to the right hon. Member, my constituency neighbour, for giving way and I am delighted to see him in his place—on the Opposition side of the Chamber. Can I take it from his remarks that he subscribes to the view that we need not only a rules-based order, but a rights-based order? Here in our country, and indeed in Europe, the framework for those rights is the European convention on human rights. Are we to take it from his remarks that it is the policy of His Majesty's loyal Opposition that we should remain a member of the ECHR?

**Mr Mitchell:** That is certainly the policy of the Opposition, and I hope it is common across the House that we should remain part of the European convention.

I was talking about divisions hardening and debate coarsening. Public discourse is increasingly vitriolic, be it in pursuit of single issue causes or broader agendas, from the left or the right, or driven by motives that may or may not be religious and may or may not be well-intentioned. The challenge this presents to British foreign policy is immense, but Britain has punched above its weight precisely because of our leadership role in the international system.

As His Majesty's Opposition, our role is to hold the Government to account, but also to give the strongest possible support where we can. I hope that we can work constructively, as our two parties have done hitherto. In opposition, we will continue to make the case that Britain must be a force for good, that it is outward-looking and global in perspective, that we stand up for internationalism and co-operation, that we stand against populism and isolationism, and that we stand with the world's poorest and most vulnerable. I am very proud of the Conservative party's record in government on all those fronts. We stood firmly behind Ukraine, and we worked day and night with international partners to maximise the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza, while supporting negotiations to secure the release of the Israeli hostages. We produced a groundbreaking White Paper on international development, which drew in the support of all political parties in tackling global poverty in a complex geopolitical environment.

**Dr Luke Evans** (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): I am grateful to the shadow Foreign Secretary for his comments. One duty of the Opposition is to point out blind spots. We are talking about security, but one thing that was not mentioned in the King's Speech was food security. For a rural community like mine, which has an 85% agricultural base, food security is really important. We have seen the attacks on Ukraine and the grain

[Dr Luke Evans]

coming out of it. What can my right hon. Friend do in opposition to hold the Government to account to ensure we have food security on these isles?

**Mr Mitchell:** My hon. Friend is quite right about the importance of food security. He will remember that the then Prime Minister launched the global food security summit last November in Britain. Food security is an issue not just for us but, as my hon. Friend rightly says, all around the world, and we will continue to press the Government to take it as seriously as we did.

I would like to expand on some themes that I anticipate will remain dominant over the course of this Parliament. First, I turn to Ukraine. Britain's work in supporting Ukraine is a shining example of cross-party co-operation. I pay tribute to the Labour party for the constructive approach it demonstrated while in opposition. The Government can rely on us to continue in that spirit, because the struggle in Ukraine is an existential issue. Let no one believe that Putin will stop at Ukraine if he is victorious in this struggle. Our support for Ukraine in the face of Putin's brutality remains unwavering, and I know that the Government's position is the same. We welcome the Government keeping in place the commitment we made to spend at least £3 billion a year on military support for Ukraine for as long as is necessary.

In government, we were also a leading advocate for sanctioned Russian assets being used to support Ukraine and for ensuring that Russia pays for the destruction it has caused. I urge the new Government to push the international community to coalesce around the most ambitious solution possible to achieve those important aims. We on the Opposition Benches welcome the declaration agreed at the NATO summit in Washington last week—to which the Defence Secretary referred—which committed to support Ukraine

“on its irreversible path to full Euro-Atlantic integration, including NATO membership.”

It is right that the Government also committed to this in the Gracious Speech.

In relation to the middle east, we want to see the conflict in Gaza come to a sustainable end as quickly as possible. Our view remains that a negotiated pause in the fighting is the best way to secure the release of the hostages, enable a significant scaling up of much-needed humanitarian aid, and help bring about the conditions that will allow for a permanent end to hostilities. That is the plan that Britain championed in New York, and which secured the consent of the international community at the UN. There is a deal on the table to achieve those goals, backed by Israel, the United States and the United Nations Security Council. The onus is now on Hamas to accept it and bring to an end the suffering of the Palestinian people and the hostages, who remain in such awful jeopardy.

The Government must build on our hard work to see aid reach those in Gaza who desperately need it. The Conservative Government trebled their aid commitment in the last financial year and did everything possible to get more aid into Gaza by land, sea and air. Israel has committed to increasing the amount of aid reaching Gaza, and the Government of Israel must be held to account for delivering on their promises.

I want to signal a note of caution, which links to my comments earlier about composure. I am acutely aware of the very strong feelings that the conflict in Gaza has elicited. It is probably the most polarising foreign policy issue of our time, which has played out on the streets of our country, on our university campuses and in our politics, even forming the entire basis for some candidates in the general election, who are now with us in the House of Commons.

We must remember that this remains an incredibly complex issue. The questions and challenges around resolving the current conflict and achieving the two-state solution that we all want to see are profoundly difficult. We have a responsibility to set a sensible and respectful tone in the many debates we will continue to have, and to make clear that there is no room in our democracy for threats of violence and intimidation. We require serious solutions and long-term measured policies, not performative politics or short-term symbolic proclamations. We should certainly recognise the state of Palestine, but it must be at the right time, as part of an overall solution. To do so prematurely could send a signal that terror pays. I urge the Government to resist the siren calls of those who wish to demonise the state of Israel, and who draw a moral equivalence between the Hamas leadership and the democratically elected Government of Israel in a bid to isolate and delegitimise it.

While we are all appalled at the dreadful loss of life in Gaza, we must never forget the horror unleashed by Hamas on Israel on 7 October—the deadliest terrorist attack in Israel's history, to which the Defence Secretary rightly referred. The Conservative party stands four-square behind Israel's right to defend itself—but it must be in accordance with international humanitarian law. We must not lose sight of the fact that this is, at its heart, a tale of two just causes, of two peoples' legitimate aspirations for national sovereignty, security and dignity.

There are other crises around the world that must also preoccupy the Government. I refer particularly to the crisis that has engulfed Sudan—now the worst displacement of people anywhere in the world. We are seeing clear evidence of ethnic cleansing once again in Darfur. We urge the Government to continue our efforts to pressure the warring parties in Sudan to cease hostilities, and to push hard for humanitarian support to reach those desperate people, including those I saw on the border with Chad earlier this year.

The Government must also continue to hold to account the regimes around the world committing appalling acts, whether that is Iran, Myanmar, North Korea or Russia, where we must push for the immediate release of Vladimir Kara-Murza. Finally, I know that the Foreign Secretary will want to work closely with the Governments of Gibraltar and Spain, and take a hands-on approach to securing a good deal for the Rock's future prosperity. We will also be following closely the very important negotiations over the future of Diego Garcia.

I turn briefly and directly to the Gracious Speech. In spite of their legitimate desire for yet another defence review, I think the Government have made a mistake in not honouring immediately our commitment to increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2030. My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge), the shadow Defence Secretary, will say more about the matter later, but I would say now that this gives the wrong signal to our allies and adversaries about our



determination to confront the multitude of dangers the world faces. In 2014, the Conservative Government made the commitment to spend 2% of GDP on defence. The UK led the way and many NATO allies have followed, and we have now led the way with our commitment to move to 2.5% of GDP by 2030. The Government should be in no doubt, either, that we will place under the microscope any decisions that they may make on our nuclear deterrent.

On the subject of Europe, we welcome the closest possible partnership with our friends and neighbours, subject to respecting the results of the referendum and the will of our constituents over Brexit. Today's most important summit at Blenheim, served up oven-ready by my right hon. Friend the former Prime Minister, is a chance to underline the effective way in which the UK has worked with our European partners in response to the invasion of Ukraine and shown that, although we are outside the EU, we can indeed work together effectively.

The upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, which I am delighted was referenced in the Gracious Speech, will be an opportunity to show real ambition for the Commonwealth. In government, we offered strong support for Samoa's hosting of CHOGM and its desire to use this platform to enhance Commonwealth countries' resilience to global challenges. I urge the new Government to continue working closely with Samoa to make the most of this CHOGM and to mobilise action across the Commonwealth, including to boost trade and investment and enhance access to climate finance.

I wish to conclude by addressing an issue that is very close to my heart and the hearts of many others across the House, but which in many ways links all these themes together. I was privileged to return to government as the Minister for international development, a brief I held previously in 2010 as Secretary of State. For many in their darkest moments after flood, earthquake and disaster, Britain has been a beacon of hope and light. Now, 70 million people are falling back into poverty, millions of girls are out of school, famines stalk the lands of east Africa and children are starving to death. The anger and frustration of the global south is palpable. I made no secret of my dismay that the overseas aid budget was cut and that the Department for International Development was merged into the Foreign Office. My job as Deputy Foreign Secretary was to look forward, to try to make the merger work after a tumultuous start and to set out a pathway to return to 0.7%.

However, development is about much more than money. Our recent White Paper crafted new approaches that reflect the changing world around us. We formulated creative ways of mobilising new and additional funds to ensure that the sustainable development goals can get back on track. I am proud of the leadership that our former Prime Minister has shown on the green climate fund and the Global Fund, where Britain was right at the forefront of ensuring that those funds improved and were fully replenished. I hope that the new Government will do the same with the International Development Association World Bank replenishment and with Gavi.

We made the case that international development must be owned by the British people. I submit that that is not a Conservative, Labour or Liberal policy but a British policy, and we must all unite behind the goal of

bringing the British people behind the agenda set out so clearly in the White Paper. All British development money is spent in our national interest, because it helps heal the grotesque discrepancies of opportunity and wealth that disfigure our world. We will continue to stand up for the world's poorest and most vulnerable, calling for the continued reform of the international financial system to free up funding for climate finance, debt relief and achieving the SDGs. We will continue to stand up for women and girls with the same vigour that we exhibited in government, whether in relation to female genital mutilation, women's rights or LGBTQ rights, and we will press for a bolstering of the coping mechanisms of countries on the frontline of climate shocks.

Finally, we will be keeping a close eye on whether the "D" in FCDO falls silent once more. Development is only as effective as the structures and expertise behind it. I tried hard in office to strengthen the development silo in the Foreign Office, with some, but frankly not enough success. I stress in the strongest terms that development cannot be a sideshow, as people's lives depend upon it, but the Foreign Office system is built around diplomacy, with a panoply of resources focused on the Foreign Secretary's priorities. I hope that the Government keep that in mind. Development deserves the attention and energy afforded to diplomacy. With the right strategic adjustments, development and diplomacy could make for a mighty partnership, but it will require proactive leadership. If, despite best efforts, that cannot be achieved under the merger—that will become clearer sooner rather than later during this Parliament—I will urge the Government to move swiftly and decisively to plan B.

It is easy to despair at the state of the world, so I hope to end on a more sanguine note. I am long enough in the tooth to have lived through the ebbs and flows of different eras, conflicts and crises. I have witnessed the worst in humanity, but also the best. I have learned that the bleakest moments offer the greatest opportunities. However, history teaches us that most things do not come to an end, but are brought to an end. We have the power to change things for the better and to build a safer and more prosperous world, but we cannot do it alone. Only international co-operation can deliver the progress we seek. I sincerely hope that the new Government will succeed. The future of us all depends on that success.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Siobhain McDonagh):** I call Deirdre Costigan to make her maiden speech.

1.44 pm

**Deirdre Costigan** (Ealing Southall) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden remarks on this historic King's Speech, which puts into concrete action the first steps of this Labour Government of national renewal. I thank the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) for their wide-ranging remarks.

As the new Member for Ealing Southall, I stand in the shadow of Virendra Sharma, who was our MP for 17 years. With more than 50 years of public service in total, including as a local councillor and mayor of Ealing, Virendra is a towering figure in west London politics. Always dressed impeccably in a suit, and sometimes

[*Deirdre Costigan*]

sporting sunglasses, he often has the air of a mafia don, until he gives you that wonderful Sharma smile. Virendra is well known for his work on global maternal health. He has been a tireless defender of human rights and of the underdog all his political life. I thank him personally for his support and wisdom, and I pay tribute to his wife Nirmala and all the family for their years of service to Ealing Southall.

The House can probably tell from my still-intact Dublin accent that I was not born here. I came to this country in the 1990s to finish my education, but like so many Irish people before me, I fell in love with the diversity of this country, and I never went back. That is the story of my constituency, Ealing Southall, where 53% of people were, like me, born abroad. Whether from India, Pakistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Ireland or so many other places, we all came here for a better life, but we did not always find it easy to achieve that better life. Many of my constituents have faced barriers in the workplace and on the streets, but they have always stood up to them.

Ealing Southall has a strong tradition of anti-racism, and of trade unionism. In the 1960s, low-paid exploited Punjabi workers at the Woolf rubber factory joined the Transport and General Workers' Union and famously took seven weeks' successful strike action, despite attempts by management to create sectarian division. In the 1970s, residents took to the streets of Southall to defend it from the far right in the aftermath of the racist murder of Gurdip Singh Chaggar.

Until my election, I worked for the country's biggest and of course best trade union, Unison. Starting as a shop steward, I went on to become national officer for disability equality. I intend to continue Ealing Southall's proud tradition of trade unionism and fighting for workers' rights, so I welcome Labour's new deal for working people, and the much-needed laws that we will bring forward to ensure that black, Asian and disabled workers have the right to equal pay.

I am enormously thankful to the people of Ealing Southall for placing their trust in me. Since the creation of the seat, Labour has won 23 times in a row, but this is the first time in 23 elections that Ealing Southall will be represented by a woman. I intend to support this Labour Government's plans to create flexible workplaces that fit with women's lives. Ealing Southall is home to a dizzying array of places of worship, and I was delighted to visit Shree Ram mandir, Shri Guru Ravidass gurdwara, Baitul Mukarram mosque and Christ the Redeemer church during my campaign. I know that for many of us coming to this country from abroad, it was the mandirs, the gurdwaras, the mosques and the churches that provided the help and support that we needed to settle into a new country. I will always support all the diverse communities in Ealing Southall.

I am lucky to have not one but three town centres in Ealing Southall. West Ealing, Hanwell, and Southall are all filled with shops, bars and cafés. Southall is a busy shopping hub for wedding finery, famous the world over, but local businesses are not as busy as they once were, which is why they strongly back Labour's plans to review business rates and stamp out late payments to help revitalise our high streets.

Fly-tipping is a blight on town centres across London. I commend the work of the amazing LAGER Can litter picking volunteers who do so much to keep Ealing clean. As the former deputy leader of Ealing council, I hope to work with our new Labour Government to find ways of giving councils more powers to levy and enforce fines that will act as a real deterrent against that criminal behaviour.

Ealing hospital sits in the centre of my constituency, but it is badly in need of love. Ten years ago, I had a stroke while I was—of all places—at the Labour party conference. I recovered, but I am sad to say that I did miss the leader's speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) that year as a result. I am afraid to say that I missed his statement this morning as well, having unexpectedly been encouraged, shall we say, to make my maiden speech.

When I had my stroke, the care that I received from an Irish neurologist working for NHS North West London was fantastic, so I applaud the investment that Labour is making in reducing NHS waiting lists and doubling scanners for quicker diagnoses. I am not sure that I would be here today if it was not for our NHS. We must again ensure that it is the best health service in the world.

Finally, until recently, I was Ealing's cabinet member for climate action. I know that many people in my constituency worry about air pollution, nature breakdown and flood risk. I am excited about Labour's plan to set up Great British Energy, a clean new energy company that should cut carbon emissions, create jobs and help reduce household bills.

Ealing Southall has always been a place that has welcomed new arrivals. I thank this House for channelling the spirit of Ealing Southall today by similarly welcoming my arrival. I look forward to serving all my constituents, and I will start by backing the much-needed change that they voted for that is set out in the King's Speech.

1.52 pm

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): May I start by warmly congratulating the new the hon. Member for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan)? For a time I lived in Acton, close to her constituency, and when she spoke about the diversity and warmth of the area, I certainly recognised that. I have no doubt that she will be an enormous asset to this place. Many congratulations, and welcome.

I also welcome the Secretary of State for Defence and his team to their places, and the Foreign Secretary and his team to theirs. They include my fellow Oxford MP, the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the right hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds); it is wonderful to see her there. I also welcome the shadow Defence Secretary, the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge), and, in particular, the shadow Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), whose promotion I hope we can all agree is long overdue.

Under boundary changes, Oxford West and Abingdon has taken in Dalton barracks and Shippon, so I am now also the MP for a number of armed forces families. I pay tribute to them, and to all our armed forces and their families who so willingly give their lives over to service to this country.

I am very pleased that foreign affairs and defence has been chosen as the theme for the second day of the debate. We are living in a world that feels so much less stable and less secure than it has ever felt, certainly in my lifetime. Only a few days ago, we saw the horrific attempted assassination of an American presidential candidate; Putin continues to wage war in Ukraine; Xi Jinping continues his muscular foreign policy aims, threatening Taiwan and continuing to oppress people in Hong Kong and Xinjiang; and as has been mentioned, a rising tide of populism is sweeping across Europe.

The Liberal Democrats support many of the priorities set out in the King's Speech. Support for NATO, support for Ukraine and resetting our relationship with the European Union are all vital to achieving security and stability. We aim to work constructively with anyone in government who seeks to return Britain to its position as a leading light on the international stage, in particular in the area of development, on which I associate my remarks with those of the shadow Foreign Secretary. We agree that there is a huge opportunity. We want a return to spending 0.7% on development, and we think that a new Department is the way to ensure the muscle that is needed to give that oomph. Nevertheless, we wish all the Ministers well in their endeavour to find a place for development in the Foreign Office.

I was especially pleased to hear mention of the middle east and the two-state solution. For reasons that I am sure are obvious, that is what I will focus my remarks on. It has been nearly 300 days since the horrific Hamas attack on 7 October. Since then, hostages have still not returned home. The death toll in Gaza has reached 38,000. The vast majority of the dead are women and children. There are, of course, thousands more under the rubble who are left out of the statistics. Scientists fear that the death toll will soar. A letter in the medical journal *The Lancet* predicted that if we take into account indirect casualties of war—people who die of malnutrition, a lack of medication and unsanitary living conditions—the total number of deaths could climb as high as 186,000.

The children of Gaza have suffered the unimaginable. Alexandra Saieh, the head of humanitarian policy and advocacy at Save the Children International, said:

“They are being dismembered. They have been burnt alive in tents. They have been killed due to crashing apartment building blocks. They have been also killed by preventable diseases and illnesses and denied medical assistance. Children in Gaza are just suffering horrifically.”

In the first three months of this conflict alone, 1,000 children had one or both legs amputated; that meant more than 10 children lost one or both legs every single day. We need that immediate ceasefire. We needed it six months ago.

There is only one way to end the killing, to get those hostages safely home and to get that humanitarian aid in. None of that can happen until the ceasefire is achieved, but we must also understand that a ceasefire is not enough for peace. Peace is not just the absence of war. It is hope that is shared—hope for a future in which Palestinians and Israelis live in security and dignity. That is what we mean by a two-state solution. That is the real prize.

I have been relieved to be a Liberal Democrat during the last few months. In all seriousness, when my family were under siege in that church in Gaza, the professional and the personal collided completely. I got the devastating news in November that I had lost a family member; my

cousins texted me to tell me, and all they asked for was that ceasefire. That is what the Liberal Democrats have consistently argued for, because when it comes to foreign policy, we ground our approach in liberal principles of human rights and the international rules-based order.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I congratulate the hon. Member on a powerful speech. I agree with her call for an immediate ceasefire. Does she believe that we should also halt arms supplies to Israel, which are being used to bomb Gaza and make us and the United States complicit in the killing of so many people in Gaza?

**Layla Moran:** I thank the right hon. Member for his intervention. I will come to exactly those points and will expand on them.

An approach based on the international rules-based order and humanitarian law led to our being on the right side of the argument on apartheid in South Africa, on Hong Kong, and indeed on the war in Iraq. It guides our approach now. I am pleased—delighted, even—that the Government have included reference to the all-important two-state solution in the King's Speech, and I am very much heartened by their change in tone. But words are meaningless without concrete action. It is vital that we start to think about what we need to do the day after that ceasefire is secured, because at some point it will be—we all know that. Hamas are extremes in this debate, but so is Netanyahu. Neither wants peace. It is in neither of their interests. It is the framing of one versus the other that has proved to be so insidious in this debate.

There are plenty of voices in Israel, Palestine and beyond who are partners in peace and are actively calling for it. Protest in Israel is growing, with demonstrations held in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, clamouring for a deal to be done to bring those hostages home. They often link that to a ceasefire, and the release of Palestinian political prisoners such as Marwan Barghouti. That wider movement for peace is growing.

I want to tell the House about two friends of mine, Maoz and Magen Inon. They lost their parents on 7 October when Hamas targeted their house with a close-range missile. I have been twice to Netiv HaAsara—once before and once since—and I saw their house and their burnt out car. It was heartbreaking. But rather than turn to hatred, they chose instead to spend their whole lives talking about peace, because they do not want this to happen to anyone else's family. There is only one way to guarantee that: peace and a shared future. In them and in all those Israeli peace activists—a growing movement—I see that shared future.

This Chamber and this Government need to understand that people like Maoz and Magen are embers in a nascent fire. They need the oxygen of political support to survive and grow. The same is true for Palestinian peace activists Hamze and Ahmed, who I recently shared a panel with—all of us children of the Nakba, but all of us willing to devote our futures to stopping the endless taking of lives to avenge a past we no longer want to keep resurrecting over and over again. These are the voices that deserve to be amplified, and this is the kind of rhetoric that I hope we can all follow—bringing people together, not seeking to divide. I say that with some disappointment, because in the remarks of the Leader of the Opposition in response to the King's



[Layla Moran]

Speech yesterday, he did not mention Palestine at all, only Israel. We cannot do that. We must understand that we cannot have security and freedom for Israel without security and freedom for Palestine. That is why the mention of the two-state solution is so vital.

Let us start with the basics: a two-state solution needs two states. That is why we must recognise the state of Palestine, along 1967 borders, immediately without preconditions. I have laid a Bill in every parliamentary Session since I was elected, and I will do so again. Some 140 countries have already taken this step, including Ireland, Spain and Norway just this May. If the UK were to join them, it would send a powerful message to the Israeli Government that we are serious about two states—something that Netanyahu has rejected. It would also send a message to the Palestinian people, who are desperate for hope that the international community—in particular the UK with our long-standing historical obligations to the region—will help them achieve that future.

Many will say—and they are right—that recognition is not enough. One of the biggest barriers to peace are the illegal Israeli settlements in the west bank. In 2024, Israel illegally seized 23.7 sq km of Palestinian land in the occupied west bank. That is more than all the land it has taken over the past 20 years combined. These settlements are illegal under international law. They exacerbate tension and they undermine the viability of that previous two-state solution. We have called for individual violent settlers who breach international law to be sanctioned. I was pleased that the then Conservative Government took some small steps and sanctioned individual settlers, but I urge the Government to go further. The Liberal Democrats have called for sanctions to include Ministers Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, and the connected entities that provide support or enable those extremist individuals. Since 2021, we have also called for the UK to ban trade with illegal settlements, because if they are illegal under international law, we should put a firm marker in the sand.

To come to the point made by the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), the trade of British weapons needs to be handled with great care. Our policy is not to single out Israel—that is important. Our policy is built on ensuring that no British-made arms are sold to any countries that are in potential breach of human rights law. That is why we believe that we should look at our arms export trade with Israel. Despite repeated calls, the Government never released their own legal advice on potential breaches of international law in this conflict, but given that there is a case to answer at the ICJ and the ICC, the British public deserve to know whether the Government are breaching their own arms export regime. The Foreign Secretary, when he was shadow Foreign Secretary, asked for that legal advice to be released; I am curious to see whether he will make good on that promise.

While we are on the subject of courts, it is vital that the UK Government give their full-throated support to the ICC and the ICJ in their investigations and judgments. The UK Government must support them and their processes and outcomes without fear or favour. That goes beyond this conflict, as there are international ramifications if we undermine those courts that are the bedrock of our international rules-based order. When

in government, the Conservatives undermined those processes, but I had hoped for better from Labour, and I still do. In January, the now Foreign Secretary said that his party believed that if an arrest warrant were issued for Netanyahu, they would honour it. Since then, Karim Khan at the ICC has issued one for Hamas leaders and Netanyahu, but we understand from the media that the block by the UK, which should be removed, may have remained in place. It would be helpful for the Foreign Secretary to come to the House and explain the position.

**Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): As ever, the hon. Lady is a powerful advocate on injustices all over the world. The particular point she raises on the international rules-based order is very powerful. It and the international legal system must provide equal protection to all people, and they must be free from double standards. The minute those two things do not apply, the very nature of the rules-based order is under threat.

**Layla Moran**: I could not agree more. It has really concerned me how people perceive a double standard between what is happening in this conflict and what is happening between Ukraine and Russia. They are very different conflicts. As politicians, we have to bolster that international rules-based order so that people have faith that injustices anywhere in the world will be put through a proper process and determined. I am afraid to say that we are at risk—not just this country but the US—of undermining that system. I urge the Government to take a different approach.

I will simply end by saying that I urge the Government to go further and faster on a two-state solution. I would love to see a plan for what they mean by leading. I would offer my services with pleasure, because we need that two-state solution, with Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in dignity and security. It is going to take much more than a change in tone to get there. It is vital to what we need to achieve peace, not just in Israel-Palestine but in the middle east and the region as a whole.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Christopher Chope)**: I call Lee Pitcher to make his maiden speech.

2.10 pm

**Lee Pitcher** (Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran).

Like many of us, I found myself standing on the Terrace here in Parliament on my first day, with my back to the stunning Palace of Westminster and the splendour of Big Ben, and the London Eye majestically circling with the buzz, excitement and energy of the visitors here in this great capital city. There I was, looking out across the very still River Thames towards the east end of London, home to the world's greatest football team, West Ham United, who, I remind everyone, did bring home some European silverware quite recently. But in truth, I was not thinking about the London Stadium at the time; I was looking towards the place where I was born and spent my early years.

I recalled the 14-year-old in his first year of his GCSEs who slept on a double mattress on the floor, alone with just his mum and his sister; a little lad who had nothing left to his name and who was regularly

bullied at school for the length of his trousers. I can tell the House that there is nothing more stark, more devastating and more heartbreaking than seeing your mum's face—a very proud lady whose primary focus in life was to look after her babies—as she found herself working tirelessly but still losing the home that we lived in. Those times were rough, but I was so fortunate to have the very best and most inspiring women role models around me: my mum and my sister. They showed me that strength of character, resilience, and the importance of kindness regardless of the situation is what will carry you through.

At that time, what we had were many friends and families in the community who rallied round to give us support and a roof over our heads. That told me that there were people out there who cared—people who would give you hope, and hope is what we needed. That experience absolutely changed my life and set a direction of travel for me to work hard, to do well and to never ever want to see anyone in that position again. And here I am today on 18 July, my 47th birthday—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] Thank you! I stand here in the shadows of the greats in this country that I love with my every being, having been given the chance to make sure I deliver that promise to myself and to my constituents that my situation will never happen to another child.

Today is a super special day, as was 5 July, when I became first ever Member of Parliament for Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme. Let me take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work of Andrew Percy, who residents spoke of so fondly on the doorstep as a great constituency MP, and of Nick Fletcher in Don Valley, whose work promoting mental health in men is very dear to my heart, having lost a cousin a few years ago. Nick also campaigned for Doncaster airport, which is a key priority of mine too. I will not stop working closely with the Mayor of Doncaster, the South Yorkshire Mayor, officers and others to see planes flying over the skies of Doncaster again.

It really isn't hard to see why we all cared so much for my beautiful constituency, and I will tell you a little bit about why I adore it. Thirty years ago I met my best friend, my wife, who is from the constituency. She introduced me to Yorkshire, and I fell in love with the place in the same way that I fell in love with her at 18 years of age. She has been by my side ever since. Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme is my home. My family have grown up in the constituency, my children have gone to school there and, alongside work, I have volunteered with wonderful organisations.

There are many unsung heroes in the area who, over many, many years, have given back to our community. I have seen the work of great places such as the Doncaster Lions, whose motto could not align any more to our own values: “We serve”. They tirelessly walk the streets at Christmas every single year with Santa and his sleigh to bring smiles to children who otherwise would not be able to afford to go and see him in his grotto. I also have first-hand experience of the impact of Thorne's local community radio station, TMCR, which brings a ray of sunshine through music to residents across the airwaves, easing loneliness and creating a sense of family. As a school governor at Travis St Lawrence school for several years, I have seen how the monumental effort of staff and teachers gives children the very best start in life.

Community spirit can be found in every single pocket of the new constituency, from the urban, proud former mining areas and charming towns of Doncaster East,

to the fertile, agricultural farming areas, quaint towns and villages of the Isle of Axholme in north Lincolnshire, through to the thriving local independent businesses and attractions, such as Yorkshire wildlife park—I give a big shout out to Rocco the baby rhino who I met last weekend. Like Rocco, I see what I have in Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme as something rare and special that must be looked after, because mine is an area where heritage and tradition have shaped the towns and villages. I am keen to ensure that the unique identities of the different areas are respected, embraced and enjoyed for generations to come.

The Isle of Axholme was once an inland island, surrounded by streams, rivers and meres until it was drained in the 1600s. It has amazing historic architecture—you really need to come and see it—such as Normanby Hall and the Old Rectory in Epworth, which was home to John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. It is also home to the Haxey hood. Has anyone heard of that? It is a tradition that dates back to the 14th century. Lady de Mowbray was riding towards Westwoodside, when her silk hat flew off her head in the wind and 13 local farmworkers ran after it. Eventually, one of them caught it but was too shy to give it back. He handed it to another gentleman who passed it back to her. The whole thing caused such amusement that she dedicated 13 acres of land so that it could be re-enacted every single year. So I say why don't we, after Prime Minister's questions, get together in a rugby scrum, as they do every year, and see if we can push the hood back to where it needs to be!

We also have Keadby, home to the power stations; the Stainforth and Keadby canal; Crowle, with its quaint square and Gothic revival market hall; and lovely rural villages such as Luddington, Ealand, West Butterwick, Garthorpe and Fockerby. In Eastoft, I recently met a couple of farmers who told me that we have the best growing land in the world. Doncaster East comprises wonderful market towns such as Bawtry, a 12th century port, and Thorne, mentioned in the Domesday Book; mining settlements such as Dunscroft, Moorends and Rossington; Hatfield, the place where Northumbrian King Edwin was killed in the battle of Hatfield Chase; Woodhouse, the birthplace of Corporal William J Harper, a local hero who won a Victoria Cross in world war two; and Dunville, Lindholme, Bessacarr, Branton, Finningley, Austerfield and Auckley, which all have their own enticing charm.

For all the greatness in my home constituency, my team and I have real challenges ahead. The King's Speech paves the way for policies and legislation to facilitate change in a lot of areas. For the mum who came to the constituency pregnant five years ago and still has not got her child an NHS dental appointment, I say that there are 700,000 new appointments to come. For the dad I spoke to while he was getting his children ready to visit their grandma—his wife was upstairs in bed; she had had a delay in her chemotherapy treatment and wanted to not see that happen to others because of the anxiety it caused—I say that there will be 40,000 new appointments per week and a huge reduction in NHS waiting times. For the grandad who endured young adults trying to break into his home repeatedly—pretty much every day—and threatening him with knives, I say that there will be 13,000 more police officers.

[Lee Pitcher]

For the children I spoke to at the New College hustings, who wanted new industries and new jobs to excite them, I say that there will be a clean energy company, with science, technology, engineering and maths jobs for a future generation. For the parent with the child with special educational needs who got no mental health support or diagnosis for several years, I say that there is a commitment to massively increase mental health provision. For the school leaver who can never envisage having a home for the future or the ability to buy one, I say that there is a commitment to jobs and a commitment to build 1.5 million homes. For my mum, waiting for a bus that is delayed or never turns up, I say that powers will be devolved to regional mayors to take buses back into public control. For the children who go to school hungry and do not have clothes on their backs—there are plenty in my constituency, where the relative poverty rate is 19.7%, according to the House of Commons Library—I say that there are breakfast clubs for all. Energy costs will be reduced by GB Energy, there will be economic stability and growth as a result of projects such as a national wealth fund, and planning reform will create roles and jobs.

What I do from now on will require personal, role-model, visionary leadership, but it will also require a team effort. When I started my career as a sewer bairer, lifting manholes and putting down bait to kill rats, I was given some advice by the CEO of a company, who said, “Lee, to be successful you need to build the best team around you, and to do that you need to focus on brains. Do not focus on race, religion, age or sexual preference; focus on getting the best brains around you, and you will be successful.” Over the years, I have learned about the need to supplement that with passion in the heart, for those with the right passion and the right brains are bound to be successful.

I will work tirelessly across the private, public and voluntary sectors, with my wonderful volunteering team and with residents, to bring a better today and an even better tomorrow for Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme. No family should do go to bed at night and have nightmares about what tomorrow might bring; they should sleep well, dream big, and wake up to opportunities galore. I do not underestimate the challenge that lies ahead, but I can tell the House that that 14-year-old without a home never did so either, and let me bear witness to that as I stand here today. I say to every single resident of Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme, “Thank you for putting your trust in me. I am your voice here in Westminster, I am your voice in the constituency, and together we will make a difference.”

2.21 pm

**Sir Alec Shelbrooke** (Wetherby and Easingwold) (Con): It is a real pleasure to follow the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme (Lee Pitcher). It is also a great pleasure to have another Yorkshire Hammer in the House, but let me give him some friendly advice: he might not want to have my neighbour, the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon), sitting behind him next time. If the hon. Gentleman does give him any trouble, he should just ask to compare their teams’ European cabinets.

As the current leader of the UK delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, I want to say something about defence in an ever-changing world. I hope there is not too much of a pause in the defence reviews that have already taken place, and there has been some debate about that. I understand why a new defence review is taking place under a new Government, but I think it worth noting that we have moved to a 360° view of NATO and the threats that it faces.

We may well see a change of Administration in the United States, and with any change of Administration it takes time to work out the direction that the new Administration want to take. I do not feel as fearful as some about President Trump returning to the White House, because during his last tenure he invested heavily in NATO and did not undermine it. We know that while his habit is to create great upset and make big statements, the reality turns out to be somewhat different, and he works towards building on that. Nevertheless, this is something that will have to be considered. What Trump did succeed in doing was getting European allies to build their defence strategies and budgets, and we cannot escape the fact that the demands on the defence of Europe are growing and growing, not just on land but at sea.

We know that Russia has mapped the bed of the North sea. It has mapped the fuel pipelines and the data cables, and obviously the surface platforms are at risk. We know that the Royal Navy and our allies spend a great deal of time counteracting that, and I am proud that the Conservative Government established a huge shipbuilding programme the likes of which had not been seen for very many years. It provides long-term contracts that allow the shipyards and the companies to invest, and, crucially, allow the Royal Navy to be the capable force that it needs to be. That must be key not just to the maintaining of a maritime nation, but to where the maritime interests lie in the world.

Climate change has already been mentioned today. An undeniable fact in that connection is the opening up of the High North and the north-east passage. Another undeniable fact is that the Russians have been rebuilding and revamping bases along their northern shoreline, and yet another undeniable fact is that the Ukraine war that Vladimir Putin illegally started, thinking he would be able to walk in and dominate that country in a very short space of time, has decimated his economy in the long run. Going to war will always decimate an economy, but this war has decimated Russia’s military, costing it a huge number of military personnel, and has made Putin reliant on other countries, such as China. It is notable that before the Ukraine war Chinese vessels never really went into the High North, but they do now because Russia lets them in.

Tension will build in the High North, and we have to be ready for it. I think we are ready for it—we have taken part in vital exercises in the area—but that just goes to show how vital the Royal Navy is. It is, of course, also vital that we have a functioning air force, and that we continue with the procurement of F-35s. Russian jets try to violate our airspace—certainly NATO airspace—on, I think, a daily basis, and they need to be met with confrontation. NATO is a deterrent rather than an aggressive force, but deterrence can only happen if those concerned feel the consequences of the balance of power. I believe that NATO is strong enough at the



moment. No other combined maritime force in the world constantly has at least 36 ships patrolling the sea; that is what NATO is able to bring together. However, it is vital that when we carry out the strategic defence review, we analyse not just what we need in maritime terms today, but what will come in the future; not just how we patrol the airspace today, but what will come in the future.

We must also address the position of the Army, which has been under discussion for decades. It is all very well to talk about hollowing out the armed forces and going for the lowest number of personnel. This was, in many ways, the post-cold war dividend, and that dividend has gone, as a number of us warned that it would before the conflict in Ukraine, and it will not come back. That leads to some tough choices. There has to be honesty in the conversation about how much of our GDP we should be spending, because it will add up to 100%, and that means that the budget must be cut somewhere else. I am proud that we have the track to get to 2.5%, but, as I was trying to ask in my intervention on the Secretary of State, if this review adds up to more than 2.5%—if it says, “This is what we need to be able to defend a changing arena”—will the Government spend that money? We cannot on one the hand say that we aim to get to 2.5%, rather than giving a specific date, and on the other hand say, “We are going to have a strategic defence review, but what if it costs 3%?” Will this actually be achieved? That is an important question.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The right hon. Member is making a most interesting speech. Does he agree that the present size of the British Army is militating against recruitment? A great many people who might be good in the Army and have considered it as a career option are saying, “Actually, if I could get another job I might do better,” and that is very, very dangerous.

**Sir Alec Shelbrooke:** Recruitment has become a big problem in the armed forces, especially now that unemployment is at historically low levels. One of my colleagues said to me recently that it was not officers but the ranks who were difficult to recruit. I do not have an immediate answer on how we can change that, but I can say this. In my short tenure as the procurement Minister at the MOD, it became blatantly obvious within 24 hours from looking at the letters and written questions on my desk that accommodation is one of the biggest issues facing the services. I make no criticism of any of my successors or predecessors in that role for trying to handle the issue of accommodation, because I quickly discovered just how difficult it is. I wanted to make front-loading the capital expenditure budget a priority in order to sort out accommodation, but there are so many legal hurdles in the deals that have been done in the past that it becomes difficult.

I want to put on the record that I see service accommodation as a defence capability, and it should be treated like all other defence capabilities. If we are asking our service personnel to go to war, do we want the last thing they hear before they go on to the battlefield to be that their family are moving out and going somewhere else because they cannot live in such conditions any more? Do we want the last thing our personnel on

Trident hear before disappearing for four months to be, “I’m leaving; I’m going back to my family home with the kids. We can’t live like this”? That means it has become an issue of operational capability. We need our highly trained and highly professional personnel to know that they are being looked after, which starts with accommodation.

I wish the Government all success in trying to grasp this issue and take it forward, because it is exceptionally complex. I am looking at the shadow Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge), who was one of my successors. I know that he personally tried very hard to sort this issue out and carry it forward. I know there is a body of work taking place, but this is a priority and needs to be sorted. I hope that the new Minister for the Armed Forces, the hon. Member for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), makes good on the 50 written questions he submitted on 23 and 24 May this year about accommodation, and on the several questions tabled by the now Secretary of State. They obviously recognise that it is a huge concern, and we look forward to finding out how they will approach that as soon as possible.

I will move on to foreign affairs. Without a shadow of a doubt, one of the most contentious issues in the previous Parliament, as well as outside and during the general election, was the war between Israel and Gaza, which has inflamed passions on all sides. I fear that the general election campaign showed that some of the militant pro-Palestinian protesters are stepping over the mark. That does not apply to all pro-Palestinian protesters—there are very different sets of people—but I am talking about the militant pro-Palestinian protesters who seek to use fear and intimidation to try to achieve their objectives.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I have not given notice to the hon. Member for Birmingham Yardley (Jess Phillips) about what I am about to say, but it is not a criticism, so I hope she will accept it. As she pointed out in her acceptance speech, it was one of the most horrific campaigns she had ever been through. Nobody putting themselves forward in a democracy, let alone for public service, should have to experience what not just she but several other people experienced. Do you know what most of them had in common, Mr Deputy Speaker? They were women. Female candidates in the election, especially Labour female candidates, had the most horrific, misogynistic abuse hurled at them over the issue of Gaza and Israel, and we have to call that out.

Everybody elected to this place is here as a parliamentarian to speak up for the things they passionately believe in, and no one should ever dismiss someone’s passionate views about a particular subject, even if we ferociously disagree with them. However, it is incumbent on all of us to call it out when we see, in what should be a fair democracy, people having their tyres slashed, being screamed at and being intimidated, which happens to women especially. If we want to have a strong democracy, we have to make sure that this House says with one voice that everybody who wants to stand for Parliament, whatever their views, has the right to campaign safely and put their views across. As a country, we have fallen a long way behind that. Whatever anybody’s view, we have to call that out.

[*Sir Alec Shelbrooke*]

I am a strong defender and supporter of Israel. I believe that Israel has a right to exist, and a right to defend itself. I believe that a close eye must be kept on whether international humanitarian law is being broken. If it is, the people who are responsible must be brought before the courts and prosecuted.

The hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) made a very powerful speech, and I listened intently to every word she said. Her personal experiences bring value to this House, as she is able to talk about what the Israel-Gaza conflict means to her, given that her family are on the ground. Who in this House does not want to see a ceasefire? We all want to see a ceasefire, but there are two sides to the coin. It is still Hamas's objective to wipe out the state of Israel, which we have to address. We have to keep a balance. As the shadow Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), said, a pogrom was launched on 7 October, and we must make absolutely sure that what happened on that day cannot happen again.

This House has always pushed for a two-state solution, but it cannot be down to Israel alone to make the ceasefire happen. I will carry on defending Israel's right to defend itself and maintain its security. I will also carry on defending international law and making sure it is abided by. If it is not, I will hold people to account. But the call for a ceasefire cannot just be on one side. Hamas have to release the hostages and give up their objective of wiping out Israel, and then we may be able to move things forward.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Christopher Chope):** I call Joe Powell to make his maiden speech.

2.36 pm

**Joe Powell (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab):** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Wetherby and Easingwold (Sir Alec Shelbrooke), and the excellent maiden speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan) and for Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme (Lee Pitcher).

It gives me great delight to address this House as the new Member of Parliament for Kensington and Bayswater. I doubt that, for any of us, the last seven weeks have been easy. I know that many hon. Members will still be catching up on their sleep after the campaign trail, but having our twins born in the first week of the general election campaign took things to another level. If timing is everything in politics, that is certainly not a combination I would recommend anyone repeat—but my children will obviously have a great story to tell when they are older.

I want to take a moment to thank the team at Queen Charlotte's hospital and across the Imperial College NHS trust for their incredible care. Our NHS staff deserve our utmost respect and support, and I hope that in the future St Mary's, Hammersmith and Charing Cross hospitals will finally get what they need to become the first-class premises that patients and staff in our community deserve, including the delivering of plans for a brand-new St Mary's hospital.

I pay tribute to my two predecessors in this new constituency. Felicity Buchan worked hard for the residents of Kensington over the past five years, and I particularly commend her for her work on the Homes for Ukraine programme. Some issues are central to our national and international security, which transcends party politics, and supporting the struggle for a free Ukraine is one of them. I am grateful for her work on this issue. In Kensington and Bayswater, we have a Ukrainian cultural centre, the Ukraine embassy and a substantial Ukrainian population. Having personally worked to support democracy and anti-corruption in Ukraine for many years, I will make sure that our Ukrainian community continues to have a strong advocate in Parliament.

I was also fortunate enough to inherit part of Dame Karen Buck's former constituency of Westminster North. Under previous boundaries, she represented north Kensington for many years. I know from experience that tens of thousands of residents have been directly assisted by Karen and her staff with expertise and empathy. I hope I can emulate even a small part of her unwavering focus on tackling poverty and our housing crisis, whether that is by holding our social housing landlords to account, by protecting private renters, including by abolishing section 21 no-fault evictions, or by finally ending the outdated feudal leasehold system. Karen did a monumental amount of work to advance those causes, and I am sure she was absolutely delighted with their inclusion in the King's Speech. She has always exemplified public service over self-interest. I will do my best, along with my other colleagues who are inheriting her constituency, to live up to her legacy. I know how grateful we are for her 27 years of service in this House.

Kensington and Bayswater is an incredible part of London, as many hon. Members will already know—indeed, I canvassed many of them during the campaign and have already been picking up casework in the corridors. We are an amazing community, with fantastic campaigners and organisations, businesses, entrepreneurs, charities, heritage, music, parks and schools. There is so much going for it, but there is also a deep inequality that has widened in recent years.

There is now a 19-year gap in life expectancy between a woman born in Notting Dale in North Kensington and one born in Holland Park, only a third of a mile away. That gap has increased by five years in the past decade alone. Over 6,000 children are living in poverty and over 3,000 families are on a growing housing waiting list. We are rightly proud of our contribution to the nation's economy in terms of growth, talent, innovation and finance in so many different industries, and we celebrate the tourists who come to visit our museums, Portobello Road and our parks, but we must also tackle the underlying causes of the inequality that prevents too many people in my constituency from reaching their full potential, whether they are housing, education or employment opportunities.

I know from the thousands of people I have met across our constituency that far too many feel like government is not working for them. They see too many politicians putting political party before country and self-interest before community. I know that trust in government and politicians has plummeted as a result, but it does not have to be this way. I have spent my career working to make democracy work better in dozens of countries around the world by supporting reformers

in government to work with civil society to be more transparent, more inclusive and more accountable and to deliver for people on the priorities that they care about. In Kensington and Bayswater, that means, for example, getting a grip on the dirty money in luxury property that still stains our community.

Despite recent progress in legislation, and despite the leadership that Baroness Hodge, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) and many others have shown on this topic, we still have in our constituency one of the highest numbers of anonymously owned properties registered in tax havens, with loopholes allowing autocrats and kleptocrats to continue shielding their ownership. Many of those properties sit empty, hurting our local businesses and schools and hollowing out our sense of community. I agree that those that are frozen under sanctions should be utilised as soon as possible, so I am determined to build on our Kensington Against Dirty Money campaign and continue advocating for London to end its reputation as the dirty money capital of the world, and instead become the anti-corruption capital of the world.

There is no worse example of what happens when government stops listening to people and when transparency and accountability are discarded than what happened at Grenfell Tower over seven years ago. Seventy-two people lost their life in an entirely preventable tragedy, yet we still do not have truth, justice and change for the bereaved, survivors and affected community. These are people whose lives were changed forever on 14 June 2017 and who have had to wait far too long for justice and for those responsible to be held to account. In the coming weeks, the second phase of the public inquiry will report. I know that hon. Members here will join me in looking to those recommendations to ensure that a tragedy like Grenfell can never happen again.

I warmly welcome the inclusion in the King's Speech of the duty of candour law for public servants. I applaud the effective campaigning of those affected by Grenfell, Hillsborough, infected blood and Windrush, and of others who have suffered because of an unacceptable defensive culture across many of our public institutions. I hope we can look at further measures to ensure robust oversight of the implementation of the recommendations from those inquiries.

Kensington and Bayswater is a special place making a huge contribution to our national life in so many ways. My hope is that, under this Labour Government, we will become a fairer place too, building on our strengths and addressing the inequalities that have held us back. It will not be easy and it will not happen overnight—as a QPR fan, I have learned over many years to be realistic—but we have an opportunity now to restore faith and trust in government and democracy, and to restore our reputation internationally too.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Christopher Chope):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, may I say that demand to participate in this debate will exceed supply if we carry on at such length? I do not believe in regulation; I prefer self-regulation, so my advice is that if Members stick to about six minutes each from now on, we will not have to impose a time limit.

2.45 pm

**David Mundell** (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): What a pleasure to have heard three such effective maiden speeches! I commend the hon. Member for Kensington and Bayswater (Joe Powell) for surviving not only the election, but the birth of twins. I wish his family well. I wish the hon. Member for Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme (Lee Pitcher) a happy birthday. I do not think that making a speech in the House of Commons on future birthdays will have the same allure, somehow.

I regarded Virendra Sharma as a great friend in the House of Commons. I never quite saw him as a mafia don, but I did see him as a very effective operator. All new MPs, and indeed returning MPs, could learn a lot from Virendra about how to get things done in Parliament.

I commend the new teams at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Ministry of Defence. I am particularly pleased to see the noble Lord Collins of Highbury becoming an Under-Secretary in the Department. I have worked closely with him on development-related issues over the past five years, particularly as his co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on nutrition for development. Lord Collins championed those issues in opposition; I am confident that he will now do so within the FCDO, along with the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), whom I congratulate on her appointment.

I want to concentrate on international development, although I note that there was no specific mention of it—nor any ambition to return to spending 0.7% on it—in the King's Speech. I commend my long-standing right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) for his efforts in the previous Government. Not only did he bring his usual vigour and drive to his time as Minister for International Development, but he stabilised what all the evidence presented to the Select Committee on International Development showed had been a chaotically managed merger of the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the thinking behind the merger, we cannot pretend that it was well executed, or that the randomness of some of the decisions and the scale of the funding cuts were not seriously damaging to frontline programmes and the UK's reputation as a reliable development partner.

Thank to my right hon. Friend, that is behind us. I listen to his warning about the need for a plan B, although the last thing those delivering aid on the frontline need is the distraction and disruption of further organisational change in the FCDO. However, I am sure that they want to know this Government's criteria and anticipated timescale for returning to 0.7%. In opposition, Labour Members rightly highlighted the cuts to the aid budget, and the impact on that budget of spending on refugees in the UK, but in government they need to put their money where their mouth is, so I look forward to hearing some detail on that spending in the Minister's winding-up speech.

If we are to make meaningful progress on achieving the sustainable development goals by 2030, the Government should embrace the White Paper published by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield. It was



[David Mundell]

well received across the development community in the UK and internationally. Although it is understandable that a new Government might want to put their own bells and whistles on it, I hope the core objectives of ending extreme poverty and tackling climate change will remain, along with the framework for doing so.

**Mr Mitchell:** I assure my right hon. Friend that there are bells and whistles from across the House in the international development White Paper.

**David Mundell:** Indeed, and I see the White Paper as an important part of building a new consensus on development, and of re-engaging the wider public with that agenda. A cross-party approach is the best way to build public support for development and confidence that funding is being spent effectively, which is a legitimate concern of our constituents.

All of us in this place who care about development should set ourselves the objective of increasing public engagement in the UK, as should those who work in the sector. In recent years, too many non-governmental organisations have gone down an overtly corporate route and lost touch with their members and supporters, who are often the most powerful advocates for aid in their communities.

Having listened to Mr Deputy Speaker's guidance, I think I do not have time to go into detail on what I think the specific priorities should be, but having co-chaired the all-party parliamentary groups on HIV/AIDS and nutrition for development, I am absolutely clear that those must be at the heart of the Government's approach to international development.

*The Economist* has highlighted this week that spending on nutrition delivers the best outcomes for the money spent. As the Government move forward on delivering the sustainable development goals, which we seem far from achieving by 2030, I hope that nutrition will be at the heart of the agenda, and that the Government will take the opportunity of the forthcoming Nutrition for Growth conference in Paris to restate their commitment not just to nutrition, but to international development.

2.52 pm

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell). It is also a pleasure to finally sit on the Government Benches with my Labour colleagues. The view is so much better from here.

It is an honour to have heard such incredibly powerful maiden speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan), for Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme (Lee Pitcher), and for Kensington and Bayswater (Joe Powell). They have raised the bar. It will be difficult for us to match them.

In my acceptance speech on election night, I spoke about how the Conservative austerity agenda had so badly damaged this nation over 14 years. That agenda's destruction of our public services and people's incomes devastated communities like mine, so it is incredibly welcome to hear the King's Speech of a Labour Government who will immediately begin to address those matters.

I am particularly pleased to welcome the employment rights Bill. In 2021, as shadow Secretary of State for Employment Rights and Protections, I was honoured to accept the invitation of the then Leader of the Opposition, now Prime Minister, to chair a taskforce that ultimately led to Labour's Green Paper heralding the new deal for working people. For their hard work and dedication, I must thank Labour's affiliated trade unions, the non-affiliated unions, the TUC and the then Leader of the Opposition's office. I must also mention the expertise of my noble Friend Lord John Hendy and the Institute of Employment Rights, who worked on this agenda over many years, and my staff, Karl Hansen and Eli Machover.

It is right for us to take action to ban exploitative zero-hour contracts and to end the scourge of fire and rehire. While we are at it, we should pay attention to P&O's "fire and replace"; it sacked 800 workers over Zoom. Those concerned have to be held responsible for their despicable acts.

I was pleased to import from New Zealand the concept of fair pay agreements. I am delighted to see my right hon. and hon. Friends engross the proposal, starting with the introduction of FPAs in the social care sector. Hopefully, that will mark the full restoration of sectoral collective bargaining. Over 25 years ago, 80% of our economy was represented by collective bargaining, but now it is less than 25%. That must be corrected.

There is a great deal of work to do, but the introduction of a single status of "worker" will be transformative for the millions of workers in precarious and fragile employment, who currently struggle to make ends meet and have no hope of planning their future. All of that changes with the new deal. As we update trade union legislation, we look forward to the repeal of the unworkable and ill-advised Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023 and the Trade Union Act 2016.

Elsewhere in the King's Speech, I very much welcome the two railway Bills and the better buses Bill. Having produced, as shadow Transport Secretary, the White Paper setting out Labour's plan for a nationally integrated, publicly owned railway, I am delighted that the Secretary of State for Transport has been so quick off the mark in tabling the necessary Bills.

I place on record my heartfelt thanks to the incredible Dr Ian Taylor, formerly of Transport for Quality of Life, for his great expertise and sheer hard work in progressing the agenda on rail reconfiguration and the re-regulation of buses. It is right that we get on with establishing Great British Railways under public ownership. I welcome Lord Peter Hendy—I mentioned his brother—to the role of railways Minister, which is undoubtedly an excellent appointment.

I cannot fail to mention that in my Middlesbrough and Thornaby East constituency we have some of the worst child poverty in Britain. The Prime Minister is right to say that the abolition of the two-child cap is merely one lever for tackling the abomination of child poverty, as all Labour Governments are destined to do, but the cap is undoubtedly the most cruel and draconian measure to be visited on low income households by the party in opposition. I hope that my colleagues on the Front Bench will pull that lever as a priority, and abolish this grotesquely punishing measure at the earliest opportunity.

We need a serious approach to public sector pay restoration and outsourcing. I very much welcome the Chancellor's commitment to the largest programme of insourcing in British history, as well as the Health Secretary's intervention; he is doing what his predecessor did not do: meet junior doctors in an attempt to bring the dispute to an end.

We need to grow our economy, but we cannot shy away from the fact that our taxation system is grossly unfair. I trust that the glaring anomalies will be addressed early on. I welcome the focus on devolution. There are powers that we want to take away from this place and give to our nations and regions, but my goodness, that has to come with accountability, transparency and openness. Sadly, too often that has been lacking, and that must be addressed.

Finally, on foreign affairs, it is perhaps a statement of the obvious, but our foreign policy must be based on human rights and adherence to international humanitarian law. On Gaza, I welcome the Foreign Secretary this week calling for an immediate ceasefire, for hostages to be released and for aid to reach the people of Gaza, but the question is how we will apply pressure to achieve these goals. We must have clarity in a number of areas.

First, I urge the Government to set out how they will use all the necessary levers to achieve the ceasefire, including the end of arms export licensing. Secondly, I trust that this Government can provide the House with early confirmation of the re-establishing of direct funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

Thirdly, I ask the Government to clarify that they support the processes that will prosecute war crimes, and that the UK accepts the International Criminal Court jurisdiction over Israel and has no truck with the nonsensical legal argument that Israel is exempt from international law. We have seen that time and again. I do not think that anybody in this House was not shaken to the core by the vision of that young man with Down's syndrome who, having been attacked by IDF soldiers, was savaged by dogs and then bled to death. We have seen such scenes over and over, and the justification that it is okay to kill 110 people—innocent children, women and men—in the pursuit of a military target is an abomination. I hope the Foreign Secretary will quickly clarify the new Government's approach to the early recognition of the state of Palestine. We need equality and fairness to resolve this crisis, and it will not be resolved without the recognition of Palestine.

There is so much in this King's Speech. We have an awful lot to be happy about, and a lot of optimism pours from it. There is much to do, but we are indeed up and running.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Christopher Chope):** I call Carla Denyer to make her maiden speech.

3.1 pm

**Carla Denyer** (Bristol Central) (Green): I am most grateful to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in today's debate.

Good afternoon, colleagues. My name is Carla Denyer. My pronouns are she/her, and I am very much looking forward to getting to know you all. I congratulate the hon. Members for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan), for Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme (Lee Pitcher), and for Kensington and Bayswater (Joe Powell) on their

interesting maiden speeches. I also want to take a moment to honour the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) for her very compelling speech about the route to peace in Gaza and Israel.

I look forward to working with all the newly elected MPs, and, in fact, everybody in this place, in pursuit of a better future for our constituents. I will return to the shape of that future shortly, but first I want to look back for a moment and to thank the people of Bristol Central for making history and electing me as the first Green MP for the city and also, as far as I am aware, the first bisexual MP for the constituency. We are, as a city, rightly proud of our firsts. In 1371—do not worry, I will not be doing every year—the town of Bristol was the first in England to be given the status of a county. In 1739, John Wesley founded the very first Methodist chapel, The New Room, in what is now the very heart of my constituency.

In 2015, the city became the first in the UK to be given the European Green Capital award. In 2016, the city elected Marvin Rees, and thus became the first major European city to elect a mayor of black African heritage. And what is widely agreed to be Banksy's first large stencil mural—The Mild Mild West—was painted in 1999, in Stokes Croft in my constituency. In fact, it is on a wall just around the corner from where I first met a member of the Green party—a meeting that rather changed the course of my life.

Unfortunately, the history of Bristol cannot, and must not, be disentangled from the UK's shameful and immoral history of colonialism and slavery. A 1499 voyage, led by merchant William Weston of Bristol, was the first expedition commanded by an Englishman to North America. And rich Bristol merchants financed more than 2,000 slaving voyages between 1698 and 1807. Those ships carried over 500,000 enslaved Africans from Africa to slave labour in the Americas.

A blue plaque on the Seven Stars Inn on Thomas Lane in the city centre marks how Thomas Clarkson, an anti-slavery activist, together with the Seven Stars' landlord, collected testimonies from sailors in 1787 that were used as evidence here in Parliament. These statements played a role in the passing of the 1807 Slave Trade Act, which eventually led to the historic end of the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans. Bristol Central's hugely successful M Shed museum highlights the anti-slavery movement, alongside its exhibition about modern public protests, including the Bristol bus boycott, and it holds the infamous, now-toppled Colston statue. The exhibition points to the abolition campaign as the start of a British tradition of society campaigning for change. Today, the city that I have proudly called home for 15 years, and part of which I am now immensely proud to represent here in Parliament, is beginning to take responsibility for its history, and continuing to lead the way when it comes to demanding change.

Like most of the other esteemed Members making their maiden speeches, I got the Library note advising me that my remarks should not be politically contentious or critical. I admit to having struggled a little with how to define that, given that I am here first and foremost to demand and create change on behalf of my constituents. In 1943, a slightly different-shaped version of Bristol Central elected its first woman MP. I can applaud that landmark moment, though not Lady Apsley's reported radical right-wing conservatism, imperialist, racist and

[Carla Denyer]

antisemitic views, or the fact that she apparently considered women first and foremost as wives and mothers. She made her maiden speech to the Commons from her wheelchair and, it is widely reported, defied convention by making a passionate appeal for the better treatment of disabled people. That is one thing on which I can agree with her, though I do not think that championing disabled rights should ever be considered controversial. I hope that in this Parliament it never will be.

Nor do I think that a voting system that makes every vote count is an especially controversial proposition, so I agree strongly with another of my predecessors: Stephen Williams, the first Liberal Democrat ever to represent what was then Bristol West. He used his maiden speech to call for, as he put it, radical electoral reform and for first past the post to be swept away and replaced with a system of fair votes. Now is a good moment to recognise the contribution to Parliament made by my immediate predecessor, Thangam Debbonaire, including as shadow Leader of the House. I pay tribute to her work on behalf of Bristolians, particularly in support of the city's amazing creative industries as shadow Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and her groundbreaking move to hold what is believed to have been the first-ever constituency surgery for people on the autistic spectrum. Thank you, Thangam, for your service to the city.

What unites all these threads is the idea of speaking up for what we believe in regardless of whether others might find it contentious, or whether we are swimming against the popular tide. As an MP, I am determined to fully honour Bristol Central's history of doing exactly that: using my voice as a force for good, for real change and for real hope, to create a brighter future for my constituents and for us all—the kind of future that the King's Speech represents an opportunity to build. That bright future depends on the Government taking bold action to tackle inequality and poverty through measures such as lifting the two-child benefit cap, a mass council-house building programme, and giving councils the power to keep private rents under control. Private rents in Bristol have increased by 52% over the last decade, while wages have not even increased by a quarter. This is an untenable situation, but one that around half my constituents find themselves in as private renters.

The bright future that I talked about depends on defending and restoring our public services, from hospitals to dentists, schools and youth services, and it means looking to restore the UK's reputation on the world stage. This is a reputation that has been sorely damaged by Brexit. I know that I speak for the majority of Bristol Central when I say that we must be open and active in our efforts to rebuild stronger links with Europe and work eventually towards a future where the UK can rejoin the EU. It is a reputation too that has been compromised by our Government's refusal to clearly condemn the Israeli Government's disproportionate response to the horrific terrorist attacks of 7 October, and in particular by the UK's continuing arms sales for use against Palestinians, in persistent breach of international law. I am clear that that must stop, and I am clear too that demanding it should not be controversial.

Finally, it is a reputation that has been seriously eroded in relation to climate action. As a councillor I was responsible for proposing the UK's first climate

emergency motion in autumn 2018—another first for Bristol. I know what the climate science requires that we get done in the lifetime of this Parliament, as this critical decade for the climate marches on. The brighter future we all want for our constituents and our country demands that we urgently secure a liveable future. Our warming planet has just passed another milestone. For the first time, global temperatures were above the crucial 1.5°C limit for an entire year. I hope this House will agree that that is one first that we all have a responsibility to try to ensure is also a last.

The last Government sought to break the climate consensus, to weaponise culture wars and to spread lies and misinformation about what a net zero future will be like. This Government must reverse the damage and have the courage to show genuine climate leadership at this critical time in our planet's history. I will stand with the Government if they do that, but I will not be afraid to speak up where I think they might need to go a little faster. We have heard in the King's Speech a commitment to a cleaner energy transition and public ownership of public transport, and I hope more will be forthcoming across the weeks and months ahead of us.

I stand ready to work across party lines to help to secure the ambitious changes we need for our climate and our natural world and to make the UK a fairer place. In fact I have already begun that cross-party work, so I say a big thank you to the hon. Members of other parties and none who have signed my amendment to the Loyal Address already, and well done to those MPs whose amendments and motions I have in turn supported. The challenges that we face together, and that our constituents face daily, are too important for us to fall victim to political tribalism. As Bristol Central's many firsts illustrate, all our choices today will become part of history. As a Green MP, I feel that responsibility on my shoulders. I will do everything I can to carry it responsibly and repay the enormous trust put in me by the people of Bristol Central.

3.12 pm

**Navendu Mishra** (Stockport) (Lab): I congratulate all the hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches. I grew up in Bristol, so I wish the new hon. Member for Bristol Central (Carla Denyer) well in her parliamentary career. Her predecessor was a good friend of mine, and I wish her well as well. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan), who I know will be very successful in delivering for her constituency. Her predecessor was a very good friend of mine—I talk about him in the past tense, but I should not, because he continues to be a very good friend of mine! My hon. Friends the Members for Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme (Lee Pitcher) and for Kensington and Bayswater (Joe Powell) also made excellent speeches. I remember making my maiden speech in 2020 and how unnerving it was, so I congratulate them all.

There were a lot of positive announcements in the King's Speech—in fact all the announcements in the King's Speech are positive. I am so glad after that after my four and a half to five years on the Opposition Benches, Labour has transitioned to the Government Benches. I congratulate the Secretary of State for Defence, now that he has taken office, and I echo his remarks about serving personnel, and non-uniformed personnel,



who serve Britain both within our borders and abroad. They make an enormous contribution and everyone should recognise that.

I am grateful to the people of Stockport for re-electing me as their Labour Member of Parliament. The constituency boundaries were slightly different, with Reddish coming in and the Manor ward going into the Hazel Grove constituency. I place on record my thanks to all Labour activists, members and supporters for their commitment during the campaign and for returning me to the House of Commons.

The topic I want to start with is housing, which continues to be the single biggest issue that people contact me about. Sadly, Stockport council is not part of the Greater Manchester spatial framework, because the Liberal Democrat councillors in Stockport aligned with the Conservatives and voted together in December 2020 against Labour's proposal to join the framework. That means that the borough of Stockport is massively behind on housing targets. When Stockport withdrew from the Greater Manchester spatial framework, the borough needed to build 793 homes per year. In September 2022, Place North West estimated that that figure had risen to almost 1,200 homes per year. The council is on schedule to fall short of its target by 6,000 homes.

We are in a housing emergency. I welcome the Labour Government's commitment to building 1.5 million homes and decent, affordable housing for everyone. In my view, Stockport does not need any more developments for investors; it needs housing for families and young people so that they can get on the housing ladder and have the dignity and respect of safe housing. People are desperate for secure, safe and affordable homes. Far too many face homelessness or being placed outside Stockport, far from their families, support networks and schools. I am familiar with a case that came through my office last week. A person experiencing homelessness was offered a place to live in Birmingham, which is almost 100 miles from Stockport—that is simply not acceptable. Many private landlords in Stockport and across the UK have ensured that renting is unaffordable for many. There are bidding wars for properties. It is vital that rents are controlled and rent caps implemented. I urge the Government to go further.

On healthcare, it is fantastic that the new Health Secretary has met the British Dental Association. NHS dentistry is in crisis. So many people in Stockport and across Greater Manchester simply cannot even register with an NHS dentist, let alone get an appointment. One of the first steps that the Health Secretary took was to meet the British Dental Association, which has a long track record of campaigning for proper funding for NHS dentistry to ensure that people can access high-quality dental care regardless of their circumstances.

Let me mention the case of someone who contacted my office. My paperwork states:

“A young mother was unable to find an NHS dentist when pregnant. She is distressed that she cannot access NHS dentistry for her now six-month-old daughter, for when she gets her first teeth, as she is on the waiting list for heart surgery at Alder Hey hospital. Her daughter should be checked by a dentist prior to surgery due to an increased risk of infection of the heart. Children with heart conditions need proactive dental care and many parents are simply unable to pay for private dental care.”

NHS dentistry is in crisis. I am so pleased that the new Health Secretary and the team at the Department for Health and Social Care are making efforts to address that serious issue.

Stepping Hill hospital serves the borough of Stockport, although it is not in my constituency but just over the border in Cheadle. I raised the state of that hospital with the former Prime Minister just a few months ago. The buildings are in desperate need of refurbishment and capital investment. Again, I thank the new Secretary of State for his Department's announcement of funding for local hospitals, including Stepping Hill—an example of Labour in government making a real difference to people's lives.

I will not take up too much of the House's time, but I wish to mention two issues quickly. On railways, I thank the Friends of Reddish South Station for meeting me on several occasions. I will campaign to restore proper rail services to Reddish South station, which has one service a week—that is simply not acceptable. I also want to see disabled access at all train stations, starting of course in my constituency. Brinnington, Heaton Chapel, Reddish North and Reddish South stations all need proper disabled access.

We must also invest in Stockport station, which is quite old and worn out. It is a wonderful asset, offering services to London, Birmingham, Wales and across England. In 2022-23, passengers entered and exited Stockport station a total of 3.2 million times. It is vital that our regional and national rail infrastructure is protected and invested in. The station is dated, the lifts are often faulty and it is a poor experience for passengers and for the staff working there.

The commitment to Great British Railways in the Labour party manifesto and from the new Secretary of State for Transport is welcome. Anyone who has travelled with Avanti will be familiar with the service that it offers, and everyone—employees as well as passengers—is unhappy with it. The ticket prices are too expensive, the services are unreliable, and it is just a negative experience overall. Avanti is holding back regional growth for Greater Manchester—it is holding people back from making the commute for business reasons, or to meet family or friends. Labour's plan for a simplified and unified governance structure places passengers at the heart of the railway. The new Government will bring train operators under public ownership and control, which I welcome.

The final point I will make is on the employment rights Bill. We have far too many employers exploiting people and paying them poverty wages; we need to make sure that people get respectable wages, so that they can bring up their family with pride and have the dignity of work. The Bill announced in the King's Speech will address that issue, and I welcome it.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Christopher Chope):** I call Jim Allister to make his maiden speech.

3.20 pm

**Jim Allister (North Antrim) (TUV):** The other new Members who have spoken today have set a very high bar with their maiden speeches, and I commend them on their delivery and the very cogent construction of their speeches.

[Jim Allister]

I come to this place representing the constituency of North Antrim. Therefore, my first privilege is to thank the electors of North Antrim for placing their confidence in me—and, of course, I commend their wisdom. The North Antrim constituency is a magnificent blend of urban and rural. We have the county town of Ballymena; we have other main towns, such as Ballymoney and Ballycastle; and we have a great patchwork of villages and small towns, including Bushmills, whose famous products some in this House may be familiar with. Others in that patchwork of villages have excelled in national competitions—Britain in Bloom and all of that—such as Broughshane, Ahoghill and Cullybackey.

It is a wonderful place to represent; it is also a place of fantastic scenery, because we have the world-famous north coast. The crowning glory of that, of course, is the Giant's Causeway, as well as Carrick-a-Rede bridge and all those magnificent places. We also have iconic inland tourist attractions such as the Dark Hedges, so I say to Members of this House, "If you've never been to North Antrim, it's time to put that right. What's been keeping you?"

What was keeping me from representing North Antrim in this House was a 54-year dynasty of family and party. From June 1970, North Antrim was represented in this House by Ian Paisley, father and son. Today, I want to pay tribute to my predecessor for the considerable work that he did for his constituents in North Antrim, but it is a new era—it is a new start—and I am here with a very distinctive and particular message in regard to the future of Northern Ireland. There was not much in the King's Speech about Northern Ireland, apart from a couple of fleeting references. It was a disappointment to me that there was nothing to address the disenfranchising of the people of Northern Ireland.

Let me explain. Those Members who come from England, Scotland or Wales come to this House as a Parliament that, in tandem with devolved institutions—if they have them—can collectively legislate for all the laws that govern their constituents. Sadly, we cannot say that about my constituents or any constituent in Northern Ireland, because in 300 areas of law, sovereignty over making those laws has been surrendered to a foreign Parliament. We are now subject to the last Government's protocol and Windsor framework arrangements—subject to laws governing our trade, our agrifood industry, much of our economy and much of our environment that this House cannot make and that Stormont cannot make. Those laws are made in a foreign Parliament and then, colony-like, are imposed on Northern Ireland.

The Labour movement has a very proud history of opposition to colonialism, but this Government inherit a position whereby they are presiding over a colonial situation of a foreign jurisdiction administering laws, and decreeing and legislating laws, in part of this kingdom. That is something that this Government need to address, and I am not talking about trifling incidental laws. I am talking about many laws that cut to the very heart of what it means to be a United Kingdom and to be a part of that United Kingdom. I refer to just one, but Members will find the 300 listed, if they are interested, in annex 2 to the protocol that was foisted upon us.

I refer to only one, which is the subjection of Northern Ireland to the EU's customs code. What that means in practice is that when Great Britain sends goods—and it

is our main source of supply—to our manufacturing industries in Northern Ireland, it is sending them, according to the EU customs code, from a foreign country, because Northern Ireland is decreed to be EU territory. That is an unbearable constitutional and economic affront, and that is something I say to this Government. The Secretary of State talked today about democracy, and the Foreign Secretary will go around the world advancing the cause of democracy, yet in Northern Ireland we have a situation where there are laws governing so many vital aspects that we cannot make and cannot change. That has to change, and it has to be changed by this House.

That is the fundamental message that I bring from my constituents, and that is why I am here—because my constituents will not, cannot, should not put up with it, just as the constituents of any Member of this House would not put up with it.

3.27 pm

**Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): It is an honour to speak on the second day of this very important debate, and I thank all those who have made their maiden speeches today. We have heard some excellent contributions from around the House, particularly from my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan). There was much on which her predecessor and I agreed, and sometimes we even disagreed, but one thing on which we very much agreed was that the curry in Bradford is far superior to that in Ealing Southall. [Interruption.] That is perhaps contentious—Birmingham is third. My hon. Friend used a really key word as the theme throughout her speech, which I think we could all do with reflecting much more on and using much more, and that was "diversity" and the celebration of diversity. So let me welcome all our new hon. Members across the House who have joined us in what is perhaps one of the most diverse Parliaments. I look forward to working with all of them.

It was my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme (Lee Pitcher)—I did not know there was an island next to Doncaster East, but we are always learning something new—who said something we should all take great note of. In ending his speech, he said—perhaps not in these words, but it will be in *Hansard*—that he would stay true to the people of his constituency. If I could offer one word of advice to new hon. Members, that would be it, because tragically, this place can consume us—where it has its positives, it also has its negatives. Sometimes speaking truth to power is one of the most difficult things we can do, especially, I remember, as a new Member, but I have always believed and championed the idea that one should be free to speak. We can agree to disagree, but we are here to represent our constituents. Westminster did not send me to Bradford. The people of Bradford sent me here, and I will make sure that the people of Bradford are always heard. I would also say, as a word of caution, that this is not necessarily a blueprint to success; by saying all the right things, sometimes one does not succeed in the same way, but I believe that we should continue to be true to ourselves in this place.

Sticking with diversity, I represent the beautiful city of Bradford. I am so grateful to the people of Bradford for trusting me and sending me back down to Parliament as their representative. Bradford is a diverse place, and

people from many different backgrounds have come together to call it their home. That is what gives the place its strength. My own grandparents came to this country in the '60s, working long hours seven days a week in the textile mills, sometimes with 10 people sleeping in a room that could barely accommodate three or four. The journeys we have made from then are remarkable. May God bless the soul of my grandad. May God give him the highest station in paradise. If he was here today and saw the achievements that we have made, he would be very proud. All of us have to do that job here—to represent our constituents and those journeys.

Equally, Bradford is a place that has suffered. In the last 14 years, the poverty and deprivation that I have seen on the streets of Bradford has been unprecedented. The reality remains that the last Tory Government spent 14 years crippling our economy, creating a crisis in our NHS, allowing crime to rise, polluting our rivers, breaking our housing market, letting wages stagnate and persecuting minorities; so for families in my constituency, there is a lot in this King's Speech to feel positive about.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough and Thornaby East (Andy McDonald), who is no longer in his place, said, with the implementation of our transformative new deal for working people to strengthen people's rights at work, boost wages and tackle bad employers, we can make work pay after years of Tory pay stagnation. With the establishment of Great British Energy to cut household energy bills and the plans to boost wealth creation in our communities, we can tackle the cost of living crisis that so many families continue to face. With the return of rail operators to public ownership and plans to bring buses under public control, we can ensure that public transport serves passengers, not private company shareholders. With investment in proper neighbourhood policing and named officers for every community—something that I have long championed—we can cut crime, tackle antisocial behaviour and keep our streets safe. And with the delivery of more healthcare in our communities and improvements to our NHS, we can tackle the stark health inequalities that continue to blight communities in Bradford and in constituencies up and down the country.

Yet the King's Speech should have gone much further. Failing to scrap the two-child limit, which affects three in five households in Bradford, means that it will not tackle rampant child poverty. The Government yesterday launched a taskforce to work on a new child poverty strategy, but that taskforce is guaranteed to reach at least one conclusion and make at least one recommendation: that child poverty is entrenched by the two-child limit, and that that limit must be scrapped. I urge Ministers not to kick the can down the road to a time when they will have to scrap the limit anyway. Instead, they should stop the delay, scrap the limit now and lift children out of poverty today, and not in six months or a year.

After the last Tory Government stood by as clear violations of international law were carried out, re-emphasising in the King's Speech the Government's commitment to human rights and the rule of law is an important step. However, if we want the UK to regain its global leadership on these issues, we cannot do so without upholding our responsibilities under international law. That includes fulfilling obligations to abide by and protect the independence of the International Criminal

Court, as well as supporting the International Court of Justice and upholding numerous charters, treaties, conventions and resolutions. The Government must therefore immediately drop the baseless legal challenge over the ICC's jurisdiction and the arrest warrants sought by the chief prosecutor for Benjamin Netanyahu and others, and they must reject all attempts to impede the ICC's work.

As the Foreign Secretary knows, I recently visited the ICC in The Hague with my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) to meet human rights organisations and to present to the chief prosecutor's team evidence of Israeli war crimes gathered over months of meetings with witnesses and experts. What was clear was just how concerned those organisations were over the lack of UK involvement in such an important case. I again urge the Government to back the ICC's efforts to secure justice for all victims of war crimes. If the Government do not get that right—if they stray from upholding international law—it puts the whole international rules-based order at risk, and it perpetuates double standards that effectively mean one life is not always valued the same as another. The UK has an absolute duty to challenge those double standards, to make it clear that everyone is afforded the same protections and to prove that international law institutions and UN resolutions actually mean something. The Government must do that in Palestine, but also in such places as Kashmir, where they must uphold UN resolutions that sit gathering dust after more than seven decades and grant the sons and daughters of Kashmir their birthright of self-determination.

Finally, it is important that the Government declare that the UK will play its part in trying to secure long-term peace in the middle east. As a number of Members have mentioned, with such death and destruction, a few lines about trying for peace are frankly not enough. Close to 40,000 men, women and children have been killed, while countless more have been injured. Homes, schools, mosques and hospitals have been levelled and reduced to rubble. Almost 2 million Palestinians have been displaced from their homes and forced to flee for their lives. Gaza remains under siege with insufficient food, water, medicine or fuel reaching those in need. The Israeli military continue to bomb, shoot and kill Palestinian civilians in direct violation of international law. A catastrophic humanitarian nightmare is taking place in Gaza.

The Foreign Secretary may call for an immediate ceasefire, but mistrust and uncertainty means that the King's Speech should have made it an iron-clad commitment. The King's Speech should have redoubled efforts to deliver desperately needed humanitarian aid to Gaza. It should have made it clear that the sale of arms to the Israeli military will end, in line with international law. It should have made clear the UK's opposition to the collective punishment of the Palestinians and demanded an end to the siege of Gaza. Instead of just recommitting to the two-state solution, the King's Speech should have set out the immediate recognition of a viable state of Palestine. That is what we needed to see in the King's Speech yesterday, and that is why I tabled an amendment with my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana) to set out that position clearly.

After 14 years of the Tories, the King's Speech is a strong start to undo the damage they caused, and it has my support, but there is much work to be done. I will



[Imran Hussain]

continue to press the Government to get the best results for my constituents, because it is my constituents who sent me down here, and their voice will be heard.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Christopher Chope):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, can I express my disappointment that self-regulation does not seem to have worked? One of the consequences of self-regulation not working is that we get the situation of collective punishment to which the hon. Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain) was referring. Can I make one more plea that we try to self-regulate and perhaps limit ourselves to four or five minutes for the rest of the debate? I call Cameron Thomas to make his maiden speech.

3.40 pm

**Cameron Thomas (Tewkesbury) (LD):** It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain) and his impassioned words. If I may address him directly—if you will oblige me, Mr Deputy Speaker—as well as other Members staking their claim to Britain's best curry, it would be an honour on behalf of the people of Tewkesbury to join them in sampling great curry and determining a champion.

On a more sombre note, I am grateful that during the King's Speech there was a commitment to a strategic defence review. I remind the House that in 2018 the Russian President deployed a chemical weapon on the streets of Salisbury. The lives of Sergei and Yulia Skripal were changed forever, as was the life of a courageous police officer, and a young mother lost her life. Today, in 2024, the Russian war machine again deploys chemicals on the battlefields of Europe. I hope that the strategic defence review will give due impetus to countering the renewed chemical threat.

I once held the honour of leading a parade at the Menin Gate ceremony in Ypres, commemorating those who gave their lives in some of the most vicious battles of world war one. I have had the honour to call the salute at the national Cenotaph here in Westminster. It is an honour in equal standing to deliver my maiden speech to the House on behalf of the people of Tewkesbury. I follow a proud lineage of armed forces service, which includes my two brothers and my great-grandfather, Petty Officer Supply Charles Trenchard, who gave his life aboard HMS *Illustrious* in world war two.

I first moved to Tewkesbury 16 years into my own military career with the Royal Air Force assignment at Imjin barracks, so named after the battle of the Imjin river fought by the Glorious Glosters in 1951 while outnumbered 18:1. Tewkesbury's quaint Cotswold villages and towns, crowned by our beautiful abbey, now make for an idyllic environment to raise my darling daughter. Should any Member of the House wish to don armour and join me at Europe's largest annual medieval festival, they would be very welcome.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, the honourable Laurence Robertson, a Lancastrian who made north Gloucestershire his home and represented Tewkesbury for 27 years, winning at seven consecutive general elections. My defeat of that particular Lancastrian, I must say, was not in keeping with the traditions set in 1471 by the Yorkists at

the battle of Tewkesbury; it was an altogether more peaceful affair, and I found Laurence to be dignified and humble as the result became clear. Indeed, the closest thing to weaponry on show that morning were the daggers being stared at me by one member of his entourage, which I must admit I thoroughly enjoyed. In defeating my predecessor, I became the first non-Conservative Member of Parliament in Tewkesbury since 1885. The weight of history bears heavily, yet pales alongside the responsibility.

The only other time I have been elected in any capacity was by my fellow officer cadets on initial officer training course 60 at RAF College Cranwell, to represent them to the College Commandant, a one-star officer. Immediately following that vote, my squadron leader Craig Gaul brought me to his office, swore that I was his man, but practically force-fed me his Debrett's guide to etiquette and begged me not to end his career. Six years on, he is no longer in the RAF, though I am unaware of any connection. For my own part, I also had to hand in my uniform once it became clear that the changes so desperately needed by our most courageous and selfless public servants must take place within this House.

Our country finds itself at a crossroads. The climate emergency presents an existential threat to humankind and to the ecosystems that support life on this planet. We must collectively and decisively turn to face the threat now and export bold leadership to our neighbours across the world. The future is in the hands of our young people. We must equip them today so that they can apply their energy to the challenges of tomorrow, but we cannot expect young people to engage in their political future when the curriculum does not enable them to do so and while an imbalanced education system denies so many the opportunities of the privileged few. Neurodiverse children are let down by a neurotypical education system built by neurotypical people for neurotypical people. If we are to unlock the challenges of tomorrow with diversity of thought, we must harness the opportunity of neurodiversity.

Finally, trust in politics has never been more fragile. It is the responsibility of us all to restore public faith in our political institutions. I invite fellow Members in the Chamber to renew UK politics through respectful discourse, regardless of our differences, and by dedicating this parliamentary term to public service. Voters will engage with politics only if they feel that their vote has value. We must transition to an electoral system of proportional representation. On behalf of the people of Tewkesbury, thank you.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Christopher Chope):** I call Kirsty McNeill to make her maiden speech.

3.45 pm

**Kirsty McNeill (Midlothian) (Lab/Co-op):** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Let me start by congratulating my hon. Friends the Members for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan), for Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme (Lee Pitcher), and for Kensington and Bayswater (Joe Powell), and the hon. Members for Bristol Central (Carla Denyer) and for Tewkesbury (Cameron Thomas) on their maiden speeches. It was an honour to be in the Chamber to hear from our new Defence Secretary and the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), who I have worked with on the cause of internationalism for many years.

I am conscious of the honour and privilege that being a Member of Parliament represents. Recent events in the United States of America remind us that we must never let violence or the threat of it undermine our politics. That I am speaking today in a Chamber bearing the coats of arms of Sir David Amess and our beloved friend Jo Cox is a reminder of the nobility and fragility of our democracy. I will always endeavour to fulfil my duties with the same open heart that they both displayed.

Hon. Members will know that I have many distinguished predecessors as Midlothian's representative, not least William Ewart Gladstone. His Midlothian campaign is remembered as the first truly modern political campaign. I hope that we continued that tradition somewhat in recent weeks, although I do not think that any of the Midlothian candidates could claim to have inspired the same hysteria at our public meetings; at his, people were passed over the heads of the crowd, as if dead, having fainted. The Midlothian campaign is also remembered as a moment when choices were made about the obligations of international solidarity. In Penicuik, we have a memorial to the prisoners of war who died there during the Napoleonic wars, bearing the inscription "All men are brethren"—something that I hope we can hold on to as we seek to make the UK a force for good in the world.

It was only two weeks ago today that I was elected Member of Parliament for Midlothian. In that time, I have had cause to reflect deeply on the spirit of public service that animates the staff in Midlothian council who administered our election, the officials at the Scotland Office where I am now privileged to serve, and the parliamentary staff who have welcomed us with such professionalism. It was that spirit, too, that called my predecessor, Owen Thompson, to public life, first as a Midlothian councillor, then as our Member of Parliament, and latterly as a Privy Counsellor serving the whole nation. His support for constituents and for our many wonderful community groups will never be forgotten. I sincerely hope that I can be of assistance as he continues his work advocating for veterans and miners.

It is impossible to be the Member of Parliament for Midlothian and fail to remind the House of that proud mining heritage. I hope that fellow trade unionists in this House will watch the inspiring footage of civil rights hero and actor Paul Robeson visiting Midlothian and singing "Joe Hill" for our miners. I hope, too, to welcome many fellow Members to Midlothian to visit our many mining memorials, including the newest one in Dalkeith, bearing the unforgettable description, "They spent their lives in the dark so that others might have light". Mineworkers from Midlothian and across our coalfields powered this country. I am delighted that our Labour manifesto committed to ending the injustice of the mineworkers' pension scheme and to a proper investigation of events at Orgreave.

Some months ago I hosted an event in Midlothian, and I asked participants what had inspired their activism. One man, Bill, said that he was there because when he was growing up in Newtongrange they had a mine, and now they have a mining museum. This was said in a spirit of reflection, not nostalgia. People in Midlothian are looking to the future, seeking the industries and sectors that can play the progressive role in the next century that mining played in the last.

In particular, let me commend all the world-leading scientists working in Midlothian at the Roslin Institute and associated organisations. I am sure that they would

acknowledge, whatever their individual brilliance, that none of them would be where they are without the science teachers whose inspiration first lit a spark in their young mind. We are all of us products of the investments made in us as children. It is to Midlothian's children and young people that I want to make my most solemn undertakings. If you have disabilities or additional needs, you are among my most precious constituents. If you are care-experienced, you will always have a friend and champion in me. If you find that your life chances are diminished by poverty or discrimination, then it is by my contribution to helping you realise your limitless potential that I wish my time as your MP to be judged.

As colleagues may know, I have spent much of my time working with and advocating for children. I would often say that good and bad childhoods follow people around forever. I know this to be true because of my mother's experiences of the care system, which inspired her adult commitment to the Children's Panel and fierce advocacy for families in crisis. She taught me so much about fighting for fairness. More than anything, however, both she and my father taught me about disagreeing well. While we have been on different sides of the constitutional divide, our family, I humbly suggest, holds something of a lesson for Scotland as a whole. It is possible—indeed, it is necessary—to approach disagreement with a spirit of curiosity and care. The birthplace of the enlightenment deserves nothing less.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Christopher Chope):** I call Ellie Chowns to make her maiden speech.

3.51 pm

**Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green):** I am grateful to be called to make my maiden speech in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Midlothian (Kirsty McNeill) on her passionate advocacy for children and young people. I congratulate all new Members, especially those who have made their maiden speeches today. There have been some really excellent contributions. I would like to warmly thank all the staff of the House, who have made us feel so welcome here and helped us all to find our feet.

I am particularly pleased to be called to speak in this debate, which focuses on foreign affairs and defence, having spent my own career working in the field of international development and having served in the European Parliament. These are issues that are very close to my heart and I will be following them with a close eye during the period of this Parliament.

I would like to focus my remarks today on North Herefordshire, my constituency. It has been my home for over 20 years, and it is an incredible honour and privilege to be standing here today as the first woman MP from the county of Herefordshire. I would like to thank the voters of North Herefordshire for putting their faith and trust in me. During my campaign, I promised to work my socks off to represent and serve the people of my constituency. Having arrived here in this House, I was delighted to discover that the House of Commons gift shop stocks socks in a delightfully fitting shade of green, so I have no fear of running short while I work them off in this place. I reiterate my pledge to my constituents to do everything in my power to repay the trust they have put in me, and to represent and serve them well.

[*Ellie Chowns*]

Before I go further, I would like to honour the tradition of paying tribute to my predecessor, Sir Bill Wiggin, who served as the MP for North Herefordshire for 23 years. I would like to recognise his long years of service and his contribution to local improvements, such as the installation of the lift at Leominster station; local improvements were referred to by another Member earlier. That sort of improvement makes such a difference in people's day-to-day lives and is key to being a good constituency MP. Our party politics may be very different, but as a former shadow Minister for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, he proudly championed North Herefordshire and its farmers. Indeed, Sir Bill is famously fond of Hereford cattle and featured them prominently in his literature and on his parliamentary letterhead. I wish him all the best as he enjoys spending more time on his farm and with his family, and I want to thank him for his long service in this House.

North Herefordshire is one of the largest constituencies in England. It is an hour's drive east to west, from the Malvern hills to the Welsh border, and an hour's drive north to south, from Shropshire nearly all the way down to Ross, the birthplace of British tourism. I am clearly going to be competing with others in inviting Members to visit our delightful constituencies to sample their touristic delights.

North Herefordshire is rightly famed for its bustling market towns, Leominster and Ledbury, Bromyard and Kington; for its distinctive black and white villages; and for its people and its produce. It includes two of the UK's 46 national landscapes, the Malvern hills and the Wye valley, so its landscape is indeed gloriously green! Running along the southern boundary of the constituency is the stunning River Wye, about which I shall have more to say shortly.

Farming is of course central to life in North Herefordshire, and our county is famous for both its cattle and its apples. Since my predecessor made it his business to promote the cattle, I will take this opportunity to talk up our Herefordshire apples, which—although hon. Members from Somerset may wish to debate this—undoubtedly produce the finest cider in the country. Indeed, it is one of my ambitions while in this House to introduce some of my county's most famed beverage into the aforementioned House of Commons gift shop.

However, it is not just the landscape and the produce that make North Herefordshire special; it is the people. One of the immense privileges of becoming involved in politics has been the opportunity to get to know the multitude of local institutions, charities, community groups and thriving businesses that make up our community. The people of North Herefordshire are creative, innovative, entrepreneurial, and deeply caring. It is impossible to mention all who deserve it, but perhaps I can give the House a flavour by highlighting some of them. I think of the creativity of the recent Ledbury poetry festival; the innovation exemplified by Wye Valley Brewery's approach to energy efficiency; the entrepreneurialism of award-winning local food businesses such as Peter Cooks Bread and my sons' favourite place to eat, The Beefy Boys, home of officially the best burger in the UK; and the care exemplified by St Michael's Hospice, by ECHO, a local charity that is very close to my heart, and by innumerable other local charities and

community groups. The people of North Herefordshire are what make the place so wonderful, and they are why I am here.

In my election campaign I focused on three issues in particular—renewing our economy, repairing our NHS and restoring our rivers—and I want to say a few words about each of those topics here. First, renewing our economy is urgent. The cost of living crisis has hit many people very hard indeed. Fuel poverty is a real issue in my constituency, where the combination of relatively low wages and particularly hard-to-heat housing stock makes home insulation an urgent priority. I will be pressing the new Government hard to take the urgent action that we need to ensure that every home is an affordable home and a warm home.

For too long, the previous Government neglected the opportunities offered by the green economic transformation, and I very much hope that this new Government will not make the same mistake. The King's Speech indicated some welcome steps in the right direction, but we need to do more to renew and rebuild our economy on a sustainable basis, one that is compatible with the challenge of climate change that so many Members have said they recognise.

As will already be clear to the House, a key area of interest for me is housing. The Green policy—the right home in the right place at the right price—will be the guiding principle for my colleagues and me as we scrutinise the new Government's proposals on planning. The country desperately needs new homes, especially new social housing, and it is vital that those homes are accompanied by the right infrastructure so that health, education and transport services are not put under yet more strain. It is also crucial to ensure that new houses are built to the highest possible energy efficiency standards. It is so much cheaper to do that now than to have to retrofit them further down the line. Given that we enjoy an average of eight hours of glorious sunshine each day in my constituency, I hope the House will forgive me in advance for repeatedly making the case for every single new building in North Herefordshire, and indeed the country, to be fitted with solar panels, ready to harness that sunshine. It is extraordinary that we still build houses without solar panels on top of them. So I assure colleagues, and my constituents, that I will work my socks off in the House to bring forward the policies that will deliver sustainable prosperity by renewing our economy.

Another issue that is of great concern to my constituents is the urgent need to repair our NHS and nurse it back to health, along with the urgent need to invest in the local public services on which we all rely. Far too often, on the doorsteps and in the village halls of my constituency, I have heard stories of people who have been waiting far too long for the urgent treatment that they need, and far too often I have heard concerns expressed about the potholes that are perhaps the most visible symptom of under-investment in local government. We need real change. We need an end to the way in which our local NHS and Herefordshire council have been starved of cash. We need funding to match the level of local need. We need a return to multi-year funding settlements for local government, for both revenue and capital funding, to allow councils to plan long-term for the infrastructure and services that are needed. We need more investment in preventive healthcare services. We need to show our



wonderful public-spirited NHS staff how much we value them—not just with warm words and applause, but with training bursaries and salaries that keep pace with inflation.

And this Parliament really must address social care. For too long it has been a political hot potato that no one wants to touch, and I confess that I was somewhat disappointed to see no mention of this crucial topic in the King's Speech. I believe that mechanisms such as a citizens' assembly on social care could really help us move forward in this vital area with cross-party agreement, and I look forward to working with colleagues on this and other measures to help repair our NHS and public services.

Finally, let me turn to a topic that is very close to my heart and to those of my constituents: the need to restore our rivers to good health. I have already extolled the virtues of the beautiful River Wye, which forms the southern boundary of my constituency. It is an integral part of the landscape and was voted the nation's favourite river in 2010, but the ecological health of this much-loved river and its tributaries—including the Lugg, the Arrow and the Frome—is under threat, particularly due to phosphate pollution. Last year, Natural England officially downgraded its condition to “unfavourable - declining”.

The Lugg catchment has been subjected to a planning moratorium since 2019 due to excess phosphate levels. There is good understanding of the causes of the problem in my constituency—primarily agricultural run-off—with the recent major expansion of the industrial poultry industry clearly playing a key role. For too long our rivers have, unfortunately, been effectively treated as free sewers, and this cannot continue. Businesses cannot free-ride on the natural world, and companies must not profit from pollution.

Local campaigners have done an excellent job of highlighting the condition of the river, and there is now a great deal of good will among all players. What we need now is a supportive Government who will take the action needed to enforce pollution rules and invest in genuine solutions, because we know that restoring the river, and all our rivers across the country, goes hand in hand with renewing our economy. Indeed, sectors such as tourism and the construction industry depend on it.

Farmers have a key role to play in this restoration and, indeed, in nature restoration across the whole country. I live on a farm, and I am particularly inspired by the fact that so many farmers are leading the transition towards more nature-friendly farming. I will be a voice for those farmers in this House and call for the investment that farmers need to ensure that we can grow more good, healthy and affordable food in the UK in a way that generates and protects good jobs, and that protects nature and the health of the soil and the water on which all life ultimately depends.

In closing, I would like to say that I believe in the politics of co-operation. I believe we can do more if we work together, rather than against each other. I believe we can do more if we focus on our areas of common ground, rather than our disagreements, and I know that people in my constituency and across the country want to see a better sort of politics. That is why I am a passionate supporter of a fair voting system in which everyone's vote counts equally. I pledge to my constituents, and to all other Members of this House, that I will work with you to find common ground. I look forward to

working my socks off together with you to renew our economy, to repair our NHS and to restore our rivers. In doing so, I hope that together we can create real change and rebuild trust in politics.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Edward Leigh):** Order. We are slightly running out of time now, so I am going to ensure that our two remaining maiden speakers get in. There will obviously be no time limit on them, but I urge them to think of other colleagues. I will try to get in as many people as possible, but I am afraid we are slightly running out of time because there have been some quite long speeches. I call Martin McCluskey to make his maiden speech.

4.3 pm

**Martin McCluskey** (Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity speak in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Ellie Chowns), who spoke with such passion, and the many other hon. Members who have spoken this afternoon.

Like many in this Chamber, I am a Member for a new constituency. Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West stretches along the Clyde coast and takes in the coastal communities of Inverkip, Wemyss Bay, Gourrock, Greenock and Port Glasgow, before moving inland to the villages of Kilmacolm, Quarrier's, Bridge of Weir, and Houston, as well as Crosslee and Craigends. My constituency has a proud history of looking outward around the world, from producing the ships that contributed to our maritime defence to providing the base for the free French navy during world war two. More recently, it has continued with the idea of giving people refuge by contributing to the Ukrainian refugee and resettlement programme.

It is also—people will not be surprised to hear me say this—a beautiful part of the world. I know it is a bit of a tradition for Members to say that their constituency is the most beautiful in the country, and I do not intend to disappoint this afternoon, so Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West is the most beautiful constituency in the country. But it is not the beauty of our surroundings that I am most proud of; it is the resilience, the kindness and the determination of our people.

I have the privilege of representing the place where I was born and raised, and where I continue to live. I see every day what people achieve together for the benefit of the community. In Gourrock, which I also have the pleasure of representing on Inverclyde council, the “Bowl and a Blether” group at St John's church grew out of the cost of living crisis, but is now a regular event where people from all walks of life can come together for a chat and a warm meal. In Port Glasgow, Parklea Branching Out provides opportunities for people to develop their skills and talents through horticulture. It has gone from strength to strength since it opened in 1997, and earlier this year I had the pleasure of seeing how it was investing to expand its work. In Greenock, the Inverclyde Shed has redeveloped an old industrial building to create a space for people, in its words, to meet, make, grow and share. In Bridge of Weir just last weekend, I visited the Bridge community centre. It was set up with the simple purpose of providing a post office for the village, but now provides a shop and a community space right on the high street.

[*Martin McCluskey*]

Our people bring our communities to life. They look out for each other, and they rarely ask for anything in return. The Prime Minister has spoken about a Government of service, and it is the people of my constituency who I look to as the best example of what service really means.

In the last Parliament, these wonderful people and places were represented by two Members: Ronnie Cowan for Inverclyde and Gavin Newlands for Paisley and Renfrewshire North, which covered the villages of Bridge of Weir and Houston. Both of them served their constituents with distinction. I want to pay particular tribute to Ronnie Cowan, who was my opponent in three elections. He will be remembered fondly in Inverclyde for his important campaigning in the last Parliament to improve treatment and support for people affected by drug addiction—a problem that emerges from the hopelessness that so many people feel today.

That hopelessness has its roots in decisions made decades ago that still scar many of our communities. Today, we live with the consequences of the loss of much of our shipbuilding industry and the failure to find a sustainable replacement for those jobs. In his maiden speech in 1983, one of my predecessors, Norman Godman, described shipbuilding and engineering as

“the economic backbone of Greenock and Port Glasgow.”—[*Official Report*, 24 June 1983; Vol. 44, c. 283.]

But today, only about 7% of those at work in my constituency are employed in a manufacturing business. That issue was raised by another of my predecessors, Iain McKenzie, who led a debate on manufacturing in this place almost a decade ago. It is therefore disappointing that under the last Government we did not see the progress that was called for.

The measures announced yesterday will begin the work of changing that. GB Energy and the Government’s plans for a national wealth fund are as important for reducing our dependence on foreign energy reserves as they are for providing opportunities here at home. I welcome the ambition of the Government’s plans. They are putting the brakes on the approach that says that decline is inevitable. For my constituency, Government working in partnership with energy companies, with shipyards and with advanced manufacturers, including in the defence sector, can bring prosperity back to the Clyde. I was encouraged to hear the Secretary of State laying out how defence and the defence industries will be central to the Government’s agenda for growth.

Industries such as shipbuilding did not just provide people with a source of employment and income. They gave them strong relationships, dignity, pride and a sense that the future offered promise and opportunity rather than decline and despair. As a boy, I learned this from my grandfather, who was the union treasurer at Scotts shipyard in Greenock. Work and the trade union movement provided him with a route out of poverty, the ability to provide for his family and the chance to ensure that his children and grandchildren could see their living standards increase, generation after generation. That is what good work does for people and for communities, and that is why investing in the jobs of the future must go hand in hand with ensuring people’s rights at work. The new deal for working people will provide the certainty of well-paid work, underpinned by strong rights and protections.

Across Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West, there are already examples of manufacturing businesses, trading internationally, that are offering high-quality, unionised jobs. Bridge of Weir Leather, which produces the leather for these Benches, is a family-run business that trades around the world from my constituency. James Walker Devol, an engineering firm with a decades-long history in Inverclyde, produces advanced plastics for the oil and gas industry and the renewables sector from its factory in Gourrock.

The Chancellor has set out her ambition for sustainable growth that includes every part of the country. She knows what every Labour Chancellor and every Labour Government have understood, which is that economic growth in every part of Britain and a strong economy allow us to pay for the services that our communities so desperately need.

I spoke earlier about my family, and about my grandparents’ ambition that their children should do better than they did. I close by saying something about the people who taught me the values that led me here, and about those who encouraged me to put those values in the service of my community through politics.

My grandmother was born in 1914, and in the early 1930s she made her first trip to London to enter domestic service for the man who then owned Tottenham Hotspur football club. She sent the money she made back home to help her mother raise 12 children in a two-room flat on Rue End Street in Greenock. Within two generations, her grandson has found his own way to London to sit in the House of Commons.

Like all new Members, I did not achieve this alone. My family and community taught me the values that led me into public service. Unfortunately, neither of my parents lived long enough to see this, but they gave me the start in life that I want to see for every child. And I was lucky to know two Members of this House who demonstrated to me the best of what public service has to offer.

The first was the former Member for Glasgow East, Margaret Curran, who has had a lifelong commitment to public service and taught me the cut and thrust of Scottish politics—for anyone who has not realised, there is a lot of cut and thrust in Scottish politics. The second was the former Member for Inverclyde, David Cairns, who I know was loved by many in this House. David was a model MP who worked hard for all his constituents and who built his reputation on delivering for people in our community. As a gay man in politics 20 years ago, he showed me that who you love should not be a barrier to holding elected office. It is often said that, “You can’t be what you can’t see.” If not for David Cairns and the model he set, I know I would not be standing here today with my soon-to-be husband watching from the Gallery above.

In everything I do in this place, I will work to live up to their example and to the values of the people and community that raised me.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Edward Leigh):** I call John Cooper to make his maiden speech.

4.12 pm

**John Cooper** (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West (Martin McCluskey) on his excellent

maiden speech, which is difficult to follow. I gently say that it is marred only by the fact that he did not reference two of his most famous constituents: William Kidd, the pirate, and my mother, who was born in Houston.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to take part in this important debate at the dawn of this new Parliament. I also thank my colleagues for their wise counsel and help as I take my first steps here in the cockpit of democracy.

Defence is the No. 1 task of any Government, as we have heard, and I am proud that my constituency, Dumfries and Galloway, has many fine young men and women currently in our armed forces, and many gallant veterans who have served on air, sea and land. Of course, like every constituency, Dumfries and Galloway has many people working in the UK's world-class defence industry, which deserves our support.

I worry about using the expression “punching above our weight” in relation to our armed forces. A British major general who served with distinction in Afghanistan, and who knows a lot more about conflict and boxing than I do, told me, “That’s a recipe for getting knocked out as soon as the bell rings.”

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Alister Jack. I make it clear that, although such praise is customary on these occasions, I offer tribute not out of duty but out of genuine respect and admiration. As a special adviser, I had a front-row seat for Alister’s tour-de-force performance as Secretary of State for Scotland. Under his leadership, the Scotland Office, small but perfectly formed—not unlike myself—was a bantamweight bazooka, bang on target for the people of Scotland on issues including equality, the independence debate and the benighted A75 and A77 roads that are so crucial to Dumfries and Galloway. I hope I can apply the lessons learned at the feet of the master for the betterment of Dumfries and Galloway. I got the finest start possible there and I want to make sure others get the same chances.

Only through marrying the talent and aspiration that abound in the south-west of Scotland with opportunities can we defeat that blight on all rural areas: depopulation. We need the three J’s: jobs, jobs, jobs. We have much work to do to make ours a go-to destination, not a go-through destination. Blessed with a balmy climate, we are home to some of the country’s finest dairy herds. Our unspoiled landscape is a tourism dream. The terrain, for instance around Newton Stewart and Minnigaff, is ideal for cycling. The Merrick, Cairnsmore of Fleet and the Galloway hills are a delight for hikers. Stroll on the beach at Killantringan—I will help *Hansard* with the spelling later—on the rugged Rhins peninsula, and you will probably have the golden strand all to yourself, and you will see our Northern Irish friends in this great Union just 14 miles distant.

Dumfries itself, astride the mighty Nith, is rightly lauded as the “Queen of the South”. Erudite Wigtown is Scotland’s national book town, and there I picked up a copy of “If”, arguably the finest work by Rudyard Kipling. His lines,

“If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same”,

resonate now on the Government Benches, where Labour Members are having a moment in the sun, but also on

the Opposition Benches, where the blue flame of Conservatism gutters in the storm, burns low, but does not go out.

Many suppose “If” to be about Kipling’s son, John, who was tragically killed serving with the Irish Guards in the great war. In fact, it was inspired by Leander Starr Jameson, who grew up in my home town of Stranraer, after his father took editorship of the *Wigtownshire Free Press*. That venerable newspaper is still in circulation, and I got my first and last journalism jobs there, as a trainee reporter and latterly as editor. Jameson led a daring raid against the South African Republic in 1896.

Perhaps there is something in the pristine waters of south-west Scotland that instils a resilience and self-reliance in its people, for John Paul Jones, father of the United States navy, was also a native Gallovidian. Jones unfortunately went pirate on us in the American revolution. Locked in mortal combat with the Royal Navy off Flamborough Head in 1779, he is reputed to have said:

“Surrender? I have not yet begun to fight!”

I am proud, then, to have been elected to represent the redoubtable people of Dumfries and Galloway, inheritors of Jameson’s alacrity and Jones’s never-say-die attitude, both vital in today’s febrile times. In conclusion, Bonnie Galloway has a storied past and, I am determined, a bright future. I shall endeavour, as Kipling didn’t quite put it, to keep the heid.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Edward Leigh):** I intend to call the wind-ups shortly after 4.30 pm, so there should be some very short speeches now to try to get everybody in. Remember, the short speeches are the best—the Gettysburg address was only four minutes. Richard Burgon, I know, will set an example.

4.17 pm

**Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (John Cooper) on his maiden speech, as well as every single Member who has made a maiden speech today, particularly my Labour colleagues who join us in government. It is a great pleasure to give this speech on the second day of the King’s Speech debate, welcoming the first King’s Speech under a Labour Government for so long. It makes me reflect on the opportunity we now have to deliver the change that people in our communities not only need but deserve, after 14 years of Conservative misrule.

We gather in this House after a period of nearly 15 years that ended with more food banks in this country than branches of McDonald’s, record numbers on NHS waiting lists, 4 million children living in poverty in the sixth richest economy on earth, rivers literally full of sewage and real wages lower than they were back in 2008. All that is before we get on to the shameful history of corrupt crony contracts and MPs lining their pockets with second, third, fourth and fifth jobs. I am glad that our Government will make progress on that very shortly, by making an announcement about second jobs for MPs.

There are 40 Bills in the King’s Speech that could initiate a decade of national renewal. As a former trade union lawyer, I particularly welcome the new deal for working people. For too long, we have seen workers in



[Richard Burgon]

this country being treated as if they do not matter. We all saw what happened at P&O, when decent, hardworking people were marched off their ferry by trained security guards in balaclavas and treated like dirt by that very wealthy company.

Then we have the exciting announcements on how we will bring rail back into public ownership and how we will give local councils greater powers to develop their own bus services. Those measures are so important for our communities. If there is one thing that runs through the history of our party it is the fact that we deliver best when we recognise that there are some things in life that are more important than the pursuit of profit, and they are the good of people and the good of public services. That is what helped us to found our national health service—our party's proudest achievement in government. We need to rise to the challenge now of securing a great future for it under this Labour Government.

As I have said, I was pleased to see new measures to ban MPs' second jobs. Indeed, I drafted a Bill in the previous Parliament to do just that. Funnily enough, the Conservative Government rejected that Bill again and again. I do wonder why that was!

We have a real opportunity now to deliver the change that people need and deserve. I could not have been prouder to have been re-elected to represent my community of Leeds East in this Parliament for the fourth time. I was particularly pleased to welcome into the new enlarged constituency the proud communities of Garforth, Swillington and Little Preston. It is great to be working with people locally to improve public services under a Labour Government and to deliver the change that people need.

Before I conclude this curtailed speech, I want to raise two other issues. First, I very much welcome the Government's announcement yesterday of a child poverty taskforce. That is an important step forward. What we need now is a long-term strategy, given that 4 million children are living in poverty in the sixth richest country on earth. However, implementing a strategy does not mean that we cannot take immediate action now. Every child poverty expert says that scrapping the two-child benefit cap is a key measure, and I encourage our Government to get on with that. That is why I support the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Riverside (Kim Johnson).

Secondly, I wish to raise respect for international law and the question of arms sales. I was one of the sponsors of the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana). As my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain) mentioned in his speech, he and I went to the International Criminal Court at The Hague and delivered to the team of the chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, evidence of Israeli war crimes that we had gathered through parliamentary meetings. It is so important that we uphold both the integrity and independence of the International Criminal Court and the integrity of the international rules-based order. I regret to say that I believe that the previous Government flouted international law, and I look forward to our Labour Government doing something very different. That is why I backed the amendment to end arms sales to Israel.

We have talked about the legal case, and of course there is a legal case, but it is the moral case that burns in the hearts of so many people in our country and around the world when they see the horrific scenes from Gaza of the slaughter of men, women and children. We have debated it so many times in this Chamber that we have almost got used to it. People out there want our Government—and I hope that our Government will do this—to take a clear moral stand by, yes, calling for an immediate ceasefire and upholding international law, but also by stopping arms sales to Israel to put pressure on Netanyahu. We do not want to see arms licensed in this country going to maim and kill men, women and children in Gaza. It is completely unconscionable and it must stop, in my opinion.

I thank my constituents for re-electing me with an increased majority. I will work night and day for you to ensure the best deal under this new Government that you can get, because you deserve change after nearly 15 years of Conservative misrule. You deserve an increase in your living standards. You deserve an end to child poverty. You deserve an NHS that we can be proud of once again.

Under the last Labour Government, satisfaction levels with our NHS were at record highs. While it was the Welsh trade unionist and socialist Aneurin Bevan, who was briefly expelled from the Labour party and came back in, who created our national health service, the Conservatives voted against the creation of a national health service over 20 times. That is one of the reasons they could not be trusted with the NHS—[*Interruption.*] Well, history is important, and had the Conservatives learned from history there would not be just a handful of them on the Opposition Benches after getting the worst election result in their history—an election result that I am delighted to say they thoroughly deserved. Let us get on with making the change under a Labour Government that people really need, however much Conservative Members resent it and try to stop it.

4.26 pm

**Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): I join many others in congratulating Members on their maiden speeches—they were so much better than my own—but as we are short of time, let me move back to the topic of this debate, which is defence and foreign affairs. While I congratulate the incoming Government on their success, and we wish them well in the spirit of national service, there are serious concerns arising already from the Gracious Speech, and the disconnect between the words of the Government and their actions, particularly in relation to defence and foreign affairs.

Let us look first at the defence budget. We are told by the Government that the world is more dangerous than it has been in living memory. We are told that there is cast-iron support for increasing the defence budget to 2.5% of GDP, but where are the actions? Stability in terms of the defence budget would be to increase it to 2.5%. That was the decision already communicated by the Conservative Government. That means £75 billion of increased defence spending between now and 2031. Where is the stability, in a more dangerous world, in effectively reducing defence spending between now and 2030—particularly in an environment where defence procurement needs long-term reliability from which to plan? There seems to be a disconnect there.

The second area is veterans. We are told by the Labour Government that they are focused on the defence family, and that the defence process should be about people. Quite right too, but what about the veterans Minister? Under the last Government, the veterans Minister was a Cabinet member. He had the ability to look right across Government. What was said in the debate down in Plymouth Moor View a few weeks ago between the two gallant candidates? Did Labour stand on a programme that said, “We’re going to reduce the importance of the veterans Minister. We’re going to make them a junior Minister who will be subsumed within the Ministry of Defence”? I doubt that was the message that the residents of Plymouth voted on, but that is what the Government are planning to do. I ask the Government to think again about that.

Finally, let us look at the overseas development aid budget. Back in the dark days of 2021, when our economy was struggling from the fallout from covid—this massive global pandemic—the Conservative Government took the very difficult decision to reduce ODA from 0.7% of GNI to 0.5%, with an ambition to reverse that as the economic conditions allowed. At the time, Labour was furious and outraged by that, saying that even in the economic situation that existed in 2021 it was the wrong decision. The then shadow Minister for International Development, the hon. Member for Birmingham Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill), said:

“Britain and the world deserve better than a Foreign Secretary who has allowed the aid budget to be slashed, leaving our global reputation lying in tatters”.—[*Official Report*, 26 November 2020; Vol. 684, c. 1021.]

The now Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said that

“to choose to break this promise to the world’s poorest people is unforgivable”.—[*Official Report*, 26 November 2020; Vol. 684, c. 1028.]

But what is Labour doing now? The economy has improved significantly since those dark days, yet Labour’s action is to keep the figure at 0.5%.

Labour tells us that we need to increase trust in politicians, and that trust must be restored. Well, the way to do that is to act in government in the way that they said they would act when in opposition. I intend to hold this new Government to account.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Edward Leigh):** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

4.29 pm

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have sat through this important debate and it has been an absolute pleasure. What a galaxy of maiden speeches we have heard all around us—and that, of course, is democracy. Everyone can take great encouragement from what they have seen today.

The only problem is that I do not know all these new faces, so can I issue a blanket apology in advance to all those on the Labour Benches if I come up to them and say, “I’m so pleased you are a new Lib Dem MP”? I do not mean anything by it. If I say to Members on the Liberal Democrat Benches, “Well done on getting elected on a Labour ticket”, I am terribly sorry about that. You can take comfort, Mr Deputy Speaker, in the fact that

I visited an old folks’ home recently and a lovely old lady thought I was Jeremy Thorpe. At least it was the right party.

I am on my feet today because my party’s defence spokesperson, my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord), is ill with covid. I am sure we all wish him a speedy recovery. However, I did five years as my party’s defence spokesperson. That leads me to my main theme, which I will touch on by simply saying that we will build relationships with those on the Government Front Bench and the shadow Front Bench—that is how we work.

I will always remember Ben Wallace arranging for me and the present Secretary of State to be helicoptered to Belvoir castle for a meeting of the joint expeditionary force Foreign Ministers. I have never forgotten that, because it was just two days before Putin’s tanks rolled across the border. I remember going in the car from the MOD to board our military helicopter, and the civil servant asking me and the present Secretary of State, “What do you think will happen?” I think we both said, “He’ll probably invade.”

I also remember Ben Wallace saying, during the dinner with the Foreign Secretaries, “I am doing this because Governments change and it’s as well you are prepared, although you may belong to other parties, and that you know as much as you can about the defence brief.” I want to go on the record as thanking Ben Wallace for his very generous attitude to keeping me briefed on intelligence, and I thank the present Secretary of State for his generous offer to see that my colleague, my party’s defence spokesperson, is similarly briefed. That is very good news indeed.

I want to congratulate, through reasons of friendship, those on the Government Front Bench on their appointments; it is very good to see them in their places—and indeed, I am bound to say, it is good to see those on the Opposition Front Bench in their places. The shadow Foreign Secretary was quite correct to remind us of what is going on in Sudan. It is not just about Russia and Ukraine or the middle east; there are all sorts of terrible things happening in the world. I liked too the Secretary of State’s saying that Britain is “democracy’s most reliable ally”. We ought to remember that on a day like today, when all these new faces exemplify democracy in its good, healthy, working form.

I do not have much time, but I want to touch on two points, one of which I think those on both Front Benches know I care passionately about. I served for a short spell of time as a private soldier in the Territorial Army, and one of my children served in the forces until recently. The size of our forces matters an enormous amount to my party, and I think we all understand that we are very far stretched at the moment—hence my intervention earlier in the debate about the present size of the British Army being not exactly helpful to recruitment.

One other thing that I think is desperately important, based on when we met with the joint expeditionary force Foreign Ministers, is that—as all hon. Members have said—we must work across borders, we must work with the European community, and we must work with friends. Only by co-operation, by standing together, can we take on the Russian bear and see it off. As has quite correctly been said, if Ukraine falls, what is next?

[*Jamie Stone*]

Finally, in defence debates during my years in this place, I have always thought the atmosphere of consensus across party boundaries very important. I know from my own family that it was encouraging to our servicewomen and servicemen to know that politicians were speaking as one. From what I have heard this afternoon, I have no reason to worry that that will not go on in future. I think that we can work together for the defence of our nation, which we love so well.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Edward Leigh):** I call the Opposition spokesperson.

4.35 pm

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (*Jamie Stone*)—although I must say that I have never confused him with *Jeremy Thorpe*—and to see you in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, as I respond to the Gracious Speech debate.

I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have made speeches today, but I pay particular tribute to all those who made maiden speeches. The time limit means that I cannot go through those contributions in as much detail as I would like, but I will briefly congratulate all those hon. Members. The hon. Member for Ealing Southall (*Deirdre Costigan*) spoke passionately about diversity, and adds to it with her strong Irish heritage. The hon. Member for Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme (*Lee Pitcher*) is surely the first ever MP to have worked as a sewer bairner. My twins had their 10th birthday during the election campaign, so I know how the hon. Member for Kensington and Bayswater (*Joe Powell*) feels. It is painful, but it gets better—don't worry. I wish him and his family well.

The hon. Member for Bristol Central (*Carla Denyer*) made a point of order earlier about energy infrastructure. Pylons have also been proposed in Suffolk, and I agree with her that there are other options; we are saying to the Government that we want to see them. I am grateful for her very passionate maiden speech. The hon. Member for North Antrim (*Jim Allister*) will, I am sure it is fair to say, be a doughty champion for his constituents.

It is brilliant to have, in the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (*Cameron Thomas*), a former member of the Royal Air Force in Parliament, especially in the current context. I was passionate about the global combat air programme when I was Minister for Defence Procurement—it shows the importance of our maintaining combat air competitiveness. I hope that he will contribute to the debate next Wednesday.

I was grateful to hear the cut and thrust of Scottish colleagues, including the hon. Members for Midlothian (*Kirsty McNeill*) and for Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West (*Martin McCluskey*), and, of course, my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and Galloway (*John Cooper*), who certainly punched above his weight in his maiden speech.

Arguably, we did not hear enough about rural matters in the King's Speech, but the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (*Ellie Chowns*) certainly made up for that. She will clearly be a passionate advocate for farming and the environment in her constituency. I am grateful for all those maiden speeches, and I hope that we will hear much more from those colleagues in future.

Turning to defence matters, may I welcome the new foreign affairs and defence ministerial teams to their positions? As the shadow Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (*Mr Mitchell*), said, we will work with them where it is in the national interest—especially on supporting Ukraine for as long as it takes—as they did when they were in opposition. We welcome the cross-party spirit in which the Secretary of State for Defence set out his plans for a strategic defence review. We look forward to working with Lord Robertson, for whom I have the greatest respect, in a constructive and collaborative manner.

May I thank the Secretary of State for paying tribute to the two previous Secretaries of State, *Ben Wallace* and *Grant Shapps*, both of whom I had the privilege to work with as Minister for Defence Procurement? They can both be rightly proud of the enormous contribution that they made in supporting Ukraine, but they had something else in common: they were not afraid to make the unambiguous case for higher defence spending, and most importantly, they were successful. It helped that they had a Prime Minister who, as Chancellor, oversaw the largest spending review increase for defence since the cold war, and ensured that we went into the general election with a credible and fully funded plan to increase our defence budget to 2.5% of GDP by 2030.

Although I welcome the fact that the Labour Government have said that they are committed to 2.5%, we have nothing but uncertainty over their timetable. Indeed, this morning I was interviewed by *Kay Burley* of Sky News. She put it to me that the Government's timetable is to reach 2.5% by the end of the Parliament—so 2028 or 2029. I said that that was not what I understood the public position to be, but she told me that she had been informed privately by the Government that that was the timetable, so I would be grateful if they confirmed now, in Parliament, what exactly the position is on this matter of great sensitivity.

Let me explain why the timetable for 2.5% really matters. When the previous Prime Minister announced that we would commit to 2.5%, he stated that his top priority was to replenish our munitions. That 2.5% figure enabled us to commit £10 billion of extra funding over 10 years to fund munitions, and it is a fact—I know this—that without a clear pathway to 2.5%, the Ministry of Defence would have had to make substantial cuts or deferrals to programmes in order to afford that necessary replenishment of our munitions. That is why it is so significant, and why we need to know exactly what the position is. Is *Kay Burley* correct that the Government have told Sky News that they have a timetable for reaching 2.5% by 2028 or 2029? If not—if there is no timetable for 2.5%—how is the MOD going to fund its munitions strategy? Will those orders for shells and missiles for the Army, Navy and Air Force actually be placed this year? If not, what will be the impact on our world-leading defence sector, and above all, what will be the impact on our warfighting capability as a nation?

Without a clear pathway to 2.5%, what will be the immediate impact on the Department's finances? Will the MOD continue to invest in cutting-edge capability such as directed energy weapons and hypersonics? That 2.5% would also have stabilised our two biggest defence programmes in light of the inflationary funding pressures that followed Putin's invasion of Ukraine. This is all open and in the public domain—the Public Accounts



Committee was talking about it in the lead-up to the general election. I am talking about the nuclear deterrent and the global combat air programme, our absolutely essential sixth-generation fighter programme. I am delighted that we now have consensus between the Government and ourselves on both the nuclear deterrent and GCAP, but can the Government confirm that delaying 2.5% will have no impact on the funding elements of either of those two major programmes? Can the Secretary of State or the Minister responding also confirm that the Secretary of State's strategic defence review will conclude entirely before the next spending review commences, so that that review is threat-based, rather than forced on to the financial back foot by Treasury considerations?

Of course, if the Government's public position is that there is no timetable to 2.5%, they will inevitably point to the old chestnut of the public finances being worse than feared, justifying the inevitable cuts or deferments of programmes that follow. I have the greatest respect for the Secretary of State, but we did hear some of that in his opening remarks. I am afraid that that excuse will not wash, though. Inflation is at 2% and on target; the economy is growing at a healthy rate and ahead of our competitors; wages are rising; unemployment is almost half what it was in 2010, when we took power; and the deficit is forecast to fall to just over 1% of GDP by the end of the current forecast period. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members chunter. They talk about missions; when we came to power, our mission was to save this country from bankruptcy, because once again, the socialists had run out of other people's money.

The forecast deficit in 2010 was heading well north of 10%, so we did the right thing: we had to take difficult decisions, and we restored our public finances. Because of that, when the pandemic struck and the energy support had to be put in place, we could afford that enormous support. We are proud of that—proud of furlough, of saving those jobs and those businesses in every constituency. We did it because of those difficult decisions after the mess Labour left us in 2010. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members talk about the previous Prime Minister but one, but our strong economic legacy cannot be used to pray in aid a cover for cuts and deferments. *[Interruption.]* They quibble when we talk about a strong economic legacy. How else can we describe low unemployment, inflation at 2%, a low and falling deficit—half what it was when we took over from them—or the highest growth in the G7? That is a fantastic inheritance. Far from being an excuse for the cuts that the Government will have to come to, those are the features of the very improvement in economic conditions that made our pre-election commitment to 2.5% financially credible and deliverable.

We strongly welcome the Prime Minister's staunch support for NATO, as evidenced in Washington, and we want him to succeed on his pledges to strengthen Britain's defence. That is in our national interest, but it is actions that matter and by which the Government will be judged, and deferring and delaying 2.5% offers nothing but uncertainty to our armed forces at the worst possible time. If the Government have a private timetable to reach 2.5%, they need to share it; if there is not one, I urge the Secretary of State to persuade the Prime Minister and his Treasury colleagues to think again, because in this more dangerous world, higher defence spending is a matter of the utmost urgency for Britain.

4.44 pm

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anneliese Dodds):** It is an honour to close such a well informed and at times passionate debate, and I will endeavour to respond to as many points as I can get through in the time available. As my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary said at the beginning of this debate, the Foreign Secretary is extremely disappointed that he was not able to participate today, and I know that he will want to update the House shortly on his recent international engagement.

It is an enormous privilege for me to speak in this Chamber for the first time as the Minister of State for Development, as the Minister for Women and Equalities, and as part of a new Government who are proud to serve our country and are working to reconnect Britain with the world. I welcome the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) to his new place on the Opposition Front Bench, and of course the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), to whom I am personally very grateful for reaching out to me on my appointment. I note that both the previous incumbent in my role and the Defence Secretary said at the very beginning of the debate that this is a time when we need to respect others' points of view. I think that has largely held, although perhaps we had a slight change of approach in the speech by the hon. Member for South Suffolk.

Overall, I think we heard throughout this debate a definite determination to focus on bringing people together when we can as part of a national mission of renewal. We heard so many excellent maiden speeches today—really terrific introductions to the House from many new colleagues—but it is particularly pertinent that my new hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Kirsty McNeill) made reference to the need to recognise that so often, we have more in common than divides us. We need to bear that approach in mind locally, nationally and globally in these often dangerous times.

It is clear that the British people have given this new Government a mandate for change in order to deliver our progressive vision for a shared future—a vision rooted in cool-headed realism about the world as it is, and guided by hope for what it can be. As I say, we are already working to reconnect Britain to the world after 14 years during which there has, at times, been disengagement and isolationism. In so doing, we are turbocharging our mission for growth, to bring investment and jobs to every part of our country.

In these often dangerous and divided times, the UK's security is our first priority, as my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary made clear. We will stand up for our interests and for our values. We will create a new relationship with the EU, we will deepen our engagement with the global south, we will reclaim leadership on tackling the climate crisis, and we will champion human rights and international law. We will work in partnership with our friends and allies to reduce global poverty and the drivers of conflict and instability, and we will also empower women and girls. In that connection, I congratulate my new hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme (Lee Pitcher) on his heartwarming maiden speech, and particularly his reference to the women in his life. Indeed, many new Members have made reference to their partners and families in their maiden speeches.

[Anneliese Dodds]

As the Minister for Development and for Women and Equalities, I know that delivering a truly effective and modern approach to development has never been so urgent or so important. On that, I concur with the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell). Partnership, not paternalism, is required to deliver the change that is so desperately needed. Next week, I will go to the G20 development ministerial meeting in Brazil to reconnect with allies and partner countries in the global south. Together, we must reform the international financial system to tackle unsustainable debt, accelerate growth and unlock climate finance. Together, we must enhance our ability to prevent conflict, and together we must restore our development reputation to deliver both for our international partners and for the British people—and it does need restoring.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield rightly referred to the critical role for development for the world's poorest and most vulnerable people, for our stability, for security and for global prosperity. The commitment to development has always been fundamental for my party. So many powerful champions from this House are household names: Barbara Castle, Clare Short, Gordon Brown, and of course my predecessor who held this brief in opposition, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), to whom I pay tribute.

The shadow Foreign Secretary has often been critical of damage done under Conservative Governments to development and our country's reputation. He referred to the fact that previous Conservative Governments had "literally removed" food

"from the plates of starving children."—[*Official Report*, 6 July 2022; Vol. 717, c. 922.]

He also said that previous Conservative Governments had "trashed" our international reputation. I appreciate his honesty, but now is the time for reflection on a fact that he did not mention today: the damage done by the uncontrolled growth in the previous Government's spending from the development budget on accommodation. That spending was classified as overseas development aid, but it led to cuts in programmes for some of the neediest people in the world. In a spirit of openness, we must surely acknowledge today that that has done tremendous damage to our reputation.

We are wasting no time in seeking to restore our development reputation by increasing support for those most affected by Hurricane Beryl, and by ensuring that the Foreign Secretary visits our closest allies.

**Mr Mitchell:** I have listened carefully to the Minister. As she knows, not least from what I said today, I have been critical of earlier decisions, but can she tell the House today whether she has yet thought through when we might see the 0.7% return?

**Anneliese Dodds:** That is absolutely something that this Government take incredibly seriously. Under previous Labour Governments, the 0.7% commitment helped to build our reputation across the world. We have been clear that we are determined to get back to 0.7% as fiscal circumstances allow, but we will also be clear about situations in which the percentage of our gross national income that can go to development has been

compromised because of uncontrolled costs, such as those incurred under the previous Government. Surely the shadow Foreign Secretary must acknowledge that damage and what has happened to programmes for some of the poorest people around the world under his party's watch.

As I stated, we have sought to restore our development reputation by increasing support for those affected by Hurricane Beryl, and by immediately taking action to reconnect with our allies, with the Foreign Secretary visiting Germany, Poland and Sweden in his first 48 hours in his role, and the Defence Secretary, of course, visiting Ukraine. The Defence Secretary was crystal clear: Ukraine and its people have no firmer friend than the UK in their fight against Putin. The Ukrainians are defending our shared security and prosperity, and we stand with them now and always. The right hon. Member for Wetherby and Easingwold (Sir Alec Shelbrooke) rightly referred to their bravery as well as that of the UK's armed forces, to whom I pay tribute. It was a pleasure to hear from new Members who have services experience, including in the maiden speech of the new hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Cameron Thomas), and the new hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (John Cooper) talked about the noble military history of his constituency.

We are clear that under the new Government, the UK will pledge £3 billion in military aid to Ukraine every year. We are speeding up delivery, including of a new package of military equipment, and will aim to play a leading role in supporting a clear, irreversible road for Ukraine to full NATO membership. That commitment from the UK to ensuring that Ukraine can proceed to NATO is unshakeable. As has been mentioned, we will also set out a clear and credible path to spending 2.5% of UK GDP on defence, as we call on others to step up. I would gently point out to the hon. Member for Broadland and Fakenham (Jerome Mayhew) that there was no credible plan from the previous Government.

**Jerome Mayhew:** Will the Minister give way?

**Anneliese Dodds:** No, I will not; I will make progress. We are undertaking the unglamorous, hard work of putting that plan in place, rather than engaging in the wishful thinking we saw from the previous Conservative Government on this issue and so many others.

As this debate has indicated, there is deep concern in our country and globally about the death and destruction in Gaza. The Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), referred to it, as she has often done so powerfully; she has both a professional understanding of the issue and, sadly, personal experience of it. Before the Foreign Secretary's first fortnight in the job was up, this priority was clear from his application to visit the region. He went to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories to progress diplomatic engagement, as we play our part in efforts towards long-term peace and security in the middle east. It is clear that the situation in Gaza is untenable and intolerable. We need a ceasefire not tomorrow or next week, but today. We need the immediate release of all hostages, unfettered and rapid access to humanitarian aid into Gaza, and action to enable British nationals and their families still trapped there to leave.

My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough and Thornaby East (Andy McDonald) inquired about the new Government's position on UNRWA. We recognise

the vital role that UNRWA plays in saving lives in Gaza, providing basic services and promoting stability in the west bank and the wider region. We are closely considering funding to UNRWA and will ensure that we keep Parliament informed.

The Foreign Secretary made the case clearly in the region for an urgent, credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution, an end to illegal Israeli settlements and rising settler violence in the west bank, and a reformed and empowered Palestinian Authority. This Government are clear that the world needs a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state.

Sudan was rightly mentioned by the shadow Foreign Secretary. I was determined to be fully briefed on that situation, as well as the situation in Gaza, on coming into my role. In my first week in office, I announced new lifesaving support for up to 150,000 refugees in Libya who are fleeing escalating violence in Darfur. We must do all we can in this area. The Government are accelerating work on rebuilding that connection with the rest of the world. We are making real the rights that we all hold in common. I was particularly pleased to hear Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Navendu Mishra), referring to the rights of disabled people in this debate, and the new hon. Member for Bristol Central (Carla Denyer) spoke about disabled people in her maiden speech.

We are also accelerating work on tackling corruption and money laundering, which was rightly referred to by my new hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Bayswater (Joe Powell), and we are making sure that the voice of working people is heard. I was pleased to hear the new hon. Member for North Antrim (Jim Allister) refer to the importance of the trade union movement, perhaps from a slightly unexpected angle.

We are taking a strong, consistent and long-term approach to China and convening a new clean power alliance. We are clear that Britain is stronger when we work with others. That point was made by so many speakers, including my new hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan) in her powerful remarks and my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain). Together, we need to turn towards the project for national renewal, and Britain's enormous potential in the world. Together, as the new hon. Member

for North Herefordshire (Ellie Chowns) said, we can achieve and do so much. Together, we can work towards a liveable planet that is free from poverty. The work towards that starts now.

*Ordered,* That the debate be now adjourned.—(*Christian Wakeford.*)

*Debate to be resumed tomorrow.*

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

*Ordered,*

That at today's sitting the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Lucy Powell relating to Sittings of the House (Friday 19 and 26 July) not later than one hour after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings on that Motion may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Lucy Powell.*)

## Business without Debate

### SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE (FRIDAY 19 AND 26 JULY)

*Resolved,*

That the House shall sit on

- (i) Friday 19 July at 9.30 am and
- (ii) Friday 26 July at 9.30 am

and notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 11(4) the Speaker may interrupt proceedings to permit statements to be made by Ministers at any time during the sitting; and the provisions of Standing Order No. 14(1) shall apply.—(*Lucy Powell.*)

### NOTICE OF QUESTIONS (24 JULY)

*Resolved,*

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 22(5)(a), the questions for oral answer to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland circulated on Wednesday 17 July shall be put down for answer at the question time on Wednesday 24 July.—(*Lucy Powell.*)



## Adequacy of the Scotland Act 1998

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Christian Wakeford.)*

5 pm

**Sir David Davis** (Goole and Pocklington) (Con): Thank you for calling me, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will hesitate for just a second as the Chamber clears—my normal popularity.

Three years ago, on 16 March 2021, I presented to the House the implications of the unlawful Scottish Government investigation and contrived criminal charges against Alex Salmond. I recommended empowering the Scottish Parliament to investigate as a Scottish court found that the Government acted illegally and engaged in a process tainted by bias against Mr Salmond. Regrettably, the investigative committee appointed by Holyrood was limited in its powers of investigation, operated without the protection of privilege and was thwarted at every turn by the delay, obfuscation and even threats from the Scottish Government and institutions of state. Three years on, that failure in democratic accountability has not been addressed.

The investigatory powers of the Scottish Parliament could have been strengthened. Decisions about whether and who to prosecute could have been made entirely independently of Ministers in the Scottish Government. Neither of those things has happened, forcing me to raise the matter again.

Mr Salmond has been found innocent. He previously succeeded in Scotland's highest civil court in establishing the illegality of Scottish Government actions. He is currently suing the Scottish Government in a civil action. That has been assisted as some of those involved in constructing the case against Mr Salmond are now themselves under police investigation. I will therefore focus today on the wider failings in this sorry case and what they raise for the state of the rule of law in Scotland.

In 2017, senior Scottish Government figures set up a procedure for dealing with sexual harassment allegations that effectively targeted Alex Salmond. I believe that, at an early stage, that was done with the knowledge of Nicola Sturgeon's team, and potentially with their encouragement. The procedure applied retrospectively to former Ministers—Mr Salmond no longer being a Minister—but excluded civil servants. Sue Gray, then head of propriety and ethics at the Cabinet Office, expressed discomfort with the procedure. Despite that, the Scottish Government proceeded. An investigating officer was appointed. They were to have had no prior contact with complainants, yet the officer appointed, Judith Mackinnon, had in fact had extensive prior contact with the complainants.

It has now also emerged the person deciding the case—former permanent secretary Leslie Evans—also met with complainants during the process. That information was withheld from the Court of Session in one of the many breaches of the Scottish governmental duty of candour in this case.

Mr Salmond was informed of the complaints against him in March 2018. All were denied, and in April 2018 his legal team immediately raised concerns about the fairness and legality of the new procedure as well as concerns over Mr Salmond's access to witnesses and

documents. He offered mediation and arbitration to bring the illegality of the process into focus; it was repeatedly rejected. Messages between two civil servants in early February 2018 show how Liz Lloyd, Sturgeon's chief of staff, was directly interfering in discussions with complainants ahead of their complaints being made. Her role—acting, we must assume, with the knowledge of her boss—was central to these events.

Furthermore, evidence to the Holyrood inquiry from Mr Salmond's former chief of staff, Geoff Aberdein, stated that Liz Lloyd in early March 2018 informed him that

“there were two individual complainants”.

Three other witnesses support that assertion. That directly contradicts her claim that she first became aware of the allegations in April 2018, yet it is a claim she doubtless felt compelled to make in order not to contradict Nicola Sturgeon's position already given to the Scottish Parliament. Sturgeon misleading the Scottish Parliament would, of course, have led to her resignation. The same untruth was repeated on behalf of the Scottish Government during the judicial review. It is the position of Mr Salmond's legal team that neither Lloyd nor Sturgeon was telling the truth.

Very quickly after my previous debate on these matters, the Scottish police visited me, asking where I had got all this information. They got a nice cup of tea and a biscuit. Strangely, they had no interest whatsoever in what appears to be prima facie evidence of perjury by those holding high office. Let me say clearly today that these matters obviously require to be properly investigated by the police.

In August 2018, ignoring the evident impropriety of the process, the permanent secretary Leslie Evans decided that some complaints against Salmond were well-founded. Salmond was told of Evans' decision, and that a press release was to be issued at 5 pm. Salmond's legal team was about to lodge a judicial review of the whole procedure, so it urgently sought—and received—written assurances that no press release would be issued. Despite those assurances, only hours later, the *Daily Record* published news of the allegations—part of the decision report had been unlawfully leaked. Other than Mr Salmond, only the Scottish Government had that report. However, I have met a witness who has made a statement that he was told by the then political editor of the *Daily Record* that the story was leaked by Liz Lloyd. The House should know that the prosecutor from the Information Commissioner's Office investigating the leak concluded:

“I have sympathy with the hypothesis that the leak came from an employee of the Scottish Government.”

The Scottish Government fought the judicial review, at huge cost, despite their own legal advisers telling them in no uncertain terms that they would fail. They were warned:

“it makes little sense to continue to defend the indefensible”

and that the least worst option was to concede the case. Eventually, both the Scottish Government's external counsel told the Government that they were in an untenable position and were suffering extreme professional embarrassment because of Government failings. They were also warned—this is important—that civil servants were deliberately misleading both them and the court.

Despite these repeated warnings, the Government only conceded the judicial review after their external counsel threatened resignation.

In January 2019, the Court of Session found that the Scottish Government had acted unlawfully, and that their actions and processes were procedurally unfair and tainted by apparent bias. Commentators often describe the investigation as “botched”. It was that, and more: it was illegal, pure and simple. Yet no one has been held accountable, and millions of pounds of taxpayer money was wasted. That is perhaps unsurprising when looking at the attitude of those at the top of the Scottish civil service.

The same day that Salmond won his case, the permanent secretary Leslie Evans sent a message to a colleague saying that the battle was lost but not “the war”. That is hardly the language of an impartial civil servant. Senior figures at the top of the Scottish Government appear to have colluded to ensure that Salmond was reported to Police Scotland. There is evidence of contact between figures in the Scottish Government and officers of the Scottish National party. WhatsApp messages reveal that Liz Lloyd was convening a “council of war” WhatsApp group.

A whistleblower revealed communications from Sue Ruddick, the SNP’s chief operating officer that in their words point to

“to collusion, perjury, up to criminal conspiracy.”

In the communications, she and the then chief executive of the SNP Peter Murrell, encouraged and coached complainants into reporting Salmond to the police. Appearing at the Holyrood inquiry in December 2020, Murrell was asked whether he was part of the so-called “council of war” WhatsApp group. Murrell denied even using WhatsApp, yet it emerged that he did have WhatsApp and had used it within weeks of the evidence session. Yet another clear lie.

The House may wonder what the Scottish Government investigation had to do with the Scottish National party in the first place. The answer is provided by Anne Harvey, a qualified lawyer who was then a senior official for the SNP in this House, who wisely refused to have anything to do with what she characterised as a witch hunt.

I recommend colleagues read again my debate on 16 March 2021. In that debate, I outlined the actions of senior officers of the SNP Peter Murrell and Sue Ruddick, and their compliance officer Ian McCann, whose interference in an ongoing police inquiry represented nothing less than an attempt to pervert the course of justice. The Police Scotland investigation was triggered by Leslie Evans, who sent the results of this internal inquiry to the Crown Agent, Mr David Harvie. The Crown Agent is responsible for overseeing all prosecutions in Scotland. Despite the subsequent police inquiry and court case, Salmond was acquitted on all charges by a majority female jury in front of a female judge.

As a result of the Scottish Government’s unlawful handling of the allegations, the Scottish Parliament established a committee to examine how the First Minister, Scottish Government officials and special advisers dealt with complaints against Salmond. Even before the committee’s report was published, the convener said the committee was being undermined by “delay, prevarication and obfuscation” on the part of the SNP Government. When published, the report was damning. It reads:

“Many documents were, in our view, insufficient to provide a complete picture of the events being considered by the committee and again that has hampered the committee’s work”.

There would be uproar if a Committee of this House was impeded in such a manner, but the Scottish Government’s attempts to thwart the parliamentary inquiry did not stop there. It ignored two votes in the Scottish Parliament and waited until the very last minute to release legal advice it had received on the judicial review. That advice was only released the day before Sturgeon would give evidence, after the Opposition threatened a no confidence motion against the current First Minister, John Swinney. Even then, when released, it was not the full advice. Crucial parts were only made available after Sturgeon had appeared. Additionally, the Crown Office was threatening MSPs with prosecution due to the proceedings of the committee. Such threats would be treated in Westminster as a contempt of Parliament.

At the instigation of the Crown Office, Police Scotland opened an investigation after WhatsApp messages given to the inquiry were made public. The messages showed Peter Murrell calling for pressure to be put on the police to investigate Salmond. Throughout this sorry business, the Crown Office has been enthusiastic in its pursuit of those who have published evidence in this case. A journalist has been jailed. Another journalist was prosecuted in a case completely dismissed by the sheriff court. The Crown Office engaged in a legal battle with *The Spectator* to stop the publication of evidence to the parliamentary committee. What is most troubling is that at the time, the line manager of David Harvie, the Crown Agent who oversees prosecutions in Scotland, was Leslie Evans, the Scottish Government permanent secretary. And Mr Harvie’s legal boss was the former Lord Advocate James Wolfe, who himself was advising the Scottish Government not to concede the judicial review against that same Scottish Government! That set-up is fundamentally wrong. I will outline just one example of why.

On 2 March 2021, Mr Harvie, the Crown Agent, was at pains to tell the parliamentary committee, under oath, that he had never discussed the case with his line manager, Leslie Evans. Now, that may be true. However, what I can now tell the House is that documents show Mr Harvie had, in fact, discussed the matter with Leslie Evan’s private secretary—her representative on earth, if you like—in the days before he became involved in the case. It is fundamentally unsatisfactory that the then Crown Agent, the senior official in the administration of justice in Scotland, cannot be relied upon to tell a parliamentary committee the whole truth. I find it even more unsatisfactory when the Crown Office shows no interest in investigating these grave matters.

In giving evidence to the inquiry, Nicola Sturgeon repeatedly failed to answer questions because she “could not recall”. In the end, the committee found, by a vote of five to four, that Nicola Sturgeon had given an “inaccurate” account of her knowledge of the allegations. In one of its clearest findings, the parliamentary committee found, unanimously, that Leslie Evans was personally as well as corporately responsible for failings that cost the Scottish taxpayer millions of pounds and led to the humiliation of the Scottish Government in the highest civil court in Scotland, due to their unlawful behaviour.

[Sir David Davis]

Has there been any penalty for those failings? Of course not. Instead, Ms Evans' contract was extended, along with her pension. The damage she has caused, both by her action and inaction, has been left totally unaccounted for. Something must be done to prevent these failures of accountability in public service in future, and I hope that the "duty of candour" legislation in the King's Speech means that something finally will be done.

Alongside the Holyrood inquiry, the lawyer James Hamilton was asked to consider whether Nicola Sturgeon had breached the ministerial code during this affair. While Mr Hamilton concluded that Sturgeon did not breach the code, his report was so heavily redacted by the Scottish Government that he, in a highly unusual move, insisted on the publication of a rather stark note along with it. Hamilton said that such redaction

"presents an incomplete and even at times misleading version of what happened."

I have heard evidence that special advisers—not lawyers—appointed by Nicola Sturgeon had been directly involved in the redactions of Mr Hamilton's report. I have pursued this point with the current permanent secretary, but I have not received a satisfactory or clear reply.

To obtain further information on the Hamilton report, a freedom of information request was made to the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government refused to publish the requested information, claiming that they did not hold it—despite its being their report. The Information Commissioner rubbished their claim, and ordered that it be published. The Scottish Government attempted to appeal against that decision. I attended the appeal last year in Edinburgh, and noted that the Government case was not just summarily dismissed, but dismissed in a completely humiliating manner. I have brought a number of cases against Governments, and I have never seen quite such an outright humiliating dismissal. Despite these losses, the Scottish Government have still failed to publish the information requested, and now oppose the publication on other grounds.

When I first brought these matters to the attention of the House, Nicola Sturgeon was still First Minister in all her unchallengeable pomp. She is not any more. We all know what has happened to her and the top management of the SNP since. I cannot and will not go into all that now, but that is the important backdrop to this sorry saga. My purpose today has been to concentrate on matters of fundamental principle, so we can ensure that such unlawful and shameful events cannot be repeated.

These events have occurred under the devolution settlement secured under the Scotland Act 1998. The Holyrood parliamentary committee suffered because it did not have adequate power to hold the Scottish Government to account, which allowed it to be frustrated by the Government and threatened by the Crown Office. It is simply not appropriate for the Lord Advocate to be both the public prosecutor and the Government's legal adviser. I put forward that position three years ago, in my Adjournment debate of 16 March 2021, and was supported by the former Member for Edinburgh South West, Joanna Cherry. Ms Cherry presented a private Member's Bill that had cross-party support. However, despite the case being conceded in principle by the Scottish Government, no legislative action has followed.

There is also concern about how the SNP's leadership exerted influence over the rule of law in Scotland, in the Scottish Parliament, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, the courts, the police and the media. Nicola Sturgeon is no longer First Minister, but her successors have continued to suppress the truth about their party's disgraceful attempts to destroy Alex Salmond, and in so doing they have continued to deny him proper redress. However, this is about more than Alex Salmond. To ensure that it never happens again, we must review the consequences for civil servants found to have acted improperly by parliamentary committees, we must strengthen the investigative powers and legal protections offered to Members of the Scottish Parliament, and we must immediately separate the powers of Scottish Law Officers from their roles in administering criminal justice and providing advice to the Scottish Government. It is time to invoke a famous phrase, often invoked in England but just as pertinent in Scotland: *fiat justitia*—let justice be done.

Before I sit down, may I—in what is otherwise an incredibly serious debate—apologise to the Minister for the fact that my action today forced her to make her maiden speech at such short notice? If I may say so, she carried that off brilliantly, and deserves double points for it.

5.19 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Kirsty McNeill):** I thank the right hon. Member for warmly welcoming me to the Chamber and, indeed, for the work that we have done together in the past on promoting the values of humanitarianism. He will know not only that this is my first day speaking at the Dispatch Box but that my maiden speech, just a short while ago, was my very first contribution of any kind in this House. I hope that with nearly four decades of dedicated service in this place, he may still recall the trepidation of standing here to speak for the first time.

Turning to the subject matter of the debate, I begin with a celebration of the Scotland Act 1998. It is 25 years since Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II opened the Scottish Parliament and the late, and much-missed, Donald Dewar was sworn in as First Minister. Donald Dewar, the father of devolution, described the Scottish Parliament as "not an end" but a "means to greater ends"—namely, greater social justice in Scotland. That is the driving imperative that still guides Labour, which is why ensuring support for both the Union and the devolved institutions should be seen as a precondition for, and not the sum total of, this Government's ambitions.

In the quarter century since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, we have seen a deepening of devolution through the 2012 and 2016 Scotland Acts. Crucially, those reforms were based on cross-party consensus in Scotland. I am immensely proud that I will now have a role in the ongoing success of those Acts as they continue to deliver for people in Scotland.

It is right that we continue to hear views from all sides on how constitutional frameworks should evolve. However, I believe that it is through relationships and collaboration that we will drive progress together and deliver for the people we were sent here to serve. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has made clear, we all need to work on resetting relationships. Indeed, the Prime Minister has already made this a



priority, with his first official engagement being with the First Minister in Scotland. That has been mirrored by early engagement by Ministers throughout the UK Government, and I assure the House that it will continue.

For my part, I am clear that improved and ongoing co-operation will depend on three main things. The first is the sincerity of our collective commitment to a deep and durable resetting of relationships. Like the 1998 Act itself, collaborative working must endure beyond specific Administrations and Ministers, and be about more than formal structures and machinery. That does not always mean that we will agree, but we must be more mature about those disagreements, and depolarise and detoxify the tone of debate in Scotland. That should be the nature of grown-up politics and it is what the people of Scotland, and of all four nations of the UK, rightly expect from us as their elected representatives.

Secondly, we need a dynamic understanding of devolution as an ongoing process of redistributing power, which is already evidenced in our commitment to metro mayors in England and to further devolution within England, as set out in the King's Speech, and in the establishment of the Council of the Nations and Regions. Thirdly, we must commit to a genuine era of people power, with communities, co-operatives, civil society and local government working with the Government at all levels to deliver the change Scotland needs. As I hope my maiden speech made clear, we all need to have an open-hearted approach to working together in the best interests of the people we serve.

I turn now to the substance of today's debate. I appreciate the deeply held concern of the right hon. Member. The Government are focused on rebuilding trust in politics across the whole of the UK. In our manifesto, we have been clear that it is not only here in Westminster where more must be done to uphold the standards we expect to see in public life. Scrutiny of the Scottish Government is a matter for the Scottish Parliament, and it could be

raised there by the right hon. Member's colleagues. Nevertheless, we have committed in our manifesto to ensuring that Members of devolved legislatures will have the same free speech protections enjoyed by MPs here at Westminster, to better ensure that elected representatives can hold those in power to account. I hope that the right hon. Member will welcome that commitment. It is important to emphasise that legal proceedings between Mr Salmond and the Scottish Government are ongoing.

I appreciate that there will be many views on how the Scotland Act 1998 might be improved. That is only right, and I am sure that we will continue to hear those views both here and in the Scottish Parliament, but as I have said, the settlement has been remade over the course of 25 years on the basis of broad consensus. Delivery must now be our focus. As the King's Speech set out yesterday, this Government are committed to delivering change for Scotland. From making Scotland the home of Great British Energy, which is central to our mission to make the UK a clean energy superpower, to the new national wealth fund and the new deal for working people, we will deliver a better outcome for people in Scotland, particularly those at the sharp end of inequality, which holds back too many people.

While it is true that co-operation between Governments at a political level has not always been straightforward, nevertheless the Scotland Act has endured. I have often said that while Scots do not have to agree about everything, we do have to find ways to agree about more. Labour is the party of devolution and we will be a Government of collaboration, but above all we are going to deliver for the people of Scotland. There is so much to do. It is time to get started.

*Question put and agreed to.*

5.24 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Written Statements

Thursday 18 July 2024

## BUSINESS AND TRADE

### UK Steel Safeguard Extension

**The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Jonathan Reynolds):** I would like to make a statement on decisions made by the previous Government in relation to the UK's steel safeguard measure.

A successful steel industry is critical to our economic future, and we need the right policy environment to build sustainable growth in the UK and to ensure we respond effectively to unfair overseas trading practices and protectionist measures.

Trade remedy measures enable Governments to protect their businesses from unfair foreign trade practices. They tackle issues of dumping or of unfair Government subsidies or, as in the case of safeguards, give businesses time to adjust to unforeseen increases in imports.

The UK has, since 2018, applied a safeguard measure on imports of certain steel products. A safeguard measure imposes a tariff on specified product imports. This provides a level playing field and protects domestic producers from serious injury caused by unforeseen increases in imports giving them the needed time to adjust.

The UK's safeguard measure applies on 15 different steel product categories and was set to expire on 30 June 2024 under UK law. The Trade Remedies Authority conducted an investigation to determine whether or not there would be injury or threat of injury to domestic steel producers without the safeguard. They considered evidence from both domestic and international industry and organisations. After careful consideration, the Trade Remedies Authority recommended to the previous Secretary of State for Business and Trade that the measure should be extended on all 15 product categories for a further two years, to 30 June 2026.

The previous Government considered the evidence in the Trade Remedies Authority's recommendation and wider matters in the public interest, including the UK's obligations under the relevant World Trade Organization agreement. They took the decision to extend the measure on all 15 categories for a further two years, to 30 June 2026. The decision to extend the measure on five of the 15 product categories represented a departure from the UK's obligations under the relevant WTO agreements. The previous Government balanced this against the evidence the TRA found in their investigation and the UK's public interest. As shadow Business and Trade Secretary, I supported this decision.

The previous Government also decided to extend the application of the suspension for Ukraine to 30 June 2026. The extension review conducted by the Trade Remedies Authority did not consider the future of the existing suspension for Ukraine as it was beyond the scope of their investigation. The previous Government decided that it was in the UK's public interest to extend the suspension for Ukraine to 30 June 2026. This decision was taken to ensure that imports of Ukrainian steel will

not be subject to the additional safeguard quotas and duty. This is in line with the UK's commitment to support Ukraine in the war with Russia, which the Prime Minister has reaffirmed to President Zelensky.

In taking this decision with respect to the Ukraine suspension, UK legislation requires the Secretary of State to lay a statement before the House to explain why such a decision was taken. Now that Parliament has been reconstituted, I am laying this statement to make the House aware of the decision taken by the previous Government.

[HCWS5]

### Code of Practice on Dismissal and Re-engagement

**The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Jonathan Reynolds):** This Government are committed to updating Britain's employment protections so they are fit for our modern economy and the future of work. As we set out in our plan to make work pay, we will boost wages, make work more secure and support working people to thrive—including by delivering a genuine living wage, banning exploitative zero-hours contracts, and ending fire and rehire.

Last year, the previous Government published the code of practice on dismissal and re-engagement (fire and rehire). At the time, we criticised the code for not going far enough to address the scourges of fire and rehire, and fire and replace, which leaves working people at the mercy of bullying threats.

We will be bringing forward legislation within our first 100 days of Government to put an end to these practices, which have no place in a modern labour market.

In the meantime, we have decided not to prevent the previous Government's code of practice from coming into force today. While the code is an inadequate measure to deal with fire and rehire, it will at least provide a small additional level of protection for workers while we bring forward legislation to implement our commitments on fire and rehire in our plan to make work pay.

The code sets out how employers should act when seeking to change employment terms and conditions. It requires employers to contact the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service before raising the prospect of fire and rehire and seeks to ensure that fire and rehire is only used as a last resort. Once the code is in force, an employment tribunal will be able to increase an employee's compensation in certain circumstances by up to 25% if an employer has unreasonably failed to comply with the code. We will replace the code with a strengthened version as soon as we have brought forward legislation on fire and rehire.

[HCWS2]

## ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

### Energy Infrastructure Planning Projects

**The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Edward Miliband):** This statement confirms that it has been necessary to extend the deadlines for decisions on the following four applications made under the Planning Act 2008:

The Mallard Pass solar farm development consent order for the construction and operation of a solar farm energy generation development on land in Lincolnshire, South Kesteven and



Rutland by Mallard Pass Solar Farm Ltd. The Secretary of State received the examining authority's report on 16 February 2024, and the previous deadline for a decision was 13 June 2024.

The Sunnica solar farm development consent order for the construction and operation of a solar farm and battery storage energy generation development on land in Cambridgeshire by Sunnica Ltd. The Secretary of State received the examining authority's report on 28 June 2023, and the previous deadline for a decision was 20 June 2024.

The Gate Burton energy park development consent order for the construction and operation of a solar farm and battery storage energy generation development on land in Lincolnshire by Gate Burton Energy Park Ltd. The Secretary of State received the examining authority's report on 4 April 2024 and the previous deadline for a decision was 4 July 2024.

The North Lincolnshire green energy park development consent order for the construction and operation of a combined heat and power enabled energy generating development, with an electrical output of up to 95 MWe, incorporating carbon capture, associated district heat and private wire networks, hydrogen production, ash treatment, and other associated developments on land at Flixborough industrial estate, Scunthorpe by North Lincolnshire Green Energy Park Ltd. The Secretary of State received the examining authority's report on 15 August 2023, and the previous deadline for a decision was 18 July 2024.

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make a decision on an application within three months of the receipt of the examining authority's report unless exercising the power under section 107(3) of the Act to set a new deadline. Where a new deadline is set, the Secretary of State must make a statement to Parliament to announce it. Prior to taking decisions, the Secretary of State decided to set new deadlines for the applications as follows:

Mallard Pass solar farm: 22 July 2024.

Sunnica solar farm: 22 July 2024.

Gate Burton energy park: 22 July 2024.

This is due to the general election as no decisions are taken during a pre-election period. This is the first opportunity I have had to update the House on these cases.

The decisions for those cases extended to 22 July have now been taken. In the case of the North Lincolnshire green energy park, the new deadline is 18 October 2024 to allow for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to consider the evidence gathered by its review into the role of waste incineration capacity in the management of residual wastes in England.

The Department will always endeavour to issue decisions ahead of the deadlines above, wherever possible.

The decision to set the new deadline for the North Lincolnshire green energy park application is without prejudice to the decision on whether to grant or refuse development consent.

[HCWS6]

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Water Sector Reform: First Steps

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Steve Reed):** The new Government will never look the other way while water companies pump record levels of sewage into our rivers, lakes and seas. That is why we have outlined our immediate measures to begin the work to clean up our waterways.

### *First steps to clean up our rivers, lakes and seas*

The Government have announced a series of initial steps towards ending the crisis in the water sector.

The new measures represent a step change to ensure the water industry cuts sewage dumping and attracts major private-sector investment to upgrade infrastructure while prioritising the interests of customers and the environment. The initial measures include:

Securing agreement from Ofwat that funding for vital infrastructure investment is ringfenced and can only be spent on upgrades benefiting customers and the environment. Ofwat will also ensure that when money for investment is not spent, companies refund customers, with money never allowed to be diverted for bonuses, dividends or salary increases.

Water companies will place customers and the environment at the heart of their objectives by changing their articles of association—the rules governing each company—to make the interests of customers and the environment a primary objective.

Consumers will gain new powers to hold water company bosses to account through powerful new customer panels. For the first time in history, customers will have the power to summon board members and hold water executives to account.

Strengthening protection and compensation for households and businesses when their basic water services are affected. Subject to consultation, the amount of compensation customers are legally entitled to when key standards are not met will more than double. The payments will also be triggered by a wider set of circumstances including boil water notices.

### *Water (Special Measures) Bill*

Yesterday, the Government went further in the King's Speech announcing the intention to introduce a new Bill to put water companies under special measures to strengthen regulation as a first step to clean up our rivers, lakes and seas.

The Water (Special Measures) Bill will:

Strengthen regulation to make water company executives criminally liable for severe failure.

Give the water regulator new powers to ban the payment of bonuses if environmental standards are not met.

Boost accountability for water executives through a new code of conduct for water companies, so customers can summon board members and hold executives to account.

Introduce new powers to bring automatic and severe fines.

Require water companies to install real-time monitors at every sewage outlet with data independently scrutinised by the water regulators.

These measures will strengthen the enforcement regime and make clear that the new Government will not tolerate poor performance across the water sector.

The Government will outline further legislation to fundamentally transform and reset our water industry and restore our rivers, lakes and seas to good health.

[HCWS3]

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### Respiratory Syncytial Virus Immunisation Programmes

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Andrew Gwynne):** I am today confirming that the new immunisation programme to protect infants, with a vaccine during pregnancy, and older adults against respiratory syncytial virus will start this September.

RSV is a common respiratory virus that usually causes mild cold-like symptoms but can cause severe illness, especially for young infants and older adults. There is a significant burden of RSV illness in the UK population which greatly impacts NHS services during the winter months. RSV accounts for over 30,000 hospital admissions for children under five and is estimated to cause around 9,000 admissions among adults over the age of 75 each year. The programme could free up thousands of hospital bed days and help to prevent hundreds of deaths each year.

In June 2023, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation advised that an RSV immunisation programme that is cost-effective should be developed to protect both infants and older adults. From September, a routine programme will begin in England for those turning 75 and for pregnant women, who will be offered vaccination from 28 weeks of pregnancy until full term to protect their baby during the first months of life when they are most vulnerable to RSV. A one-off campaign will also run from September 2024 until 31 August 2025 for all older adults aged 75 to 79 years old on 1 September 2024.

The UK Health Security Agency is now working rapidly with the NHS to ensure we are ready, in September, to deliver the UK's first RSV vaccination programme. The programme will save lives and protect people most at risk. We are delighted that the RSV vaccination programme will begin soon across all four UK nations.

His Majesty's Government are encouraging eligible members of the population to come forward for their vaccination when they have been invited to do so by the NHS, to protect those most vulnerable to RSV illness and to reduce NHS winter pressures.

Older adults will be invited to come forward when they turn 75 and will be able to book their vaccination appointment with their GP.

Older adults aged 75 to 79 years old on 1 September 2024 will be invited to receive their RSV vaccination with their GP in a timely manner to ensure as many people as possible are protected this winter.

Those that are at least 28 weeks pregnant should speak to their maternity service or GP surgery to get the vaccine to protect their baby.

[HCWS7]

## JUSTICE

### Personal Injury Discount Rate Review 2024

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Shabana Mahmood):** I would like to announce that I have now commenced a review of the personal injury discount rate, in line with my statutory duties.

The Damages Act 1996, as amended by the Civil Liability Act 2018, requires the Lord Chancellor to commence a review of the personal injury discount rate within five years of and including the date on which the previous rate was announced, which occurred on 15 July 2019. This is stipulated by schedule A1 to the Damages Act 1996, as inserted by section 10(2) of the Civil Liability Act 2018.

The Damages Act requires that I, in conducting the review, must consult (a) an expert panel, which has already been appointed for this review in June 2023; and (b) HM Treasury. Both consultees are then required by the Act to respond to my consultation within 90 days.

In accordance with these statutory requirements, I commenced this review on 15 July 2024, with the consequence that I must conduct the review and make the determination regarding the rate on or before 11 January 2025. On that same day I sent letters to the expert panel and HM Treasury to begin their period of consultation. I have also deposited copies of the terms of reference for their respective consultations in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

I will make a further announcement on the completion of the review.

[HCWS4]

## LEADER OF THE HOUSE

### Government's Legislative Programme 2024

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Lucy Powell):** Following the state opening of Parliament, it is customary for the Leader of the House of Commons to list the formal titles of Bills to be introduced.

Other measures will be laid before the House in the usual way. The programme will also include Finance Bills to implement budget policy decisions and estimates for public services. The list does not include draft Bills.

Arbitration Bill  
 Armed Forces Commissioner Bill  
 Bank Resolution (Recapitalisation) Bill  
 Better Buses Bill  
 Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill  
 Budget Responsibility Bill  
 Children's Wellbeing Bill  
 Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and International Committee of the Red Cross (Status) Bill  
 Crime and Policing Bill  
 Cyber Security and Resilience Bill  
 Digital Information and Smart Data Bill  
 Employment Rights Bill  
 English Devolution Bill  
 Football Governance Bill  
 Great British Energy Bill  
 High Speed Rail (Crewe to Manchester) Bill  
 Hillsborough Law  
 Holocaust Memorial Bill  
 House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Bill  
 Lords Spiritual (Women) Act 2015 (Extension) Bill  
 Mental Health Bill  
 National Wealth Fund Bill  
 Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill  
 Pension Schemes Bill  
 Planning and Infrastructure Bill  
 Product Safety and Metrology Bill  
 Rail Reform Bill  
 Renters Reform Bill  
 Skills England Bill  
 Sustainable Aviation Fuel (Revenue Support Mechanism) Bill  
 Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill  
 The Crown Estate Bill  
 Tobacco and Vapes Bill  
 Victims, Courts and Public Protection Bill  
 Water (Special Measures) Bill

Detailed information about each of these Bills can be accessed from the gov.uk website at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/kings-speech-2024-background-briefing-notes>

[HCWS1]

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Government's Legislative Programme: Northern Ireland

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Hilary Benn):** The UK Government's legislative programme for the first Session was set out at the state opening of Parliament on 17 July 2024. This statement summarises the programme and how it applies to Northern Ireland. It does not include draft Bills, Law Commission Bills, or Finance Bills.

This Government aim to deliver for working people, their families and communities across the UK. This legislative programme sets out some of our first steps to begin rebuilding the UK.

Our programme will deliver economic stability and kick-start growth. We will bring forward legislation to protect public funds and set up a national wealth fund, which will make transformative investments across every part of the country.

We will establish a new, publicly-owned clean energy company, GB Energy, which will give the UK real energy security. GB Energy will make investments across the UK.

We will prevent ill health by passing landmark legislation to pave the way for a smoke-free UK.

We will work with all political parties and communities in Northern Ireland to ensure the stability of devolved government and to improve public services and the sustainability of public finances. We will continue to implement the Windsor framework in good faith and protect Northern Ireland's place in the UK internal market.

We will champion Northern Ireland as a place to invest around the world, and we will work with the Executive to encourage greater business investment and take forward discussions on a fiscal framework.

As a guarantor of the Good Friday agreement, the UK Government are committed to upholding the agreement both in letter and spirit: this includes the principle of consent upon which the agreement rests. Keeping the agreement's approach, and acknowledging the close relationship between our two countries, we will strengthen the bilateral relationship with the Irish Government. A close partnership presents many opportunities for our respective countries.

The UK Government are committed to addressing legacy issues in a way that commands the support of communities, and complies with our human rights obligations. In consultation with all parties, measures will be brought forward to begin the process of repealing and replacing the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023.

We will reset relationships between the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, by strengthening the Sewel convention through a new memorandum of understanding, and work together for the common good.

The following Bills will extend and apply to Northern Ireland, either in full or in part:

- Arbitration Bill
- Armed Forces Commissioner Bill
- Budget Responsibility Bill
- Banking Resolution (Recapitalisation) Bill
- Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill
- Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and International Committee of the Red Cross Bill
- Cyber Security and Resilience Bill
- Digital Information and Smart Data Bill
- Hillsborough Law
- Great British Energy Bill
- House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Bill
- Lords Spiritual (Women) Act 2015 (Extension) Bill
- National Wealth Fund Bill
- Product Safety and Metrology Bill
- Sustainable Aviation Fuel (Revenue Support Mechanism) Bill
- Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill
- The Crown Estate Bill
- Tobacco and Vapes Bill

The UK Government will work collaboratively with the Northern Ireland Executive to secure the legislative consent of the Assembly where appropriate.

[HCWS10]

## PRIME MINISTER

### NATO Summit 2024

**The Prime Minister (Keir Starmer):** I attended the NATO leaders summit in Washington DC on 9-11 July, with the Foreign Secretary, the Defence Secretary and the Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet.

The summit marked the 75th anniversary of the world's most successful defensive alliance. Following Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, NATO stands bigger, stronger and more united than ever. Sweden attended for the first time as a full ally. Ukraine, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, the Republic of Korea and the EU also participated.

Allies welcomed Mark Rutte's confirmation as NATO's next Secretary-General, following on from Jens Stoltenberg's outstanding decade of leadership.

The summit agreed an ambitious set of outcomes which will help to ensure the safety, security and prosperity of the one billion citizens of NATO allies. This included: further measures to boost our deterrence and defence, particularly against Russia, including ensuring that readier and more capable forces are available to deliver NATO's new war-fighting plans; agreeing a NATO industrial capacity expansion pledge to accelerate defence industrial production; a new cyber-defence centre; and a refreshed artificial intelligence strategy. We welcomed the fact that 23 allies now invest at or above NATO's target of 2% of GDP on defence.

I emphasised this Government's steadfast commitment to the NATO alliance. Our strategic defence review will ensure that a NATO-first policy is at the heart of Britain's defence plans. I confirmed that the UK will commit almost all of our armed forces to NATO, maintain our presence in Estonia and Poland, lead the land arm of the allied reaction force this year, and maintain and modernise our nuclear deterrent.



NATO allies met with President Zelensky in the NATO-Ukraine Council and agreed measures to enhance NATO's support to Ukraine as it advances on its irreversible path to NATO membership. These included establishing the NATO security assistance and training for Ukraine (NSATU), which will coordinate the provision of military equipment and training for Ukraine by allies and partners. We made a pledge of long-term security assistance for Ukraine, with allies proportionately contributing a minimum baseline of funding of €40 billion over the next year. This pledge includes this Government's commitment to providing £3 billion a year of military support for Ukraine until 2030-31 and for as long as needed. I joined 22 other countries in signing a Ukraine compact that draws together the bilateral security assurances that we have each signed with Ukraine.

Allies also met with leaders from New Zealand, Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea and the EU. We agreed with our Indo-Pacific partners that we should continue to work together on shared challenges of the future, as security developments in their region directly affect Euro-Atlantic security. I had bilateral discussions with Prime Minister Kishida of Japan, President Yoon of the Republic of Korea and Prime Minister Luxon of New Zealand to discuss a range of topics, including advancing a shared approach that protects our interests, security and values.

I met with President Biden at the summit and at the White House, where we reaffirmed our shared commitment to NATO and the special relationship as the bedrock of our collective security and prosperity. We will continue to work side by side across the breadth of the relationship including on shared geopolitical challenges and our aligned ambitions for greater economic growth.

I also held bilateral meetings with President Zelensky of Ukraine, Prime Minister Kristersson of Sweden, Prime Minister Støre of Norway, President Erdoğan of Türkiye, Chancellor Scholz of Germany, and Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada. I engaged with all other allied and visiting leaders at the Summit. I met with Congressman Mike Johnson, Speaker of the United States House of Representatives; Congressman Hakeem Jefferies, Democratic Leader of the United States House of Representatives; Senator Chuck Schumer, Majority Leader of the United States Senate, and Senator Mitch McConnell, Republican Leader of the United States Senate. Additionally, I met with Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi and had a discussion with other key Senators.

I look forward to continuing to strengthen relations with European counterparts at the European Political Community summit at Blenheim Palace today.

[HCWS8]

### UK Covid-19 Inquiry Module 1 Report

**The Prime Minister (Keir Starmer):** The Chair of the UK covid-19 inquiry, the right honourable Baroness Heather Hallett, has today published the inquiry's module 1 report, which examines the resilience and preparedness of the United Kingdom between 2009 and early 2020. I have today laid before both Houses a copy of this report.

The report concludes that the UK was under-prepared for the covid-19 pandemic, and that process, planning and policy across all four nations failed UK citizens.

Poorly performing public services, pre-existing general levels of ill-health, and health and social inequalities are cited as factors that made the UK more vulnerable.

The covid-19 pandemic impacted each and every person in the UK. However, it did not have an equal impact, with some affected more than others and with some people still living with the impact of the virus.

The Government's first responsibility is to keep the public safe, and as Prime Minister I am personally committed to each and every family who lost loved ones, and whose lives were changed forever, that this Government will learn the lessons from the inquiry. This means ensuring that the UK is prepared for a future pandemic, as well as the broadest range of potential risks facing our country. That is a top priority for this Government and what everyone should rightly expect from a Government working in their service.

The Government are committed to working with our colleagues in the devolved Governments, mayors and local partners as we carefully consider the recommendations in the report, as their efforts are vital to ensuring the resilience of the whole of the United Kingdom.

I would like to thank Baroness Hallett and her team for their thorough work on this report. The Government will carefully consider all of the findings and recommendations of the report in the context of the Government's overall approach to resilience.

[HCWS11]

## SCOTLAND

### Government's Legislative Programme: Scotland

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (Ian Murray):** The UK Government's legislative programme for the first session was outlined at the state opening of Parliament on Wednesday 17 July. This statement provides a summary of the programme and its application to Scotland. It does not include draft Bills, Law Commission Bills, or Finance Bills.

The UK Government are committed to delivering change for Scotland. This legislative programme delivers on our missions to enable the best outcomes for the people of our four nations. This includes kick-starting economic growth, making Britain a clean energy superpower, breaking down barriers to opportunity, and keeping people safe.

Meaningful collaboration built on mutual respect will be key to delivering this change. We will reset the relationship with the Scottish Government. Through effective joint working, we can deliver better results for people across the UK. Central to this is our commitment to strengthen the Sewel convention by setting out a new memorandum of understanding outlining how the nations will work together for the common good. Now is also the time to conduct a reset in our public life; a clean-up that ensures the highest standards of integrity and honesty. We will legislate to remove hereditary peers from the House of Lords.

Scotland will be at the heart of our mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower. Great British Energy, a new publicly owned energy company, will make Britain

a world leader in energy technologies, create jobs, and build supply chains in every corner of the UK. Scotland will be the powerhouse of our mission, with Great British Energy headquartered there.

We are committed to supporting economic growth across Scotland and will continue to work in collaboration with the Scottish Government, local authorities and other partners to deliver this. Our new national wealth fund will have a remit to support our growth and clean energy missions, making transformative investments across every part of the country. We will also bring forward legislation to improve workers' rights, to protect public funds and end the requirement to franchise rail services. This change will come ahead of a broader Bill to reform the railways and establish Great British Railways.

In this legislative Session, we will embed economic stability to create the conditions for long-term growth that will improve the lives and opportunities of people in Scotland and across the United Kingdom. We will invest in our infrastructure, deliver the public services that people need, secure our borders and restore order to the asylum system so that it operates swiftly, firmly and fairly. We are boosting our energy security to cut bills and ensuring that work pays with our new deal for working people. In addition, we will protect the health of people across the UK by introducing a generational ban on smoking, and imposing limits on the sale and marketing of vapes, taking a landmark step in creating a smoke-free UK.

The following Bills will extend and apply to Scotland (either in full or in part):

- Armed Forces Commissioner Bill
- Bank Resolution (Recapitalisation) Bill
- Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill
- Budget Responsibility Bill
- Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and International Committee of the Red Cross (Status) Bill
- Digital Information and Smart Data Bill
- Cyber Security and Resilience Bill
- Employment Rights Bill
- Great British Energy Bill
- Hillsborough Law
- House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Bill
- Lords Spiritual (Women) Act 2015 (Extension) Bill
- National Wealth Fund Bill
- Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill
- Pension Schemes Bill
- Planning and Infrastructure Bill
- Product Safety and Metrology Bill
- Railways Bill
- Renters Rights Bill
- Sustainable Aviation Fuel (Revenue Support Mechanism) Bill
- Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill
- Tobacco and Vapes Bill

The UK Government will work collaboratively with the Scottish Government to secure the legislative consent of the Scottish Parliament where appropriate.

[HCWS9]

## WALES

### Government's Legislative Programme: Wales

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Jo Stevens):** The Government's legislative programme for the first session was outlined at the state opening of Parliament on 17 July 2024. This statement provides a summary of the programme and its application to Wales. It does not include draft Bills, Law Commission Bills or finance Bills.

This Government will match the ambitions that working people across the UK have for their families and communities. At the heart of our plan are our five national missions, and this legislative programme delivers some of our first steps to begin the journey of rebuilding Britain. The programme will deliver economic stability and kickstart growth, including through a new national wealth fund which will make transformative investments across every part of the country. The clean energy transition represents a huge opportunity for generating growth and tackling the cost-of-living crisis for people in Wales and across the UK. We will establish Great British Energy to capitalise on this opportunity. We will end the requirement to franchise rail services, bringing greater certainty over the operation of publicly owned Transport for Wales by confirming it can remain as the default operator of rail services across all of Wales. And we will also create Great British Railways, focused on improving services and ensuring better value for money for passengers. We will also take back our streets by improving policing and criminal justice, and prevent ill health by passing landmark legislation to pave the way for a smokefree UK.

The Government will unleash Wales's enormous untapped potential and place it front and centre of powering the UK's national renewal. We will also reset the relationship between the UK and Welsh Governments, building a true working partnership based on mutual trust and respect to stabilise the economy, drive investment and create jobs in Wales. Stronger intergovernmental working, spearheaded by a new Council of the Nations and Regions, will boost collaboration and support delivery across the United Kingdom.

In this spirit, we will work in lockstep with the Welsh Government to secure the legislative consent of the Senedd for bills in this programme which make provision in devolved areas. The Sewel convention will also be strengthened through a new memorandum of understanding, outlining how the UK and devolved Governments will work together for the common good.

The following bills will extend and apply to Wales (either in full or in part):

- Arbitration Bill
- Armed Forces Commissioner Bill
- Bank Resolution (Recapitalisation) Bill
- Budget Responsibility Bill
- Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and International Committee of the Red Cross (Status) Bill
- Crime and Policing Bill
- Cyber Security and Resilience Bill
- Digital Information and Smart Data Bill
- Hillsborough Bill
- Employment Rights Bill
- Football Governance Bill

Great British Energy Bill  
House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Bill  
Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill  
Lords Spiritual (Women) Act 2015 (Extension) Bill  
Mental Health Bill  
National Wealth Fund Bill  
Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill  
Product Safety and Metrology Bill  
Pension Schemes Bill  
Planning and Infrastructure Bill  
Railways Bill

Renters Reform Bill  
Sustainable Aviation Fuel (Revenue Support Mechanism) Bill  
Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill  
The Crown Estate Bill  
Tobacco and Vapes Bill  
Victims, Courts and Public Protection Bill  
Water (Special Measures) Bill

The UK Government will work collaboratively with the Welsh Government to secure the legislative consent of the Senedd where appropriate.

[HCWS12]





# WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 18 July 2024

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>BUSINESS AND TRADE</b> .....	1WS	<b>LEADER OF THE HOUSE</b> .....	6WS
Code of Practice on Dismissal and Re-engagement .....	2WS	Government's Legislative Programme 2024.....	6WS
UK Steel Safeguard Extension .....	1WS	<b>NORTHERN IRELAND</b> .....	7WS
<b>ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO</b> .....	2WS	Government's Legislative Programme: Northern Ireland .....	7WS
Energy Infrastructure Planning Projects.....	2WS	<b>PRIME MINISTER</b> .....	8WS
<b>ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS..</b>	3WS	NATO Summit 2024.....	8WS
Water Sector Reform: First Steps .....	3WS	UK Covid-19 Inquiry Module 1 Report.....	9WS
<b>HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE</b> .....	4WS	<b>SCOTLAND</b> .....	10WS
Respiratory Syncytial Virus Immunisation Programmes.....	4WS	Government's Legislative Programme: Scotland...	10WS
<b>JUSTICE</b> .....	5WS	<b>WALES</b> .....	12WS
Personal Injury Discount Rate Review 2024 .....	5WS	Government's Legislative Programme: Wales .....	12WS

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**CONTENTS**

**Thursday 18 July 2024**

**Post Office Horizon Scandal**

*Answer to urgent question—(Justin Madders)*

**Business of the House [Col. 157]**

*Statement—(Lucy Powell)*

**Prison Capacity [Col. 175]**

*Statement—(Shabana Mahmood)*

**Clean Energy Superpower Mission [Col. 188]**

*Statement—(Ed Miliband)*

**Debate on the Address (Second day) [Col. 213]**

*Debate adjourned*

**Scotland Act 1998 [Col. 277]**

*Debate on motion for Adjournment*

**Written Statements [Col. 1WS]**

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